



TUNCA, DOMUS, 2016, CHALK ON WALDPAPER, 100x50 CM

TUNCA

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Island

Hera Büyüктаşçıyan has an island. We do not always have a chance to meet someone having geographies inside. Under the most untouched golden light of the day, we travel with her like two monks bound to the roots of this land. This is a 'walking article', which leads us to the depths of the history, from Hera's self to the island's memory on the route she plotted. I let myself go with her pace

Words: Elâ Atakan Photography: Sırma Aksüyek



It's seven thirty-five in the morning. The sea lies along ahead of me as though gold dusts spilled on its blue shades, looking as calm as inland waters.

I approach the first page of a novel as if I am approaching an island. Nearly a month ago, Hera was standing in front of me at the beginning of the staircase of a school with creaky floors, her hair was braided and she had an earth colour blouse on. When she said 'I follow the birds when I go to the island, they show me where the dolphins are', I started dreaming about today.

I look around as I approach the Island. As white chests of the swallows are nearly touching the sea, I am looking for the dolphins Hera told me about, but I cannot see them. Swallows pass by swiftly and circle around a big light beam ahead. Morning appetite. So I have an appetite for what I am about to listen, I will turn the first page a little later. I come near her land. Hera Büyüktaşçıyan has an island. We do not always have a chance to meet someone having geographies inside. Firstly, I look at her hair, she let free, black curls on her waist, shining. Her eyes sparkle, renewing the loneliness of the island. Under the most untouched golden light of the day, we will travel with her like two monks bound to the roots of this land. This is a 'walking article', which leads us to the depths on the map she plotted, from Hera's self to the island's memory. I let myself go with her pace.



(ÜSTTE) HERA'NIN YÜKTAŞCIYAN TARAFINDAN ÇİZİLMİŞ DEĞİŞİNE ATULAN YERLİ KÖKÜNÜ RESMİ
(SAGSA) YEĞİDA'HERA BÜYÜKTAŞCIYAN TARAFINDAN ÇİZİLMİŞ HEYBELİ ADALARI ÜSTÜNE ELA'ATILAN YERLİ YÜKTAŞCIYAN GÜZÜNG'AHIRI İZİTİLEMEYİ

We are at Heybeliada. Formerly named as Halkos, the island is named after the blue copper ore, which is equal to gold in value. An island that has been preserved and blessed for centuries. Hera has been living on this island for fifteen years in summer and winter. She, many times alone, has passed by this route that she leads us. Every time she passed by in different seasons, she came back, maybe with a new thought striking her. Here we meet this route, Hera's world, the images she assigned a meaning to, the memories she had on this route in the past.

We stand in front of a house, a very green mansion. 'My grandfather was born in Heybeliada. I found out after a very long time, from the pictures I found by chance in the house,' she says. They are taking the belongings which can be considered as scrap out of the garden of her grandfather's house. An evacuation movement. By the law of capital tax, they had lost the house in one night. She was more emotionally attached to this house when she was a kid. 'However, as a person working with the past, this may be the only place I do not assign a meaning to,' she says.

We are moving ahead to the upper side of the island. Some of the frame houses were renovated, making us dream of the existence of a blissful life with its new owners. Some of

them are discoloured, empty, balconied houses with broken shutters, looking like their brown wood blocks are about to collapse. Hera says that she takes inspiration for many of her works from the Greek island houses with abraded woods which resisted all earthquake forces due to their interlocking system. We stand in front of some of these by turns. In front of one, she says: 'I used to sit in front of the door of this house all the time without knowing the reason why.' We are looking at the base of a balcony reminiscent of her work Destroy Your House and Build Up A Boat. 'I drew the balcony of this house which had nothing but railings over and over again for the Balcony work,' she says. She tells us about her connection to the balconies and what they mean to her: 'I used to build up my own world in the balcony when I was a kid. A rug would be rolled out in the balcony, there would be a tarp stretched among the railings, and I used to begin a journey by a boat looking upon the city.' The tarps swelling with the wind in the balcony, which she told us about, resolves Hera's recent work on the group exhibition by Fondazione Prada in Athens: 'Balcony is both a public space and a personal space offering a window to the outside world. When you step out to a Balcony, you look at somewhere distant and dream of another imaginary place.'







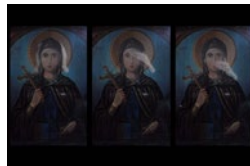
The Greeks living here left this island until the eighties almost every ten months with a migration wave. Population exchange in 1922, the Capital Tax in 1942, events of September 6-7 in 1955, Greeks being sent off without taking nothing with them in one night in 1964 and in 1974, military operation in Cyprus... Hera talks about how the houses vomited, letting everything inside them out, the memories on the streets... We pass by a shop which collects the stuff from Greek houses. 'This is the place where I buy the stuff for several of my works,' says Hera. 'The lives piled on top of each other are together here, this place has a unique voice. This shop has a time zone of its own.' Perhaps, Hera's idea of a boat house is based on learning how to live on the water, on a slippery ground flowing like the sea... Just then, Hera puts her hand on the trunk of an old plane tree: 'This is a special tree, you should not pass by without touching its trunk.' Then she tears off a piece from the bark and she starts walking again saying 'I used to paint on tree barks'. Hera is impressed by the paving stone textures of the house with red geraniums which we lastly stand in front of. She started working with mosaics after attending Mustafa Pilevneli's wall workshop when she was in the university. 'You are an old soul of the Byzantine, it is seen obviously in every picture you drew, in the colours you picked' her teacher said to her. After that workshop, she embraced her Byzantium identity and then she served as a research assistant to Hatice Nalçabıtmaz who is an expert on icon restoration. 'Later, I realized that I had actually grown up in this culture,' she says.

As a daughter of a mother who studied Byzantine history, Hera grew up in a house full of all the books written about

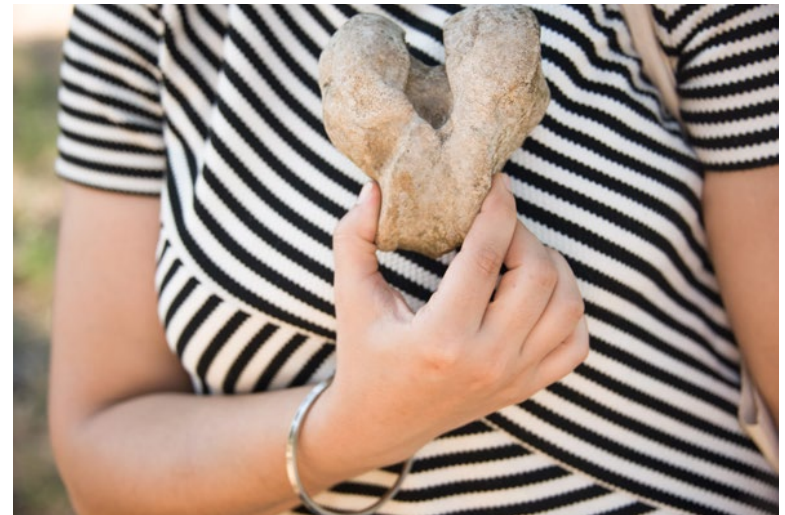
İstanbul. She used to play in the garden of the Turkish and Islamic Arts and Archeological Museum and she went to archaeological sites with her mother a few times. She was a child who creates her own crowds of her fantasy world when she was alone. She used to lay icons together and make them talk. In the Greek tradition, a protective icon is placed beside of the newborn child and her patroness saint icon was Evangelia, the namesake of her mother. 'I always used to think she was my mother and she was protecting me,' says Hera, describing at once, all these interrelated issues that are the roots of the work she does.

When we move to the point where houses are rare and the sea approaches us, Hera turns to me and asks excitedly, 'Now we have moved to a different time zone. Do you feel it?' 'It is like the feeling you get when you go swimming early in the morning. I feel like that after this point of the island. Especially when walking on rainy days, that feeling becomes more intense,' she adds.

When I asked Hera what time zone she feels that she belongs to, she told me that she belongs to a timeless time zone and that the whole past seems so close to her as if it happened only yesterday even if it is from Neolithic ages and belongs to Byzantine. So, she is transforming the past to bring it in compliance with today. For the place she felt that she belonged to, she said that she pieced together the places she was impressed by on some separate trips she took while working. Hera, like one of the old travelers of a timeless world, takes us to deeper places at every step in this journey she leads us.



HERA RUYUKTAŞÇIYIN İNİTİSİBİLES
VIDEO STILL







While we are moving towards to her monastery on the middle road covered by pine trees in both sides, she remembers a memory of this road and tells me: 'Fires breaks out every year in the island. One time we could not move on this road, because all the animals, hedgehogs, snakes ran away from their nests near the seashore where the fire broke out and they were trying to pass over the hill to the other side. It must have been a very long distance for them. There is nothing you can do, you just watch it, without being able to help. I think it is because of this geography, not doing anything and just sitting back and watching. Some of the most frequently mentioned topics in Hera's works are immigration, unhousing... Just at that moment, I am thinking about that humanity story, perhaps the oldest one, the great flood, as if to complete all her thoughts.

The pine trees on the way to the monastery are like an arch at the entrance of a city. After I pass under it, I get another feeling.' Then we stop right in front of the monastery, a place like a coppice forest with pine trees.

This place has a unique atmosphere. Hera says that she considers this place as a necropolis. A place where dead horses are left, belongings are thrown away, a place where dogs die, like the site of a murder. It has a strange smell. Hera tells me that she has found tile pieces here dating from 1960: 'As if there was a house and it exploded, then all its pieces went everywhere.' Maybe, our last stop before arriving the Monastery Hera calls the end of the world, is

to remember the death, the forgotten, the residual. In conformity with a necropolis, we find a heart-shaped horse bone, Hera puts it on her heart. Hera summarizes all her works in a single movement, she embraces all emotions and memories affectionately regardless of the sadness and the pain of the past, the time and the place.

There is a stone wall lined one after the other right next to the grave of the monk Arsenios who rebuilt the monastery of Hagios Spyridon. 'Every stone is like from a different age, a different civilization, I love this wall so much' says Hera. Right next to us is the garden of the Monastery, full of lavenders, grapevines, welcoming us with all its abundance. Then, we walk in together. She places the votive candles edge to edge in the sand, so that they burn together as one flame. 'Have you seen the rainbow room?' she asks us excitedly. The stained glasses on the inner side of the monastery turns light into rainbow and reflects it around. We are in Hera's magical world. Anything is possible here. We look at the endless view from the Monastery's side, overlooking the sea, with seagull shadows upon us. Hera writes her own legend. She gives voice to a new fairy tale. At that moment, we surrender to the existence of the island and to the sea lying ahead of us with all its blueness, running away from the city and forgetting where we came from, where we are going to or what the time is like that monk in the Island story of Bilge Karasu's book 'A Long Day's Evening' which we often mentioned during our walk with Hera.

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Studio that hides in the house of Seza Paker

Words: Nazlı Pektaş Photography: Romain Winkel

