

Balanced we were / Never to be

Merve Kılıçer

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Gouwstraat 21, Rotterdam

AN EXHIBITION TEXT IN PROGRESS

(TO BE PUBLISHED FULLY ON THE OPENING DAY OF THE EXHIBITION)

1

*Expectations, album as a method.*¹

We go on a trip together, and we take pictures. We stand for the pictures. We wait for the pictures. We change our route to make sure we get the pictures. We separate for the pictures, we pose for the pictures, we imagine the pictures. We get the pictures. We look at the pictures, we remember the pictures, or we let the pictures remember for us. We organise the pictures. We save the pictures. For years, we keep the pictures.

It was something about the ruins, about the histories of past cities and their gates, thresholds, entrances, libraries, columns we leaned on. But it was about the ruins, really. The ruins were conducive to thinking through histories, thinking through the then (still) small bodies, living and soft leaning up against these histories. So it was something about the ruins in the pictures that would help. But when the pictures came, it was nothing about the ruins. Or, the ruins were ruined, or the ruins stood tall encased in another system of logic, of order, of power, of imbalance, our systems, our score. And the thing of it was, this encasement obscured the ruins only for us. The pictures still effectively carried the *ruins as simply ruins*. But our witnessing of the ruins, and the record of this witnessing in front of and behind the lens, makes *ruins as simply ruins* impossible, for us.

An impossible slate. Bukağı, the unity we taught ourselves to keep ourselves taut.

2

Making new work is impossible. It can never a tabula rasa. Esse Rasa - impossible slate.

IMPOSSIBLE SLATE

IMPOSSIBLE STATE²

On one of these past very busy days, an important list of chores stored digitally was unintentionally erased. Standing shocked and now aimless with no longer a script to guide them, the user shakes the device in desperation. The list reappears in response.

Tablets made from beeswax intended for note-taking could be heated and smoothed for eternal blank slates. Then chalkboards. Then galleries, with walls painted stock white and holes always small enough to fill, pencil marks rubbed off with rubber. They read: new words, fresh ideas, preceded by nothing, shall be replaced by something. The user shakes them in frustration. Have you no memory? No lineage? Haven't your ideas come from some where, from some one? Even your ideas of your self? The user walks around themselves to see their whole surface, knowing wrapped tightly coiled inside is a lineage longer than they can perceptively, or practically, shake out.

¹ Excerpt from studio visit notes, 10 February 2022.

² Excerpt from studio visit notes, 3 January 2022.

3

*Proedria: the right to sit in front seats at the theatre or public games;
or, the area separating the orchestra and the audience.* ³

Sitting on two stone chairs are two people who sit on the stone chairs to be captured sitting on them. They are places many people before them have sat - most recently for the same reason (the photographs for the albums around the world), and further back as people with respect, with a particularly elevated societal position that needed to be matched in its height (the chairs are tall) and permanence (the chairs are ancient).

It is likely the two people feel the seat of these stone chairs differently. One ass recognizes the elevated place as similar to what they have been told, through words and actions, they belong. The other ass sits crooked on their stone seat, a posture that is a combination of humor, mocking, pride, and resistance: all responses to the imbedded understanding that they have not been told, through words and actions, the same as the first ass, and that they sit to watch, not to be watched. This Kodak moment is the exception.

4

*I've spit the seeds
Covered them up with earth
I escaped from your shadow
Planted a tree of my own.* ⁴

On good days it feels like a difficult level of a game. The first rounds, so long ago, two mandarins bouncing between two hands - was a meditation and an optic pleasure. Now, with many more added through shouts or whispers or stares, on a good day it feels like a difficult level of the same game. You're destined to fail, really, but how you fail is the question. Shall you leave kicking and screaming, denouncing the conditioning you've been subjected to outright (no one listens, but perhaps they'll hear only far past your years)? Shall you let them all drop sadly, fulfilling expectations by reassuring your audience your predecessor will do better having witnessed your failure (securing the persistence of the condition)? Or shall you subvert the skills you were conditioned to know, and put one mandarin after the other on your head, your audience at once transfixed and disgusted by your adept misuse of the traits you were given?

The seeds of mandarins are the capsules of their lineage. In earth, they activate, stretching and reforming as little hairs, reaching to the edges of shadows to continue beyond.

³ From a screenshot of a definition of proedria from a website called Wordnik.com, sent to Lili by Merve the night before the opening of the exhibition.

⁴ Last verse of *Mandarin Poem*, Merve Kılıçer, 2022.

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