"Things that already exist
are also signs of nonexistent things."[1]

UNDERNEATH THE STONES: MOMENT AND ARCHIVE

As locations of memory, spaces are not only part of our daily life, but also triggers of the practice of recollection, the historical manifestation of the human world, layers that allocate the order of things that need to be remembered. The cities that are in continuous transformation like a living organism are each a space of memory, and history is the shared biography of these organisms. Just as looking at a city does not mean seeing it, thinking about the city does not only mean tracing the spatial remains of past civilizations. Even though the act of remembering/reminding the city might not be able to bring back what no longer exists, it may represent it. Because the more abstract the thought/imagining is, the more concrete the process of forming through remembering can get. Approaching cultural heritage as an archaeology of memory, Tuğçe Diri takes a topographical survey of recollection wandering through the remains of history in her series "Mono-Signs" and "Artisanal Iteration" that she brought together under the title of "Underneath the Stones: Moment and Archive".

Blending cultural codes and social representations within the frame of now, Tuğçe Diri rebuilds and symbolically constructs the physical and spiritual layers that are gradually fading and embarks to make a visual archive of culture by concretizing them. While looking beyond the "stones" as the memory of nature and civilization, the traces of concrete and abstract universal culture, and the remaining witnesses of recollection, the artist transfers the inherent features of architecture, painting and sculpture to the surface of pictorial thinking with frottage, drawing and illustration techniques. The architectural elements that documents the historical past from Constantinople to Istanbul; the benediction icon of the Deisis mosaic in Hagia Sophia, the Nativity fresco the Arab Mosque (San Domenico), the zigzag brick decoration inside the niche which appears as a detail forming a pattern in Molla Zeyrek Mosque (Pantokrator Monastery Church), or the abstractions from which the city is distinguished as a whole of intricately intertwined layers like walls, doors,

[1] Leppert, R., Sanatta Anlamın Görüntüsü, İmgelerin Toplumsal İşlevi, çev. İsmail Türkmen, Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul, 2009, s.24

windows, bridges, galleries, passages and domes points out to the meaning of architecture as the transporter of “values.” As in “A Portrait of Istanbul” the artist places the topography of the city inside the image of a halo, which has been typically used in iconography from the cult of Mithra to monotheistic religions, from Mesopotamia to Europe, attributing holiness to it, and she arranges the possibilities of coexisting again by abstracting architectural indicators, which may contain meanings such as continuity of cultural values, symbolism and representation from time, space and reality, and tries to keep the collective memory alive through relationships based on temporal and historical perspective.

“Underneath the Stones: Moment and Archive” relates the results of the different transformations that took place in Istanbul for centuries, having a history of three hundred thousand years with several cultural layers from Rome to Byzantium, from Ottoman to today to the time-defeated existence of the disabled, destroyed, overlooked and abandoned architectural structures, the erosion of cultural memory, thereby the loss of identity and belonging. The works that point to the distinct role of the space in the continuity of the cultural identity as an expression of social and political existence indicate events of urbicide as a policy of dispossession and memoricide that causes loss of collective bonds and cultural memory. The works that evoke an act of recollection that involves repetition, pattern and actuality reflect time and space in a layered way. In works that refer to the repetitive pattern and stacking system of traditional aesthetics, where the functional dimension of materials and techniques provide the artist with various textures in image creation, the physical, social and cultural layers of different periods of history are stacked on top of each other, creating locations that allow people to navigate with the feeling of depth constructed by the forms without being reduced to a mere abstract formula.

Petroglyphs, which are the identifiers of the cultures they belong to through patterns, symbols, inscriptions and signs engraved in caves, city walls and architectural structures are stone carvings that convey the “knowledge” of civilization about geography, daily life, rituals, beliefs and values. Tuğçe Diri's forms, which look like they were etched onto the texture of paper over a petroglyph with frottage technique, belong to neither sacred nor profane spaces, with the shapes they

remind of from ancient sun beliefs to mythologies, from cosmological temples to modern city plans. On the contrary, these images, standing on the threshold between the two, serve as a reminder of the loss of cultural heritage and the eroded sense of belonging. The erosion of time makes everything round; from planets to stars, from tree trunks to pebbles. For this reason, the visual database of the history of civilization is filled with records of the syndetic, powerful and impeccable quality of the circle form. The sphere form is the symbol of integrity within circularity and represents infinity. That is why in kurgan mausoleums, terracotta houses and tents, sacred spaces and temples the central dome is a baseline construction form both in religious and civilian architecture. The circle and dome, which we encounter systematically in Tuğçe Diri's works, correspond to cosmological thought. The Hittite sun appearing in the frottage pattern in the shape of a dome, or the circle that forms the background of three-dimensional urban abstractions that move out of the picture plane and turn into spatial compositions, symbolize the existence of a new balance and state of reality by pointing out the continuity and infinity of the universe against nature. This state of reality is the view that presents the intersection of the concrete and abstract world.

Handling the concepts in her works in a way that blends it with a tradition-based visual culture, Tuğçe Diri’s forms with a collective structure have a sociocultural context. In the artist’s drawings, which reflect the traces left by thousands of years of history as spatial evidence, the image-text relationship does not appear as a purely plastic element. From cave walls to epigraphs, tablets, seals, hieroglyphs, manuscripts, calligraphy and typography, the relationship between writing and painting in art history dates back almost 40,000 years. Writing is the whole of a visual representation and communication language system in which concepts and ideas are first transformed into symbols and then sounds into signs. From the Archaic period to Mesopotamia, Africa, Egypt and Asian cultures, just like writing art has a communicational function of recording, pointing, uttering, explaining and making a mark. In Tuğçe Diri’s works, where she uses symbols and signs that resemble writing as an artistic means of expression as part and detail of the general composition, the image that turns into picture with an aesthetic form of inscription appears as the plastic/abstract arrangement of meaning. While these stylized writing forms that make formal

and philosophical connections between the perspectives of abstract art and eastern calligraphy open the way for the viewer to reach meaning through visuality, they do not refer to a specific form of representation or alphabet, on the contrary, they bear the traces of a universal understanding, timeless and intercultural visual language.

It's suggested that the image production that started with people imitating the outside world and flourished with the power of fantasy has a past of at least thirty thousand years. Knowledge is interpreted and used by the human mind through an uninterrupted process of accumulation, exposure and explication.

The human memory has the ability of construction that puts the variables in order, therefore all artistic representations, as long as they are collective images either objective or abstract, are subjective designs of the world. Placing cultural distinctions and similarities in the context of art and crafts, East-West, traditional-current, social-personal synthesis and the relationships between these phenomena at the center of her practice, she uses cultural visual heritage as a layer of memory. From the decoration pattern of Anatolia to stylized imagery of Byzantian art, from the brick/salmon color of gothic architecture to cobalt blue, from the writing-picture tradition of the Eastern art to the dynamism of Abstract Expressionism, Tuğçe Diri makes formal and philosophical connections between “representation” and “abstraction” and produces the “image” as a cultural structure. Using the traditional aesthetic language not as a nostalgic/ethnographic formal material, but as a language of expression that corresponds to current critical discourse and concepts, the artist’s works, shaped by her style that involves patience, meticulousness, subtlety, repetition and cycles, are influenced by culture, history and society. So, each work of art also turns into sociocultural objects of knowledge. The stone does not forget, it accumulates. In her works, time is endless, space is unlimited, and conventions are truths.

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