

TimeOut

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December 2016 – January 2017/6 TL

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Hello, 2017!
Everything you need to know
to greet the New Year in style



Art

"We're surrounded by violence, death, dishonesty, homophobia, ignorance and a lack of empathy"

TIME OUT MEETS

Arda Yalkın

Don't be fooled by the title of Arda Yalkın's new solo show: in *Everything is Awesome*, the artist seeks to reveal the games we play on social media to prove how happy we are in a mad world, he tells *Ezgi Atabilen*

The title of your exhibition is *Everything is Awesome*, yet the works on display are rather dark. What inspired this contrast?

"You're right, the exhibition did end up being somewhat dark. *Everything is Awesome* is actually a popular hashtag on social media. In this show, I focus on the pornography of consumption and the iconography of the modern-day middle class. As it happens, capitalism is sounding alarm signals all over the world, but the situation is much more cataclysmic in countries like ours, where the most kitsch versions of capitalism are experienced. We're surrounded by violence, death, dishonesty, homophobia, ignorance and a lack of empathy. Despite all this, social media – which is, in a sense, our tool of personal communication – there's a constant state of pseudo happiness and ecstasy. This paradox really intrigues me. I should also clarify that I certainly don't consider myself cut off from this madness. What we're experiencing is collective hysteria."

Could you tell us about the works on display?

"Two video installations make up the biggest part of the exhibition. The first

of these is my *Rorschach Project*, which focuses on the improvisational music created by four musicians – who were theretofore unaware of each other's participation – upon viewing an animation they saw for the first time in their lives. I layered these separate sounds in a four-minute, five-channel video. The video premiered last August in a show hosted by Gaia Gallery at the 12th International D-Marin Classical Music Festival in Bodrum. The second video on display is *The Circle Jerk*, which premiered last May at LOOP Barcelona. That one is a ten-minute, seven-channel video about a job interview. I also created several digital prints inspired by this video. You'll also get to see nine other works, some from my earlier *St. Celebrity* and *Gymferno* series and a few from my new *Look Mommy, I Am A Grown Up* series."

Your *St. Celebrity* series is fascinating. How did you get the idea for it?

"*St. Celebrity* is my take on the saints depicted in Orthodox iconography. Back then, iconographers claimed they were simply intermediaries who only painted what God wanted them to paint. I view the

pornographic madness of exposure and consumption in social media as people creating their own icons, in a way. While the saints depicted in traditional iconography must go through seclusion, submission, wisdom and suffering, only to achieve their holy status posthumously, the icons of today manage to stay relevant through exposure, a sense of pleasure and the false courage that stems from ignorance. On the other hand, traditional iconography generally doesn't depict the painful, destructive aspect of religion. You always see heroisms and miracles. This is done to win over new followers and make them believe they're enduring the evils of this world for a holy purpose and everlasting happiness. This is exactly similar to how we see everyday pleasures depicted in the images we expose on social media instead of the war, fascism, destruction and collapse surrounding us... While *St. Celebrity* represents a deliberate and perfected fabrication regarding how we want to portray ourselves to the outside world, *Gymferno* deals with the effort we put in to attain this status. It's about the things we do today to draw attention to ourselves or look younger, like plastic surgery, sports, social media or shopaholism."



Dolapdere's newest resident

The future home of the Koç Contemporary Art Museum currently under construction, Dolapdere is fast on its way to becoming Istanbul's newest culture and arts destination. After the opening of Dirimart's new art space in the neighborhood, we received news that Raffi Portakal and Murat Pilevneli were also getting ready to open a new space in Dolapdere. Yet it looks as though Gaia Gallery beat them to the punch, unveiling its new home in Dolapdere with an opening show by Arda Yalkın. Gallery Director Nil Nuhoglu says relocating Gaia from Elhamra Han to Dolapdere was a project that had been in the works for some time. "We enjoyed using the venue as a multipurpose space for both our gallery exhibitions at the historic Elhamra Han and our other projects," Nuhoglu says. "Here, we expanded the scope of our aim to play with viewers' perception of venue and set the tone for them to have different impressions."

In addition to an exhibition space, Gaia Gallery's new home in Dolapdere also includes a book selection at GaiaBookmark as well as a platform for #GaiaEditions, a project that brings Gaia together with the Association of the Museums of Painting and Sculpture. Nuhoglu says their aim is to create a space where art lovers in the neighborhood can get together, a ripple that grows through different initiatives. Don't be surprised if you see workshops, performances, screenings and panels held here in the very near future.

→ Serdar Ömer Paşa Caddesi 3, Dolapdere.

Marcus Graf wrote an essay for the exhibition catalogue in which he calls our era "The Age of Mega-Materialism and Optic-Opium." What are your thoughts on that?

"I think 'Age of Optic-Opium' is especially fitting. Nowadays it's as if we derive more pleasure from showing that we had a particular experience than we do from the experience itself. Doing strange things like sharing the image of a meal before we sit down to eat, or sharing photographs and videos from concerts instead of focusing on the music, is the new 'norm.' On the other hand, our agency is restricted, so consumption and the display of consumption create a false sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Even the most sensible among us believe they can change things for the better simply by typing their name on a website, unfortunately."

As we're bombarded with millions of images each day, whether from the screens of smartphones, laptops or TVs or through various advertising media like billboards, how do you manage to keep your visual memory clear of this pollution?

"I think this question also has to do with information pollution in general.

Unfortunately, there's no way to be completely free of this pollution.

My situation is particularly grim, since I also use the computer to create my works. Perhaps we can try to manage the information we're exposed to, but there's another danger in doing so: you're then exposed to a unilateral flow of information that suits your point of view, which I believe further polarizes people and amplifies even the smallest difference of opinion. I'm learning to detach from this pollution at times through 'simple' distractions like sports, travel or art."

→ Gaia Gallery. Until Dec 30.



Gymferno V