

The Monaco Times

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Surprising paintings out of another world. Yes, it's obviously contemporaneous painting, but all the characters, symbols and scenes are taken out of ancient times: Leda, Phoenix, Pegasus, Achilles, Helena, Troy and so on. These characters are obviously symbolic, woven in symbolic tales about the essential questions of mankind like love and loneliness, courage and cowardice, fight and death.



Ahmet Guenestekin's work will be on show this month in the Marlborough Gallery in Monaco

It's sometimes difficult to recognise the mythological characters in the paintings, they are disintegrated in a network of body parts, eyes, ails and hairs. This rhythmical interweaving of abstract stylised body parts creates a fascinating, ornamental structure all over the canvas. In a second process the artist intervenes with strong colours; they are pure, enchanting and hypnotising and douse the delicate ornamental forms of the basic drawing. The eye enjoys it to the full, the mind is overwhelmed. This art is far from any realism, it is rather a new kind of symbolism which had its blossom period in

the penultimate turn of the century in Western Europe. The poetic titles match the symbolic content (Pegasus Meets the Crimson Phoenix). They give no explanation; they mention only the characters and a mysterious relationship between them.

The Riviera Times: In your paintings, you provide encounters of mythological characters out of different cultural traditions. For what reason do you create this mix?

Ahmet Günestekin: I want to express that all these myths, particularly the Hellenic and the Mesopotamian myth, are very important for me and I think their symbolic message is still significant today.

The sun is an element that plays a dominant role in nearly all of your oeuvres. Why do you give so much importance to it and to which mythological tradition do you refer?

In the pre-Hellenistic world there was a sun cult in Anatolia, proof of which you can see in the ruins of a sun temple constructed about 12,000 years B.C.

Does the sun cult still hold a religious significance personally for you?

I am and will always be a Muslim, it is an established fact of my family tradition. The sun as a life-giving element is a superior power which is evident for me, in which I believe and which I adore.

In Islam there is an image interdiction, particularly for the representation of God and high-ranked characters in its religious tradition. The consequence is that Muslim art is highly dominated by ornaments. Has this image interdiction affected your personal artistic expression?

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No, the figurative way of expression is present in all my oeuvres, even though in an abstract stylised way. When in a painting Pegasus meets Phoenix, both can be recognised in their profile and characteristic details.

Your contribution to the last Biennale of Venice, which provoked much attention and was conducive to your international breakthrough, was explicitly political and used new media. Was this an exception in your work?

With the multiform oeuvre 'Momentum of Memory' I put together new media like the video installation, a sculpture in the centre of the exhibition and a large bas-relief. Until then, paintings and bas-reliefs were predominant in my work. The message in Venice should have come through very clear: the denunciation of the suppression of the Kurdish language exemplified in the interdiction of the letters W, Q and X which don't exist in the Turkish but only in the Kurdish alphabet.

Basically, my profound conviction is: it's essential for the humanitarian evolvement of mankind that people all over the world develop an interest, tolerance and respect for the cultural traditions of others and discover the richness of the world cultural heritage.

This profound conviction expressed in the interview is reflected in his resolution to study the history and myths of each country he visits for an exhibition. Here in Monaco, the audience can see an oeuvre which owes its existence to this intention - the big quadrimonial painting in the entry hall of the Marlborough Gallery 'The Four Seasons of the Grimaldi', in which Günestekin illustrates a notorious episode in the history of the House of Grimaldi. The exhibition will be held in the Marlborough Gallery until 14th November.

Alfred Thum