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**HERA BÜYÜKTAŞÇIYAN**, *Destroy your house, build up a boat, save life*, 2014–15. Installation view in “A Century of Centuries” at SALT Beyoğlu, Istanbul. Courtesy SALT Beyoğlu.

## A CENTURY OF CENTURIES

ALEXANDRA MACGILP  
SALT BEYOĞLU

TURKEY

Curated by November Paynter, “A Century of Centuries,” recently held at SALT Beyoğlu in Turkey, presented an unfolding dialogue between various individual artistic positions. Each exhibited work was formed in response to transformative moments, traumatic experiences and social transitions of the past that continue to resonate in, and shape, the present. Cumulatively they expressed the repetitious nature of history and the dark legacy of the past century. The exhibition coincided with—and was haunted by—the centenary of the Armenian genocide of 1915, which was commemorated internationally, but unrecognized by Turkey, where the historical incident had taken place.

The galleries of SALT were infused with the creaking sound of Hera Büyüktaşçıyan’s poetic installation *Destroy your house, build up a boat, save life!* (2015), where wooden planks suggesting the form of a boat move slowly in sequence, mark the passing of time. Büyüktaşçıyan engaged with the history of SALT’s building, home to many minority communities during the last century, by uncovering a ceiling painting from that time. Rolled up carpets, also part of the work, speak of the Greek population of Istanbul who were forced to pack up and leave the city during the 1950s. The work’s title evokes Noah’s Ark, and the act of taking only what is necessary in order to rebuild a life once safety is reached—the mythic fantasy of a new beginning.

Elsewhere on view was Dilek Winchester’s installation, *as if nothing has ever been said before us* (2007–15), which celebrates the polyphonic nature of Turkey’s history. Texts from writer Oğuz Atay’s novel *Tutunamayanlar* (“The Disconnected,” 1971) have been transcribed phonetically in Turkish, but using letters from the Armenian, Greek, Hebrew, Latin and Arabic alphabets, which were commonly used in the Ottoman Empire before the enactment of the alphabet reform in 1928, which enforced the sole use of the Latin alphabet in Turkey.



**DILEK WINCHESTER**, *as if nothing has ever been said before us*, 2007–15. Installation view in “A Century of Centuries” at SALT Beyoğlu, Istanbul. Courtesy SALT Beyoğlu.

At the heart of the exhibition was Winchester’s “Negative Epiphany” (2015)—a series of black prints made by over-exposing paper to sunlight—which was shown alongside antique cameras from 1900 to 1915. The prints were a stand-in for photographs that could not be shown in the gallery, and reflected the unrepresentable nature of memory. Also in the show was Yasemin Özcan’s *threehundredone* (2008), comprising a jeweled necklace fashioned by Armenian craftsmen. The work’s title refers to Article 301 of the Turkish penal code—which prohibits one from insulting the nation of Turkey or its government institutions—and its involvement in the prosecution of Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink in 2007, who was later assassinated.

Meanwhile, German colonialism was explored in Judith Raun’s *eser* (2014–15) and Kapwani Kiwanga’s *...rumours Maji was a lie*. (2014) through the two works’ reanimation of archival materials. The former work examines German engineers who constructed the Anatolian and Baghdad railways in pre-war Anatolia, and the latter looks at the Maji Maji uprising (1905–07) against German occupation that took place in East Africa and was led by the spiritual medium Kinjekitile.



**YASEMIN ÖZCAN**, *threehundredone*, 2008. Installation view in “A Century of Centuries” at SALT Beyoğlu, Istanbul. Courtesy SALT Beyoğlu.



**KAPWANI KIWANGA.** ...rumours Maji was a lie., 2014. Installation view in "A Century of Centuries" at SALT Beyoğlu, Istanbul. Courtesy SALT Beyoğlu.

In Jumana Manna and Sille Storihe's *The Goodness Regime* (2013), youngsters enact scenes from Norwegian history. The film looks at how this small, Scandinavian country has based its national character on its past use of its wealth for "the greater good," when, in fact, Norwegian attempts to support the peace process in Palestine, for example, have produced mixed results. Meanwhile, Shilpa Gupta's installation *Untitled* (2013–14) reflects the daily physical struggles of living in a *chhitmahal*, or Indian enclaves that are within Bangladesh and vice versa.

Didem Pekün's diaristic video essay, *Of Dice and Men* (2011–), shares her experience of living between London and Istanbul, highlighting significant moments of her life in these two places. She first learned of the Gezi Park protests at a remove, via social and foreign media. After returning to Istanbul, while the protests continued, she questioned whether to live in the moment, or attempt to document the movement and the way the representation and experience of events, memories and consciousness are shaped by the media. The vulnerability of the protestors' bodies, in the face of rubber bullets and water canons, is evoked in the video. Emphasis on the body as a site of resistance is also seen in art collective Chto Delat's video installation *The Excluded. In a Moment of Danger* (2014), which explores the current state of repression in their native Russia.

The false dawn of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution is poignantly evoked in Maha Maamoun's film trilogy entitled *Like Milking a Stone* (2009–11). The first of the films is an exuberant piece that comprises a series of clips from Egyptian movies, which feature the pyramids as a backdrop, where women in beehive hairdos and miniskirts optimistically discuss their dreams of the future.

"A Century of Centuries" was a timely, moving and intensely thought-provoking exhibition that discussed the colonial histories, nationalism and contested borders of Turkey and that of other countries abroad. It prompted viewers to think about how history is (ab)used by those in power—and to consider ways to resist such hegemonic interpretations—as well as the ability of art to help us imagine a better future.



**JUDITH RAUM.** eser, 2014. Installation view in "A Century of Centuries" at SALT Beyoğlu, Istanbul. Courtesy SALT Beyoğlu.

"A Century of Centuries" was on view at SALT Beyoğlu, Istanbul, from March 10 to May 24, 2015.

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