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Curators:

Merve Elveren

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Participants:

Gürbey Hiz

Emre Hüner

Mona Mahall

& Aslı Serbest

Metehan Özcan

Firuzan Melike Sümertaş

Deniz Tortum

PresentAbsent

Behind the Exhibition

A Place Called YUNT.

We have been discussing institutions for a long time; we feel the narrowing as a result of the near disappearance of small- and medium-scale institutions. We are experiencing the lack of a space where we can develop critical programmes regardless of visitor numbers, and where we can evaluate research, propositions and questions. In such an environment, YUNT emerges as a more vital space. Its scale allows it to develop programmes through multiple invitations that do not repeat themselves yet create a thread between them. These programmes prioritise “today”, can change, can start again by saying “that didn’t work”, can even pause and, more importantly, can transform.

When YUNT invited us in February 2025 to develop a year-long project, the subject it was focusing on was the “public sphere”. But what is there left to say about the public sphere today (today in the broadest sense of the word)?

“Public Sphere”.

When “publicness” is used to define our living sphere, we find ourselves caught in a spiral woven from more than thirty years of debate. At its centre lie progressive social ideals, which in turn rest upon a *European* intellectual performance. We remain suspended at a point where we can never quite reach something better, never quite arrive at that expanse we long for, walking and running towards it, and never quite manage to make up for what is missing.

An exhibition built along similar intellectual concerns is unlikely to break through such an accumulation of history. At best, it may allow a series of voices to emerge; perhaps to be answered or fiercely criticised in some way, possibly to fade away immediately or gather force later. Yet this potential, properly situated and operating on its own, will inevitably give rise to a claim to publicness on a miniature scale

In line with our choices, it will point to the fractures inscribed in a time and space in which we experience, first-hand, what it means to belong to the public. Without necessarily overlapping in time and geographies, works in intuitive yet discontinuous order will be interpreted by the exhibition’s public. Perhaps, in this form, they will unsettle the formulas that repeatedly circulate in the mind.

Making an Exhibition.

This means that the exhibition will not take shape from the pleasure of bringing together things that are beautiful in themselves or harmonious as a whole. Nor will it be a compilation of the work of a single artist. Since publicness is taken as an inherent quality of exhibition-making, the discourse will, where possible, remain close to its



enactment rather than straying too far from it. It will not adopt a didactic tone, nor attempt to organise the matter into categories or turn it into a linear or homogeneous narrative.

As the exhibition recalls the ruptures of publicness across time and place, its own coherence will also be divided into three. Only later will we realise that this decision in fact expands the exhibition's provisional field of propositions by multiplying it three-fold.

Uncertainty.

The exhibition ultimately takes shape around a question: "How can the sudden transformation of what is assumed to be protected by being public be recorded here and now?" What follows is, for us, an intuitive search. As our conversations develop a vocabulary for the exhibition, the people we want to invite along begin to emerge. As we speak of the fluidity between time and space, we begin to discuss Metehan Özcan's work.

In producing his work, the artist relinquishes his position as author, becoming instead exposed to the very subject and situation he is working with. In this sense, the details in the images and found texts stem from his personal experience. The line between the private and the public, neither concealed nor hardened, ultimately challenges what we know about the norm.

Imagination.

When we recognise the mismatch between expectations and realities, we are confronted with visions that hang in the air and gradually fade. The visions we have shaped at a personal, societal and global level turn out to be "a narrative of the future" projected from the past, and one that has, for the most part, never been tested.

To trace the accelerated steps towards *progress*, we think of architectural historian Gürbey Hiz's atlas, compiled from accounts published in *Servet-i Fünûn*. We begin to browse his "A to Z of *Servet-i Fünûn*" articles on *Manifold*. We encounter the promise and vision we are looking for almost immediately, under the entry "Balloon": "One will board the balloon in Beyazıd and get off in Şişli."

History in the Present Tense.

When articulating the bind in which the public sphere finds itself, leaping across time becomes a useful device. But this does not mean overlooking the relationships between society and space. To think through examples grounded in changes that have endured from the past to the present, we turn to Firuzan Melike Sümertaş's research.

In Istanbul, there are numerous buildings commissioned by and named after the women of the Ottoman dynasty. One of them, Büyük Valide Han, has continued to serve its original purpose from the seventeenth century to the present day. Its community bears the traces of more than three centuries of history.

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Borders/Boundaries.

Moving between reality and imagination, it is impossible not to dwell on the way powers have defined who owns what and where through written rules and drawn maps. When we sat down with Mona Mahall and Aslı Serbest to discuss their new work, emerging from the tensions between private and public space, we were still at the re-search stage, exchanging ideas and suggestions. Yet at the heart of our conversation was Europe's presence as both a real and an artificial construct.

The anthropologist Marija Gimbutas, whose work forms part of Mahall and Serbest's research, describes a Europe that is egalitarian, heterarchical, peaceful and highly developed. The female figurines she identified, the understanding of collective life they embody, and their insistence on bringing the outside in are far removed from the "realities" of today. Gimbutas experienced, during her own lifetime, the unbridgeable gap between expectations and realities.

Worlds Elsewhere.

The exhibition makes visible a fantastical universe through a discourse that oscillates between expectations, promises, realities and imaginings, and between yesterday, today and tomorrow; a discourse that is largely intuitive and therefore remains necessarily elusive. Guided in this direction, we invite Emre Hüner to join us. After all, in the scenes he constructs through drawings, three-dimensional objects and videos, his work reveals the undeniable fluidity between archaeological remnants and a post-human world. Through scientific data and speculative narratives, he brings to the surface the vulnerabilities of the social system whose collapse we are so deeply feeling today.

Threshold.

If our expectations have been thwarted amid such a collapse, if our visions of the future have become blurred, and if the definition of the present has been cast into uncertainty, why are we still negotiating? We turn to Deniz Tortum to preserve what remains, to transform the existing, and to insist on intervening. Tortum's film meets Efe Murad's poetry with a stance that exists neither here nor there, neither in the *Earth* nor beyond it, but somewhere in between - present yet unwilling to conform to it: "your sweet and dream instances earth. / if the whole of deprivation is tempted. / if it truly asks and truly speaks. / deprivation reunites earth."

Encountering/Situating.

As the participants and works take shape, the space for negotiation becomes more clearly defined. An exhibition, at its core, creates an environment in which a work encounters another through proximities and distances, altering its impact in the process. As we settle into the physical space YUNT has opened up to us, we seek to avoid an airless crowding. The idea of transforming the content brought together into expansive installations and clues, and unfolding them across three stages, emerges from this consideration. Yet there is a deeper rationale behind our reluctance to shy away from installing all works at once. We do not wish to consume in three months an

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exhibition whose conversations began in February 2025 and whose first chapter to be presented in October 2025. We are excited by the possibility of making tangible the exhibition's subtle shifts in space and time, sometimes concealed and sometimes visible.

We also cannot help but probe the following questions: "What does it mean to make an exhibition today? What can a static format offer us? Can an exhibition be reconfigured, again and again, over the course of its run? Can it propose new questions grounded in the uncertainty of the present and the emotional fluctuations that accompany it?"

Cross-Pollination.

Divided into three parts, the exhibition also multiplies everything by three. The overarching titles "Alive" (Gürbey Hiz and Emre Hüner), "Under the Rug" (Metehan Özcan and Mona Mahall-Aslı Serbest) and "Monumentesque" (Firuzan Melike Sümertaş and Deniz Tortum) allow for internal shifts and rearrangements; each participant and each work can reach beyond the section in which they appear and engage with the others, with other works. Pollens drift through the exhibition space across all three sections.

Gürbey Hiz's selections from his observations of *Servet-i Fünûn* in *An Atlas of Imaginations, Constructions and Experiences*, and the accumulations beneath bridges that appear in Metehan Özcan's photographic series *Kahramanlar*, do they not both trace, within the city, what belongs to no one and everyone at once? How far apart are the utopian reading of the Neolithic finds reinterpreted in Mona Mahall and Aslı Serbest's installation *newold europe* and the striking claim to reality made by the Neolithic remnants that Emre Hüner incorporates and renders functional once again in his installation *Neochronophobia*?

Are accumulations beneath the bridges in Metehan Özcan's photos any different from the archaeological sites evoked by these works? What would Marija Gimbutas have made of the Büyük Valide Han, brought to life as a shared space for trade and living as featured in Firuzan Melike Sümertaş's research, had she encountered it through Mahall and Serbest's research? Can the sense of belonging in Deniz Tortum's otherworldly *Earth* be considered apart from the quotation "Long live the soil, you are my dwelling," cited in Hiz's research?

PresentAbsent completes the traces it has gathered from different times and geographies for the present with questions suspended in the space. And with the other questions added by those of you who have brought your eyes and minds to the exhibition...

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