



Installation view from *Nighttime*, Dirimart Pera, Istanbul, photo by: Nazlı Erdemirel.

making a game out of the conflict between desire and order

A conversation with Berke Yazıcıoğlu

Aslı Seven

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I would like to take your exhibition “Nighttime” at Dirimart as an introduction to your practice, to expand around your process and other projects. Looking into the selection of works, my thoughts gathered around two main observations. Let’s start with the first one: You have developed a quite precise, discernible graphic vocabulary in terms of colors and technical choices. What is the relationship between your material choices and the image content? How do you arrive at a final image?

My motivation to make visual work has often come from a communicative impulse. Bringing graphic design applications into the fine art context feels intuitive, as it combines the appropriate practices for my intended output. I’m interested in how a 2D surface can function as a communication tool. I want to make it apparent to the viewer that my intention is to establish a communicative, visual language. Drawing is the basis of my studio practice and the common thread through my work across different media. My planning involves finding the most articulate 2D representation of a 3D object or body, often with one color. This is a process of studying silhouette, surface texture, and three-dimensional form, all of which form the basis of representational drawing. Graphic design fits into this process as a field within the wider practice of visual communication, which deals with imagery as a vehicle for conveying information. When viewed this way the line between drawing and graphic design seems to blur, and my pursuit of pictorial communication is revealed to fully overlap with the medium of drawing.

My second observation is more about the imagery. Especially in your larger canvas works, but also in some of the smaller works on paper, we are presented with “scenes” filled with “characters”, caught in the middle of a variety of actions in different – mostly interior – settings. What is your relationship to narrative as a source of inspiration? Do you ever think that these “scenes” might

operate as fragments from a larger narrative, or prompt the viewer to engage in storytelling?

Storytelling is a function in some of my work but not all. I often involve narrative as a tool to support the aim of a piece. I find unclear narratives compelling, particularly when we're unable to understand whether something good or bad is happening. In 'Nighttime', the narrative connection is somewhat loose. Most of the scenes depict relatively uncanny things in everyday spaces. The intention is to communicate questions and ideas rather than definitive events.



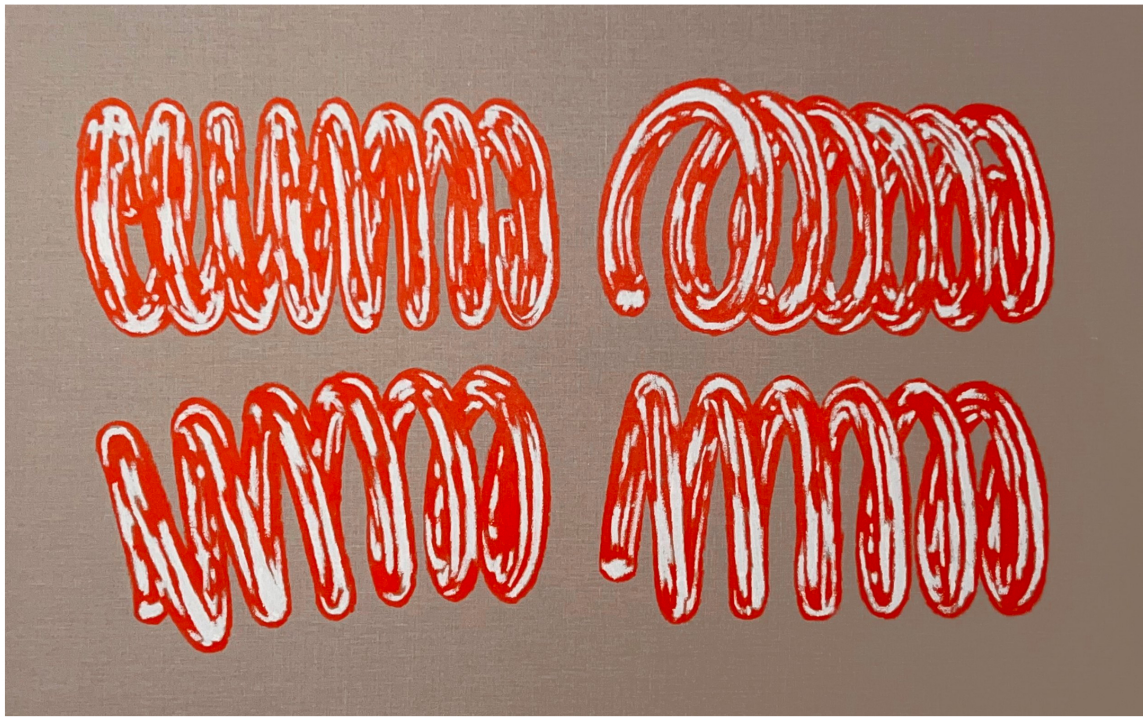
Installation view from Nighttime, Dirimart Pera, Istanbul, photo by: Nazlı Erdemirel.

Both the title of the exhibition, and the color spectrum used in the works create a nocturnal atmosphere. In several works, we see figures in bodysuits, sleeping. Do you envision the nighttime as revelatory of fantasy or crime?

The potential for fantasy at night is definitely something I wanted to communicate in this series. Darkness is illusory whether we're awake or asleep. It can be characterized both with a sense of wonder and a fear of the unknown. I wouldn't say my intention is to portray the night as revelatory of crime, but the link between nighttime and underground culture is undeniable. The nocturnal self can seem criminal to people who hold conservative values, which is quite funny and worth exploring. I like playing with this assumption that nighttime is when the monsters come out. If we can manage to look at ourselves and our desires without fear, perhaps we won't see any monsters. I wanted to work with the feeling of approaching something intimidating, and instead discovering an invitation to pleasure.

There is a dynamic tension and a degree of absurdity in bringing together the vulnerability of sleep & physical exhaustion, and the provocative stance in wearing a full body latex suit. And then there is the focus in some of your works, on the lower half of the body, we repeatedly see a male figure running away from something. Furthermore, there is a heightened sense of "eroticism" in these scenes, which, at times, borders on fetish, without ever taking it too seriously. I also see a lot of humor in your treatment of the body, its positions and its performances. When I take all of these separate items together, it creates something like a story: controlled displays of eroticism, furtive moments of fetish, exhaustion and vulnerability. Is this accurate? What is your intention in terms of the relationships and situations these works describe, especially in regard to gender performance and public displays of sexuality?

Completely. That tension and absurdity is very interesting to me. The most intimate and personal things are often more universal than we imagine it. It's ironic that centuries of civilization have confined eroticism to private space, while the dynamics of sexual activity remain integral to the social order performed in public. We are, traditionally, encouraged to imagine absolute separation between private and public activity, despite the very apparent link between them. Public spaces like the street or the office carry many influences that originate in the private realm and form sexual activity. The sharply binary gendering in capitalist workspaces and religious buildings, for example, appears to conceal the so-called 'inappropriate' activities of intimate space while revealing the resulting dynamics. I want to contribute to the proliferation of images that address this duality. It seems both helpful and necessary to encourage societies to understand the sources of social constructs. Prevalent imagery naturally enforces prevalent ideologies, but we're often blind to this connection. As part of the collective pursuit to encourage social change, the most useful function of my visual art practice is to contribute to the imagery that depict different potentials, and encourage questioning.



Red Spring, 2022, Oil on canvas, Framed: 95 x 135,5 cm, Unframed: 90 x 130 cm.

Latex bodysuits, oxford shoes and trench coats are central figures in your work. What I discern here is that each of these elements at times have a “uniform” function. Can you talk about the reason why you chose to focus on such items? What is your relationship to fashion and its history?

This is about the tension between desire and order. Establishing social order involves limiting the extent of individual interests. The pursuits of pleasure and order can both support and be in opposition to each other. I think everyone feels this conflict at different degrees, and one of its most obvious manifestations is fashion. Here I'm not addressing fashion as a design practice, but more directly as clothing, uniform, and culture. Formalwear and office attire, for example, effectively enforce uniforms while leaving a limited range of opportunity for individual expression. There are also surprising parallels between office clothes and BDSM clothes; they enforce strict visual codes to better enable a particular activity. Office and military clothes involve tailoring and collective organization, and feature motifs like buckles and leather accessories. It's fascinating to understand fetish clothing as an extension of these kinds of uniforms. Fetish clothing makes a game out of the conflict between desire and order, by willfully including it in the pursuit of pleasure. I wanted to use these themes to show how there isn't total separation between intimate and public activities.



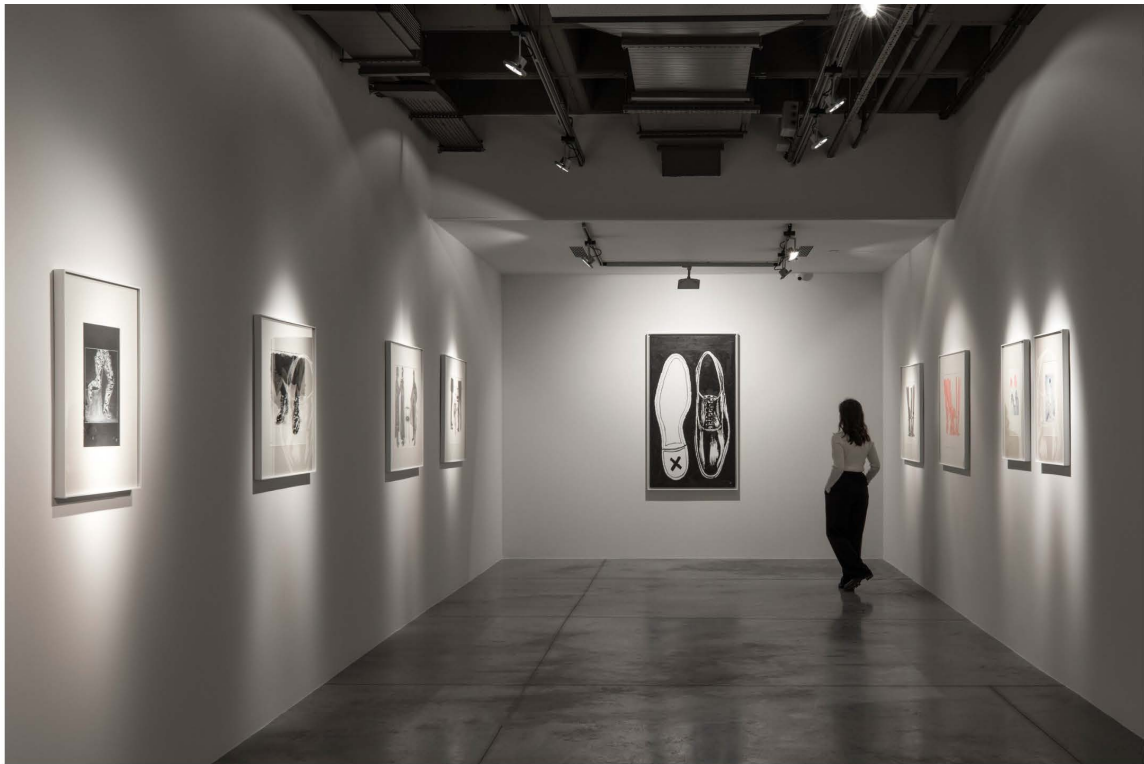


The Rite of Spring Act II Scene 5, 2020, 125 x 120 cm.

Looking at your past works, you have frequently created series of works inspired by classical music. The most recent one is “The Rite” inspired by Stravinsky’s “The Rite of Spring”, which was produced in textile during a residency at the Sarabande Foundation. Can you tell us about how that collaboration came to be? I also noticed a previous series of works based on Strauss’ Salome. What is your method of translating works of music into graphic imagery? Is textile a medium you intend to explore further?

I will definitely make more tapestries and textile works. They involve a larger production process than painting which is why I embark on them less frequently. Woven fabric is a particularly appropriate medium for sequential, narrative work. The visual adaptation I did for Salome is different from that of The Rite of Spring. In the Rite of Spring I came up with ways to visualize melodies and narratives using geometric shapes and figures. It was an almost mechanical process of visualizing the musical data. In Salome I focused on the psychological details buried in the story. It’s an almost cartoonish drama full of metaphors, and an uncannily effective attempt at storytelling. I drew diagrammatic explanations of the metaphors to go alongside the libretto in a storybook format.

Berke Yazıcioğlu - Nighttime



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