

2007

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HALE TENGER Where the Winds Rest

BY HG MASTERS

The room is dark and breezy. Slits of light come in through the old wooden shutters. Sixteen metal fans placed on the parquet floor are humming away, their sinuous black cables covering the surface. A single projector, sitting just off the ground in the middle of the room, pivots around the room shining the alternating phrases “Çıkardık mı su altındaki ölüyü” and “Çıkarmadık su altındaki ölüyü” in white letters onto the bottom of the walls and over the steel grilles of the fans: “Didn’t we pull the body out from underwater / We didn’t pull the body out from underwater.” The words are distorted as they move over the architectural features and are sliced up by the grilles, which reflect little shimmers of light over the floor. The moving air at first refreshes, then chills.

Hale Tenger’s *Where the Winds Rest* (2007) was originally created for the first edition of the Port İzmir 07 International Contemporary Art Festival, “Mirage and Desire,” which ran for one month beginning on September 7, 2007, with 20 artists, ten of them Turkish, the rest French and other Europeans. The program was initiated by Jean-Luc Maeso of the French Cultural Center and was curated by Emmy de Martelaere in collaboration with Aşşegül Kurtel of İzmir’s K2 Contemporary Art Center. One of the venues, chosen by Tenger, was a stately home located across from the Alsancak train station. Its residents long gone, the house had been built in the mid-19th century for the director of the British-run railway—the first in the Ottoman Empire—that ran from İzmir on the west coast to Aydın, 100 kilometers to the south.

“Rüzgarların Dinlendiği Yer” (“Where the Winds Rest”) is the title of a Turkish poem by Edip Cansever (1928–86), whose melancholic, modern verses Tenger discovered while she was in university. The words projected around the room form a kind of question and answer. They appear to be spoken by a protagonist who is also an accomplice—your accomplice—in some dark crime, returning to you like the voice of conscience in the middle of the night. The whirring fans block out the city noise, until only the words remain in your head. Whatever you have done, it remains unresolved. The dead remain in the water; the story has not yet been brought to light.

Known for its laidback Aegean lifestyle, İzmir (formerly Smyrna) is Turkey’s third largest city, and a hotbed of Kemalist nationalism. Before the outbreak in 1919 of the Greek-Turkish war, more than half of the population had been Greek, with sizable Armenian and Jewish communities. A fire that swept through the city in September 1922—reportedly instigated as retaliation by Turkish soldiers who had recaptured the city days before—killed tens of thousands of Greeks and Armenians and decimated their neighborhoods. Hundreds of thousands crowded the harbor front hoping to be rescued; instead many were crushed or drowned in the sea. Eventually, more than 200,000 refugees were evacuated by foreign-flagged ships; what

remained of the city’s Greek community was relocated in the official 1923 population exchange between the two adversaries.

Though Tenger says on reflection that she wasn’t thinking necessarily about the city’s history, since the start of her career in the mid-1980s she has addressed systematic political injustices and assassinations, as in her 1993 installation of stacked rows of newspaper-filled jars, *Decent Deathwatch: Bosnia Herzegovina*. Similarly, the video *Beirut* (2005–07) lingers on the facade of the St. George Hotel, where Lebanese prime minister Rafic Hariri was killed in 2005. *Where the Winds Rest* is not only related to the İzmir story, Tenger insists. Hers is a more general lament about how, in her words, “Issues in Turkey are not faced up to and frequently covered up—whether it’s with Kurds, Armenians or other minorities—particularly in cases where killing is involved.”

Another event that deeply influenced *Where the Winds Rest* occurred as Tenger was preparing a solo exhibition, “Lâhavle,” at the Yapı Kredi Kazım Taşkent Gallery, Istanbul, in early 2007. On January 19, Hrant Dink, the editor of the Armenian-Turkish newspaper *Agos*, was assassinated outside his Istanbul office in broad daylight by ultranationalists. Members of the police and security services are widely believed to have been involved, though much of the evidence was supposedly destroyed or lost. Tenger remembers that before Dink’s murder she had believed that decades of political assassinations in Turkey had ended. She recalls that it took her months to unravel “the depth of sorrow that came over me,” as the killing triggered a dramatic loss of the hopes she had for her daughter’s future.

After creating *Where the Winds Rest* in İzmir, Tenger could not attend the opening as she was re-installing *Decent Deathwatch* at the newly opened SantralIstanbul museum in a survey of Turkish art, “Modern and Beyond: 1950–2000.” There are no known mentions of *Where the Winds Rest* in the press of the time. It wouldn’t be shown in Istanbul until four years later at Arter – Space for Art, in the touring group show “Tactics of Invisibility,” which showcased Turkish artists whose works explored “the repressed or the silenced.”

These themes—along with the dual motifs of presence/absence and remembering/forgetting—have long remained central to Tenger’s practice. *We Didn’t Go Outside, We Were Always On the Outside / We Didn’t Go Inside, We Were Always On the Inside* (1995)—another title taken from Cansever—consists of a guard house ringed in barbed wire created for the 1995 Istanbul Biennial. *I Know People Like This III* (2013), commissioned by Arter’s director Emre Baykal (who also co-curated “Tactics of Invisibility”), is a maze of pictures of traumatic moments in Turkey’s political history—including the murder and subsequent protests in memory of Hrant Dink—printed on x-ray film, once again suggesting the ways in which Turkey’s history needs to be brought up from the depths for examination.



HALE TENGER, 2007, “Where the Winds Rest” (detail), installation, fans and video, dimensions variable. Installed at Port İzmir exhibition, 2007. Courtesy the artist and Vehbi Koç Foundation, Istanbul.