

Irfan Önürmen graduated from Istanbul Fine Arts Academy (now known as Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University), Department of Painting, in 1987. His work has been shown in numerous exhibitions, including the 10th Istanbul Biennial. We spoke with Önürmen at his latest solo show in New York, *PENDULUM*, at C24 Gallery in Chelsea.

Irfan Önürmen



C24 Gallery, New York

M. Brendon Macinnis

**Why the title of this show, *Pendulum*?** My work in the past few years has swung back and forth between political concerns, addressing my outward environment; and looking inward, how I personally

feel about things. So I see this show as a kind of pendulum between the two.

**When you say political, in the context of Turkey there is so much happening in that**

region. Do you mean the issue of Kurdish rights? Not only the Kurdish problem, which has escalated a lot with the Syrian problem and what's happening in neigh-

boring countries. I'm looking at fear and insecurity, how we feel in our daily lives; what the media pushes us to believe and how terror is perceived. What this means for our families, our children, how bleak things look. So it's more a political statement about the whole structure of the region.



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**Before the mess today, where the region exploded in war, people had talked about Turkey as the one country in the area where things seemed to be going in a positive direction, as a bridge between East and West. What do you think of the current president, Erdoğan?** I don't like his style of management, he's a dictator. And half the population thinks this too. In some of my work I address these issues of dictatorship and freedom of speech.

**But Erdoğan wins elections.** Yes, he gets fifty percent, because the other half of the population [the opposition] is dispersed. This leaves him with a majority, compared to

other parties. But he doesn't represent a majority of the population.

**In your work, does religion play any role?** Religion is a form of dictatorship; a symbol of dictatorship, and so I don't believe in this system. My work is not about religion, but I sometimes satirize the political system; how people live in this system.

**You mean like the sculpture statue you made from chocolate [*Statue of a Labourer, 2011*]?** Yes, that was about the Turkish workers who were leaving to find work in Germany [during the rebuilding after World War II]. It was done to mark the 50th anniversary of when these workers started to immigrate to Germany. When they came home to their families in the summer they would bring back chocolate...

**I see. You use such a wide range of materials in your work, from painting to sculpture to making installations. Do you see yourself more as**

**a conceptual artist, rather than someone working in a particular medium?** I started as a painter, figurative painting, and I work in multi-media. So I'm directly involved in the whole process, I like to do everything.

**Aside from your politically tinged installations, a lot of the pieces in this show have a strong aesthetic appeal.** Yes, on the other side there is my personal or introspective work, which is more lyrical, concerned with space. The subject matter often depicts daily life.

**How would you describe the art scene in Turkey today?** Since the Istanbul Biennial was started in the 1980s, and international curators got involved, it has opened up and evolved into a real contemporary, scene, where artist experiment with lots of non-traditional materials. **M**

Photo Captions: (left to right): Installation view of Irfan Önürmen's solo show, *PENDULUM*, and the artist at C24 Gallery, 560 W 24th Street New York, NY 10011 646-416-6300