

Artist: Onur Gökmen

Exhibition Title: Possession

Venue: Scherben, Berlin, Germany

Opening: May 26, 2023 7pm

Date: May 27, 2023 - July 23, 2023

Photography: All images copyright and courtesy of the artists and Scherben

Captions:

1. Exhibition view
2. M.E.T.U. (Middle East Technical University)
3. M.E.T.U. (Middle East Technical University) (detail)
4. M.E.T.U. (Middle East Technical University) (detail)
5. M.E.T.U. (Middle East Technical University) (detail)
6. Bob
7. Bob
8. M.E.T.U. (Middle East Technical University) (detail)
9. M.E.T.U. (Middle East Technical University) (detail)
10. M.E.T.U. (Middle East Technical University) (detail)
11. Dad's bumper (Opel Vectra 1993)
12. Dad's bumper (Opel Vectra 1993)
13. Dad's bumper (Opel Vectra 1993) (detail)
14. Dad's bumper (Opel Vectra 1993) (detail)
15. Turkish chair
16. Turkish chair
17. Turkish chair (detail)

Press Release:

Possession

Central to the exhibition is a large, expansive sculpture reminiscent of a bunker, titled „M.E.T.U. (Middle East Technical University)“ (2023). Its brutalist architecture blends almost seamlessly into its immediate surroundings: the concrete architecture of the exhibition space, as well as the modernist streetscape of the Leipziger Straße Complex, built by the DDR as a prestige project between 1969 and 1982. A peephole in the surface of the facade, almost resembling an embrasure, allows a glimpse into the desolate interior. Here, personal objects and a television set amidst chaos and dirty tiles suggest a sense of domesticity and reveal what appears to be a personal history.

The video „Bob“ (2023), playing on the television, features an unattended child during a breakfast ritual. This scene references a sequence from Andrzej Żuławski's psychological drama and horror film „Possession“ directed in 1981. „Possession“ stylizes the Berlin Wall's image amidst the postwar, partly capitalist and partly communist, architectural collage of the divided city as a recurring allegory for inner conflict and psychological turmoil. Like Żuławski, who used his film to process his impending divorce and the ever-present threat of the Cold War, Gökmen's sculptures represent a psychological processing of his own biography, and are woven with wider historical contexts, encouraging a comprehension of the intricate relationship between individual experiences and collective history.

Continuing this analysis, one of the interior walls reveals a collage of personal and archival photographs. What can be made out here are images of modernist buildings constructed in Turkey after World War II. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, the United States pledged material and economic aid to all states threatened by the Soviet Union, primarily Turkey, and Greece, in a doctrine issued on March 12, 1947: the Marshall Plan. The Middle East Technical University, where Gökmen spent a significant portion of his childhood, not only gives the title to the central sculpture of the exhibition but also exemplifies this architectural manifestation of modernism. Further into the exhibition space, an ordinary camping chair is displayed, covered in a rough, ochre-colored layer as if it would succumb to the weight of its use at any moment. On one of the walls, another monolithic sculpture is showcased, only remotely reminiscent of the original car body it is made of. The works titled „Turkish Chair“ (2023) and „Dad's Bumper (Opel Vectra, 1993)“ (2023) give further hints to the artist's cultural context and family background.

„Possession“ at Scherben is Onur Gökmen's first solo exhibition in Berlin. Born in 1985 in Ankara, the artist studied at Bard College in New York and at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main. Today, he lives in between Berlin, and Istanbul. In Onur Gökmen's works seeks to question the relationship between westernization and modernization, challenging established narratives and exploring the subjective nature of history itself.