

Güler Ates

Transcendent

Private View: Saturday, 30th September 2023, 6.00 – 9.00pm

By invitation only

The Grange, 50 Llanvair Drive, Ascot, Berkshire SL5 9LN

*My parcels of land have been scattered around the world
I am now incomplete as part of me has been stripped
I search and search to unite myself*

-Güler Ates (2023)

Transcendent is a solo exhibition of new video, sound, performance and textile work made by Turkish artist Güler Ates while an artist in residence in the forest behind the home of curator Marcelle Joseph in Ascot, Berkshire. In this instance, the site of production is also the site of exhibition, allowing visitors the chance to absorb the setting where Ates spent the last 18 months, making, filming, recording and reflecting under the gigantic fir trees that are a feature of this British landscape. This collaboration between the artist and the curator dates back to 2010 when they first met after which six solo shows have ensued (including this exhibition). Over the period of the Forest Residency, Ates began writing poetry for the first time, inspired by the setting and the subject matter of this exhibition – namely, the concept of home for refugees and immigrants migrating to and seeking political asylum in the United Kingdom. The title of this exhibition comes from another poem written by Rumi and alludes to the experience of cultural displacement as a form of mental and physical trauma that transcends the limits of a person's coping abilities.

What is home? It is a question and site of meaning that Ates has grappled with, critiqued and explored over the artist's entire career. The site of the exhibition – a parcel of land in the United Kingdom – has significant importance to Ates' new body of work as it relates to the country where numerous refugees from Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Sudan have escaped to after being subject to political persecution in their respective nation states. Ates has spent the last nine years working with these refugees and immigrants in the UK and Turkey as part of quilting workshops and other volunteer work (most recently in connection with the Reading Refugee Support Group near the artist's home in Berkshire).

To pay tribute to these culturally displaced people, Ates has crafted an exhibition that tells the story of migration and exile. For example, one sound work in the exhibition, made in collaboration with Anatolian opera singer Cagla Yildiz, borrows from Kurdish and Alevi folk music while lamenting the gruelling voyages many refugees endure to make the journey to the UK. Cagla's '*Huyayis*' song is based on a Zazaki poem written by Mehmet Seyitalioglu. Zazaki¹ is Ates' mother tongue and was listed as an endangered language by UNESCO in 2009. With the selection of a poem written in the threatened language of her ancestors, the artist grapples with her own emotional heritage and in turn seeks a revival of her mother tongue in order to transcend her own historical trauma.

One of the two video works titled '*Whisper of the Trees*' depicts a lone woman fully covered in swathes of orange damask reminiscent of a "veil" with all its contemporary Western readings, walking alone through a dark and wintry woodland. During the opening of the exhibition, there will also be two live performances, including a hypnotically beautiful musical performance titled '*Shore to Shore*' sung by Turkish musician

¹ Zazaki, the native language of the Zaza community, was listed as an endangered language by UNESCO in 2009. Zazaki is an Indo-European language and forms part of the Zaza - Gorani language group of the northwestern group of the Iranian branch. Despite some recent encouraging developments, it still faces the risk of extinction due to assimilationist policies. The Turkish state has previously prohibited Zazaki.

Leyla Huysal and produced as a collaboration between Ates, Leyla Huysal and Yusuf Huysal. In the other performance, *'A Room on Wheels'*, a veiled model strains as she walks across the lawn pulling a small room behind her, evoking the expression 'home is where the heart is' regardless of the person's nation, ethnicity, gender or religion. At the end of the performance, the performer abruptly leaves behind her shackled house and escapes into the forest, intimating perhaps an assimilation into the culture of her adopted new homeland or a final reckoning with or acceptance of her own personhood. Finding resonance in the artist's own experience of the Forest Residency in 2022-23 as well as her biography of diaspora and displacement in her home country as a result of her family's origins in eastern Turkey, Ates accentuates how Eastern and Western culture can peacefully coexist while exploring notions of female identity and critiquing accepted models of culture in the West.

In addition to the new time-based media, this exhibition also includes four quilted works, consisting of a multitude of quilt squares produced by refugee and immigrant women the artist has worked with at various quilting workshops she has organised over the last nine years in the UK and Turkey. These workshops were the result of the artist's efforts to build communities among refugee and immigrant women in their newly adopted homeland. As a woman born in Eastern Turkey but raised in a shantytown in Istanbul, the artist herself shares parts of their lived experience, resulting in the creation of a new body of work filled with empathy and compassion for these narratives of diaspora, belonging and identity. Visitors will experience these quilted textile works as well as the video, sound and performance pieces as a journey to selfhood for which home and community are integrally important.

The Forest Residency was supported using public funding by Arts Council England. It was also supported by Marcelle Joseph Projects and the Royal Academy Schools. The artist would like to give special thanks to all collaborators on this project, including performance artist Zoe Simon, model Evie Lockhart, editors Madalina Zaharia and James Irwin, musicians Leyla Huysal and Cagla Yildiz, music and sound designers Yusuf Huysal and Donato Wharton, construction technicians Liz and Peter Driver, creative director Ozge Inal and textile technicians Emma Tabor, Rosina Godwin, Seren Temur and Shahram Dalvand.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE ARTIST

Güler Ates (b. 1977, Eastern Turkey) works with video, photography, printmaking and performance. At the heart of her work lies an exploration into the experience of cultural displacement and activities that merge Eastern and Western sensibilities. Ates has been living and working in London since 1998. She graduated in 2008 from the Royal College of Art with an MA in Printmaking. Currently, she is Digital Print Tutor at the Royal Academy Schools. Her work can be found in the print collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Royal Academy of Art and the Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR) in Rio de Janeiro. Ates' work has been exhibited at the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy for the last several years as well as in recent solo exhibitions in 2020 at the Museum of Oriental Art (MAO) in Turin, Italy; in 2019 at the Art Stations of the Cross, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; in 2017 at Museum Van Loon, The Netherlands; in 2016 at the Salvation Army International HQ, London; in 2014 at Warmond Castle, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Instituto Inclusartiz in Rio de Janeiro, and Kubikgallery in Porto, Portugal; in 2013 at the Royal Academy of Arts's Café Gallery, London; in 2012 at the LOFT at the Lower Parel, Mumbai; and in 2010 at Leighton House Museum, London. Her work has been featured in numerous groups shows including *Unexpected: Continuing Narratives of Identity and Migration*, Ben Uri Gallery and Museum, London (2016); *Journey*, Jewish Museum, London (2015); *Some Schools are Cages and Some Schools are Wings*, Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2014); and *2Q13: Women Collectors, Women Artists*, Lloyds Club, London (2013). Ates has completed other residencies at Eton College (2015) and in Rio de Janeiro (2013-2014), Istanbul (2014) and India (2012 and 2009).