

PAST

A Year Without A Summer

ELMAS DENİZ

8 FEBRUARY 2018 - 17 MARCH 2018

Pilot Gallery hosts "A Year Without A Summer", Elmas Deniz's second solo exhibition at the gallery between 8 February-17 March 2018. The exhibition is based on Deniz's new video and her artist book (1) she produced in Sri Lanka, and brings together her new paintings, sculptures, texts and objects. Deniz asks how humans relate to nature from economical, cultural and historical points of view.

The exhibition borrows its title from a historic natural phenomenon. The volcanic eruption in Indonesia on 17 April 1815 affected most of the world and led to a change in climate. The following year marked by widespread crop failures and famine, later became known as "— year without a summer".

Over the years, humankind has developed diverse discourses on values incompatible with their interest. They range from the idea that all living beings were created by God hence have to be protected, to the concept of noblesse oblige where humans must care and be responsible for lesser beings and to the Deep Ecology philosophy that rejects radically the superiority of human beings over nature. The approaches each work uses to look at the human - nature relationship are various, beyond human-centered, nature-centered or pragmatic. They present diverse emotional layers including formal, personal, affectionate or vicious. They speak of the place of commercials in our lives, regulations of plant transportation, use of animals, humans' struggle to make things happen in places that don't belong to them, relocating plants, not being able to sell local seeds, a greenhouse made of iron and glass, human-like raven portraits, scientists' statements that teach us animals, and how economy-oriented man is unable to grasp his own nature. The exhibition centres around nature: nature represented in news, in commercials, historical nature, the nature we live in, the one we rule,



Made to be seen, 2017, videostill

the one that we'd like to possess or the one that we depend on, the one that is being extinguished because of us & with us, and finally the nature caught in an economic whirlpool.

Deniz's new video "Made to be seen", on display for the first time in Istanbul, addresses our "gaze" at nature and how this gaze influences the way we view, perceive and market nature. Borrowing the features and conceptual roots from advertisements, the work transforms Sri Lanka's unique and extraordinary natural landscape into a luxury consumption item. The words pronounced by the voice in the video are inspired by the commercials of luxury goods. If the promoted product is the green natural beauty of Sri Lanka, 'a true unsellable thing', then what is being sold?

The artist book "Flying Plants, Dogs and Elephants" draws attention to our perception of nature and focuses on our bond with other species and beings in nature. Silk-printed on a special paper made of elephant dung, the book includes drawings of exported indoor plants of Sri Lankan origin, stories about stray dogs written by the artist herself and international transportation regulations of living plants. The artist suggests to us to mingle in with stray dogs instead of being their owner or caretaker through this book:

"...Imagine suddenly collapsing to the ground as you are walking. Hugging a stray dog is exactly the same sudden collapse.... Life continues on the different, upper levels... Like a dance, to let yourself sink down, to hug a dog this intensely, as if it was a human being." (2)

Deniz knows that she can not rewind the automated human-animal relationship that has become artificial in the last two centuries. However, the encounters she narrates in Flying Plants, Dogs and Elephants are attempts to narrow the gap between human and animal, although on a personal level.

Triggering the long-forgotten (and extinguished) proximity of the two species are "Raven Portraits". First time she uses this media in an exhibition. Almost human-like, these animal portraits allow us to encounter the look of ravens renowned since Ancient Greece for their tool-making skills and problem-solving capabilities. This small gesture offers an alternative to the human-centered and human-scaled worldview. Deniz portrays ravens as messengers referring to the scientists who claim that "ravens have a theory of mind". (3)

"Greenhouse for Nothing" is a sculpture made of iron, glass and soil; a kind of terrarium Deniz created with her elder brother in Izmir. The work proposes to reconsider the greenhouse, which people construct to cultivate plants to overcome adversities of the climate, and the culture around it.

In "Unsellable Artwork", Deniz uses a selection of vegetable and fruit seeds she bought from a local organic market. It highlights the country's ongoing restrictions on seed exchange and sales, thus establishing a connection between the exhibition and the local context.

Finally "Mistake I" and "Mistake II" highlight the misleading concept of labelling plastic bags as recyclable / unrecyclable and reveal how we fail to learn from past experiences and repeat the same mistakes. As the artist has been dealing with the subjects of nature and the economy through a conceptual framework for over ten years, this older work about plastic waste is included in this exhibition.

Elmas Deniz's solo exhibition can be seen between 8 February-17 March at Pilot Gallery.

(1) SAHA provided support for the production of the video Made to be Seen and the artist book Flying Plants, Dogs and Elephants by Elmas Deniz who was invited to the Cinnamon Colomboscope Festival held between 22 August-10 September 2017.

(2) excerpt from the artist book Flying Plants, Dogs and Elephants.

(3) in reference to the piece at the show.