



TIDES OF MEMORY

Known for her site-specific explorations of memory-charged spaces, Istanbul-based artist Hera Büyüktaşçıyan fathoms the aquatic currents of our minds. Her work navigates the sharp edge of social/political rupture, and floats through the endlessness of petrified time.

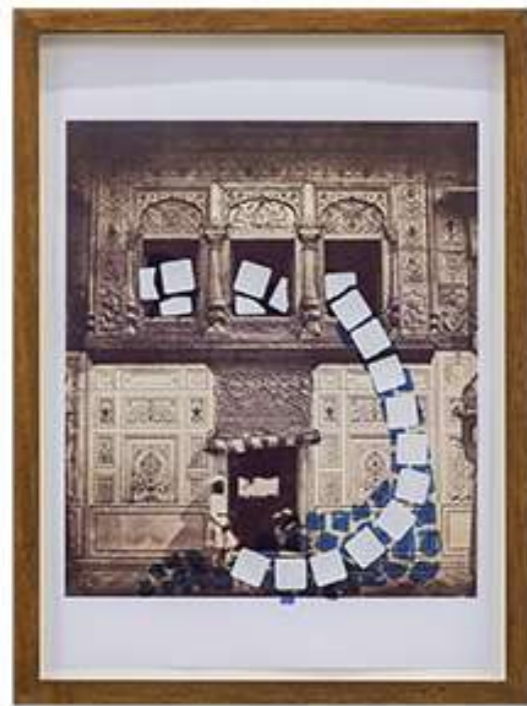
Text by Kevin Jones

In Naples, below virtually every built structure lurks an architectural shadow world. The ancient Serino Aqueduct, once used to ferry water, becomes, in Büyüktaşçıyan's hands, a 'floating' architecture. The artist confounds space by making it seem to defy gravity: the water's path is resurrected and suspended overhead, like a sky, destabilizing both visual and spatial experience. True to her approach to all spaces, Büyüktaşçıyan dives deep into the site's memory and resurfaces with a complex commentary of its dynamics.



Images:
Hera Büyüktaşçıyan
From There We Came Out and Saw the Stars, 2018
Installation view at Underneath the Arches - Aqua Augusta, Naples, Italy, 2018

Nuances abound, like the differing weights of ancient terracotta and contemporary industrial tiles as they sag in the azure netting overhead. Yet through such details, she compels us to sense much bigger forces—disappearance/appearance, destruction/reconstruction, life/death—and brings us face-to-face (or head-to-head?) with aquatic infinity.



Hera Büyüktaşçıyan
Reconstructors Volume III, 2017
Collage on paper

If modernity is liquid, as sociologist Zygmunt Bauman proposes, so too is history fluid. Büyüktaşçıyan's fascination with the Punjab took her to both the Indian and Pakistani sides of the post-Partition divide, retracing the flows of history across a barrier born of conflict and ideological tensions. The white, collaged squares of these works recall both bullet hole 'placeholders'—municipal markers dotting the surfaces of buildings pocked by British fire—and the white marble slabs

“Space is only knowable through the ebbs and flows of its history.”



Hera Büyüktaşçıyan
Deconstructors Volume I (detail), 2017
Collage on paper

of industrious renovation. Abandoned buildings, at once witnesses and victims of rupture, are caught in this endless time-tide that trickles out of frame, a clue to its cyclical knot. No place can be understood in its present, Büyüktaşçıyan implies, nor should we try. Space is only knowable through the ebbs and flows of its history.



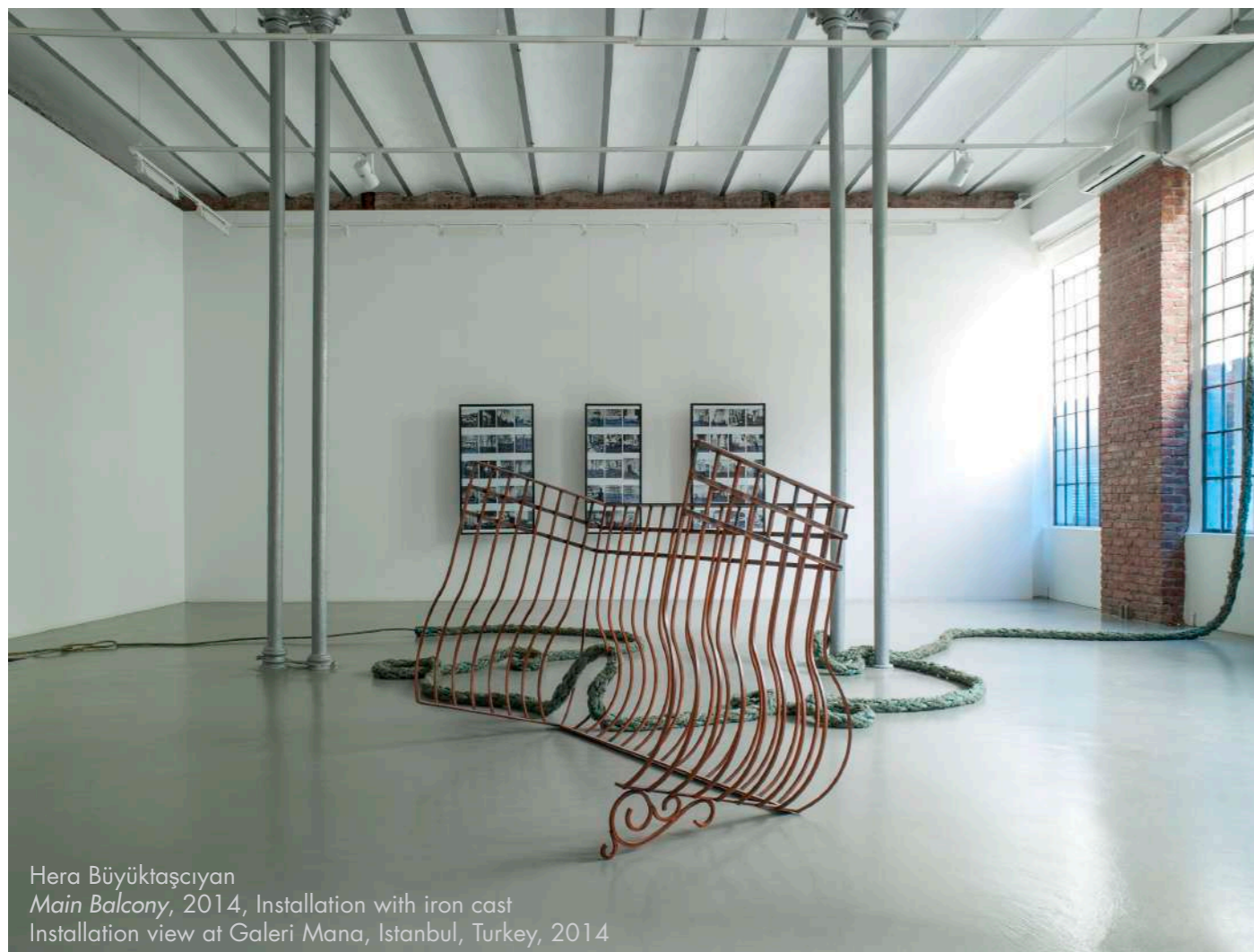
Left top and bottom:
 Hera Büyüktaşçıyan
Destroy Your House, Build up a Boat, Save Life, 2015
 Carpet, wood, rope
 Installation view at EVA International, Ireland, 2016

Below: research material



How do ruptures shape our perception of spaces? In 1955, a pogrom targeting non-Muslim properties rocked a Beyoğlu apartment house, forcing its inhabitant into exile over the following years. Reflecting on the trauma and precarity of migration, Büyüktaşçıyan merged the forlorn irony of a ceiling panel depicting a serene mountain-and-lake landscape from one of the flats, with the pre-Biblical Babylonian

tale of a diluvial arc à la Noah. Rolled carpets—a signifier of both unexpected exodus and longed-for home—bear the newly charged image, yanked from its decorative function within the space, and set on a perilous course in its new guise within a carpet-hulled boat. Scrubbed and whitewashed, the initial space bears no trace of the trauma it housed, yet the unease lingers.



Hera Büyüktaşçıyan
Main Balcony, 2014, Installation with iron cast
 Installation view at Galeri Mana, Istanbul, Turkey, 2014

“Familiar and yet foreign, these structures are eerie emblems of Büyüktaşçıyan’s hallmark entanglements of space, memory, and trauma.”

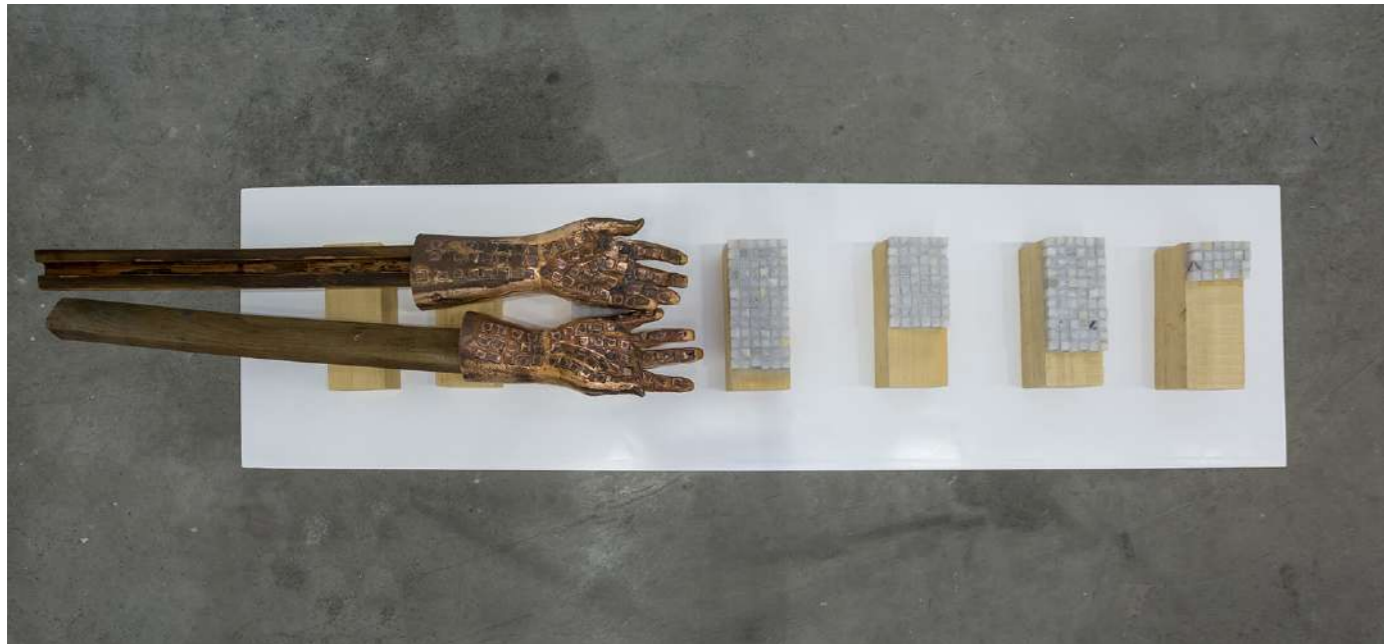
VIDEO: *Dock*, 2014

Link: <https://vimeo.com/458500656>

Büyüktaşçıyan revels in the uncanny, particularly when it concerns the very ground we stand on. Docks and balconies are slippery spaces—somewhere in between land and non-land, inside and outside—and they are often cast in her tales of the loss or impossibility of terra firma. The over-scaled *Main Balcony* is a former site of sight, from which its forcibly exiled Greek resident would admire the seascape into which she was ejected following a 1964 exile. *Dock*, less directly traumatizing, nonetheless manifests instability—its slats creaking and bobbing atop a truncated wardrobe. Familiar and yet foreign, these structures are eerie emblems of Büyüktaşçıyan’s hallmark entanglements of space, memory, and trauma.



Hera Büyüktaşçıyan
Dock, 2014
 Found wooden furniture, plank, magnet, engine driven mechanism in two parts
 Installation view at Galeri Mana, Istanbul, Turkey, 2014



Hera Büyüktaşçıyan
The Relic, 2016
 Wood, bronze and marble mosaic
 Installation view at Green Art Gallery, Dubai, 2017

No watery navigation of Büyüktaşçıyan's practice is complete without dipping into what she calls 'aquamorphology'—water's ability to transform every substance it touches, over time. Repetitive indented squares mar bronze hands and forearms in *The Relic*, conjuring the transformed identities of workers building the Taj Mahal, their fingerprints erased by the laborious sanding of stone with wet grass. Splayed in weighty supplication, the petrified skin belies the deep—and continuous—violence gurgling in its mutilated pores.



Right and below:
 Hera Büyüktaşçıyan
Freely You have Received, Freely Give, 2016, Ceramic, acrylic, wood
 Installation view from Cappadox, Kızılçukur Valley/Cappadocia, 2016



The gesture is simple but harrowing: set an architectural reminder of Turkey's formerly vibrant Greek community in land so extenuated from agricultural overproduction as to be 'burnt.' A ghost culture planted in dead soil. The architectural element is a ceramic-grape-strewn church doorframe from a Greek village reduced to a ghost town after the post-Greco-Turkish War (1922) population swap. Sown in the arid Cappadocia soil, the vine-laden reconstruction channels an inebriating irony. Büyüktaşçıyan prompts us to question not just the extinction of a historic viticulture, but perhaps the infertility of contemporary culture as a whole.



“(Hera) Büyüktaşçıyan prompts us to question not just the extinction of a historic viticulture, but perhaps the infertility of contemporary culture as a whole.”

Hera Büyüktaşçıyan
Freely You have Received, Freely Give, 2016
Ceramic, acrylic, wood
Installation view from Cappadox, Kızılçukur Valley/Cappadocia, 2016

The violence of any colonial enterprise is double: it appropriates lands, and then enslaves the disenfranchised to constructing its cities. In Toronto, where this work was first shown, Büyüктаşçıyan directly critiqued not only the theft of indigenous First Nation forests, but also the enlisting of Punjabi migrants into an exploited workforce. *Reveries* toggles between two views: the 'landscape' of carpets-cum-timber, and the 'abstract' patterns singed into the soft industrial carpets, conflating aerial urban mapping and traditional Punjabi textile patterns. The imperious

regiment of erect rolls echoes the network of timber posts undergirding the city's invisible underground infrastructure; the scars in the carpet flesh revive the memory of lands (and lives) lost. Together, they embody an uneasy yet indelible dialogue between architectural memory and belonging. Like many Büyüктаşçıyan works, *Reveries'* uncomfortable message lingers, despite its strategy of petrification.

Hera Büyüктаşçıyan
Reveries of an Underground Forest, 2019
Installation view at Green Art Gallery, Dubai, 2020



Left and below:
Hera Büyüктаşçıyan
Reveries of an Underground Forest (detail), 2019



VIDEO DOCUMENTATION

In her own words, Hera Büyüktaşçıyan takes us through the journey of the research and making of *Reveries of an Underground Forest* by unearthing different historical narratives and timelines. Commissioned and produced for the 2019 Toronto Biennial, the work is currently on view at the artist's solo at Green Art Gallery.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/460464945>

