

mert diner

gözden uzak

out of sight

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I M A L A T
- H A N E

Mert Diner

Out of Sight

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out of sight



“Out of Sight”

Deniz Kırkallı

On the ground floor of Imalat-hane, we see works by Mert Diner; a collection that has evolved into three different series, and was exhibited in various locations between 2016-2022. In the first room, we encounter “Lovely Fucking Greys”, a series of paintings where the central theme of Mert’s practice, the issue of ‘covering up,’ and his gesture related to form are most clearly and directly addressed. Moving around, we notice a change in the color palette, and a growing acceptance of the failure to cover: the covering layers become more transparent, and the underlying images more insistent, seeping through the edges. Returning to the wall at the entrance, we see how Mert gradually unburdens himself from the layers he was hiding under; he invites the viewer back to the actual space with the most intimate and generous state of his practice- his sketches: a myriad of visual clues about the personal history behind his paintings. To me, this wall is both a curatorial decision that shakes Mert’s practice, and a demonstration that he has taken the issues he addressed over the years, a step further. It is a gesture that disrupts the linear narrative of the exhibition, pointing to a cumulative process of thinking and producing.

I, on the other hand, write this text both as a curator who has long followed Mert’s practice and closely observed his different stages, and as a friend who has related to Mert on various levels over the years. Since 2018, I have been working on concepts of post-human relationships, reciprocity and relationality, friendship, and learning from each other. Recently, I have come to conceptualize forming friendships as a curatorial methodology. Here, I emphasize that friendship should not be limited to merely interpersonal relationships and should not be considered a seamless, perpetual harmonization process. I believe that friendship is not just a phenomenon to be discussed and written about, but a steady, consistent practice. I can’t help but think that Mert’s effort to cover up is in essence, a desire to share, a tentative hand of friendship.

If the self is a context-based performance, then it is impossible to fully know a person. Sometimes, when we see the face of someone we think we know in a new light, or when we witness them experiencing an emotion, we feel a mix of instant alienation, curiosity, and excitement. Getting to know Mert, and continuing to see and hear him accepting that I can never fully know him, allows me to look at his work with a different eye every time. This way, I can see details that were once invisible and experience emotions that were once unfamiliar.

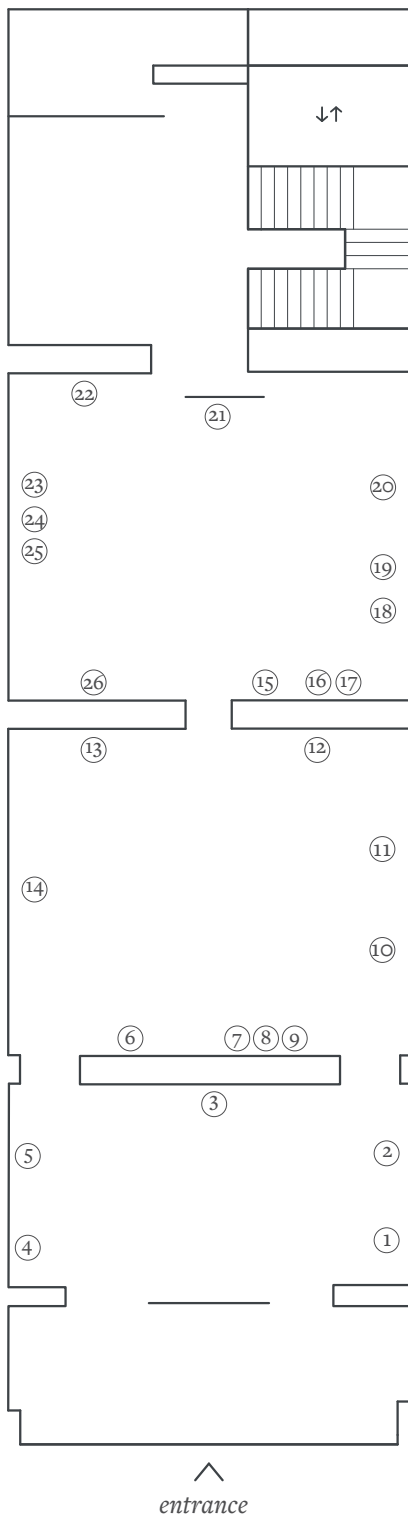
Over the years, as Mert and I got to know each other in various contexts, we discovered different forms of relating within changing social dynamics. As I entered the world that indirectly

reflects on Mert’s canvas, Mert, on the other hand, got acquainted with my collective working methods, which are quite contrary to his practice. Over time, we saw these worlds’ permeabilities, shortcuts, common concerns and desires. At moments when our instincts and sensitivities converged - for instance when contemplating a painting that Mert had just finished in his Karaköy studio - we could feel this friendship deepening.

Aren’t all these affects enclosed in the layers central to Mert’s painting, the ones that cover and are believed to need covering? Is what is hidden underneath opening itself to me as our friendship deepens? Is it because Mert knows how to hide it so well, that I unlock a new feeling with each glance? Or is it an inevitable process of learning, a practice of friendship? The potential of abstract painting? Is it an exploration of different ways of relating to the work and the artist behind it? I suppose it is a little of each. The unchanging conclusion, however, is that what is hidden and covered attracts the viewer and invites them with the promise of seeing the unseeable.

Where there is an effort to hide/cover/mask/conceal, there is fear. We, who have walked for years on streets covered with grey walls, know this well. Remembering and still feeling the traces of what lies beneath the grey, and trying to understand the fear of the one who covers with grey, are all part of our relationship with that wall. It’s part of us, the person in front of us, and the relationship between us. So, there are at least three of us there. To see the fragility behind what is covered in the process, perhaps to ‘read’ Mert’s series of grey works, one needs to see the fragility behind his effort to cover; see the artist who wants to put the sketch of the conversation with his therapist on the cover of the exhibition catalog, an artist who wants to leave a process behind and look at new, larger, empty walls.

While drawing a conceptual framework for this exhibition, I also wanted to practice the intimacy we have reinforced over the past years in this text. At the same time, through our friendship, I brought into this text the vulnerability that Mert generously opened up/trusted at an important turning point in his practice. Hence, this text is not only an attempt to interpret the exhibition’s works within the context they evoke in my mind but also a tribute to friendship. I feel fortunate to know Mert’s world to a great extent, the things he pushes to the background, the ones he paints over, highlights, hides, needs to cover up, can’t open up, and the he pours onto the canvas more boldly with each passing day. “Out of Sight” invites you to look as if you were looking at your friend’s face changing in the light, and to examine the dilemmas, emotions, and enlightenments that Mert expresses by covering up. ■



① *untitled.g24*
2016
Acrylic on canvas
160 × 140 cm

② *U never know-1*
2018
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
115 × 100 cm

③ *Drawings*
2016-2022

④ *untitled.g8*
2016
Acrylic on canvas,
marker and spray
paint
115 × 100 cm

⑤ *untitled.g4*
2016
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
160 × 140 cm

⑥ *untitled.g3*
2016
Acrylic on canvas
80 × 70 cm

⑦ *untitled.g6*
2016
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
80 × 70 cm

⑧ *untitled.g22*
2017
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
80 × 70 cm

⑨ *untitled.g5*
2016
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
80 × 70 cm

⑩ *Seriously what the
fuck you want?*
2018
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
170 × 158 cm

⑪ *On the way*
2019
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
140 × 120 cm

⑫ *U never know-3*
2018
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
140 × 120 cm

⑬ *idfm*
2018
Acrylic on canvas
ve sprej boya
140 × 120 cm

⑭ *When you do the same shit
over and over again nothing
happens...*
2019
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
200 × 180 cm

⑮ *a small clue*
2022
Acrylic on canvas
40 × 35 cm

⑯ *i am always behind me*
2022
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
Dyptic, 52 × 90 cm

⑰ *unt.us6*
2022
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
52 × 45 cm

⑱ *unt.us5*
2022
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
52 × 45 cm

⑳ *it is scary to get the shits
out*
2022
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
110 × 100 cm

㉑ *it is far away but seems
close*
2022
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
110 × 100 cm

㉒ *you never know (yellow)*
2022
Acrylic on canvas
140 × 120 cm

㉓ *it took a while*
2020-2022
Acrylic on canvas
160 × 140 cm

㉔ *Nothing happens*
2018
Acrylic on canvas
160 × 140 cm

㉕ *it is not clear at all it won't
be probably*
2021
Acrylic on canvas
and spray paint
160 × 140 cm

㉖ *unt.us3*
2022
Acrylic on canvas
52 × 45 cm

^
entrance



Close Contact, Distant Possibility

Depth and Touch in Diner's Paintings

Oğulcan Yiğit Özdemir

“(...) Each creation changes, alters, enlightens, deepens, confirms, exalts, re-creates, or creates in advance all the others” — Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*

No matter how we instigate the history of painting, we continuously crash into the same rock: our interpretations of a human child's primordial relationship to vision. Even if knowing is a kind of remembering, as Plato underlines, it is already framed by the subject and his environment. We cannot talk about a singularity through merely the memory of experiences, in that the things that trigger remembering are not immutable and given under all circumstances. New works emerge in a contentious exchange with the predicates of objects created and presented before them.

For example, the three-dimensional recoloring of the original statues from Ancient Greece as a result of researching the pigment residues on them is unimportant at some point, as we sense that the fact that Greece was one of the most magnificent empires that collapsed is echoed only in those colorless, gray marbles. Thousands of years-old works cannot be considered differently once the political, socio-cultural, and economic structures that keep them alive are decimated.

Our senses inform us that these 3D models, even if recreated with the color palette of the past, are no more real than the melancholy of the colorless sculptures. The ghost of a ruined empire haunts the viewer in these Greek sculptures, an idealization only possible through a burial ceremony. Thus, “The Story of the Eye” begins long before a person is exiled to life.

The history of art will, in a sense, have to constantly start over and over again unless there is a ‘noble’ view that does not take into account the path that the entity has traveled through time and space and the meanings it has acquired along the way, and that permeates into the so-called essence. Generations remake, distort, and give meaning to the past with every act of individuals and artists. In this respect, innovations in the history of vision are limited only by the discipline's capacity to transfer internal problems and bring new interpretations of past art. A solution found in the history of painting may be accepted only to the extent necessary, but it also derives its value from triggering brand-new problems.

Painter Mert Diner opens up to discussion and, most

importantly, vision, the questions, disruptions, and starting over that he carried out during his artistic adventure spanning nearly twenty years on the first floor of İmalathane Bursa with this selection, which covers more than six years with three series in his oeuvre.

I.

“It is, therefore, mute Being which comes to show its meaning. Herein lies the reason why the dilemma between figurative and nonfigurative art is badly posed; it is true and uncontradictory that no grape was ever what it is in the most figurative painting and that no painting, no matter how abstract, can get away from Being, that even Caravaggio's grape is the grape itself”

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*

Environmental factors gain a different dimension in the process of taking the city as an object of thought and vision, apart from being the place where our reflections take place. The remembrance relationship we establish with the urban area, which is abstracted as an entity, diverges directly. Walls, windows, houses, inscriptions, all kinds of traces, routes, and routines, every notch that takes the city beyond being a machine, a functional whole, reminding of the human in it, thus placing this object in the field of vision and containing the desire to see “something living” in it. Every voluntary move is valuable. Every move that prevents the city from being a closed area is political. Every space where those who pass through it meet their life demands is expectant with a new space.

I'm thus talking about a shift. From the history of art, the series of paintings and canvases as a line flowing through the city, An eye that does not see the city as separate from the archeology of past buildings and that goes in search of the suppressed, in Diner's own words, “covered” traces of this topography that traverses an inherent space. In this sense, the story of the eye takes on the vastness of a nomadic narrator-eye, injured by an event that interrupts the situation and is thrown into a new way of seeing. Modern art's subjective and objective archetypes, the flaneur, the cave painting, and the cine-eye, begin to boil in the same pot.

In this vastness, the plane of the canvas is no longer a closed box placed within the plane, as Foucault stated concerning the classical pictorial space¹. However, Diner also subverts Edouard Manet's understanding, which emphasizes the pictorial plane and

¹ Michel Foucault, *Manet, Velazquez ve Estetik Modernizm*, trans. Savaş Kılıç, İletişim Yayınları, 2018.

establishes the canvas object as the primary place where the light falls: the space within the painting. He does not emphasize that it is on a single plane; he aims to show the depth of everyday planes and invite them back to the field of experience. If the former's political goal in doing this was to strip away the aura of religious references regarding the image and its production, to deny art banal and processed judgments, Diner's political will in a post-Enlightenment era was to make room for awe and surprise in the ordinary, to return what is worth seeing in the mundane to the object through his art.

As such, we are at a point where the simple abstract/figurative distinction no longer works. Although Manet's realism inspired the Malevich/Kandinsky/Klee triumvirate and American abstract expressionism, which paved the way for abstract painting, we still lack studies that will reveal this genealogy and enable us to understand how abstract painting emerged from aesthetic modernism—we only have speculations. Standing at the center of the stage, Fountain has been postponing this problem for a while and sacrificing the issues of seeing for the inarticulate appetite of contemporary art in a language-centric space.

We will all see the role of the widespread belief that we live in a world of data-centered stock market speculation and our faith in economic gods that direct our lives and control the 'economy.'

II.

Thus, we return to the initial question. What kind of relationship does a human being have with what they begin to see before they are presented with the appetite and will of the gods? Let's consider that Ancient Greece was, in Karl Marx's words, "the glorious childhood of humanity". It may be possible for us to overlap the meaning of an era with that of a singular individual, at least at the metaphorical level. To borrow lines from American poet Louise Glück, perhaps "We look at the world once, in childhood. The rest is memory." But this memory takes on a different meaning and even style every time it is taken out of the drawer, even if it's the same record.

The records of these remembering processes can launch us into first contact with what is seen. When looking at Diner's paintings, we may feel like we are seeing what we see for the first time, we may remember our first close contact, and this seeing may even turn into a vague question about why we want this. But at this very moment the object of vision becomes a distant possibility and escapes us. Depth plays on a surface whose contact is constantly postponed, and the audience turns into a shadow. The canvas object, which Manet insistently included in the painting, turns out to be a blurry image repository at this point.

Moreover, this process requires an operation: There is also a need to interpret the meaning of what is seen in Diner's paintings, the meaning of the wounds and scars made during the processes of remembering, and the journey of life. It is as if the world's skin is laid out before us with all its scars and wrinkles on these canvases. When viewed this way, there is a way of seeing far from the Greek statues' perfecting gaze. However, just like the products of ancient sculpture, it was broken, injured, and wounded while dealing with a timeless issue related to its era.

So, we have a gaze that moves away from the initial naive vision. These paintings go through a process of self-awareness that examines one's memory and questions why he is looking there, at this time, in this way. Keeping in mind Merleau-Ponty's parenthesis about the need to take into account the painter's interpretations of the meaning of existence, couldn't this boundary—which swallows its tongue just when it seems to be expressed and the void positioned on this boundary—precisely be the zero point of expression? While Diner wanders around many abstract artists' minds and re-lives his childhood, couldn't it be that his mother suddenly called him from home for dinner?

Maybe he's too tired, maybe it's late. In any case, Diner must now enter the separation process with his painting. In this sense, these paintings, with their mistakes, coverings and re-coverings, negative spaces left behind, and endless questions about the meaning of voids, are not in a rush to make us swim in a sweet image. Instead, he wishes to question what we understand from painting in the visual field he invites us into. He achieves this by visualizing a process of making sense and reinterpreting one's psychic characteristics and observations. ■



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mert Diner (b. 1976, İskenderun) establishes his painting practice on the contradictory relationship between the visible and the invisible and the situational outcomes of the void belonging to the unknown. He draws inspiration from concepts such as psychology, the unconscious, existence, nature, meaning, and emptiness and examines the surface possibilities of these concepts among the temporal layers of memory. After completing his undergraduate education in Mechanical Engineering at Uludağ University, Diner worked for some time in international companies, during which he had the opportunity to work with the painter İrfan Önürmen for three years. He then received a painting education at the New York Studio School in 2007. Diner, whose works have been continuing in Istanbul since 2009, has held prominent solo exhibitions in recent years, including “uncanny states” (2023) and “leave us alone” (2021).



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