

Melike Kara  
*was uns bleibt*  
10 Jan– 1 Mar 2025  
55 Walker

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Bortolami gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by German-Kurdish artist Melike Kara. Materially symphonic, Kara employs painting, installation, and photography to map heritage, origin, and belonging. The artist's previous centering on cultural affiliation as a site for identification here broadens to include her new role as a mother. In exploring motherhood as an expansive condition that attenuates the self and tradition, the artist entwines a web that marries history and the contemporary moment from which she speaks.

For *was uns bleibt*—what we have left—Kara has interwoven rose-colored text and black and white images into a wallpaper-like collage spanning the length of the entire exhibition wall. The fragmented and borrowed texts and associated images approach a collective, yet inherently subjective, image of motherhood—the generative conduit through which care and home is passed and, with this, inevitably lost and transformed. Overlaid and wheatpasted, this skin acts like a literal membrane, made up of multiple strata of translucent paper that together cohere and dissolve into a unitary mass. The installation, an intertextual network, provides a definition of motherhood that is protean and elastic. Guided by the artist's assembly, it offers a novel model that trudges a path through societal expectations and yet to be established ways of being. Kara's visual glossary is multilingual with texts reproduced in German, the language through which she speaks, dreams, and communicates with her own child; Kurdish, the mother tongue of her maternal figures; and English, the de-facto language of New York City, host to the exhibition.

These inquiries relate to and spring from an archival project begun by the artist in 2014. Made up of images gathered from both personal and public sources, the artist has been amassing an archive of the Kurdish diaspora, past and present. This roving library roots the life of this de-territorialized group to the abstract, yet materially concrete, spaces built through the layering of these photographs. Here, the memories of the Kurdish people and their narratives evade erasure by transforming exhibition and artmaking into sites and acts of remembrance and preservation.

Two suites of abstract paintings, jewel-toned green and red monochromes respectively, are extensions of the artist's pictorial atlas. Kara, a student of Rosemarie Trockel, treats each gestural line like a thread coalescing into a complex tapestry, borrowing patterns and knotting techniques from Kurdish looms. Ornamentation shares the migratory patterns of the Kurdish population, combining into novel motifs as it resettles into new geographies. Kara here chooses to articulate from the abstracted language of weaving, a feminized

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vocabulary and form of labor. Produced intuitively with oil stick, the artist's individual strokes score the surface of her canvas, congealing through rhythmic repetition, while the slack of each thread-like line evinces a potential unraveling. Kara likens the ritualizing repetition of her tandem line/thread to identity's formation, borrowing a theory from diasporic Caribbean thinker Édouard Glissant: identification is a dynamic process, just as singular threads congeal into a patterned fabric, individual identities are formed through the interplay of various rites, experiences, and histories.

Melike Kara (b. 1985) lives and works in Cologne, Germany. An exhibition of her work is currently on view at the Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation in Aachen, Germany. In 2022, she was included in 58th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, curated by Sohrab Mohebbi. Solo exhibitions by Kara have been held across museums in Europe including at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2024); Kunst Halle St.Gallen (2023); and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (2019). She has also presented work at MO.CO. Montpellier; the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2024); Kunsthalle Zürich (2024); Wiels Contemporary, Brussels (2020), along with many other institutions. Her work is found in museum collections including Centre Pompidou, Paris; FRAC des Pays de la Loire, France; Yuz Museum, Shanghai; LACMA, Los Angeles, and Museum Ludwig, Cologne.