

An abstract painting featuring two hands reaching towards each other. The hand on the left is dark brown with a white and purple face-like shape. The hand on the right is reddish-brown with a white face-like shape. The background is split into yellow and teal sections. The text 'ZÜMRÜTOĞLU' and 'ALL AND NONE' is centered in white.

ZÜMRÜTOĞLU  
ALL AND NONE

JD MALAT  
GALLERY

7 SEPTEMBER – 7 OCTOBER 2023

ZÜMRÜTOĞLU  
*ALL AND NONE*

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# ZÜMRÜTOĞLU

## ALL AND NONE

This is JD Malat's third solo exhibition of work by Zümrütoğlu (b. 1970). The first, *Mirror of Darkness* (2018), based on Joseph Conrad's postcolonial novel *Heart of Darkness*, was the artist's response to Romantic and Modernist literature dealing with the binary oppositional nature of human behaviour. The second, *Atonal Drift* (2020), referenced Modernist music including Arnold Schoenberg's 'drift' from tonal to atonal music. That discombobulating aural process is similar to the visual experience communicated in Zümrütoğlu's paintings and sculptures. Zümrütoğlu himself has referenced musical terms for example when describing the 'dissonant and disharmonious body' which regularly appears in his work. In retrospect, those two exhibitions prophesied the global pandemic's disquieting and disorientating effects on human behaviour and communications.

Most recently, Zümrütoğlu's work was exhibited in a group show at the Odunpazari Modern Museum in Eskişehir, Turkey entitled *Yas Ve Haz (Grief and Pleasure)* which focused on 'all bodily mechanisms that enable contradictory states such as grief and pleasure to co-exist'. Other artists included internationally renowned names such as Robert Mapplethorpe, Bruce Nauman, Julian Opie, Cindy Sherman and Bill Viola. This list is significant because it demonstrates not only how far Zümrütoğlu has progressed since his previous London show but also informs us of the oppositional human themes in his work shared with those other artists.

The current exhibition, with its eloquently significant binary title *All and None*, continues Zümrütoğlu's exploration of contradictory human emotions in his favoured style of figurative abstraction in both painting and sculpture. He continues to avoid preparatory drawings preferring the spontaneous organic creation of ideas directly onto the canvas with his favoured oils as ever applied with visceral hard-hitting physicality and fluid swirling extravagance. Frans Hals (1582-1666), the subject of a major exhibition about to open in the National Gallery, employed a similar strategy as did one of Zümrütoğlu's favourite modern artists, Francis Bacon (1909-1992). Zümrütoğlu has told me in interview that he

wants to hit the viewer 'in the gut first, followed by the eyes and the brain'. That progression from instinctive childlike emotional response followed by the sensual engagement of vision and finally the intellect remains one way of experiencing Zümrütoğlu's world.

The paintings remain monumental in both their epic scale and internal forms, creating that immersive theatricality which has become a hallmark of Zümrütoğlu's oeuvre. Unsurprisingly two living neo-expressionists Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945) and Georg Baselitz (b. 1938) are other important influences. Zümrütoğlu showed his three-dimensional work in the *Atonal Drift* exhibition of 2020 with polychrome ceramic surreal portrait sculptures which could have walked out of his paintings. This can also be said of the patinated bronze portraits of *All and None* which have the teasingly enigmatic 'work-in-progress' titles of *Modules for Unknown Composition*. The sculptures are in the generic tradition of the portrait bust which originates in ancient Greece and Rome and represents the sitter's head, neck and shoulders.

Zümrütoğlu imagines this tradition through a contemporary veristic but surrealist lens where the original clarity and nobility of the human sitter is deconstructed into something more troubled and distorted. This creative strategy recalls the famous ancient prophecy: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known' (Paul, 1 Corinthians, 13:12). As in the paintings, so in the sculptures, the scale of *Modules for Unknown Composition III* is almost colossal with the head and shoulders measuring nearly 3' (90 cm) tall, dramatically enhancing the hierarchical relationship of power between the work and the viewer. The scale creates a quasi-iconic deconstructed image which, when resolved by the viewer, carries the potential of reconstruction into the original realistic and perhaps Platonic ideal perfect form.

The 'portrait' paintings are similarly deconstructed images of imagined original human forms which once more offer the promise of a return to the realistic or even ideal original. The childlike simplicity of their titles indicates this way of reading the images: *Why Not?* and *Here It is* and *Of course Would Be* create a series of surreal portrait images which indicate present realities and conditional promises for the future. These are anonymous 'universal' portraits of everyman/ everywoman whilst the only portrait of a known person is *Saint Thomas*. The

intentionality of Zümrütoğlu is plain to behold with his inscription of the saint placed (thrice for emphasis) like a baroque strapline disappearing and reappearing from bottom to top of the portrait-format canvas, signifying the repeated sceptical doubting of human nature throughout history. The half-length iconic portrait is once again of heroic scale at nearly 6 foot (182 cm) in height. It is significant that Zümrütoğlu's choice of saint is 'Doubting Thomas', the sceptic who refused to believe in the resurrected Christ without the direct Kantian proof of physical experience, the *All or None* of the exhibition's title. Like Bacon, Zümrütoğlu's portrait strategy in both sculptures and paintings is to reveal the sitter's identity in places but to sufficiently obfuscate with blurred patches of (the original) clay and paint as to anonymise the finished article. Thus gender is not apparent except in the *St. Thomas* painting and the *Modules for Unknown Composition III* sculpture.

The monumental 'narrative' paintings are themselves sometimes portraits conflated with narratives as in *Persona Non Grata* where the human sitter, in a common strategy for Zümrütoğlu, appears to shift in the traditional left-right reading of western art from shadow to solid to skeleton. The curtain which in old master portraits appears behind the sitter here begins to literally bring the curtain down on the sitter's 'non grata' ('not welcome') mortal skeletal remains. As in Zümrütoğlu's earlier paintings, there are expressionist brushstrokes combined with surreal forms creating a dreamlike, some would say nightmarish, world. The clarity of some of the forms in the earlier exhibitions has now gone to be replaced by cloudier passages on the canvas. For example, though the flat blue sky remains as background, perspectival lines on the floors and walls have now become abstract patches and squiggles in *Persona Non Grata*. This painting recalls what Zümrütoğlu told me in 2018 that his own experiences of literature and music teach him what 'the dark truth of life is, and having the terrible burden of carrying it and communicating it to people through his art'.

This type of portrait/narrative appears in other paintings where the human figure appears to be running, sometimes in different directions. In *Not Exactly*, the full-length skeletal human figure has a frontal ghostly head as well as a right-facing skull whilst the limbs are running to both left and right. The outstretched foot is desperate to return leftwards to the land of the living with its sand, hills, blue sky and yellow sun whilst the right side of the body moves rightwards towards grey and black darkness. *Uncanny* is a variation of this portrait-format composition,

but here the upper half of the figure with human legs is metamorphosing into an 'uncanny' bird-like monster with wings and red beaked head. As in *Not Exactly* the main movement is from left to right but in this case not towards death but reincarnation in the form of a bird. Dali's surrealist take on the ancient Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses* comes to mind in Zümrütoğlu's dynamic slippery forms.

The landscape formats of several other paintings in *All and None* continue to explore these binary compositional and philosophical ideas of life and death. In *Could Be* the human figure, with black cloak and ghostly face, attempts to escape darkness/death with hands reaching towards the brighter landscape on the right of the canvas. Here the compositional dynamics are high-pressured, with the figure apparently being sucked leftwards back towards the black hole they are trying to escape from. As ever there is tremendous movement and multi-directional pull in Zümrütoğlu's prophetic visions of our world with its daily reminders of the forces of darkness set against the natural beauty of blue sunny skies. These are magnificent paintings and sculptures in their epic content and theatricality of scale, composition and colour. As ever Zümrütoğlu makes prophetic poetic statements about our fragile status in a world at a turning point in its human and natural histories: *None? or All?* Experiencing these works allows us to resolve these existential questions, both personal and cosmic. The choice is ours.

**David Bellingham, Sotheby's Institute of Art, London © 2023**





*Not Exactly, 2023*

Oil on canvas

102 3/8 x 86 5/8 in  
260 x 220 cm





*Persona Non Grata, 2023*

Oil on canvas

88 5/8 x 72 7/8 in  
225 x 185 cm







*Maybe*, 2023

Oil on canvas

98 3/8 x 118 1/8 in  
250 x 300 cm

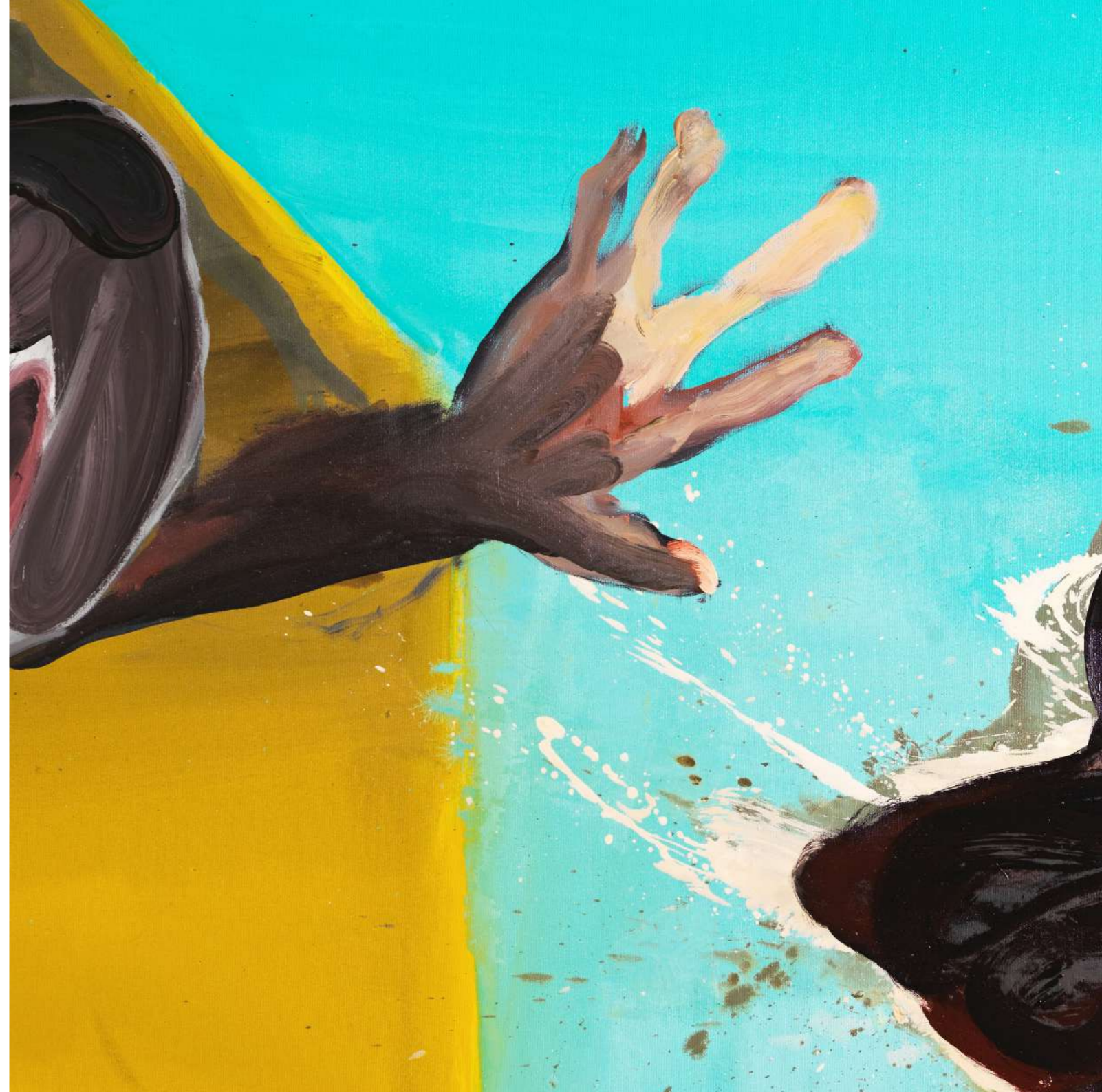




*Could Be, 2023*

Oil on canvas

98 3/8 x 118 1/8 in  
250 x 300 cm







*Or*, 2023

Oil on canvas

98 3/8 x 118 1/8 in  
250 x 300 cm





*Fuck! You Swallowed a Cloud?  
or The Guy Who Vomited The  
Sky, 2023*

Oil on canvas

70 7/8 x 98 3/8 in  
180 x 250 cm











*Three Things, 2023*

Oil on canvas

106 1/4 x 110 1/4 in  
270 x 280 cm  
3 pieces 90 x 100 cm  
6 pieces 90 x 90 cm













*Uncanny, 2023*

Oil on canvas

98 3/8 x 70 7/8 in  
250 x 180 cm







*St. Thomas, 2023*

Oil on canvas

70 7/8 x 47 1/4 in  
180 x 120 cm





*Why Not? I, 2023*

Oil on canvas

47 1/4 x 39 3/8 in  
120 x 100 cm



*Why Not? II, 2023*

Oil on canvas

47 1/4 x 39 3/8 in  
120 x 100 cm



*Why Not? III, 2023*

Oil on canvas

47 1/4 x 39 3/8 in  
120 x 100 cm





*Of course Would Be I, 2023*

Oil on canvas

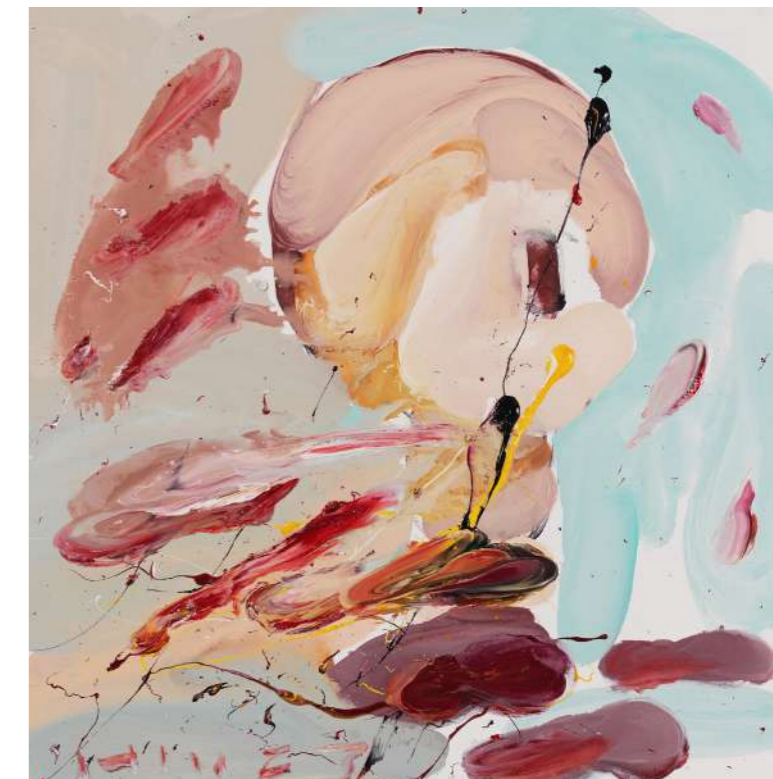
39 3/8 x 35 3/8 in  
100 x 90 cm



*Of course Would Be II, 2023*

Oil on canvas

39 3/8 x 35 3/8 in  
100 x 90 cm



*Here It Is, 2023*

Oil on canvas

39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in  
100 x 100 cm













*Modules for Unknown Composition I, 2022*

**Patinated bronze**

28 3/4 x 15 3/4 x 18 1/2 in  
73 x 40 x 47 cm

*Modules for Unknown Composition III, 2022*

**Patinated Bronze**

34 5/8 x 17 3/8 x 18 1/8 in  
88 x 44 x 46 cm

*Expected Man, 2023*

**Patinated Bronze**

78 3/4 x 47 1/4 x 33 1/2 in  
200 x 120 x 85 cm



Zümrütoğlu  
b. 1970 – Konya, Turkey

Works and lives in Istanbul, Turkey & Berlin, Germany

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2020 *Atonal Drift*, JD Malat Gallery, Mayfair, London  
2019 *Time for The Salt*, Pilevneli Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey  
2018 *Mirror of Darkness*, JD Malat Gallery, London, UK  
2017 *Holy Bargaining*, Pilevneli Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey  
2017 *Portfolio Series 5; Zümrütoğlu*, Plato Sanat, Istanbul, Turkey  
2016 *Für Alle und Keinen*, Tammen & Partner Galerie, Berlin, Germany  
2015 *Dark Matter*, The Empire Project, Istanbul, Turkey  
2013 *Cosmetic Violence*, The Empire Project, Istanbul, Turkey  
2013 *O Zaman*, Galerie Ivan Ptakhine, Paris, France  
2012 *Odysseus Yorgın*, Tammen & Partner Galerie, Berlin, Germany  
2012 *Grammar of the Other*, Tammen & Partner Galerie, Berlin, Germany  
2009 *Or II*, Pi Artworks, Istanbul, Turkey 'Or I', DEMSA Collection, Pi Artworks, Istanbul, Turkey  
2006 *The Verses of Earth*, C.A.M. Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey  
2006 *Get Stubborn*, Karşı Sanat Works, Ankara, Turkey  
2004 *Tombstone for Me*, Antik Art Gallery, 14th Istanbul TÜYAP Art Fair, Turkey  
2002 *A Poet A Painter*, Im Kontext von Antonin Artaud, bir Kunstzentrum, Istanbul, Turkey  
2001 *In the Memory of Antonin Artaud*, İzmir Art and Sculpture Museum, Izmir, Turkey

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2022-23 *Grief and Pleasure*, OMM Eskişehir, Eskişehir, Turkey  
2023 *Past, Present, Future*, JD Malat Gallery, London, UK  
2022 *Summer Exhibition*, JD Malat Gallery, London, UK  
2022 *PILEVNELI | YALIKAVAK*, PILEVNELI Yalıkavak, Bodrum, Turkey  
2021 *Summer Exhibition*, JD Malat Gallery, London, UK  
2021 *PILEVNELI X KONIG*, PILEVNELI Kaplankaya, Milas, Turkey  
2021 *ANADOL - CRETEN - ELMACI - FIRMAN - TÖRE - ZÜMRÜTOĞLU*, Pilevneli Gallery, Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum, Turkey  
2020 *Presentation Room I*, Pilevneli Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey  
2020 *Abstraction & The Natural World*, JD Malat Gallery, London, UK  
2020 *The Contemporary Human Condition*, JD Malat Gallery, London, UK  
2019 *Summer Exhibition*, JD Malat Gallery, London, UK  
2018 *At the Factory: 10 Artists/10 Individual Practices*, Pilevneli Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey  
2018 *Eyewitness*, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany  
2015 *Backyard*, Plato Sanat, Istanbul, Turkey  
2012 *Grammar of the Other*, Tammen & Partner Galerie, Berlin  
2011 *Works of Zümrütoğlu*, Tammen & Partner Galerie, Berlin, Germany  
2007 *Sisyphos*, C.A.M. Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey  
2005 *Young Expansion in Contemporary Turkish Art*, Pera Museum, Istanbul, Turkey  
2004 *Turkish Contemporary*, M-A-C Kunstgalerie, Germany  
2003 *What is missing?*, Karşı Sanat Works, Istanbul, Turkey



## Selected Art Fairs

- 2023 *Enter Art Fair, Versus Art Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark*  
2023 *ZONAMACO 2023, JD Malat Gallery, Mexico City, Mexico*  
2022 *Artweeks Akaretler, Pilevneli Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey*  
2022 *Contemporary Istanbul, JD Malat Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey*  
2022 *Contemporary Istanbul, Pilevneli and König Galerie, Istanbul, Turkey*  
2021 *Artweeks Akaretler, Pilevneli Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey*  
2021 *Contemporary Istanbul, JD Malat Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey*  
2021 *Contemporary Istanbul, Pilevneli Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey*  
2020 *Untitled Art Fair OVR Miami Beach, JD Malat Gallery*  
2020 *Artweeks Akaretler, Pilevneli Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey*  
2019 *Contemporary Istanbul, JD Malat Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey*  
2019 *ZONA MACO, JD Malat Gallery, CDMX, Mexico*  
2009 *St-art 14th European Contemporary Art Fair, Strassburg, Germany*  
2009 *Contemporary Istanbul, Pi Artworks, Istanbul, Turkey*  
2008 *TÜYAP Contemporary Art Fair, Karşı Sanat Works, Istanbul, Turkey*  
2018 *At the Factory: 10 Artists/10 Individual Practices, Pilevneli Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey*  
2007 *TÜYAP Contemporary Art Fair, Karşı Sanat Works, İstanbul, Turkey*  
2006 *Contemporary Istanbul, C.A.M. Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey*  
2005 *Opposite Art Works, Artist – 14th Istanbul TÜYAP Art Fair, Turkey*

## Museum Collections

- Istanbul Modern Museum, Turkey  
Elgiz Museum, Istanbul, Turkey



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