

Viola Yeşiltaç

Sollbruchstelle

**Thank
You for
Hustling!**

Breaking point, *Thank you for Hustling*, 2023
8 July – 25 September 2023
Kunstverein Springhornhof Neuenkirchen, Germany

by Gürsoy Doğtaş

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„While the sun and the moon follow their paths, time does not follow man“ goes a Daoist saying. Humans seem to experience time as an uninterrupted stream of moments. Once occurred, they are gone forever, never to return. French novelist Pascal Quignard (PG) writes that from the perspective of human existence, time leaves its cycle.

To use time for orientation, lines are drawn. One such line is the night sky. With the help of the annual circle of the sun (ecliptic), astrolabes calculate the positions of stars or determine the cardinal directions. The astrolabes of Viola Yeşiltaç can be seen in the vitrines of the Museum for Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul, not far from the Blue Mosque. They point to a time when these research and measurement instruments contributed to the formation of a large empire. Like in “glass coffins” (Johanna Hedva), the museum presents the relics of an empire that is no more. Neither the objects nor the empire are fully dead, so the vitrines try to make us believe. Hence, the museum revives them with narratives of nationalist hegemony.

Viola Yeşiltaç, however, measures lifetimes with these tools. Human existence leaves the cycle of time and replaces it “with the line as a long shadow of genealogical reach”, in the words of PG. Seen that way, ancestors and successors leave their shadow on individual lives. They migrate into the exhibition space.

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The study of ecliptics requires the invention of lines. On them, the star signs move around. Animals or animal signs are projected onto the night sky (PG). On earth, animals are killed for their furs or their skins.

Empty maritime images on the rough backs of artificial leather. Fibers that soak up watery paint like aquarelle paper. Akin to weather studies, Viola Yeşiltaç observes the open sea with its deep horizon in a repetitive visual composition featuring shades of blue. It might be the texture of the artificial leather that leads the gaze into infinity.

Memories of Martin Wong’s leather jacket:

He moved to New York in the early 1980s. Like the punks of his time, he painted on his black leather jacket. On it, one can see hands that gesture his name in sign language.

„Presentation detail accompanying the music: *as if one heard from underneath the skin.*” (PG/ Clara Schumann)

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To orient time, lifelines are read from the palms of hands. (PG)

Towers made from layers of felt. On one of them stands the amber-coloured folding chair „Plia”. The object made from the material of Social Sculpture and the implementation of democratic design – together they form „Plia on the Pea” (2023) and make it harder to access the exhibition space. Whose barricade is this, and against whom? An interrupted migration?

Father, are you behind the barricade, keeping us away?

In 1982, the poet Aras Ören writes the lyrics to the song „Aşk, Mark ve Ölüm” (Love, Deutschmark and Death) for the band Ideal. The German band sings it in Turkish. On the inside of the album cover, the lyrics are printed without a German translation. Aras Ören recalls: “The song describes the situation of guest workers at that time, their destiny. While writing, I thought of Anatolian folk songs that feature the lines: I worked so hard and when I finally had some money together, death came.”

The song is about the false love of the Deutschmark, the narrator is Turkish. Annette Humpe sings: „Yıllar geçti yüzüm soldu. Mark dediğin yalan sevda. Hayaller hep tuz buz oldu.” (years have passed, my face is faded. What you call Mark is false love. My dreams are frozen)

I take the hand of the Other.



“The time is out of joint” – The Intertwining of Temporalities

Viola Yeşiltaç’s exhibition “Sollbruchstelle. Thank you for Hustling!”

from July 8 to September 25, 2023, at Kunstverein Springhornhof

“The time is out of joint”—this is how Hamlet, in Shakespeare’s famous drama, expresses his discomfort with the blurring of temporalities and the past reaching into his own present. Viola Yeşiltaç also plays with the joint of time in her show “Sollbruchstelle. Thank you for Hustling!” by deliberately intertwining contexts with which she is interwoven and creating simultaneities in the exhibition space of Kunstverein Springhornhof. A simultaneity arises from the cultural objects of the Ottoman Empire, pop cultural articles from the time she was growing up, photographs of supra-geographical urban landscapes, as well as the modes of representation and depiction in the field of art.

Yeşiltaç’s “Plia auf der Erbse” (Plia on the Pea, 2023) consists of stacked felt mats arranged like a barricade in the exhibition space and obstructing one’s visual access. The felt calls Joseph Beuys’ concept of the social sculpture to mind. But instead of citing Beuys, she confronts his democratic approach with an exclusive, amber-colored folding chair named “Plia” that lies enthroned on the felt mats in a folded state. A design object encounters industrial felt—an arrangement of context-specific objects that creates a situational simultaneity in the exhibition space. After this arranged encounter, which only became possible through the artist’s personal contacts, the work will disintegrate into its individual components again after the show, the chair will be returned to its rightful owner, the felt will be reused as building material. While a physical barricade was erected here, a black-and-white photograph by Yeşiltaç shows evidence of how people barricade themselves—drawn curtains and numerous mechanisms for locks on a door. Just as Shakespeare’s Hamlet realizes that the past does not let go of him and time seems to be out of joint, traces and predetermined breaking points of Yeşiltaç’s history permeate her works and push into the present.

Behind the barricade in the exhibition space, “Die Gestolperte” (The Stumbled Person, 2018) refers to an inevitable occurrence in the wake of a supposedly insurmountable obstacle. While the physical body is absent in Yeşiltaç’s works, as in the case of the folding chair, she captures the moment of stumbling here in the washed-out colors of a person doubled over. The material serving as a ground—the reverse side of artificial leather—is a revealing element in Yeşiltaç’s works. She uses this synthetic leather, which is often produced in wage labor under precarious conditions and can be frequently found in places shaped by migrant labor, as a bridge between divergent contexts.

Seemingly unconnected complexes are brought together by repeatedly employing the same material, like in the series “Seascape” (2021-2023) featuring different sea compositions. The blue ink on artificial leather leads to dissolving contours. The recurring, tripartite horizon composition becomes blurry. Contexts are mixed, a subject like sea painting steeped in tradition is utilized, but it dissolves in blurriness and is combined with the charged material of artificial leather. While at first appearing to be a timeless depiction of the sea, the use of ink on artificial leather emphasizes the fleetingness and changeability of time because it dissolves and becoming blurry. This simultaneously draws a parallel to the process of

photography, another medium with which Yeşiltaç works. Both photography and these pieces are shaped by processes of blurring and fading that delay the recognition of the final result.

In her photo series “Eine fast ideale Stadt” (An Almost Ideal City, 2023), a synchronization of different urban contexts take place. Corners of buildings, streets, niches, bushes, park benches, coasts, or high-rises are photographed at different geographical locations. Individual characteristics, such as palm trees, words, billboards, or the architecture, reveal site-specific features, but are far from clichéd depictions. Instead, Yeşiltaç’s photos show almost supra-geographical urban spaces—be it the small German town of Langenhagen, Istanbul or American cities—everything merges. Through the specific arrangement of the photographs, grouped together and placed at different heights, they enter into a relationship with one another. Temporalities intertwine and reveal urban commonalities. Like a predetermined breaking point designed by an engineer, the arranged interplay prompts the viewers to reflect on the intersections as well as the breaking points of cultures, places and times. The photos are closely connected to Yeşiltaç’s own migration history and the shift of her center of life. Only she knows exactly where the photographs were taken. In the series of astrolabe photos, capturing moments in time, on which the photographic exploration of urban spaces is based, appears as a double motif. On the one hand, on the level of the object: astrolabes are instruments that originated in the Ottoman Empire and were used to determine the exact time or cardinal direction through the orientation to celestial bodies. They thus enable temporal orientation and connect the dimension of time with a geographical localization of the stars.

On the other hand, in the photographic mise-en-scène: Yeşiltaç photographs the astrolabes in the vitrines of the Istanbul Museum of the History of Science and Technology in Islam. Through the reflections of the glass of the vitrines in Yeşiltaç’s photos, they also refer to the location they are kept—the museum itself. What can be encountered in the institution is the migration history of Mehmet Fuat Sezgin, from Eastern Anatolia via Istanbul to Frankfurt and back to Istanbul. Sezgin studied astrolabes and rebuilt them. Yeşiltaç photographs them, not isolated, however, but in their relation to the place of storage, as testimonies of past science and also of migration movements, both Sezgin’s and her own.

This encounter is manifested in two arrangements, each consisting of a photo of the dial of an astrolabe along with a watch from Yeşiltaç’s personal collection. Two timekeepers collide: a historical instrument meets a cultural object of the 1990s, a Swatch. Both are instruments to keep time, to find one’s bearings or to orient oneself. Two photographs showing the dials of astrolabes are each framed in a display case. There is a narrow slot inserted on the side of each frame containing a Swatch and a repeated section of the astrolabe photo in the background. What becomes apparent is the literal overlapping of the contexts and the confrontation between mechanisms of museality, of showcasing, and the utility value of the objects. Yeşiltaç used her Swatch to orient herself in time and the astrolabe provided the same function, albeit in a different spatial and temporal anchoring. At the same time, both Yeşiltaç’s Swatch and Sezgin’s astrolabes are witnesses of finding one’s bearings.

Another work, “My Heirloom” (2023), goes a step further and reverses the interplay between museality and utility value. Glass objects in the shape of a Tupperware article are placed on plinths made of felt mats, an unusual material that also challenges the presentation modes of art. Three glass objects colored pink, green and yellow, all made based on the same model, bear the brand inscription “Tupperware.” The article of daily use, a brand-name plastic receptacle, is transferred to a new, supposedly more valuable material, glass, and presented as an individual object on a plinth. Yeşiltaç deliberately takes up objects that belong to a specific context, confronts her own “specters” and weaves different time levels and contexts together. In this way, temporalities gradually intertwine in a fabric of time threads.

Madeleine Häusler, 10/11/2023, Hamburg

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