

do i
cont
radict
myself
ves ?

ülgensemerci

ART
ON

do i
cont
radict
mysel
ves ?

ülgensemerci

"do i contradict myself?"

2022

Do I Contradict Myself?

Can this text bring me closer to
the artist and her artworks?

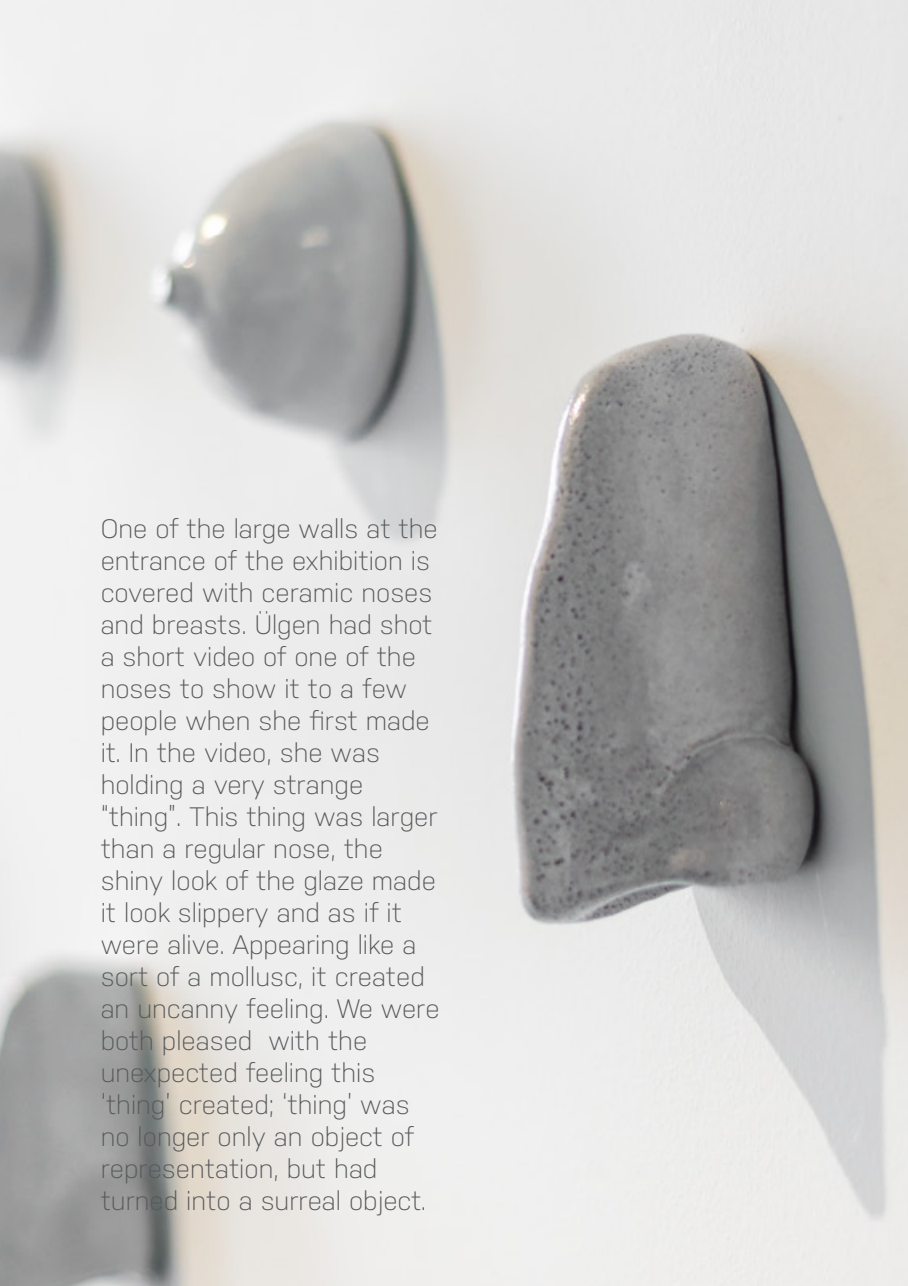
Can I write while listening to the
artists' voice and my own at the
same time?

As I place the artworks in a
theoretical context, am I framing
them; as I place the artworks in
an art historical discourse, am I
placing them on a pedestal?

My long discussions with Ülgen
have led me to think all of this,
and pushed me to look outside my
intellectual borders. To allow this
process to be more accessible, I
tried to write as transparently as I
could.



Transience | Oil on Paper | 76x56cm | 2022



One of the large walls at the entrance of the exhibition is covered with ceramic noses and breasts. Ülgen had shot a short video of one of the noses to show it to a few people when she first made it. In the video, she was holding a very strange "thing". This thing was larger than a regular nose, the shiny look of the glaze made it look slippery and as if it were alive. Appearing like a sort of a mollusc, it created an uncanny feeling. We were both pleased with the unexpected feeling this 'thing' created; 'thing' was no longer only an object of representation, but had turned into a surreal object.

When I look back and think about this video image, I am reminded of Louise Bourgeois' portrait shot by Robert Mapplethorpe in 1982; that famous photograph of Bourgeois holding a giant penis sculpture under her arm. What I see in the photo is a female artist who has agency rather than a woman possessing the phallus, the symbol of dominance, authority in the social order. What makes me read the photograph this way is the title of the sculpture the artist holds under her arm and the smirk appearing on Bourgeois' face, as she is staring into the camera. By titling the sculpture *Fillette*, Bourgeois implies the vulnerability of manhood/phallus/authority and in the photograph she smiles not like a commander who has taken over power, but with the wisdom of having captured her own vulnerability, conquering herself from within. [1]

Ülgen's installation, in which she covers a wall at the entrance of the gallery with ceramic noses and breasts, is likewise the product of a process through which the artist embraces the vulnerability/fragility of the female subject and thus holds the key to creativity and self-transformation. Ülgen wrapped herself in compassion when she had to rebuild her life in London during the painful quarantine days at the beginning of the Covid period. Her installation is kind of a 'wall of compassionate imagery' that nourishes and enables one to breathe. The wall is titled after Velvet Underground's track, "I'll Be Your Mirror".

[1] From the page of Tate Modern devoted to Mapplethorpe's portrait of Louise Bourgeois, we learn that Bourgeois was nervous before going to Mapplethorpe's studio and she took the statue with her on purpose, thinking that she would be more comfortable with this object in her hand.



I'll Be Your Mirror
Ceramic | Size Variable | 2022

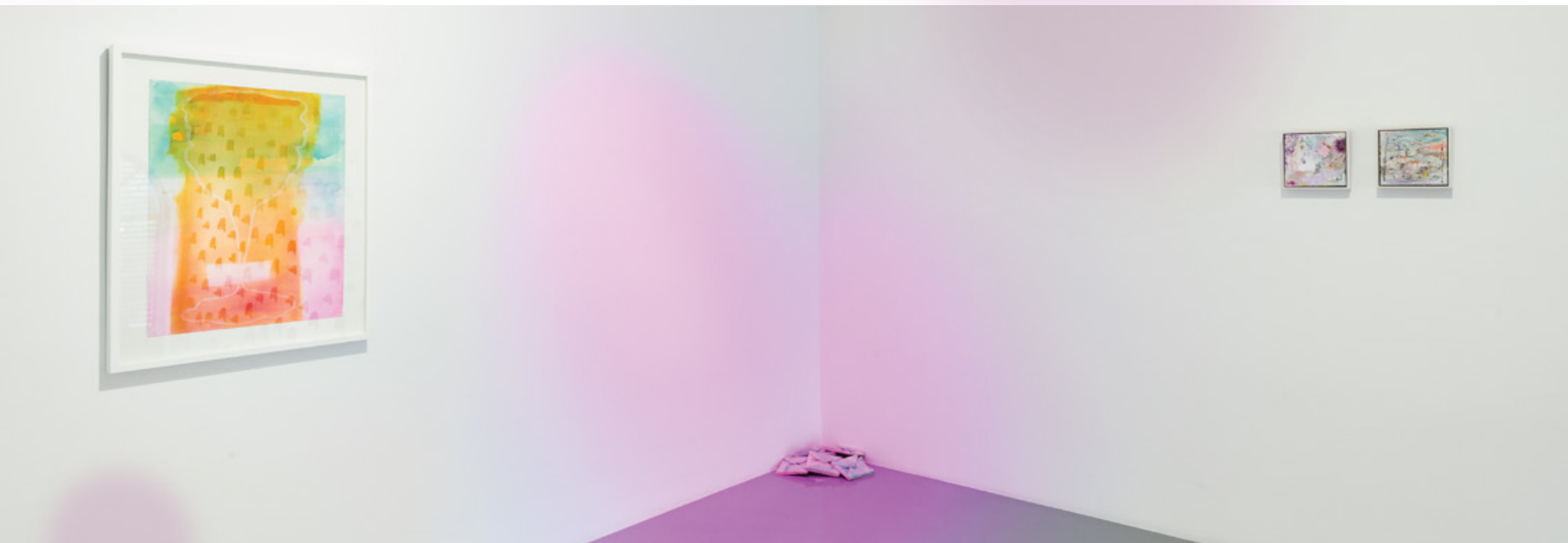
Across this wall, a single work on paper is hung. Contrary to *I'll Be Your Mirror*, which is installed with ossified imagery of the external elements of the body, *Transience* which is shaped by the fluidity of oil paint and completed with a major gesture of a few seconds following a process that lasted for months, looks inside the body.

At this point, the question 'Do I Contradict Myselfs?' that Ülgen asks in the title of the exhibition, quoting author and novelist Daisy Hildyard, is starting to appear in my mind. Hildyard makes the multitude of the self and the inevitable nature of contradiction visible by adding a plural suffix to the line (51), 'Do I contradict myself,' of Walt Whitman's poem "The Song of Myself".

*Do I contradict myself?
Very well then, I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)*

Waltman's poem, which has been swirling in my mind since the first time I read it, brings up a series of questions along with Hildyard's wordplay. Does the artist contradict her/him/themselves when she/he/they use different materials, techniques and aesthetic preferences that seem different from each other? What holds the self together? What holds an exhibition together?





I go up to the second floor with these questions in mind. The variety of materials observed throughout the exhibition, ranging from paper works to neon, from canvas to ceramics, begins to show itself on this floor. A cheerful atmosphere prevails on the mezzanine floor, where rainbow colors dominate on paper and canvas.

DOI |

In one corner, thick, heavy letters made of ceramics are piled up. A purple neon light washes over the letters painted in the colour of the sky. The weighty letters never reached their destination, or were not sent in the first place, yet they seem to lighten up with the touch of these colours, creating a vaguely surreal effect on the viewer.

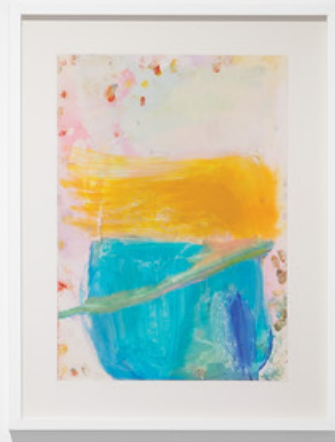
Letters
Ceramic
Light Projection
Size Variable
2022



CONI

RADIC

Breaking Light
Oil on Paper
60x42cm
2022



Breaking Light II
Oil on Paper
60x42cm
2022

MYSELVES?



Tornado | Acrylic on Paper | 56x76cm | 2020



Stairs I | Oil on Canvas | 20x20cm | 2021

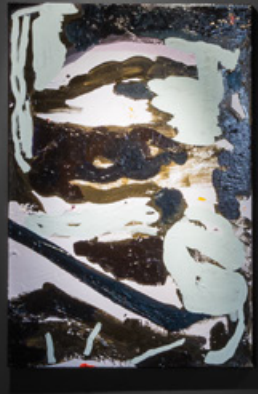


Stairs II | Oil on Canvas | 20x20cm | 2021



Untitled | Oil on Paper | 56x76cm | 2022

On the lower floor of the three-floor gallery, paper and canvas works, dominated by black with glimpses of pastel colours are exhibited on two black-painted walls. The entire imagery we see in the exhibition seems to arise from this abstract, multi-layered main source, the semi-darkness. Areas of blue, pink, and yellow are flowing through a dense, tarry liquid. Sometimes it feels as if an image is appearing in this density, but that implied thing always goes back without getting into a form. The intuitive self-reflexive painting process, in which Ülgen is constantly trying to establish and break her own grammar, and own abc, sometimes taking up to two years, is completed when the reality of the painting is revealed.



Attunement | Oil on Canvas | 61x92cm | 2022



Together-Apart | Oil on Canvas | 60x76cm | 2022



As the title implies, the exhibition can overall be read as a polyphonic, multi-layered self-portrait. In this portrait, the inner, the abstract and the cerebral relate to the external, the tangible and the bodily – through colors, flows, contrasts and affinities. While "themselves" of Ülgen can be observed in the sensory areas that are the projections of different internal forces, (her)self is felt in the atmosphere that is delicately formed by the interaction of these areas.

Elif Gül Tirben Akdağ
2022

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