

MELIKE KARA

landing softly

04. November 2022 – 08. Januar 2023

In her artistic practice, Melike Kara works with painting and installation, for which she takes up symbols, narratives and craft techniques of the Kurdish-Alevi culture. Influenced by her own family history, Kara refers to the transmission of cultural traditions in "landing softly". With her works, she asks about the significance of memories for our existence and how the past is perpetuated in the present.

The turbulent history of the Kurds, marked by migratory movements, is mainly passed on orally, but is also reflected in the transmission of cultural traditions and the preservation of ritual sites. Due to the difficult stateless status in the areas inhabited by the ethnic group in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq, there is still a lack of institutional archives and places of remembrance. Complementing the oral tradition culture, Kara creates a visual access to customs and traditions, some of which are already disappearing. With her artistic practice, she takes the place of a chronicler who, with her subjective gaze, gives new shape to the cultural heritage of her ancestors.

One of the richest and most diverse traditions, in which the eventful history of the Kurds is reflected without equal, is the production of carpets. The weavers adapt familiar patterns, recombine them or change them according to their geographic proximity to other tribes, their personal aesthetic sensibilities or the material conditions. This fluid and ongoing design process produces a wide variety of motifs that form a unique material heritage of Kurdish history. It is the freedom of further development that Kara also claims for herself when she takes up the geometric and ornamental patterns of Kurdish carpet motifs and incorporates them into her paintings and installations.

Kara has developed a distinctive style of painting in which she uses oil pens and works with the lines visible through them. She always concentrates on a few colours per painting, a limitation that underlines the two-dimensionality of her paintings. For "Khorjan (afshar)" (2022), she grounds the canvas in silver and adds red tones as well as shades of grey and white. Lines applied with a quick hand bundle together to form the patterns, which initially appear abstract. Despite their referential origin - the titles of the paintings refer to the regions from which the underlying carpet ornaments originate - the resulting structures remain ambiguous and open up a large space for interpretation.

Kara light-footedly subverts genre boundaries and classifications in her artistic practice. In her exhibition, she combines the individual works into an installation that occupies the space and incorporates aspects of Kurdish traditions as well as autobiographical elements into her artistic language of colour and form. As if to break the authority of her paintings, Kara has already combined her pictures in the past with photographic collages as backgrounds, with crocheted frames or, as now in the Neue Galerie Gladbeck, with lengths of fabric soaked in paint. Kara extends her painting out of the confines of the picture frame into space and contextualises it with a Kurdish cultural history.

Kara's installations often evoke the impression of a ritual site with which the artist intervenes in the institutional spaces of art. In the exhibition "landing softly", Kara plays

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on the floor of the Neue Galerie, wiping sugar dyed with pigments into symbols and fragments that create a pattern also based on the carpet ornaments. By adding this ritualistic layer, Kara develops a personal and emotional approach to Kurdish history. In doing so, Kara creates unique spaces that are both an exhibition and a place of memory, inviting us to trace the fragments of tradition in an impressive way.

Tomke Braun

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