

# *HEAVY GROUND*

Özgür Kar

29 November 2024 – 08 February 2025

Emalin is pleased to present *HEAVY GROUND*, a solo exhibition by Özgür Kar (b. 1992 in Ankara, Turkey; lives and works in Amsterdam, Netherlands). This is the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery. *HEAVY GROUND* comprises a new video consisting of hand-drawn animation, debuting the artist's first film work, alongside a series of works on paper.

In his practice, Özgür Kar contrasts historic and contemporary forms of cultural production to draw out their universal expressions of existentialism, whereby our sense of belonging and isolation are constantly at odds. Sincere feelings of longing, anxiety or loss are expressed in mediums and aesthetic conventions Kar draws from various cultural sources: medieval etchings, modernist theatre, 1970s hand-painted animation, or the vlogs and TikToks of the current day. He collapses contrasting affects of these forms into focused, minimalist animations and drawings – at times grotesque and graphic, at times sentimental and tender, but always speaking to a familiar human experience.

The exhibition is centred around the eponymous video work, *HEAVY GROUND* (2024). The hand-drawn animation tells the story of a romantic encounter between two flies stuck on a glue trap. After serenading each other in an operatic duet, heavy with emotion, the flies proceed to have tender missionary sex while coated in yellow fly-trap glue, until one of them seemingly perishes. The camera pans over their surroundings to reveal a scattering of dead flies, dramatically caught and withering in the sticky landscape of the same trap, all suffering the same fate.

In Kar's cast of characters, flies play recurring roles as a reference to the *musca depicta*, the baroque symbol in the trope of *memento mori* where the insect functions as a morbid reminder of the mortality and decay that await us. Beyond their art historical interpretation, flies evoke disgust – simply, viscerally, timelessly – or a sense of annoyance when forced to hear their high-pitched buzzing. Here, their buzzing voices – naturally absurd, since they aren't using their wings – are reproduced with the use of overlaid old synthesisers. To confront our disgust, Kar set out to create the most sentimental operatic duet possible in collaboration with musician Arnljótur Sigurðsson. Based on an iconic recording of Clara Rockmore, the 1920s theremin sensation, covering a 19th century romantic piece of flamenco ballet – *El amor brujo* by Manuel de Falla – the sound of *HEAVY GROUND* continues Kar's practice of connecting emotional references dispersed in culture across movements of time.

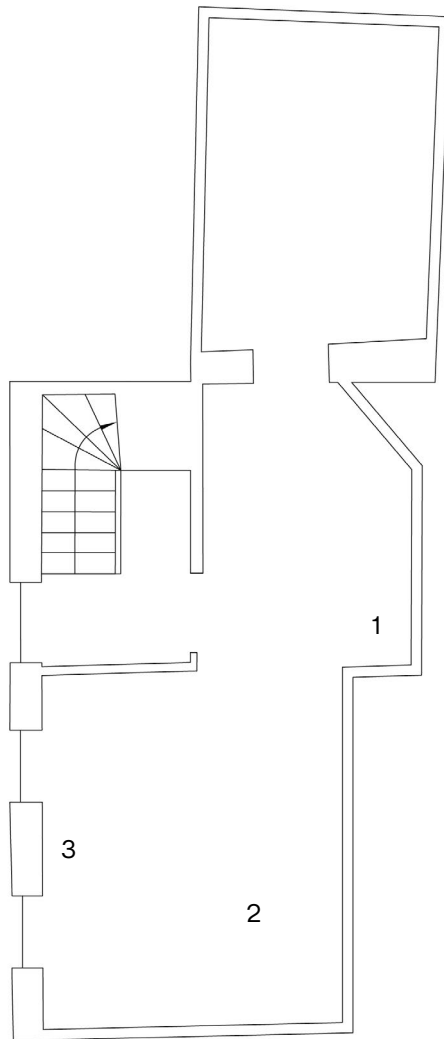
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The film's vivid backgrounds, hand-painted with watercolours and the stark mark-making of a pencil, abandon the sleekness prevalent in 21st century digital animation that makes use of AI or 3D modelling. *HEAVY GROUND* is a genre play that draws on a historical tradition and technique: the 'Golden Era' of Czechoslovak, Soviet and Romanian animation. The surreal, dark and existentialist cartoons were made in the post-war decades from 1945 until the fall of the Soviet Union. Their productions were made possible in Communist countries because of newly nationalised film industries, albeit under censorship. In the work of the time – of artists such as Jiří Trnka, Iryna Hurvych, Sabin Bălaşa – Kar identifies the genuine, emotive effort of making troubled art for troubled times, work driven by the pursuit of capturing something unresolved but sincere in their contemporary moment despite limitations in resources. Their beauty, then, is of a difficult and confrontational kind, while their universalist appeal is smuggled within surreal intimacy.

Presenting a narrative storyline for the first time in the artist's practice, *HEAVY GROUND* (2024) uses the convention of an adult animated short film. The work's postmodern, theatrical break with Aristotelian unity comes in the form of the accompanying *Ladders* (2024). The works on paper portray simple wooden ladders, hand-drawn with coloured pencils. In one way completely two-dimensional, they seem to be, on the surface, at peace with their old-school artifice – like illustrations from tarot cards, symbols of ascension from the heavy ground. Enclosed in perspex box-frames, they lean against the walls like characters pretending to be left-behind pieces of equipment – a desolate trompe l'oeil. Their physical presence in dimmed lighting extends their objecthood from a two-dimensional work on paper into something akin to a forgotten theatre prop – not quite of our world, but with one foot in it.

Each *Ladder* is drawn lit from a different angle – only sometimes are they like a heavenly staircase, when light shines from above, suggesting a way up and out of the existential misery without the need for wings. But sometimes they are lit from the side, and sometimes they are left leaning sideways altogether, like a practical tool stored away at a stable – perhaps a source to the fly infestation. The exhibition's oblique lighting does not offer them the clarity that a well-lit framed picture can claim. From afar, they are almost convincing as objects, props – but up close they reveal their true nature as completely material drawings, jesters of two-dimensional marks on two-dimensional paper. With every facet, they suggest a transition, a climb from one dimension into another – and every one of them seemingly impossible, surreal. This contrast is not just a concept, but the heart of our longing: for some other place, some other body, some other time.

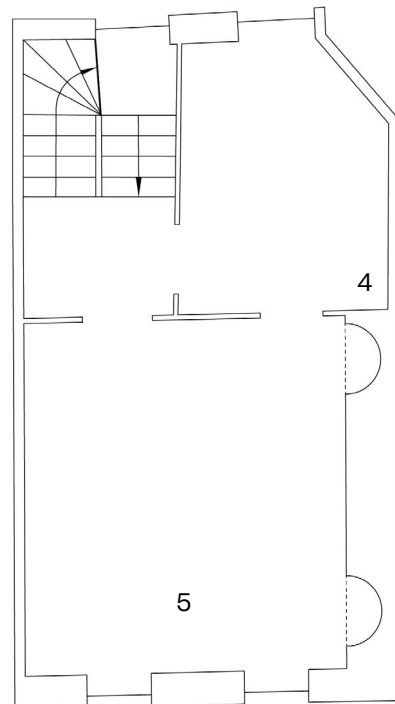


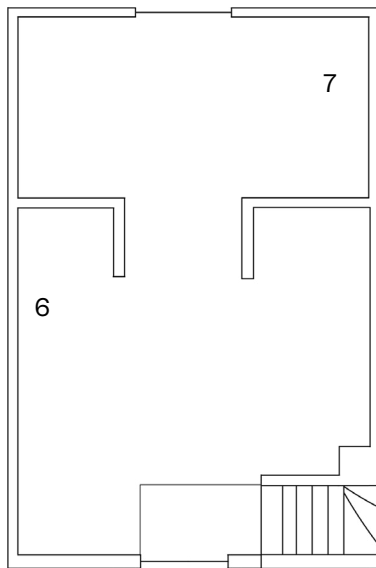
## GROUND FLOOR

1. *Ladder #2, 2024*  
coloured pencil on paper,  
custom perspex frame  
180 × 65 × 2 cm  
70 7/8 × 25 5/8 × 3/4 inches
2. *Ladder #6, 2024*  
coloured pencil on paper,  
custom perspex frame  
150 × 70 × 2 cm  
59 × 27 1/2 × 3/4 inches
3. *Ladder #1, 2024*  
coloured pencil on paper,  
custom perspex frame  
200 × 75 × 2 cm  
78 3/4 × 29 1/2 × 3/4 inches

## FIRST FLOOR

4. *Ladder #3, 2024*  
coloured pencil on paper,  
custom perspex frame  
210 × 75 × 2 cm  
82 5/8 × 29 1/2 × 3/4 inches
5. *HEAVY GROUND, 2024*  
animation with sound,  
1:1 aspect ratio  
duration: 9:00 mins (looped)  
200 × 200 cm  
78 3/4 × 78 3/4 inches





## ATTIC

6. *Ladder #5, 2024*  
coloured pencil on paper,  
custom perspex frame  
180 × 65 × 2 cm  
70 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 25 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches
  
7. *Ladder #4, 2024*  
coloured pencil on paper,  
custom perspex frame  
140 × 70 × 2 cm  
55 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 27 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches

Özgür Kar (b. 1992 in Ankara, Turkey) lives and works in Amsterdam, Netherlands. He graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in 2018 and the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in 2020. Recent solo presentations have been held at The Renaissance Society, Chicago (2023); Édouard Montassut, Paris (2023); Château Shatto, with Jacqueline de Jong, Los Angeles (2023); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2022); Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2021); Emalin, London (2021); and Kunstverein Gartenhaus, Vienna (2021). Selected group exhibitions have been held at Museo Madre, Naples (2024); the 8th Yokohama Triennale, Japan (2024); the 24th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2024); Kunstverein Bielefeld, Germany (2023); *Ghost2565*, Bangkok (2022); the 16th Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art, France (2022); and Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2022).