

MUSTAFA HULUSI

SEEKS NEW REALITIES WITHIN ART'S SPIRITUALITY

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Contrasts often cause difficult situations in life. They evoke unexpected moments and lead to unplanned events. But an "estheticized contrast" -- as an element of art -- usually offers a powerful tool to reveal various realities often hidden in life.

Such is the case with artist **Mustafa Hulusi's** work. Born, living and working in London, Hulusi is showcasing his second solo exhibition, "New Works," until Nov. 12 in İstanbul at the Galerist Art Gallery in Beyoğlu. Hulusi presents 15 of his most recent works that go back and forth between abstractionism and realism.

"I've been working on these works since early June," Hulusi told Today's Zaman. "These are all new works, made specifically for this show."

One part of the exhibition is composed of "Rose Abstracts," five oils on canvas in which paintings of flowers are coupled with various abstract designs.

"I have two separate practices [in painting]: figurative and abstract," says Hulusi. "The abstract and figurative [parts of these paintings] were worked on and developed separately. I had around 15 flower paintings and 15 abstract works, and then I matched them, so they're not necessarily specifically [complementary to] each other. They're just abstracts: shape and form. [Together with the] figurative paintings, they create a new meaning once they're put together. So, that's the premise of these works."

Belonging nowhere

The London-born Turkish Cypriot says his work is primarily based upon his identity. "I've always had an interest in how my identity was formed because it's a very hybrid identity that is quite unusual. I never felt like I belong to any particular place I've been, whether it's Cyprus or London or Turkey or anywhere," he says.

Explaining how this echoes in his art, Hulusi says: "I picked up a portion of who I am [in terms of] the historical background of my ancestors. Thus I found that ... the unifying cultural idea that struck me was the idea of the tradition in Islamic art where you have [both] figuration and abstraction. This is something modernity claimed [to have] in the past century but these intellectual ideas, visual ideas are actually kind of borrowed [from Islamic culture]. I'm trying to pick up a part from that history of European colonialism and reassert a contemporary need to reclaim certain titles."

Abstraction and figuration already existed in Islamic art and his works are up-to-date, contemporary versions of Islamic art, Hulusi says.

The flower paintings standing abreast with the abstract design altogether compose a new meaning and reveal a new contrast as well. "I'm kind of toying with different languages," says Hulusi. "There's the language of advertising. This is not only the language of 20th century art. This

is everyday language, the vernacular of advertising images; popular culture; high and low culture and they're all mixed up and turned upside down. So, you'll see that the abstract patterns describe the process of 'looking' while the flowers also describe the same process. That's how I'm trying to fracture different systems of perception in a single work."

Spirituality in art

Hulusi is an artist producing in diverse fields, including video, installation and photography. Yet, for this exhibition, he chose to create oil paintings -- what he defines as an "open space to work in" in terms of "creating a reality."

"Oil on canvas has a specific history and a specific lineage. That's the context which I'm trying to operate in," indicates Hulusi, "because that convention amplifies the process I'm trying to achieve as it talks about a certain Western history of art. There's a kind of substantiality in the paintings, one which the mechanical process wouldn't have. The fact that you know that they've been made by hand; there's a certain labor ... a loving touch to it."

"If that was a photograph of a flower, it wouldn't have the same illusion," he says, explaining why he stayed away from other fields in this exhibition. "Photo-

realism is a specific type of art; it's the 1970s American pop-art photo realism. Throughout the history of art, they spoke of the role of art, of what art has to do, so fine arts had to move into a gallery context in order to retain its autonomy and modernity. That's the lineage that I'm from; if you follow it through, you'll end up in the conceptual art of the '60s. But I had to reinvent the purpose of freedom painting can offer. And that's an open space which you can play with: I play within that area."

As for his series of installations, Hulusi uses an abstract and geometrical language through which he seeks different realities. "I've been interested in the spirituality in art," Hulusi notes. "How can one attain different realities through looking at pictures? This has always been done for as long as human beings can remember. Previously, that was the role of the clergy and so the visual arts always had that role to play. And that's something I'm interested in. With this particular work, I try to see what the optics of visuals can do. I'm just trying to push it as far as I can. It's that simple."



Mustafa Hulusi