



Anamorphic Architecture of Fascism - 150 x 130 - Acrylic on paper - 2014

weird angle / Art Unlimited - 2023

Text by Ahmet Ergenç

MONUMENTS AND THE BLACK PUBLIC

Portraits, the subject of our series spotlighting individuals who bring a peculiar perspective to contemporary art, feature artist Erol Eskici, who delves into monuments, the architecture of power, and the embodiment of ideology in monuments.

Monuments and statues in Turkey have not been written and drawn about enough, yet this strange country hosts almost as many “official” sculptures and monuments as a socialist or communist country does. There is a linear connection between statues and monuments and centralization and totalitarianism: the more centralized a country is, the more the number and visibility of “homogeneous” statues and monuments surrounding the country increase. It’s quite understandable that Turkey, with its post-Republic centralization, resembles a gallery of statues and monuments. But here’s an interesting thing: despite the prevalence of these monuments and their ideological function, there hasn’t been enough critical discussion about statues in Turkey. Statues have been

perceived as part of the ordinary flow of life. Additionally, there is a deficiency: alternative monuments haven’t been produced until now. For example, there is still no September 6-7 monument in Beyoğlu or a Madımak monument in Sivas. What’s even worse is that there haven’t been attempts to establish such alternative monuments. Sometimes, a monument that is prevented from being erected continues to exist “through its absence.”

Erol Eskici is one of the artists who concern themselves with monumentality, the architecture of power, and the embodiment of ideology in monuments. With his perspective on monuments and political architecture, he creates a “peculiar angle” for himself in contemporary art in Turkey: a perspective that reveals the generally normalized ideological meanings hidden in monuments. In works such as “Yüceler Yücesi” (The Sublimes), “Faşizmin Anamorfik Mimarisi” (The Anamorphic Architecture of Fascism), or “Toplam Kurumlar” (Total Institutions), featured in his 2014 exhibition “Nostomania,”

Eskici questioned the architectural and public expressions of a totalitarian or centralized ideology and examined the “ideological monument” culture in the modern world with his timeless and placeless compositions, somewhat. These structures, reminiscent of a narrative by Kafka, Calvino, or Saramago, for instance, have been constructed following a shared sentiment (or fear) policy in places like Ankara, Berlin, or Rome. These “dominant” and serious-faced monuments are one of the common, founding lines of the modern world. While we’re at it: many young Republic monuments in Ankara also remind one of Mussolini’s Italy or Hitler’s Berlin. In fact, the sculpture in Güven Park was made by Anton Hanak, who was also Hitler’s sculptor. Perhaps the first person to focus on this topic in Turkey was Vahap Avşar: in the 90s, during the years when the “central government” was extremely dominant, Avşar revealed ideological ‘myths’ based on sculptures and other public structures. The stories and violences contained in monuments are still waiting to be explored: A comprehensive look at monuments with similar aesthetics and functions in various parts of the world could be a tremendous tool for analyzing modern power, not only in Turkey but also globally.



Unintended monument No: 2 - 55 x 83 x 29 cm - Wooden - 2022

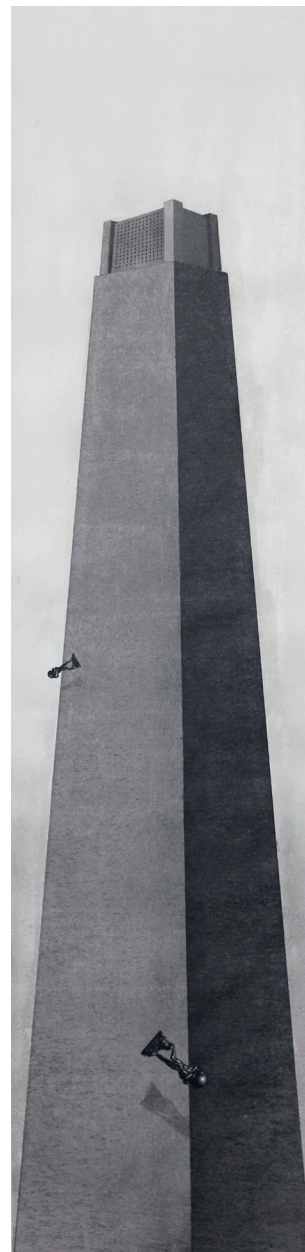
Erol Eskici has almost always conveyed this ‘universal’ authoritarian anatomy in his works. Monuments, buildings, and geometric shapes, I’ve always read them as an indirect or direct expression of a form of power. Somewhere in the air, there could be felt a “gaze of power” or a “shadow of power” covering things in his works. In his latest exhibition, taking off from Alois Riegl’s concept of ‘unintended monuments’ (the exhibition bears this name), he reflects not on monuments intentionally constructed by authorities, but rather on monuments that were not originally built as “monuments” but over time, due to certain events, have become “monuments.” It’s possible to think of the various sizes of monuments in the exhibition as civilian monuments, alternative monuments, or “silent monuments.” Since monuments are expressions of something, a period, an event, or a moment, they also have a “voice”: They carry the voice of a historian or they have a “text.” The openness in these monuments designed by Eskici in this exhibition is almost like an open work: without text and open to endless interpretation. They resemble an expression of an anonymous event or, as Deleuze puts it, “a non-people.” This openness in the monuments can actually pave the way for imagining an alternative city, country, or civilization even for those who are curious. Whether it’s a fascist country, a utopian socialist country, an apocalyptic country, or a futuristic country, from wherever you look.



Unintended monuments, drafts, raw materials - 145 x 250 x 90 cm(with pedestal) - Wooden, stone, concrete - 2022

If you look at the exhibition text, what is aimed here is to indicate the similarity between natural structures (or “monuments,” such as the Fairy Chimneys) and non-natural (political, cultural, historical, etc.) structures, but especially as someone who has been deeply reflecting on the sociology, history, and political significance of things in recent years (or someone who has been compelled to think so, I should say, due to the borders and sensitive edges of the country), personally, I felt the shadows of bureaucracy, authority, control, and oppression even in these “civil monuments” that sometimes evoke natural forms. Or the dense and gloomy shadow of what Ece Ayhan called the “black public.” You might remember, Ece Ayhan used this term to refer to the organs of state oppression and “dominant” structures, sometimes as the opposite of the “civil” public. Yes, Ece Ayhan wasn’t a political scientist, but indeed, as a “political poet” writing civil poetry, he was one of the best at expressing this political structure.

Eskici’s works in the exhibition, evoking the notion of the “black public,” occasionally exhibit not only dispersals but also a subtle and calculated, “modern evil” feeling, with geometric and controlled, “institutional” sensations. Somehow, every geometric structure reminds me a bit of power. Perhaps that’s why Deleuze and his colleagues spoke of rhizomes, as a line of liberation or escape, structures that cannot be contained by geometry.



Total Institutions - Sublime - 135 x 35 - Acrylic on paper - 2014

They talked about these structures that do not fit into geometry, as an alternative to the suffocating homogeneity and predictability of what Foucault called “disciplinary” structures (schools, hospitals, prisons, and various “public” buildings), suggesting unpredictable, scattered “lines of escape,” etc. Some monuments in the exhibition have overflow states that disrupt the dominant geometry, not conforming to the schema: in some “monuments,” resembling more of a geological formation, an uncontrollable element or excess disrupts sociology with geology. I see this from a more Lacanian perspective, as the expression of something unexpressed and uncontrollable. I believe that the expression of these ‘things’ is also political. Let me put it in a way that distorts Foucault’s famous phrase: where there is control, there is also violation. The landscape isn’t all that “dark” after all.



Total Institutions - Landscape - 150 x 138 - Acrylic on paper

Another thing that both Eskici’s earlier, more “institutional” monuments and the “civil” monuments in this exhibition made me ponder is the absence of alternative monuments to official history or the status quo in Turkey. For example, there is no Hrant Dink monument in Şişli, no September 6-7 monument in Beyoğlu, no May 1st (77) monument in Taksim Square, no Madımak monument in Sivas, and no Tahir Elçi monument in Diyarbakır: The public space is completely closed to alternative construction or expression. What’s even more interesting is that the absence of these alternative monuments, which are politically unfeasible, is also rarely attempted artistically. For example, if someone were to design a Hrant Dink monument and attempt to place it in the street, even if it were not allowed (as is highly likely), the inability to place that monument there could itself become an artistic intervention, sparking at least some-

debate. The absence of the monument itself could be a monument. Speaking of unrealized monuments, of course, one must remember Ece Ayhan's Monument to the Unknown Student. By writing poetry about a nonexistent monument, Ayhan actually gave existence to that monument: by transforming the "monument to the unknown soldier" into the "monument to the unknown student," he made the monument more civilian.

In short, the issue of monuments provides a tremendous opportunity to understand modern societies and power structures. Eskici's starting point in this exhibition, Riegl's article, also reflects on the foundational power of monuments in modern times and defines monuments as a "modern cult." It's quite possible to read the 'modern' relationship between memory, identity, ideology, nation-building, and monuments in the Turkish context. Artists such as Gülsün Karamustafa, Hale Tenger, Vahap Avşar, Memed Erdener, and Burak Delier in Turkey have produced critical works on public structures and ideologies, yet monuments in Turkey still largely function as "invisible ideological apparatuses." In my opinion, there is a need for more readings that will uncover the ideological background of these monuments and make their ideological moves "visible." Both Eskici's recent and older works provide a good foundation for such a "critical reading" and in this sense, they create a good "peculiar angle." An angle that can decipher the language of a silent sociopolitical landscape.



Detail (Unintended monument No: 3)



Unintended monument No: 4 - 190 x 180 x 180 cm(with pedestal) - Wooden - 2022