

LANDSCAPE AND PATHWAYS* Sena Başöz

In her book *Sessizin Payı* [The Share of the Silent], Nurdan Gürbilek starts by noting that the essayist finds herself at a crossroads from the very first sentence. “Either she will take her subject as a singular and unique case, gropingly discovering it, diving deep into it, willing to disappear in it, or she will relate it to other things, trying to place it through a broader angle, within a larger context”. The first option is the path of closer inspection, one based on emotion and experience, while the second is the path of concepts. For Gürbilek, the first route is akin to walking calmly, attentively on a pathway that leads to no particular destination; whereas the second one is similar to settling at a height from where one can have a bird’s eye view and grasp the whole (Gürbilek, 2015).

I do think that through her practice Sevil Tunaboğlu takes the first path. Prior to her exhibition *In My Mind* in 2015, she came across a horse carcass in Burgazada (one of the Princes’ Islands in Istanbul), carried it to her home in pieces, cleaned every single bone meticulously in her bathtub. Departing from each bone’s singularity, she was asking questions that pertain to the whole. These bones temporarily came together on a found scaffolding. Later on, after the exhibition, she burnt the pieces of this wooden scaffolding in her stove and nails that were left over from the process became the departure point of another exhibition. “Fleeting Things” is a body of work she has been working on since 2017 and parts of it are included here in this exhibition. Within this series, she focuses on singular objects devoid of any context, turns them over and over again and re-examines them.

In this pathway that “leads to no particular destination”, collecting and transforming things she comes across constitute an important part of her practice. Similar to the horse carcass and the scaffolding, this exhibition also includes found materials: pieces of paper, stones, sculpture of a head, part of a relief, a loaf of dry bread...

The series titled “On the Edge of Seeing” is the departure point of *Embarked on an Everlasting Return*. In this body of work, she gropingly discovers the singular, dives deep into it, willing to disappear in it. This series consists of drawings Tunaboğlu made in the various parts of the private school she has been teaching at for the past two years. During her breaks, the artist meanders within the corridors of the school and picks a spot to draw. From where she sits, she draws what she sees in a limited amount of time. Her desire to complete the task quickly also defines the medium: paper and charcoal. These drawings document the free time that has been spent as well as the site in her field of vision and presents a singular experience. The compositions that divide the space, the ground and the sky into pieces are placed in the middle of the white page. Since the edges of the papers are empty and the borders of the drawings are ambiguous, they don’t reveal any details about the time and space these objects belong to. The imagery of the open doors and windows that frequently appear in these drawings emphasize the division between the inside and the outside. In the end, forty drawings fill up her breaks and she concludes this series with the end of the school year.

Aside from their practices, many artists support themselves with a side job. It is difficult to find a balance between one’s artistic practice and the daytime job, especially when it’s full time. Through her series “On the Edge of Seeing” Tunaboğlu manages to include an artistic shift into her school shifts and looks for a way to resist disappearance within this full-time job. On the other hand, these drawings don’t necessarily renounce the new space being entered; on the contrary they’ve come into existence through an open gaze to the space. The drawing process of these pieces can be thought of as an attempt to define, to understand and finally to establish a bond with the space: Building up a sense of belonging to a new surrounding; through her own terms, in her own time, based on her own singular experience, step by step.

After she concludes this series, the artist continues to make work at school. For instance, another series is borne out of the reflections on the white lacquered table in the prefabricated studio the artist goes into at 7:30 in the morning. Prior to the class that starts at 8:10, before she turns on the lights, she comes across these reflections and afterwards watches the brief sunrise. Her eyes that follow the movements of the light positions the artist as a keen observer of the uniqueness of the moment. As the spring arrives, Tunaboğlu realizes that the shadows start to fade away, and begins to photograph this moment’s transformation as a witness. Later, these photos are turned into five oil on canvas paintings. On these canvasses, there are shadows constituted by moving light beams and transparent layers that intersect. Compared to the series “Edge of Seeing” this body of work reflects a more introspective look, a perspective that pertains to the whole.

The depictions of space that are dissected on paper sometimes move into abstraction, at times allude to the whole and then get fragmented again. After a while, these pieces turn into clay sculptures, a medium the artist has tackled with for the first time. The possibility of the 2-d transforming into 3-d is a repeating pattern in the exhibition. The process starts with Tunaboğlu making a small coffee cup in the ceramics studio at the school. Moving away from the painting materials which she uses with confidence; she embarks on a journey of exploring the potentials of this new material. She comes across many surprises in the kiln, in her own words “ones that sometimes lead to disappointment and ones that transform into masquerades”. Some of these objects are glazed with vibrant colors and some of them are left just bisqued, they accumulate as a pile and settle into their places in the exhibition.

The act of translating the paintings into sculptures is actually not unidirectional in this case. The exhibition includes paintings of photographs, sculptures of paintings, and paintings and photographs of sculptures. Repeatedly inspecting her subject through different mediums is one of the research methods the artist employs.

Is the path that is observed while walking different than
the one that is observed from a plane?
(Gürbilek, 2015).

The title of the exhibition *Embarked on an Everlasting Return* touches upon both routines and movements. The sketches and the maps we encounter in the exhibition are both for documenting the path that was taken and serving as a guide to comprehend the path that will be taken.

Aside from her sketches and maps, the artist also presents us stairs and mounds which we can occasionally climb on. Once we go up, we realize: Sevil Tunaboğlu is an artist who is able to create spaces. Going back to Gürbilek and drawing from her emphasis that Benjamin occasionally offers a panoramic view even when he walks on a singular path, perhaps we can venture to say that in this exhibition singular objects turn into spaces as well (Gürbilek, 2015).

In her previous exhibitions** in which she collaborated with other women artists, Sevil Tunaboğlu always constructed particular spaces. Even though the objects in the exhibitions were included there for their own singularity, they created microcosms through interacting with one another in the context of the exhibition, building up new spaces. Similar to those earlier shows, *Embarked on an Everlasting Return* bears the potentials of a space, one that is inviting and open to transformation.

A city, a school, a studio, a home, a room... What do the spaces in which we go through everlasting returns tell us about the world as a whole?

Gürbilek, N., 2015. *Sessizin Payı* [The Share of the Silent].
4th edition İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, pg.11-17.

* The title references the foreword of Nurdan Gürbilek’s *The Share of the Silent*.

**2018 – Three Windowed Play: Güneş Terkol-Sevil Tunaboğlu, NOKS Kadıköy, İstanbul
2017 – A Room of our Own, ARK Kültür, İstanbul

embarked on an everlasting return

SEVİL TUNABOĞLU

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