

OVERGADEN.

Deniz Eroglu
Milk & Honey
18.06 – 14.08 2016



Deniz Eroglu, *Mountain Elegy*, 2012. Video still

A Twinkle and a Tear

By Laura Amann

According to legend the Döner Kebab was invented by a Turkish guest worker in Berlin in 1972. The self-proclaimed inventor is said to have noticed that the large working class of Germany never had time for proper lunch thus they usually ate on the go. So he decided to put the traditional Turkish kebab in a bread roll; salad, sauces and other refinements followed later. From there began a triumphant advance throughout Europe that eventually even led to its successful re-integration into Turkish culinary culture.

Unsurprisingly, Berlin is said to be the capital of Döner with its more than 1000 Döner-shops. The popularity and wide-spread acceptance of the dish, though, does not seem to have had any impact in terms of overcoming the increase of xenophobic tendencies in recent decades and appears to be almost inversely related to it rather serving as a demarcation

of what is other and alien instead of proving common grounds. The success of the Kebab, the innumerable Döner-shops supplying the hungry masses as well as their owners, has seen the rise of right wing parties in almost every European country gaining momentum in, what we are told is an era of constant crisis; be it oil-driven wars, the displacement of millions of refugees, a grotesquely out-of-control stock market protected by politics or the relentless and manic destruction of our environment. A political rise feeding off anxieties and insecurities that were instilled by these same parties in the first place.

It is in this context that Deniz Eroglu adopts the motif of the Döner Kebab as a starting point for what in the exhibition *Milk & Honey* becomes an auto-psychoanalytical cabinet of curios self-reflections. The aestheticization of the Kebab, initially a light hearted, slightly

mischievous gesture inspired by quotidian life in Berlin soon reveals itself as a gateway and key figure allowing us to access the emotional depths of migrational Absurdistan.

While over the last years Deniz Eroglu's practice has gradually opened up to other formats besides video and film encompassing different media such as sculptures, installations, and text, for this show the source material has been narrowed down to the artist's ancestry, history and personal biography. Eroglu has long exhibited a strong interest in characters that inhabit the margins of society and are in some way vulnerable or subject to persecution; be it melancholic hermits, bedridden patients or emaciated peasants, to name a few examples. In the past year, Deniz Eroglu has seized hold of these themes of vulnerability and displacement within his own personal context. He has taken an interest in the psychology of his father, Mustafa, a Turkish man who had been working as a travelling actor in a little troupe that staged political plays in the Eastern part of Anatolia in the 70s when he saw himself forced to leave his native place as a 21-year-old just prior to an upsurge of political violence in Turkey that led to many casualties among left-wing political factions. These reflections on the fate of his father and his subsequent life in Denmark has led to the comprehensive arrangement of a full spatial installation that lies before us in this exhibition.

I had been meeting with Deniz before leaving on a trip to Kassel, Weimar, and Prague. Throughout this journey all the topics Deniz had brought up during our conversations such as his double-natured identity, the predicaments of being an immigrant, his shifting viewpoints and gradual reconciliation with the image of his father, were resonating in my head. Being myself of Chilean and Austrian descent I could very much relate to everything Deniz was describing although from quite a different angle. I had always seen myself in an advantageous position, growing up speaking Spanish with my mother, German with my father, regularly visiting our extended family in Chile and Austria while growing up in Spain, enjoying the incredulity of people unable to synthesize my latina features and passport or switching languages when my sister and I did not want

to be overheard. But I was also lacking a certain attachment to a specific homeland and people, something I would like to think of as liberating and healthy. 'Elitist immigrants', Deniz had called us. Probably rightfully so, as we had grown up in privileged situations enjoying opportunities our parents did not have.

However, his experience had been a completely different one, possibly related to an additional major difference namely religion. But more interestingly, during his childhood he had quite radically changed his point of view about his paternal heritage. Something he had regarded as rather shameful and embarrassing at a young age: his Turkish father who was so different from the other fathers. The Kebab shop owner with his golden chain and accent he would later on come to see as an inspiring father figure as well as someone who embodies an artistic sensibility in his own right. Beneath the facade of the kebab man there is a reflecting man who harbours his own idiosyncratic and critical perspectives on the world.

With *Milk & Honey*, Deniz Eroglu allows the spectator a peek into what could be perceived as a family album in form of a spatial installation that unfolds as a comprehensive construction, a configuration of family artefacts in the form of handwritten statements and self-made home videos that transport us from the prosaic into the realm of fantasy. In the works that fill the exhibition space the fantastic manifests itself woven into the tissue of everyday reality, expressing and evoking a variety of sentiments ranging from melancholy and guilt to joy and love. Sensations that ultimately merge to describe a tragicomedy of the immigrant. The biblical exodus reference that constitutes the title as well as the eponymous overarching element of the spatial installation, *Milk & Honey*, a flowing river of glittery streams of milk adorned with stacks of golden oversized Danish Kroner dripping with sticky honey, alludes to the promise of abundance and opportunity that on the one hand informs the drive of the immigrant, but on the other also fuels the anxiety and fear of loss of the natives.

The scenery of this scripted space for amusement plays with the materiality and language

of the Kebab shop. Hand blown glass vases mimicking the distinctive shape and colouring of the huge meat skewers are placed on plinths of stainless steel and white tiles performing a translation from the profane, cheap, and unhealthy to the highly aestheticized and idolized. They can be read as an effort by the artist to merge his father's identity and world with his own. Portraying and reflecting on contemporary conditions such as the psychological consequences of migration and alienation from a personal vantage point, Deniz Eroglu taps into the histories of his immediate environment involving his family members in the production of many of the works. For instance, we see them as actors in the film *Mountain Elegy* (2012), in which Eroglu and his father and brother set out to register their psychological landscape. The filmic medium serving as a seismograph of affective outbursts, in an attempt to express what may be hard to say or formulate otherwise. Scenes of primordial fear, loneliness and displacement manifest themselves, echoing the father's life and fate, condensing memories, or rather the emotions evoked by them, from a time when the young sons took part in their father's stigma. Memories of walking together in the streets like foreign outsiders. In this work estrangement and alienation become, though contradictory to their nature, a shared and mutual experience.

In a process of constant de- and reconstruction a psychological typology of the immigrant takes shape.

Oh, you believe that construction only has to do with buildings? I am constantly constructing myself and I am constructing you and you do the same. And the construction lasts until the material of our feelings crumbles and the concrete of our wills runs out. (...) It is enough to have our willpower sway just a little and to have the emotions fluctuate, well, that they just change a tiny bit, and there goes our reality!

states Vitangelo Moscarda, main character of Luigi Pirandello's novel *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand*¹ – not only elucidating on his realisation that he represents a different persona to everyone he knows or has ever met, but also to himself as he becomes aware that even though his body may be one, his spir-

it certainly is not. His quest to find the elusive, true, secret self beneath the reality of social existence leads him to the recognition that the unity of the self is nothing but an illusion and that we exist in a multiplicity of diverse strata where the self unveils itself in various forms to us and to others.

If this is true for everyone it might be even more so as an immigrant. Leaving one's home country means abandoning much more than what is tangible such as cultural norms, religious customs, a social support structure or a formerly established identity, social status, and language. Yet the expectations from the new environment are high, integration and assimilation being the magic words. From a position of privilege it is easy to feel entitled to demand, but rarely do we self-reflect on our capacities to accommodate, to feel and express empathy. Still, we rarely think about the impact cultural bereavement has, what it means to de- and reconstruct one's cultural identity and to live in dissonance with the customs, beliefs, and expectations of your surroundings.

As a rhizomatic structure Deniz' works branch out and ramify, creating connections in a déjà vu manner. We recognize the coins not only bedded in the riverbank but also in the video game *Super Baba* (2016) where we find the Kebab in form of reflective glass vases, but also as hills in Super Baba's backdrop and we feel unconsciously familiar with the white tiles, their pattern serving as the metaphorical iconography of the show. Through a 'Baba-biographical' theme park, Eroglu carefully composes a portrait of the father and simultaneously confronts us with the image of a society wrought with greed and intolerance asking us at which expense this comes. We are indisputably counted among the richest in the world, but it does not seem to be enough. Our legislation now functions as a high impenetrable wall around our countries. We live in capitalist societies where growth is religion, where people are expendable if they do not contribute, where effectiveness is treasured above anything else and immigrants ultimately have no place.

But the show is not only a portrayal of Baba's struggle, it is also a self-portrait of Deniz, the

son, who exposes the insecurities and confusion of coming to age in a situation where it was required to constantly switch from one world to another, one mind-set to the other. This show can be read as a reproach to a society that makes a young boy want to distance and detach himself from his own father. A sense of ambiguity and bewilderment is a constant companion in the installation. It is evident, however, that *Milk & Honey* was conceived for its specific Danish context and that there is a message directed at its public encrypted in the totality of the artworks.

Before us we have an exposition of a process of personal archaeology. Eroglu has re-discovered pre-existing material to offer a deeply intimate, vulnerable expression. The objects, traces and sentiments found in this excavation site, though fragmentary in their nature, amalgamate into a deeply personal act of communication. Confronted with such a palette of emotional states, we are left with a twinkle and a tear.

Laura Aaman is an architect and curator based in Amsterdam and Vienna. She is a graduate of de Appel's Curatorial Programme and co-founder of Pøl.

1. Luigi Pirandello, *Een, Ingen, Hundredtusind*. H. Hagerup, Copenhagen, 1935, p. 61. Editor's translation.

CV

Deniz Eroglu (b. 1981) studied at the Funen Art Academy and Städelschule in Frankfurt, where he graduated in 2014. Eroglu is currently on a two-year residency at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam. He has exhibited widely internationally, including shows in Germany, Austria, Mexico and the US.

EVENTS

Sunday 14 August 3pm
Talk & film screening // *Portrait of the Muslim*
– from silent film to Hollywood
This afternoon, Deniz Eroglu will shed light on

how Muslims have been represented within popular culture and film history in a film screening and conversation with the cultural sociologist Mehmet Necef.

THANK YOU

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UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

Friday 2 September 2016 Overgaden presents a solo exhibition by Mette Winkelmann and *Parable of Love* by Michael Würtz Overbeck. Both exhibitions run through 23 October 2016.

This exhibition folder can be downloaded from: www.overgaden.org

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