

Strawberry of Cosmo

Now there are intruding, from America, empty indifferent things, sham things, dummies of life . . .ⁱ

When the Cynic Diogenes pronounced himself a “citizen of the cosmos” in answer to a question in 4th Century BCE (*where do you come from-?*) he swore no allegiance to any particular polis. Neither the port city of Sinop, in modern Turkey where he was born, nor Corinth, Greece where he was enslaved and later died: a poor yet shameless ur-cosmopolitan, adrift on the continental landmass. From the French, *déraciné* means “to uproot”; as one might a vegetable.

The German word for strawberry (*çilek*) is *die Erdbeere*, or berry of the earth. Under low leafy cover, its sweet red fruits ripen, growing near to the sun-warmed soil. Turkey is the world’s fourth largest producer of strawberries (c. 370,000 metric tones per annumⁱⁱ), exporting its yield to the European and Russian markets. In early 2016, Vladimir Putin imposed trade sanctions against Turkey after a Russian jet (Su-24) flying a campaign was shot down over the Syrian border the previous November. Strawberries were included under the ban.

Since 1961, Turkey has exported cheap labor (*Gastarbeiter*) to Germany, where today around 2.5 million people with Turkish heritage still live in a state of more or less cultural non-integration. Some of the workers eventually disinvite themselves from this suspended condition, returning to no home.

In the central sculptural installation displayed here, Styrofoam plinths manufactured in China and pilfered by the artist from residential building sites across Istanbul – sites primarily managed by the Turkish state’s aggressively profiteering Housing Development Administration (TOKI) – also serve as a precariously cut-rate domestic insulation. As construed by Viola Yeşiltaç, the “images” these pebbled pedestals support are photographic analogs, cast or formed from common implements found in her German mother’s house, a peculiar dowry of poor postmodern vessels: two salad tongs, a pair of tumblers, rubber water bottle, soup ladle, tupperware bowl (with lid), hanging radiator humidifier. Molten glass and translucent color round out each captured object’s edges. In result, a perfect “picture”: the punctum of a watery recollection now contained behind a crystalline, clear optical screen. Only the cold weight of each (held, remembered) thing betrays its true consequence.

The plural form of strawberry makes a half-rhyme with the German word for “earthquake” (*das Erdbeben*) – a kind of cosmic event. When it happens, the sculptural forms on the floor and the stacked china in the cabinets shake. Under the paving stones: *la plage*. Perhaps we might fashion a barricade from the rubble, or some other monument to a home-like place.

-Kari Rittenbach

ⁱ Rainer Maria Rilke, “Letter to Muzot” (1925) quoted in Martin Heidegger, “What are Poets For?” (1946) *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 110–111.

ⁱⁱ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (<http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/>).