



“Lovers”, 2011

years at the academy, there was a discourse of the monumental figure, the monumental painting in the tradition of our studio (the Neşet Günal studio). This is in actual fact a discourse of painting that also engendered the Nazi and socialist realist world of painting. Monumental painting is exactly what its name says, it is the figure that is nailed onto the canvas like a monument; it is fixed, it is immobile, and as long as it is immobile, it transfixes the viewer in the same position, too. This is the foundation of canvas painting. Whether you paint an image of Jesus, or Moses, or a villager, or a tree, it's all the same. By adding shadows, by rendering it realistic to create the three dimensional illusion that the viewer could hold the object, you transfix the figure onto the canvas. Monumentality is not about size; monumentality is about the immobility of the figure on the surface. This is what does not exist in my painting. Quite the contrary, in my works figures escape the surface both vertically and horizontally. This is the main issue I have a conflict with. The more you render three-dimensional the figure, the image you place on the surface, the more you embellish and adorn it, the more you fix it onto the surface. This is what monumental painting in the Western tradition is. Whether you make an installation, or conceptual art, the underlying habit always remains the same. The message to the viewer is, “desire me,” “take me,” “learn from me”... There is also a didactic attitude.

**From being a sign painter to the Academy, and from the Academy to the present day –what kind of a trajectory have you followed?**

I was 10 years old when I began to work as an apprentice at a sign painter's workshop. My first job was to sandpaper surfaces, carve stencils, and to write the tombstone signs of the newly deceased. You take an A3-sized plate, fix it on the end of a stick, and write the name of the deceased, the date he or she died, and say a Fatiha (the opening surah of the Quran, and a prayer of central importance in Islam) to his soul. Not

different at all from what I do now. In my naïve world back then, I began drawing flowers, insects or other objects around the writing. When I used to ask my master “shall I draw an insect?” I remember that he used to reply, “ask the person who is in charge of the body.” It must have been '66 or '67, I had come into the possession of a record sleeve by a psychedelic rock group, and I really liked the butterflies on the cover. I asked him, “Master, shall I make a butterfly like these?”... After a while, I began to fill the signs with animal motifs. I kept on doing this for a long time. I later came across the combination of insects and text in folk paintings.

The patterns on a saddlebag, a rug, or the bowl you drink ayran from... These become part of your deeper feelings, without you realizing it. And in my opinion, a good rocker acts with that kind of deeper feeling.

**What is the impact that your painting creates on the viewer, as opposed to a tableau, a Western painting?**

If you are asking in the sense of what I expect from the viewer, the observer; I would want the viewer to fail to observe, I would want the painting to escape his or her gaze... A painting should move, it should be something that does not allow the eye to catch it. If the maker of a painting passes through what is called a gateway of mystery, then what he produces will no doubt be a gateway to mystery. We just said that the plate is concealed, and escapes the eye; he or she who can really look at the plate has passed through that gateway of mystery. I believe that if the person who produces the “work” succeeds in passing through the gateway of mystery, wandering in the beyond, and then returning back here;

then the product also becomes a gateway of mystery. But you must know how to return... **In this sense, did Jim Morrison fail in the return?**

Jim Morrison did not want to return. Because the

beyond is very mysterious and very beautiful. There are times when I, too, feel like staying there.

**Who are the ones that suit you most among those who have passed through the “gateway of mystery”?**

All the psychedelic bands of the mid-'60s, the bands that come from the blues and rock pass through that gateway; and they make their real listeners pass through it as well. Let me give an example from a closer period, I passed through that gateway and returned during a Noir Desir concert, and I am sure they did, too. Stones manage to take me there in all their works. And if they can take me, if they

can create that atmosphere, they must have been there themselves.

**What's your favourite Stones album?**

Now, which one to pick... “Goats Head Soup”, for instance; the song “Angie” on that album captures not only me, but the whole world. To tell you the truth, all the songs Stones did in '68-'69, in close contact with the Frisco bands, they all get me still, “Gimme Shelter”, or “Brown Sugar”, for instance. Led Zeppelin songs in a Middle Eastern-North African mood capture me, too.

**Then there is your all-time favourite band, the Grateful Dead.**

When talking about the Grateful Dead, we should not talk about American country music, the blues, or psychedelic music, but rather that line that extends into Anatolia, Iran and the Asia. Grateful Dead is our Alevi sama. In sama, at one point of the ritual, the gateway to mystery is opened. The thing I capture during sama after I have passed through the gateway of mystery and the thing I capture at a Grateful Dead concert, or when listening to any Grateful Dead song, are the same. You whirl in the