

















# ha:ar

# Planet I

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Kitapta yer  
alan metinleri  
Türkçe olarak da  
okuyabilirsiniz.





# PLANET I: THE ICONOGRAPHY WE CREATE AS WE HYPE OUR FICTIONAL SELVES TO THE WORLD

— Merve Akar Akgün

PLANET I: THE ICONOGRAPHY WE CREATE AS WE HYPE OUR FICTIONAL SELVES TO THE WORLD

**Merve:** Dear Hande and Arda, you two have been making art for a while now. You work as a duo but you also each have your own production. In the exhibition *Planet I*, which was held in Zülfaris – one of the oldest synagogues of Istanbul – in October and November 2020, we saw works by ha:ar, the duo, as well as solo works by Hande Şekerciler. For this reason, if you might answer the questions I will ask separately, it will be easier for the readers to get to know and understand you. Of course, you can always reply as ha:ar. But I believe this is important because I know that your practices and thoughts are nuanced. This, in my opinion, makes you unique and is also an aspect of yours that fits nicely within the era.. My first question is how do you define art: What does art mean to you and what does it complete?

**Arda:** Frankly, I have never had a special story, a super talent that was discovered at a young age, an incredible talent for painting or sculpture, or anything that amazed the neighbors. I have always been creative, despite the fact that my family and the schools I attended tried to repress this side of me. Unfortunately, it took me decades before I had the confidence to recognize, internalize and own it. No matter what I deal with, I always try to somehow alter either the process, the ideas within, or the destination I want to reach. Taking an idea and turning it into a working structure or manipulating a working structure to fit my point of view is something I do unintentionally. Art, for me, is like the fake Lego bricks I played with as a kid; I have a lot of fun playing, I can do anything I dream of. For a moment, I believe what I have produced is real, but to be honest, we also know that the outcome is always an illusion. However, bringing an idea in mind into production, without anyone having demanded it, and into the society – at least a part of it – later admitting it as a “work of art”, supporting me, applauding (or making fun of me) is what motivates me toward new dreams. Over the years, I became confident that what excites me is the process of revealing an idea, a work or an exhibition: the challenges in the process, the problems solved, the established collaborations, the

connections discovered, the state of being organized around an idea, the adrenaline... The work itself or its destination is never really the objective.

**Hande:** Long before painting, writing, drawing, and shaping was called “art”, for me – like for many of us – the paints, papers, pencils and mud I’ve been playing with since my childhood provided the backdrop of a universe where I could be on my own among the crowd, where I defined the rules, and sometimes in a playground where I showed off my skills if I wanted to join the others, one I had things to say in. Luckily, I was able to preserve my childhood universe during my adulthood, and even fictionalize my life story around this very center. The first breaking point is when I realized that I could do this for a living was when Muhsin Bilge added a sculpture of mine to his collection around the time when I was twenty. I was studying fine arts at the university, but that day, for the first time, I realized that I could become an arts professional. And it has continued to this day. I am still an avid art viewer and reader. My favorite places to spend time in are still museums.

**M:** Today, in 2022, being ahead of time evokes digital technologies and what we call “new media art”. New media art, defined as “an art form that includes artworks designed and produced by means of digital art, computer graphics, new media technologies, computer animations, virtual art, Internet art, interactive art, video games, robotics and cyborg art” often puts the technological exhibition platforms and the media under the spotlight. What kind of technologies do you use in your work?

**H:** First of all, let’s agree on this: “Technology” does not necessarily include elements such as computers or screens. Creating a dye by the mix of a plant-based pigment with egg whites, or using chemical ingredients to achieve a desired color is also utilizing technology. It is difficult to understand how people make a distinction in their minds when they decide that the technologies they use are “conventional”. A soup can, chosen by the artist who had no contribution in its production, produced in a factory for a purely functional purpose, can be the subject of art as a “work”. But why do the production techniques of a 3D printed object, that are positioned as a “work of art” by the artist, lead us to question the “artistic” value of that idea?

We are using methods like light boxes, stained glass, video, 3D, mockup and sculpture. The options are limitless. When what matters is how best to embody the idea, the decision for a medium is made by how this latter supports the narrative. We have a wide playground spanning from 3D software, robotic arms, 3D printers to traditional bronze casting techniques.



**A:** Computers and electronics came into my life at the age of 12-13. Today it is a very normal – even late – age, but I can say that when I was a kid, especially in Ankara where I was raised, it was rare. In my 35-36 years of computer adventure, I have not played games for more than 3 or 4 days. I was always in production. I became interested in CGI in 2004, when I was 30 years old. In the beginning, I imitated motion design masters, whom we now call old school. There was a lot of creative work being done, forcing software manufacturers to add their own builds to those programs as a feature to the next releases. I would believe that if I learned the hardware and software I use as well as them, I could do anything. I used to think that my missing part was technology. As I became more involved and mastered it, I realized that what really matters are the words being said, and not the technology itself. This is something I am not humble about; I have a very advanced command of the tools I use. I'm very well versed in CGI and technology (especially art technology) in general, but this is not unique to me. There are many creatives around me who are better equipped than me or have at least as much knowledge of the subject as I do. However, most of the people who use technology cannot find peace because they share their productions with the audience by hiding behind some abstract, blurry and aimless text written in post-production. I personally avoid it. A work that deals with technology and the mathematics of technology has nothing to say when more advanced technology is being used. Professionals who work close to the conventional field and have a good grasp of art history and philosophy see this as well. New media art is mostly reduced to visuality, although this is starting to change now. I can't blame them for this, but I believe they didn't try hard enough to understand. Most of the art professionals I meet and interact with have very limited knowledge of technology.

On our side, we do not talk much about things like square meters, dozens of projections, robots or data fetish. These technologies make sense when they are used to bring into life a concrete, effective, controversial idea. With the experience we have gained over the years, we have come to a level where we can adapt any technological tool we want to work with, but we also learned that we need to use them when and as much as necessary.

**M:** In an article I recently read, I learned that the surveys conducted since the 1950s have always predicted that “artificial intelligence would catch up to human intelligence in 15-25 years”. I believe it won't be that easy. Artificial intelligence is defined in many different ways. Britannica defines it as “the ability of a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings” while

Wikipedia writes “in computer science, the intelligence demonstrated by machines as opposed to the intelligence displayed by humans.” What are your expectations from artificial intelligence that you use in your production?

**H:** I perceive artificial intelligence applications as a tool for now. We use our brain's thinking capacity in a limited way, and these limits are drawn via education. Artificial intelligence, on the other hand, evaluates things differently when we train it with data and it creates outputs that we expect it to give by processing the provided data, because either it misunderstands us or we misexplain ourselves. These misunderstandings trigger us to use our creativity like a child, without being limited by boundaries. I really like this aspect of it. I see its current state as a sketchbook and find it incredibly enjoyable.

**A:** I think a little differently about this. Of course, these algorithms do not have a motivation to produce, the ability to establish social or emotional relationships, or the ability to conduct research outside of the data sets given to them, but with a processing power far beyond our capacity, they can establish connections about objects, texts, and events that the human brain can never make mathematically. In this way, they make suggestions that we would perhaps never have thought of. I do not define artificial intelligence as a “tool” in the sense we use it today. It seems to me that we use these algorithms as creative contributors.

**M:** Artists working in the digital domain are increasingly present within exhibitions, auctions and biennials, those who think that the future of art is here. I wonder, why does “future” always imply objectless or non-physical works found on the Internet?

**A:** It's about the gradual mixing of the physical and the non-physical. In my view, our perception of the physical world will change radically over time. With advances in augmented reality (AR), super-fast Internet, biotechnology (biological sensors, prosthetics, smart contact lenses, sound enhancers), real-time visual data processing (rendering), and processing power, the distinction between physical and non-physical will blur. We will be able to control complex software and hardware with very little technical knowledge and effort. Thanks to artificial intelligence and robots, the need for human labor will disappear and we will start to spend more time in the non-physical world. Business, entertainment, social life and economic activities will be moved to the metaverse. For now, we focus on the digital part of this possible future and the intriguing sci-fi part of the story. Many creators use social media (Internet) both as



a kind of medium and as a marketing area, and in this field, visuals with a bit of sci-fi sauce, in line with the aesthetic clichés of that world, attract a lot of attention, especially with the effect of the NFT craze which is currently in a serious decline. I compare this type of content, which I call *everyday creativity*, as it is prepared for consumption on social media or the Internet, with the virtual opposition on Twitter or Ekşi Sözlük; superficial, abstract, non-action... You have to constantly produce content for interaction dopamine on social media, otherwise the interest will drop. But, in my view, the main purpose of artistic supply cannot be the demand of the audience. Then what you do is not art, but “content” in social media terms. These “contents” are now attracting the attention of companies that understand the impact of standing side by side with art and social media. They support works that are easy to produce with some science fiction, a mystical story, some color and movement, and most importantly, artists who don’t have a political discourse that causes headaches. Thus, the number of virtual amusement parks is increasing rapidly. Ironically, the states of uncertainty, aimlessness and inaction better describe the dystopian aspect of technology with this happy stereotype expression used when talking about the future. Instead of discussing major problems such as unemployment, injustice, climate crisis and corporatism, which will grow further with disruption, we watch sugar-pink digital balloons and talk about how technology will save us. On the one hand, it would be unfair to say that “the future is implied by the objectless, non-physical works found on the Internet”. The future is here enough to achieve gene modification at home alone.

**M:** Your exhibition *Planet I* at Zülfaris was held between October 27th and November 4th of 2022 and hosted 5737 visitors. How consistent were your objectives while preparing for this exhibition and your post-exhibition evaluations?

**H:** Among the exhibitions we have done so far, the orchestration/show that appeals to me the most is this exhibition that we named “*Planet I*”. The physical structure of the building created a beautiful playground for us, the layer-by-layer appearance of the building, which is left to itself, spoke to the works exactly as we imagined it would. There was more interest than we had planned; for my part I did not expect such a number of visitors.

Sculpting alone is a work in which I can stay by myself despite troubles and difficulties, and it is easier to produce than our other works. All of the decisions are in my hands and there is only one person who I am responsible for, and that is me. In the work we do with Arda, there are processes that we need to decide and implement together. More people

and more responsibilities in detailed works like *MindFlow* come with both technical and emotional burdens. In summary, the exhibition was an incredibly tiring process for me, but I am happy that it received such a response. It is inspiring to take things one step further today because there are still people sending messages and going to Zülfaris to see the exhibition.

**M:** What is the story behind the title of the exhibition “*Planet I*”? How does this story relate to the works?

**A:** The title came to our minds when we were talking about people who used to consider the world to be the center of everything and believe that the universe revolves around it. *Planet I* is an exhibition about the iconography we create as we market our fictional selves to the world. On the one hand, we have our real being, what we actually do, and the consequences of those actions. On the other hand, we have the fictional selves that we imagine, which often does not turn into action, that completely occupies our lives, especially in the post-social media era. I think the deeper the gap between these two “selves”, the more unhappy we become. Of course, I am not going to lecture here or describe myself as a virtuous person watching a tragedy from the outside; I try not to fall into that abyss. I am obsessed with orthodox iconography. I find it fascinating that icon makers describe themselves as “agents guided by the will of god” and that millions of people believe so. I compare our mood when we engage in social media to iconographs: We try to create our own iconography, and many of us gradually form a morbid relationship with our *there-selves*. We consider *us-there* as holy, just like the icons. I can say that every group of works in the exhibition is somehow related to this attributed holiness.

Viewed through a broader lens, in many of the works, ha:ar deals with the battle between *ourselves*—the self we imagine and our actual selves—and the person technology wants us to be. I specifically used the word technology because I believe that it is not thought (philosophy) but technology itself that determines the direction humanity has drifted towards, especially in the last century.

**M:** You also do generative works, but the focus of each of your works is the “human”. You state that you do works that have a story, not just a technology or technique. I would like to talk about *MindFlow*, which is perhaps one of the most impressive works in *Planet I*. How did the creation process of *MindFlow*, which is a multi-disciplinary installation that brings together productions of people from different disciplines, As Hande just mentioned, developed from the idea stage to the final product?



**A:** We use generative tools and simulations in our works, but the fact that we have centered both of these tools and – more importantly – the concept of generative art puts *MindFlow* in a very different place: We question whether humans can think in this way as well as conventional computer-generated generative structures. Similar to our other works, the human is at the center; both in body, movement and thought.

*MindFlow* is a multi-layered audio-visual installation that ha:ar has been working on for nearly four years. In the first of these layers, artificial intelligence was considered as a source and the effect of the data from this source on a performance artist was recorded instantly with a sensor-based and high-sensitivity motion capture system. To elaborate on this, we did an archive study on Iznik tiles, Orthodox iconography and textile patterns and trained three different GAN algorithms. We created approximately two-minute videos from the outputs of each algorithm and asked the artist Ekin Bernay to make an impromptu performance. In the second stage, we combined the data from both artificial intelligence and Bernay's body with Zülfaris' 3D point cloud, which we recorded with Lidar scanners on iPhone, and produced a CGI video of. In this video, the visual representation of both the artist and the architectural elements was generatively manipulated with motion capture data. In the final stage, eight classical musicians watched this video independently and performed impromptu performances. Images and audio recordings of each musician taken with a 3D camera were used to produce individual audio reactive videos.

*MindFlow*, a spatial installation consisting of 9 video and 9 audio channels that blends architecture, dance, artificial intelligence and computer-based visual technology, aims to produce a new musical composition by transforming the traditional structure of classical music with randomness and improvisation, and aims to visualize the process experienced while producing this composition with generative structures.

Although *MindFlow* does not seem to be connected to the conceptual backbone of the exhibition, it is actually connected. We mediated the production of an alternative musical work by taking the instruments of classical music, which cannot even be performed without rules and the artists who perform this music, who are extremely prescriptive, and directed it with pure randomness and improvisation. We thought of it as a kind of iconoclastic action.

**M:** I would like to discuss the marble sculpture called *Disruption*, which was produced by a robot that you programmed in Tersane, Istanbul during the Contemporary Istanbul art fair, which took place shortly before the *Planet I* exhibition. *Disruption* is a marble work

carved by a robot that can work tirelessly and nonstop, revealing once again that the artist, the human, does not provide the manual labor, which is one of the most controversial issues in contemporary art. I would like to hear the story of *Disruption* from you. What were your notes about the process and your experiences? As far as I know, the sculpture was included in the group exhibition *Ancient Futures* curated by Lalin Akalan at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum after the fair. What plans do you have for the statue from now on?

**H:** *Disruption* is a sculpture-performance work in which we try to explain the break we experience in life, how art production has a share in this break, by sharing a part of the production process with the audience. We cannot understand how technology transforms life from a broad perspective. The world population has today reached 8 billion people. Almost none of them do jobs that require high knowledge and skills, on the contrary, they do jobs that can be solved with an intelligent automation system. In the near future, the AI that this audience has trained by hand, by sifting through images while signing up for a simple shopping site, will start to take these jobs from them; in fact, it has already started. Companies that employ many people, such as Amazon, began using AI-powered robots in their warehouses in the first half of the 2000s. Autonomous vehicles started driving trials in the same period. AI has been used for a while in more specialized industries such as computing and analytics. For example, I was shocked to learn that many companies on Wall Street use this software for trading, and that many traders who made millions of dollars from a transaction were out of work because of it. If I go down to my own scale and return to my art, I now prefer robotic arms, computer software or 3D printing machines over human assistants. The absence of both time/cost and emotional burdens makes them preferable to me. What will the world be like when this situation spreads to a much wider audience than it is now? *Disruption* as a process is actually a reflection exercise on this.

When we look at the result, the sculpture carved from marble makes sense on its own, independent of the performance. Although titles such as the robot arm in the performance process and the use of AI in the design process are unknown, the work still contains forms and meanings. If the viewer looks at the form we have designed in a historical context, he or she can discover the references to the monuments erected to victorious generals and references to our witnessing the destruction of these monuments one by one today. I find this sufficient and valuable.



**M:** In the context of your experiences, have you ever worried that the technologies you use are pushing you to the extreme? When we look from the point we are at today, while defining art, with knowledge being out in the open, trained people improving their skills and works being produced with artificial intelligence, the concept of authenticity seems to have gained more importance than ever. How do you take your position against the entire industry, the conditions, and definitions that are changing? Is art transforming or will it transform?

**H:** Isn't art a field where we stand on the fringes, seek and push the boundaries? What I'm looking for with technology or an idea is to go to that end anyway. Many works that are admired in museums these days are works that push the boundaries of their time. Many of today's classics are works that were astonishing in their own time and that encourage people to think about new possibilities. That's why not every painting we put on a canvas, not every 3D modeling or video is a work of art. I always think authenticity is an important value. The reason we talk a lot about authenticity today is because, with the advancing technology, we can expand our brains through AI software and advance our limits by using them in design and production processes. If you get assistance from people while sculpting marble, it means that other hands shape the form of your sculpture and other emotions are involved. While this is not a problem (assistantship is part of the master-apprentice relationship accepted in art practice), it cannot be wrong to reveal a sculpture made in a short time with the help of a robot's arm, which 10 assistants together cannot do. On the other hand, we discuss technology because we see the future only as computer software, or what you call "objectless things on the Internet". However, people once discovered how to melt metal and made bronze sculptures by pouring it into molds made of animal gelatin. This sounds incredible to me from where we are looking right now. It is surprising to be amazed by the particles that collide on the screen, and not be surprised by these. I guess no one questions this because what I'm talking about is still on the production side, but it seems to me at least as fascinating as the development of AI. I find this transformation/progress extremely normal, as I deal with the technology-art relationship with this in mind.

## A BAROQUE FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE?

—Eray Çaylı

PLANET I  
ha:ar

*Planet I*'s production method relies on digital technologies. The sculpture, called *Disruption*, uses these technologies not only for the images produced in the virtual realm but also for the marble sculptures fabricated by a software-run robotic arm. The marble comes from the ancient town of Dokimeion, or present-day İscehisar in the province of Afyon in central-western Turkey.<sup>1</sup> While the exhibition escapes any formal-stylistic uniformity, the artists often invoke the concept of "the Baroque" when speaking about the works on exhibit.

Originating in the word *barocco*, the Baroque is a particularly contested concept in art history. It tends to loom large especially in times of crisis—both political and artistic ones. Prior to the emergence of the Baroque as an art-historical concept, Italian-speaking mediaeval philosophers used *barocco* for describing "an obstacle in schematic logic" while Portuguese-speaking jewellers contemporaneously did so for referring to "an irregular or imperfectly shaped pearl."<sup>2</sup> These etymological origins continued to define the art-historical concept of the Baroque for centuries. Art critics used the word for referring to works they found "odd, grotesque, exaggerated, and over decorated"—that is, until Heinrich Wölfflin refashioned the concept in the late nineteenth century "as a stylistic designation rather than as a term of thinly veiled abuse."<sup>3</sup> This refashioning was indeed central to Wölfflin's and several of his contemporaries' invention of "style" as an art-historical and philosophical category that centres on formal characteristics.<sup>4</sup>

The category of "style" remains influential on the ways artworks are produced and spoken about today. The concept of the Baroque that was central to the invention of style deserves reconsideration due precisely to this art-historical and philosophical influence rather than simply as a formal reference. Art historians to date have paid such attention largely

<sup>1</sup> Mustafa Yavuz Çelik and Eyüp Sabah, "Geological and technical characterisation of İscehisar (Afyon-Turkey) marble deposits and the impact of marble waste on environmental pollution," *Journal of Environmental Management* 87, vol. 1 (2008): 106–116.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen M. Hart, *A Companion to Spanish-American Literature* (London: Tamesis, 1999), p.49.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000), pp.82–89.

<sup>4</sup> Helen Hills, "Introduction." In: Helen Hills (ed.) *Rethinking the Baroque* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), pp.3–4.



by seeking to give formal substance to the concept. I, instead, wish to follow here a lineage of thinkers stretching from Walter Benjamin to a number of my contemporaries who have pushed against art history's limits by situating the Baroque in the crises of modernity and treating it as an *affective* or experiential truth claim rather than simply a formal or structural one.<sup>5</sup>

Such a treatment is especially urgent today as the crisis of modernity has been thrown into sharp relief for their geological character. Climate change and environmental disasters have been thrust into the mainstream under the rubric of the Anthropocene—a term that translates as the age of the human. The term emanates from a now two-decade-old scientific thesis that posits humanity as the single most decisive factor shaping the Earth's working and physical makeup in the current geological period. At this historical juncture where the material character of modernity's crises have become so stark that they are now considered geological, it is not for nothing that the Anthropocene has become the subject of a growing number of debates that focus on its embodied implications through such theoretical frameworks as aesthetics and affect.<sup>6</sup> Taking my cue from these debates, I ask what a Baroque for the Anthropocene—one that inhabits a *geologically* crisis-ridden modernity—might entail by returning to the materialist associations inherent in the *shape* of a pearl and *obstacle* to thought that birthed the concept of the Baroque.

The first written document mentioning the Dokimeion/İscehisar marble dates from the transition between the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire (circa 27 BC). It records the marble's chromatics as white in a red-purple matrix and speaks of pieces being transported to Rome—first in the form of small stones and, eventually, as large monoliths due to rising demand from the new Empire's capital.<sup>7</sup> The labour force used in extraction at this time largely consisted of slaves and freedmen.<sup>8</sup> Scholarly interest in the marble seems to have resurged in the late Ottoman and early Republican period, with studies conducted by British archaeologists whose operations in the region cannot be considered independently of Britain's role in constructing, navigating, and managing “the Middle East” as a colonial and imperial regional category.

5 For an important example of Walter Benjamin's thinking on the subject, see his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London and New York: Verso, 1977) originally published in 1928. For recent examples, see Nadir Lahiji, *Adventures with the Theory of the Baroque and French Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), alongside Hills, “Introduction” and Vidler, *Warped Space*.

6 For a comprehensive engagement with these debates, see my book *İklimin Estetiği: Antroposen Sanatı ve Mimarlığı Üzerine Denemeler* (İstanbul: Everest, 2020) which is entering its second, expanded print run as I type these words.

7 Mustafa Yavuz Çelik and Murat Sert, “The importance of ‘Pavonazzetto marble’ (Docimium-Phrygia/İscehisar-Turkey) since ancient times and its properties as a global heritage stone resource,” *Environmental Earth Sciences* 79, 201 (2020): 2.

8 Alfred Michael Hirt, *Imperial Mines and Quarries in the Roman World: Organizational Aspects 27 BC-AD 235* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.352.

The geological and archaeological literature on the marble has since continued to grow, with an increasingly local and/or national inflection as well as a view towards commercial usefulness. A milestone in this respect was Turkey's integration into global neoliberal markets that the military coup of 12 September 1980 enforced violently at the expense of thousands of killed and disappeared leftists, revolutionary students, and Kurds. The period saw İscehisar marbles become taxonomized into the localist and marketability friendly categories of Afyon White, Afyon Sugar, Afyon Honey, Afyon Violet, Afyon Grey, and Afyon Tiger Skin.<sup>9</sup> In the 2000s, heated competition not only with countries long associated with marble production like Italy but also new players like China began to push Turkish companies to excavate and produce faster at larger volumes.<sup>10</sup> In the 2010s, the quarries started seeing larger numbers of migrant workers who, having fled new imperialist wars, now became vulnerable to worse pay and working conditions than their Turkish counterparts. In December 2020, an Afghan worker was killed by liquid marble waste that inundated him as he was offloading it from a truck.<sup>11</sup> Throughout its recorded history, the marble's story has therefore been inseparable from violent political projects that have prioritized some humans over others deemed disposable. What is more is that this disposability has shaped the marble's production materially, whether directly through enslaved or precarious labour or indirectly through enforced marketization premised upon the deaths and disappearances of thousands. The culprit of what is now termed the Anthropocene, then, is not a singular homogeneous humanity as the term suggests but rather the constituencies that have authored and benefited from these violent political projects at the expense of various others.

Today, there is a novel factor that further complexifies the unevenly violent and geologically embodied politics of the İscehisar marble. Digital technologies are playing an increasingly prominent role in the marble export sector both at the point of extraction and at that of final product fabrication. Competing with foreign producers' modern extraction capabilities has technologically been a relatively straightforward task for the Turkish marble sector. But the expanding volumes at which and speeds with which extraction has been possible due to technologically improved machinery have caused near-depletion of some types of the

9 Çelik and Sert, “The importance of ‘Pavonazzetto marble’ (Docimium-Phrygia/İscehisar-Turkey) since ancient times and its properties as a global heritage stone resource,” 2.

10 Barış Taş and Muhammed Çakır “Marble Industry and Environmental Problems in İscehisar District,” *Eastern Geographical Review* 34 (2015): 25-42.

11 *Afyon Haber*, “İscehisar'da iş kazası, Afgan işçi hayatını kaybetti,” 9 December 2020, <https://www.afyonhaber.com/iscehisar-da-is-kazasi-afgan-isci-hayatini-kaybetti/175227> (accessed 30 September 2022).



İscehisar marble and notably the whiter ones that are known to be in highest customer demand. Regarding the manufacture of final products, where Turkish companies compete mainly with Italians, technology's role has been less straightforward than its impact on extraction. Design is the key ingredient here as companies that have the capacity to supply their customers not just with blocks of raw material but instead with architectural features and decorative objects are also able to maximise profits. But there is a catch, as indicated by my conversations with those working in this sector. The Turkish higher education system in relevant fields such as art, design and engineering has reputedly failed to integrate digital fabrication training into its curriculum as well as its Italian counterpart. As a result, artists, designers and engineers in Turkey create designs incongruous with machinery's capabilities and then respond with resignation when these prove non manufacturable. According to actors familiar with the sector, in Italy, innovation in machinery spearheads the marble whereas, in Turkey, the marble sector tries to spearhead in spite of the machinery and fails. The design process reportedly causes issues not only because designers proceed according to their own creative vision instead of machinery's capabilities but also because they cause unrealistic expectations on the part of customers as designers are effectively the interface between customers and companies.

Works later conceptualised as the Baroque emerged at a time when the Renaissance's transformation of art and architecture into intellectual rather than vocational professions was experiencing its first backlash. Throughout the so-called Middle Ages, designing and making had been one and the same but the Renaissance disentangled these two processes. Rather than being manufactured simultaneously as they were devised in the mind (and vice versa), works of art and architecture were now first debated in the academy as intellectual creations and drawn on paper. Only then could they be actually manufactured. The rupture was perhaps the starkest in architecture as the makers of buildings became workers and were thus relegated to the lower stratum of an emergent class structure while architecture largely became a white-collared profession in modern terms.<sup>12</sup> As the story of the marble indicates, today, manual workers not only remain vulnerable to death and injury but also suffer from a kind of vulnerability that is more geologically embodied than ever, and white-collar creative workers are encountering expectations to submit to the authority of digital technologies. How might these

<sup>12</sup> For more on this historical juncture and its potential implications for today's digitally driven architecture, see Mario Carpo, *The Alphabet and the Algorithm* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

creative workers respond to this crisis now termed the Anthropocene and one that interweaves bodies not only with geology but, as I have tried to suggest here, also with digital technologies? Will they seek to restore their erstwhile status along a hierarchical class structure? Or might they respond to this historical juncture as an opportunity to solidarize with those deprived of their livelihood by being relegated to manual (rather than intellectual) labourers and by being rendered disposable as such? What sort of a Baroque might result from such a response? This is the question that Planet-I raises for me.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to archaeologist Ahmet Levent Zeybek and industrial/mining engineer Ahmet Gürel for taking the time to talk to me about the Dokimeion/İscehisar marble.



# DATA-MANIFESTING: TOWARD A DIGITAL ART HISTORY

— Matt Hanson

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The reduction of matter to binary principles is as at least as old as birth and death. It exists, and then it doesn't. The Tao Te Ching transcribed phenomenal experience into a philosophy, earth-bound, and yet wise enough to assimilate the perception of constant change, fleeting for a time, and yet universal, or even infinite, in terms of space.

The emergence of history, or writing, coincided with scripted enumeration. The invention of zero by Mesopotamians and Mayans is crucially linked with the conceptualization of infinity, which can be understood as a kind of virtuality before the computer. Mathematics, wrote Bertrand Russell, is an "exploratory art", an intellectual venture extrapolated at length by author Alec Wilkinson in his 2021 essay, *What is Mathematics?* for The New Yorker<sup>1</sup>.

1

The artistic use, or interpretation, of math is essentially a premodern precedent to digital art. Whereas digitization implies a system of numbering, or coding, with the assistance of automated computing machines, prehistoric mathematicians, steeped in myth on the eve of scientific literacy, might be compared to digital artists, bridging and revealing gaps between belief and theory, observation and proof.

Not incidentally, one of the first digital artists was also a mathematician by training. In 1965, Frieder Nake took part in the initial exhibitions of digital art. It was a modest, maiden voyage for the field into the public sphere. His piece from that year, *Hommage à Paul Klee 13/9/65 Nr.2*, presaged the present as the art world now faces a perfect storm of rival collaboration in the runaway advance of computer-generated imagery.

<sup>1</sup> Wilkinson, Alec. "What is Mathematics?" *The New Yorker*. March 2, 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/what-is-mathematics>

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Beyond the automation-based early digital artwork of such figures as Harold Cohen, AI is gaining ground as a leading field among the computerized creative industries.

Coupled with artificial intelligence, which might be compared to a kind of quantum realm embedded within the aggregation of code, the unfathomable streams of big data are leveling the boundaries between creature and creation, or maker and machine.

As when electricity was a scientific curiosity, Frankenstein's Monster is not only walking. It has blended in with society to the point where its coded creativity is nearly indistinguishable from human expression.

Similarly, as with the commonly used term "psychedelic" for hallucinogens, which derives from the Greek for "mind-manifesting", so, AI technology might be aptly named, "data-manifesting", as its effects are uncannily related.

Contemporary artists like the duo ha:ar and Refik Anadol are calling AI programs collaborators, not tools. They manifest their own order of material, like the shameless, copyist verve of filmmakers and artists who, as the saying goes, steal if they can not borrow.

1

In modern terms, the pedagogical tenets of dualism have been distilled to ones and zeroes to form the backbone and membrane of computer software. The key opposition is give and take, or downloading and uploading. In the former, physical material is digitized by a computer, and in the latter, digital material creates a file that can then be materialized.

Briefly, what can be downloaded is a function of what has been uploaded. But what came first? The chicken or the egg? The number or the numbered? Binaries only exist as pairs. And as software and hardware merges with the development of chips and robotics, the materialization, or manifestation, of data opens its eyes in wonder to a world looking back at it, equally awed.

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It has always been the prerogative of artists to transcend the worldly trappings of their media and touch new points of realism, encompassing the margins of knowledge and consciousness, humanizing objects of sensual and cerebral experience through plastic reformation and



ideological insight. And since the advent of computer manufacturing, artists have tickled the digital nervous system for a shared source of creative intuition.

1

Like the Big Bang, digital art was born with sound. Electronic musicians like İlhan Mimaroglu attended the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in the 1960s, studying under Vladimir Ussachevsky, who opened a space to experiment with synthesizers and samplers in 1959. By 1973, Pink Floyd's *On the Run* immortalized early electronica.

Following the global distribution of the personal computer, visual digital art started to enter center stage, particularly with innovations like Nam June Paik's video installations.

In the 1980s, Osman Kavala was instrumental in bringing Commodore 64 to Turkey. It was not powerful enough to be a business machine. It was too expensive for gaming. But its successive incarnation, Amiga, inspired Andy Warhol to create a portrait of Blondie singer, Debbie Harry.

In her 2019 book, *Face It*, Harry remembers the shoot<sup>2</sup>. She modeled for Warhol in front of live audiences at NYC's Lincoln Center, tasked with promoting Commodore Amiga. A team of technicians in lab coats watched as Warhol "sparred with the Commodore host", wrote Harry. Unlike the limitless replicability of digital images, Harry says she has one of only two copies of Warhol's inaugural piece of computer art.

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There are two ways to conceive the idea of digital art history. Firstly, digital art has a history of its own. But secondly, art history as a whole is benefitting from digital methodologies that are transforming cultural historiographic processes from the inside out.

As more of the material and virtual record is revealed and digested, while alternative historians and subjects of history emerge under the spotlight of public recognition, history is exposed for all of its sociological and technological relativism. Digital art history is no less finicky for traditionalist historiography than art proper. The means to document and historicize digital art production is subject to unprecedented manipulations that are rewriting the laws of intellectual and material copyright.

<sup>2</sup> Harry, Debbie. "'I Was Just Stunned. And Humbled': In a New Book, Debbie Harry Reflects on the Time Andy Warhol Took Her Portrait'." November 29, 2019. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/debbie-harry-andy-warhol-1696761>

In response, new art platforms and initiatives are increasingly foregrounding archival work to question the assumed authority of preexisting cultural establishments.

The novelty of digital art is not singularly modern, as creative forays into abstract mathematics and binary numerics are as old as writing. For example, the 12-count system for months and hours originates with Sumerians counting their three-jointed pointer fingers with their thumb. What is modern, however, is the speed of historicization, and the burning question of how to encompass the immediate past, while holding fast to an increasingly fugitive present.



1 ha:ar, MindFlow, 9 channel 4K video + 9 channel audio 6"20', Audiovisual installation, 2022, Performance: Ekin Bernay  
Musical Director-Sound Engineering: Can Şengün  
Creative Technologists: Çağatay Güçlü, Balkan Karışman  
AI & Archive: Ezgi Ateş  
Project Assistance: Serdar Yaşar  
Musicians:  
Harp: İpek Sonakın  
Clarinet: Ebru Çeliker  
Korangle: Barkın Balık  
Cello: Çağ Erçağ  
Violin: Esen Kıvrak  
Double Bass: Onur Özkaya  
Percussion: Tunç Çakır  
Piano: Can Şengün

2–3 Marble quarry, Afyon

4–5 ha:ar, Disruption, Detail from the robotic performance at Contemporary Istanbul, House of Brothers Lounge,

6–7 ha:ar, Refraction no: 7, Detail, 180x140 cm, vitrail, led light, 2022

8–9 ha:ar, Impossible Sculpture No: 32, Detail, 200x160 cm, Light box, 2022

10–11 ha:ar, MindFlow, Detail, 9 channel 4K video + 9 channel audio 6"20', Audiovisual installation 2022, Photo: Celal Emre Demir

12 ha:ar, Disruption, 55x65x150 cm, AI generated marble sculpture, 2022, Photo: Berk Bulgulu

37 View from the exhibition Planet I at Zülfaris Karaköy, Photo: Celal Emre Demir

38–39 View from the exhibition Planet I at Zülfaris Karaköy, Photo: Celal Emre Demir

40 ha:ar, Refraction no: 9, 80x100 cm, vitrail, led light, 2022, Photo: Celal Emre Demir

41 ha:ar, Refraction no: 5, 180x140 cm, vitrail, led light, 2022, Photo: Berk Bulgulu

42–43 ha:ar, Refraction no: 4, 180x140 cm, vitrail, led light, 2022, Photo: Emre Topdemir

44 ha:ar, Refraction no: 7, 180x140 cm, vitrail, led light, 2022, Photo: Berk Bulgulu

45 ha:ar, Refraction no: 9, 80x100 cm, vitrail, led light, 2022, Photo: Emre Topdemir

46 ha:ar, Refraction no: 4, 180x140 cm, vitrail, led light, 2022, Photo: Celal Emre Demir

47 View from the exhibition Planet I at Zülfaris Karaköy, Photo: Emre Topdemir

48–49 ha:ar, Refraction no: 6, Detail, 180x140 cm, vitrail, led light, 2022, Photo: Berk Bulgulu

50 ha:ar, Impossible Sculpture No: 32, Detail, 200x160 cm, Light box, 2022

51 View from the exhibition Planet I at Zülfaris Karaköy, Photo: Celal Emre Demir

52 ha:ar, Impossible Sculpture no: 23, 200x160 cm, Light box, 2021

53 ha:ar, Impossible Sculpture no: 34, 200x160 cm, Light box, 2022

54–55 ha:ar, MindFlow, Detail, 9 channel 4K video + 9 channel audio 6"20', Audiovisual installation 2022, Photo: Celal Emre Demir

56–57 Ekin Bernay the artist at the making process of MindFlow

58 Detail from MindFlow

59 Detail from MindFlow

60–61 ha:ar, MindFlow, Detail, 9 channel 4K video + 9 channel audio 6"20', Audiovisual installation 2022, Photo: Celal Emre Demir

62–63 ha:ar, MindFlow, Detail, 9 channel 4K video + 9 channel audio 6"20', Audiovisual installation 2022, Photo: Celal Emre Demir

64 ha:ar (Hande Şekerciler and Arda Yalkın) photographed in Afyon, at a marble quarry, Photo: Burcu Yıldız

ha:ar

Istanbul based artist duo ha:ar (Hande Şekerciler, sculpture and Arda Yalkın, new media) pursues new forms of expression. Both, Şekerciler and Yalkın, share an admiration for Classicism and new technologies. They pride themselves in mastering a wide range of production methods ranging from traditional sculpture and painting, to digital video, animation, 3D modeling together with current mainstream media aesthetics. Overall their practice is informed by questions relating to the civilization we create, the technology we produce, and conflicts we generate with our way of being.

They are also co-founders and coordinators of Piksel. | O'Art, an education, support and community building program that introduces types and production methods of digital art, technologies behind it and thinking methods to young artists and artist candidates from all fields of plastic arts designed to help them understand and incorporate digital technologies into their workflow.

[www.wearehaar.com](http://www.wearehaar.com)  
[www.piksel.ist](http://www.piksel.ist)



PLANET I  
ha:ar

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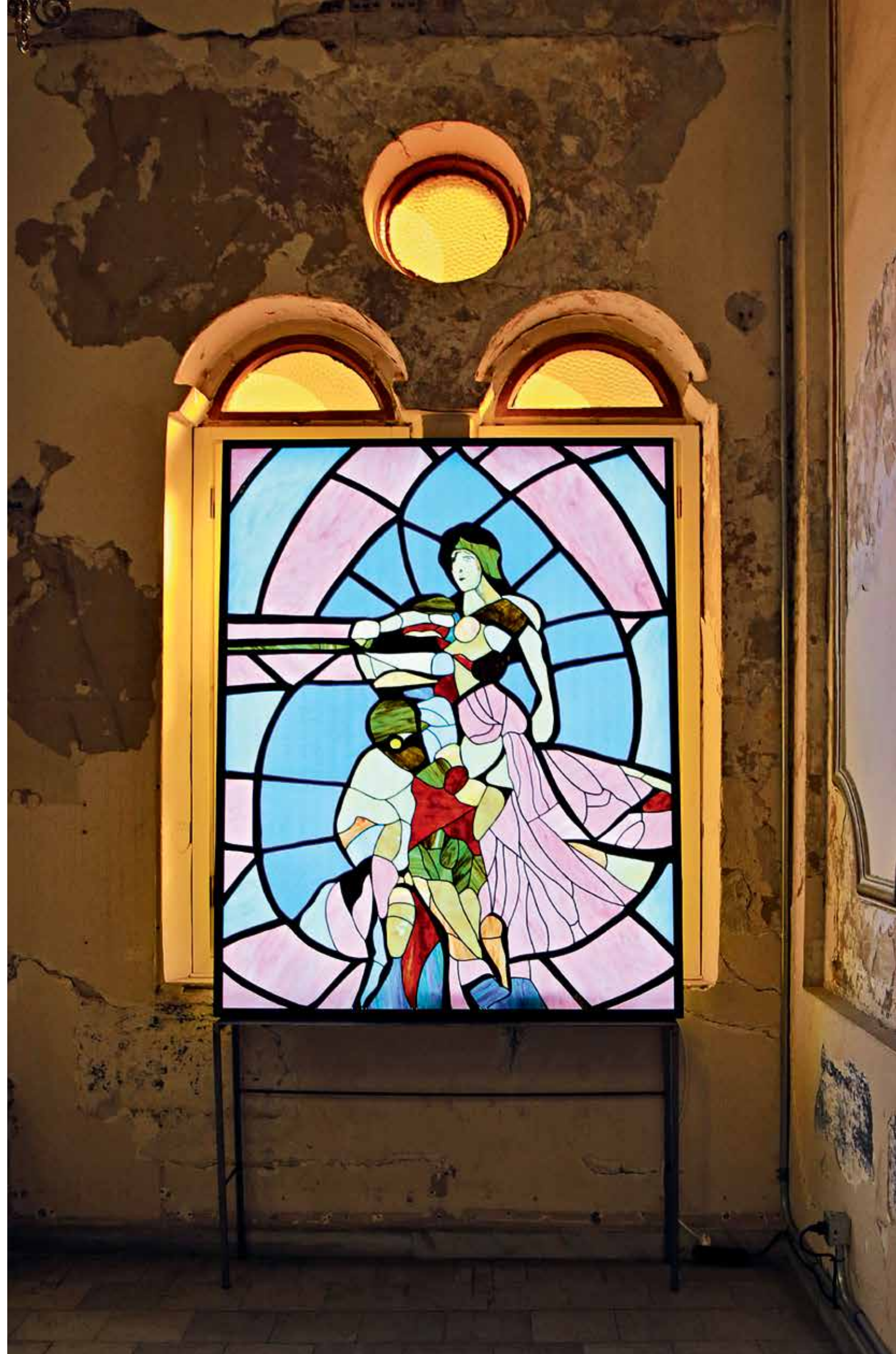
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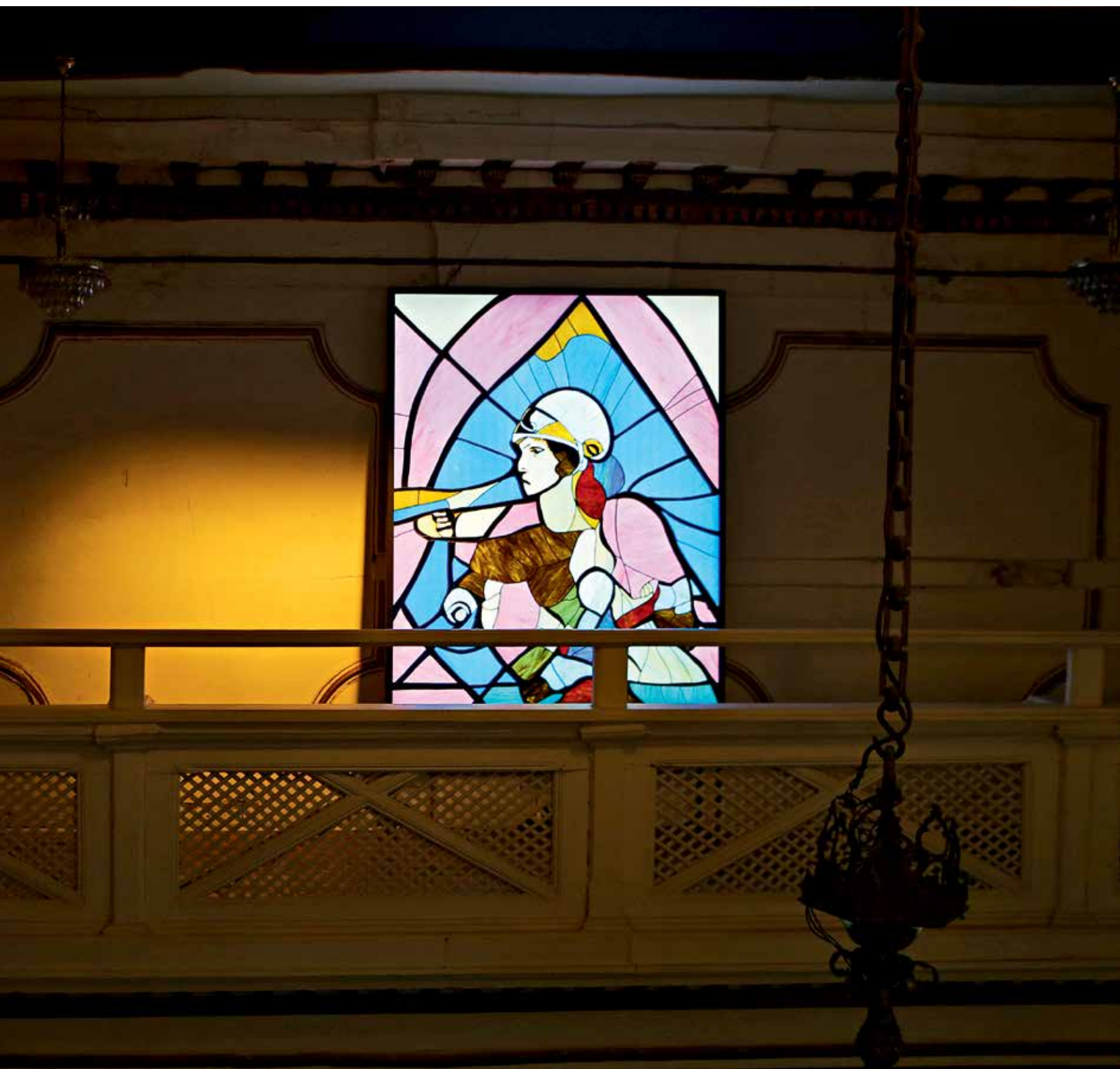
















































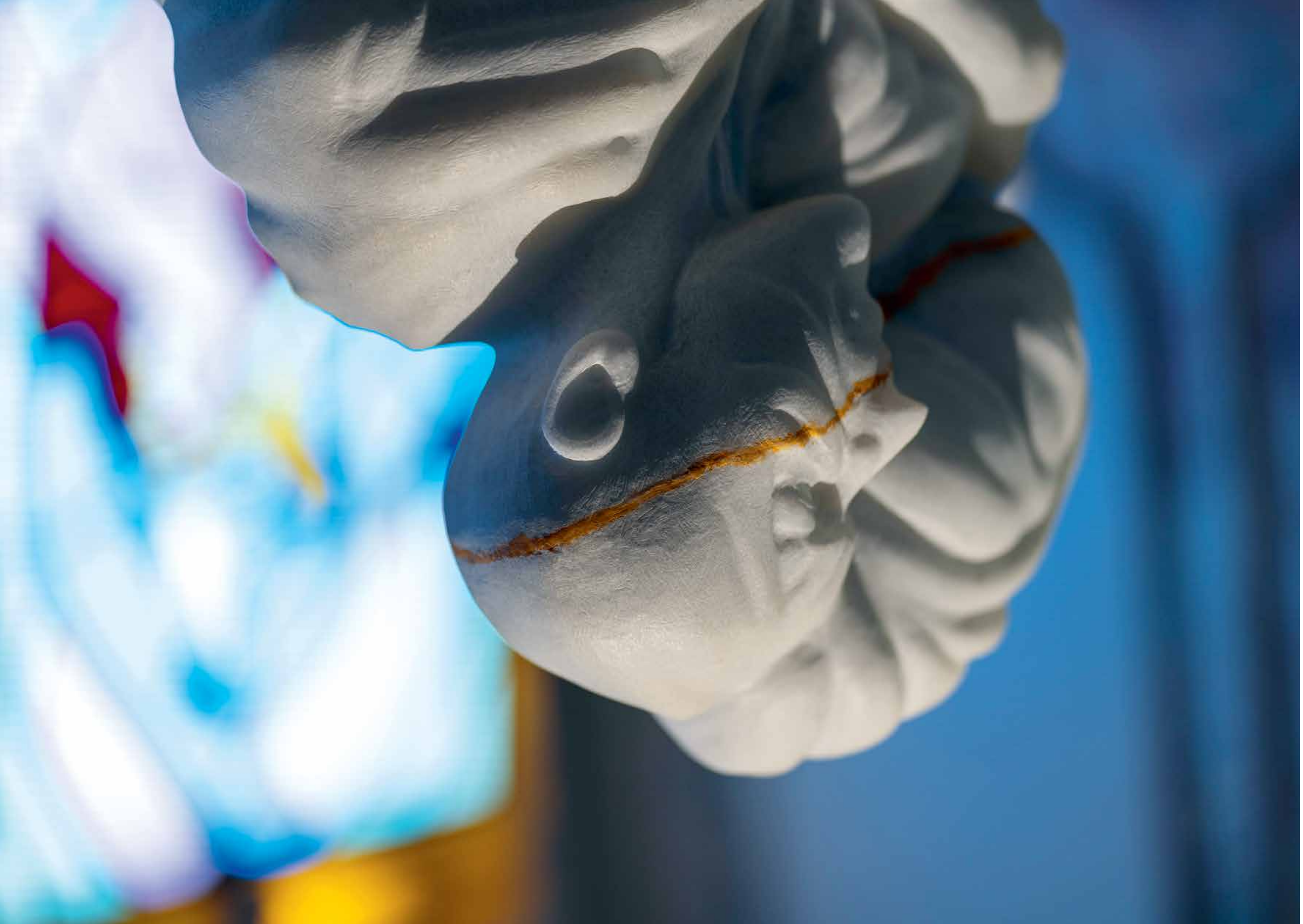












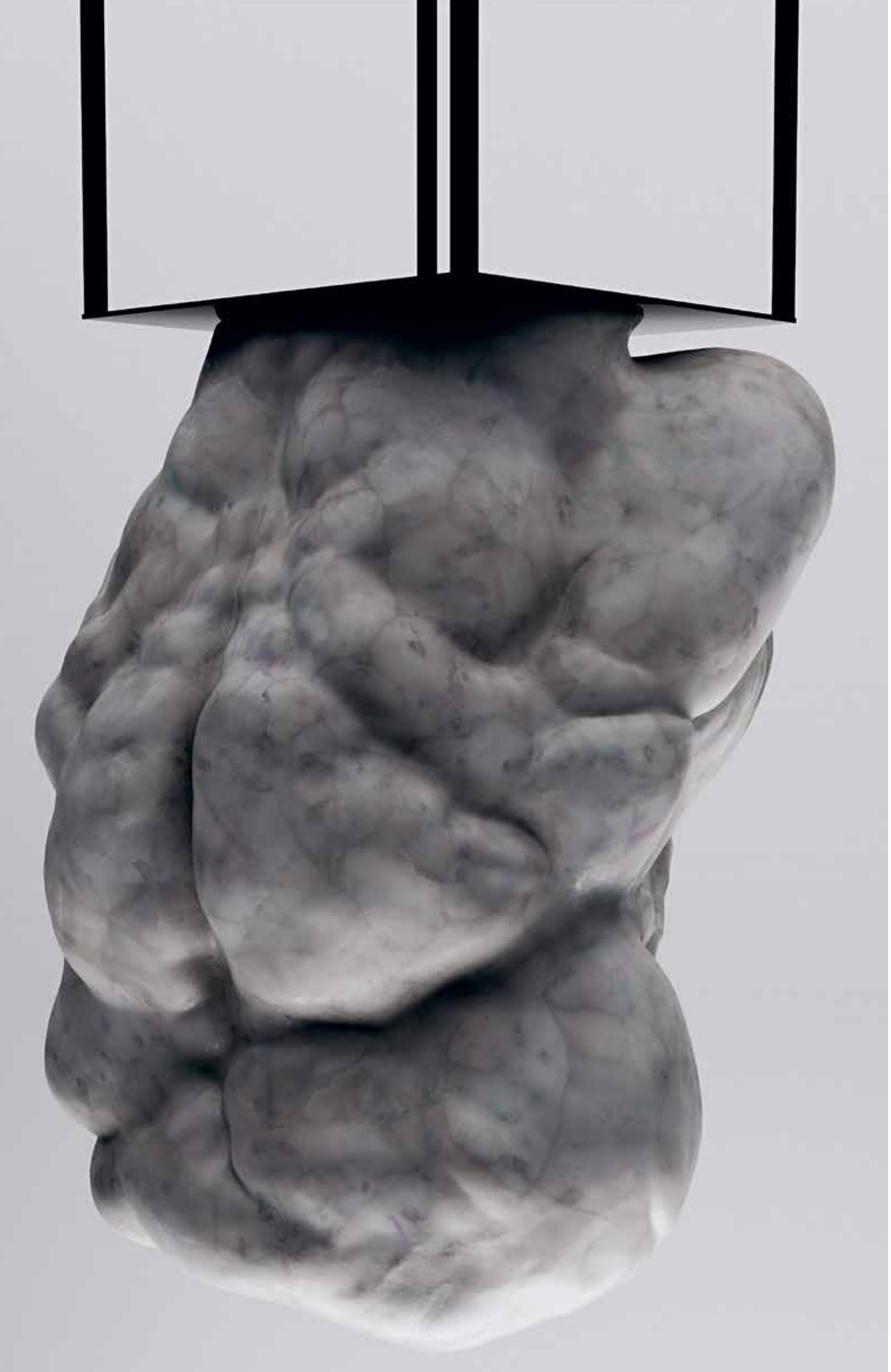
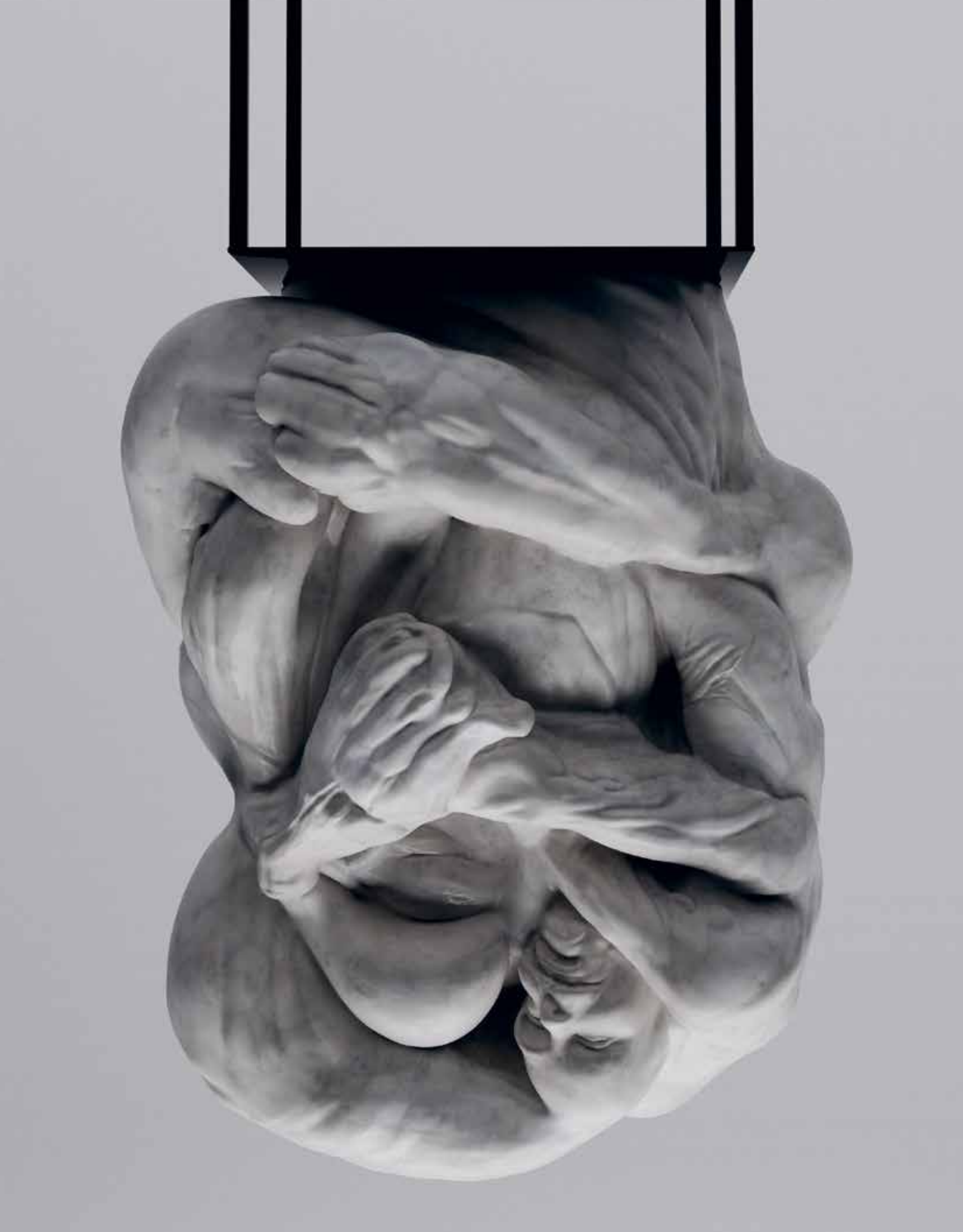














saudade  
Hande Şekerciler

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This book is published on the occasion  
of ha:ar's *Planet I* exhibition held between  
October 27th-November 4th 2022 at Zulfaris  
Karaköy with the support of Odeabank.

1 Hande Şekerciler drawing a digital sketch on iPad,  
Marble quarry, Afyon

4-5 Marble quarry, Afyon, Photo: Burcu Yildiz

6-7 Detail from Hande Şekerciler's studio, Photo: Aşık Toprak

8-9 Detail from a moulding process

10-11 Hande Şekerciler at her studio, Photo: Aşık Toprak

12 Hande Şekerciler, saudade drawing no: 1, 120x92 cm  
(with frame), Fine art print on Hahnemühle Extra  
Smooth Fine Art Paper, 290 gr, 2022

21 Hande Şekerciler, saudade no: 1, 55x44x43 cm,  
Afyon white marble, 3D render image, 2022

22-23 Hande Şekerciler, saudade no: 1, 55x44x43 cm,  
Afyon white marble, 3D render image, 2022

24 Hande Şekerciler, saudade no: 1, 55x44x43 cm,  
Afyon white marble, 3D render image, 2022

25 Hande Şekerciler, saudade no: 1, 55x44x43 cm,  
Afyon white marble, Detail from the sculpture installed  
at Zulfaris Karaköy, 2022

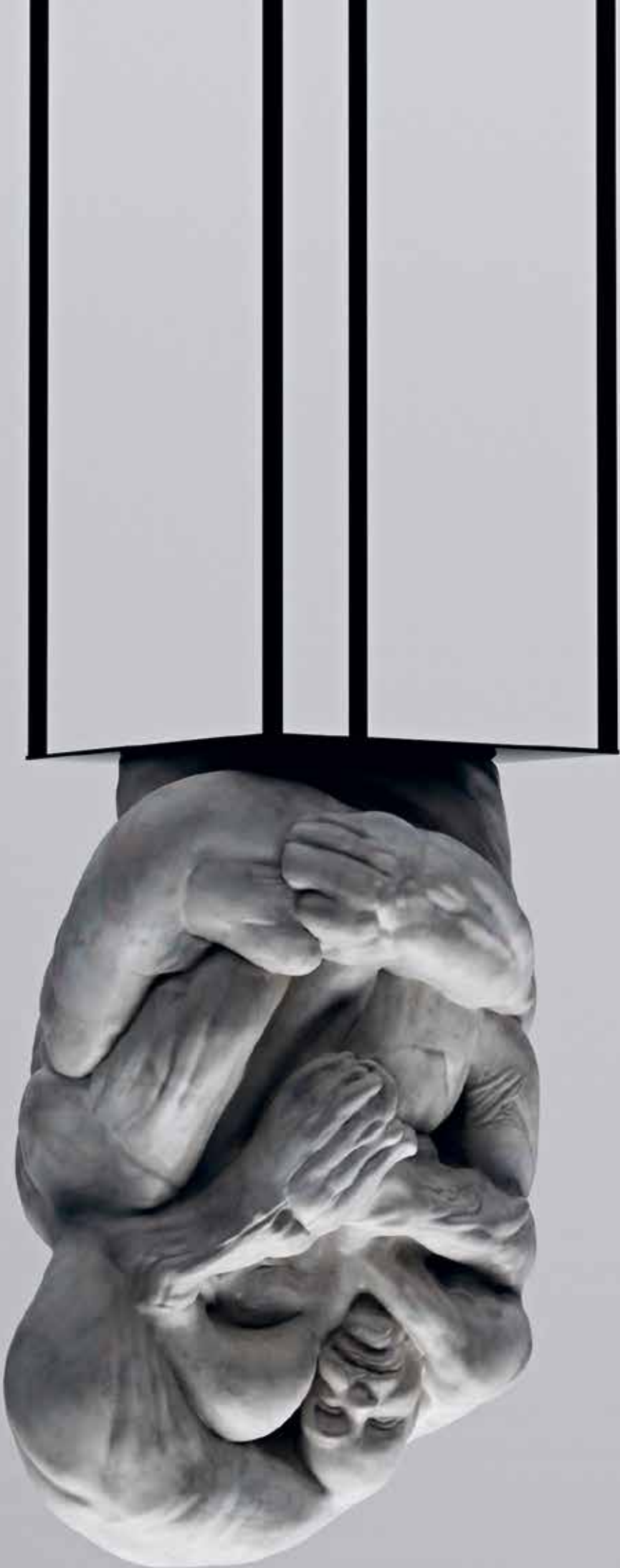
26 Hande Şekerciler, saudade no: 2, 63x45x30 cm,  
Afyon white marble, Detail from the sculpture installed  
at Zulfaris Karaköy, 2022, Photo: Emre Topdemir

27 Hande Şekerciler, saudade no: 1, 55x44x43 cm,  
Afyon white marble, Detail from the sculpture installed  
at Zulfaris Karaköy, 2022 - At the back, Hande Şekerciler,  
saudade drawing no:2, 120x92 cm (with frame), Fine Art  
Print on Hahnemühle Extra Smooth Fine Art Paper,  
290gr, 2022, Photo: Celal Emre Demir

28-29 Hande Şekerciler, saudade no: 3, 60x40x40 cm,  
Afyon white marble, Detail from the sculpture installed  
at Zulfaris Karaköy, 2022, Photo: Celal Emre Demir

30-31 Hande Şekerciler, saudade sculpture series installed  
at Zulfaris Karaköy, 2022, Photo: Celal Emre Demir

32 Hande Şekerciler photographed in Afyon,  
at a marble quarry,





the breathtaking grasp of the fall. These forms that resemble entangled vines or the slick folds of the human brain in all its glory resemble large lumps fed by the fierce aesthetic of disgust, tumors of emotions that exploit our brain and psychology that we want to excise and be rid of when they do not resemble distinct parts of the body—back and arm muscles, tendons, faces squeezed between the joints of the hands or elbows. These sculptures appear in front of us at their most primitive, tightly sewing together this vast opposition between the material's coldness and eeriness with the vivid warmth of the organic forms through memories. *saudade* is an expression of the inevitable paradox in the troubled waters of existence and the resultless war, stuck in the infinite cycle of both the plastic and the conceptual. The legendary snake (Ouroboros) who eats its own tail with massive paranoia and arrogance is a monument to how you only sacrifice yourself for the sake of staying alive, all the disappointments that cannot be digested, regurgitated over and over again, the shaken faiths, indigestion, and the ill-founded compassion that stems from all this. While the fingers grasp these centerless, bodiless masses like bony clutches trying to tear them away without realizing this will mean self-destruction, the arms are spread over the same organism like soft wings to protect it. The unlucky heads are spirits waiting to be saved, just like those at the river Styx, selves lost. These sculptures that appear outside of reality, belonging to an impossible being, make tangible the various stages of the abyss transformed into the self if gazed at for long enough, as defined by Nietzsche. The resentments, the bitterness, the lost, the missed, the almosts, the never-reached dreams, the never-even imagined become hardened, like stones, and just there, right in front of us, where they can no longer harm us, they become immobile in Hande's forms, imprisoned.

Every moment chosen from the transformation is the admirably aesthetic, harmless, stagnant, and hatefully honest expression of the great wound (*trauma*) created by the collapse of the dream (*trauma*). These things are the intellectual fragments of all the things that we know we have left behind, even if they will never come our way again, but whose presence will always disturb us in some way, but which also make us who we are and for which we are grateful and for which we yearn for no matter how much we try to distance ourselves from them. Instead of aestheticizing these things, the artist adapts them, like a translator, to the world's system of perception, to our five primitive and mortal senses. These are the most concrete, most straightforward, most rigid but transformative expressions of facing time, life, and ourselves.

saudade

HANDE SEKERCILER

WAKE UP and smell the ashes!  
You are becoming yourself.  
Once again.

*saudade* is a response in Hande's practice to another type of fluidity through an aesthetic at the edge of abstraction. Each of the soft lines implying a human or a humanoid animal, or perhaps a creature, prepares the ground for a cyclical reading by reversing the transitions within itself, just like a dream without a beginning or an end. On the other hand, the repetition inherent in the movement becomes a kind of therapist who reaches the consciousness layers of the audience with the hypnotic effect it creates and finds their traumas and moments of happiness engraved in their memory. These sculptures, which make the fluidity more evident through smooth, velvety surfaces, like a state of sleep, become the predecessors and successors of each other due to the duality of interpretation in time-space. *saudade*, while preserving the trauma and longing, which grow from the same seed but are not alike, takes on a different form in its every manifestation and re-envelopes itself in the meaning encountered for the first time, even though it is familiar. The skin on the skin becomes memory within memory.

HANDE SEKERCILER

Born in 1982 in Bursa, Turkey Hande Şekerciler attended Marmara University, studying in the Department of Arts and Crafts Education from 1998 to 2002. Renowned for her figurative forms Şekerciler states her influences as Hellenistic artworks and Renaissance period. Artworks from these eras act as a stimulus from which she experiments ideas of form and social issues through her sculpture. Her interest in technology and new production techniques help the sculptor to combine classical forms with contemporary production methods.

www.handesesekerciler.com



We miss the past. We try to reach once again for those things that we imagine in our minds, that we can remember with our sensual memory, things that appear to be inaccessible as if such an attempt were feasible; we lock our gaze to a single point, abstracting ourselves from everything else to cleanse, to self-console, and to heal. We notice that we have become weary with time, we trail behind life or just ourselves, that we are no longer as good as we used to be, making efforts to resist gravity. This is an unavoidable instinct, and we are, without a shadow of a doubt, mentally and physically flawed creatures.

*How did the time go by? When did the shattering happen?  
Immense darkness has settled into your eyes; YOU CAN FEEL IT.  
Before the now is blurry, what happened before had been erased.  
There are only MEMORIES now.  
Was everything better before?  
You WANT THOSE TIMES back.*

We begin to believe even more staunchly that as we forage the soil of time past hysterically that we can touch a magic button, that we can reach a moment when all negative things can be erased by themselves, and that we can reach over to all the things that we yearn for. The more we make an effort, the more we believe, and the more we believe, the more we make an effort. This is a vicious cycle spiraling further down into the abyss. A belittling yet authentic script that makes fun of the brains that we developed over centuries and that makes evident the primitiveness of our species! The human's biggest disappointment is itself, perhaps.

*You can't bear to see yourself in the mirror.  
Your fists are as hard as stones; your hands tremble,  
your gazes are constant.  
Lightings go off in your mind, one after the other: RAGE!  
You are compelled to DESTROY something.*

Our lives are filled with traces of our decimated hopes, missed opportunities, and lost potentials. When we turn around to squint back at the past, they all look like each other: timelines, people and spaces are indistinguishable, interwoven. The “thing” far away is a vast whole, shapeless, ill, undesirable organism. Our mind, whose presence we believe in, is helpless at that distance, and we struggle to remember the details. Despite all, there still are a few hidden moments of happiness. Among this destruction, castration, and limitations, we still have areas of liberation that belong to us—nobody can touch these areas, where emotions, people, smells, and sounds are protected. The counterweight to the shapeless darkness left behind, areas of peace-making, compassion, coming together, and rejuvenating.

*It's not the past you seek as a whole but its memories.  
Your rage subsides as you direct your gaze to your eyes, back again.  
You DIVE inside, into time.  
You remember what your dreams were like before they were destroyed,  
You begin to experience once again the times when you were happy,  
INDEPENDENT, and light.  
All the things you love are with you, ONCE AGAIN.  
The disgust of the now settles into your throat like a lump.  
Your mind calls for you, facetiously: saudade.*

This admirable ambiguity of the word “saudade,” which means happiness in or mixed with sadness in Portuguese, lends itself to Hande Şekerçiler's sculptures. *saudade*, redefined and distilled in the mind of the artist, is almost a masochistic nostalgia for the memories of being broken, battered, defeated, defeating/being defeated, the fall of Icarus, whose wings melt while trying to reach the sun greedily. It is the expression of the desperate clinging on to the happiness experienced after the loss, just before the moment of loss, and which appears never to end. It is to seek refuge in the off-beat feeling on the loss threshold as nothing is left. It is pricking the never-healing wound inherited from Prometheus with a strange peacefulness to let out the pus, to seek revenge from ourselves, all the while knowing about the imminent pain of the dagger, sometimes called death, sometimes called love or separation, which will devastate us. It is the hemlock poison we drink willingly in which happiness and pain are entangled, destroying some things. It is the innocence that we sacrifice to the world as we ruthlessly step on it with the weight of gravity. Hande's forms superimpose limbs that seem to belong to dreamlike bodies; she does not seek to beautify them while liberating them from



With the aim of making all disciplines of art accessible to everyone, we have launched O'art, Odeabank's art platform. However, O'art has evolved into so much more than being just the art platform of Odeabank, by signing lots of original and valuable projects. Recently, with Odeabank's new phygital banking approach is also reflected to art, we added supporting art and artists in the field of new media and digital art to the top of our mission list.

We believe that art and creating art forms evolve like the world and technology, ha:ar's last exhibition "Planet I", blends traditional art and new media, that we brought to life together in Istanbul and met with great interest by art lovers, has been a wonderful beginning for our new mission. It is our pleasure to support this publication, which immortalizes the "Planet I" and the impressive works of ha:ar.

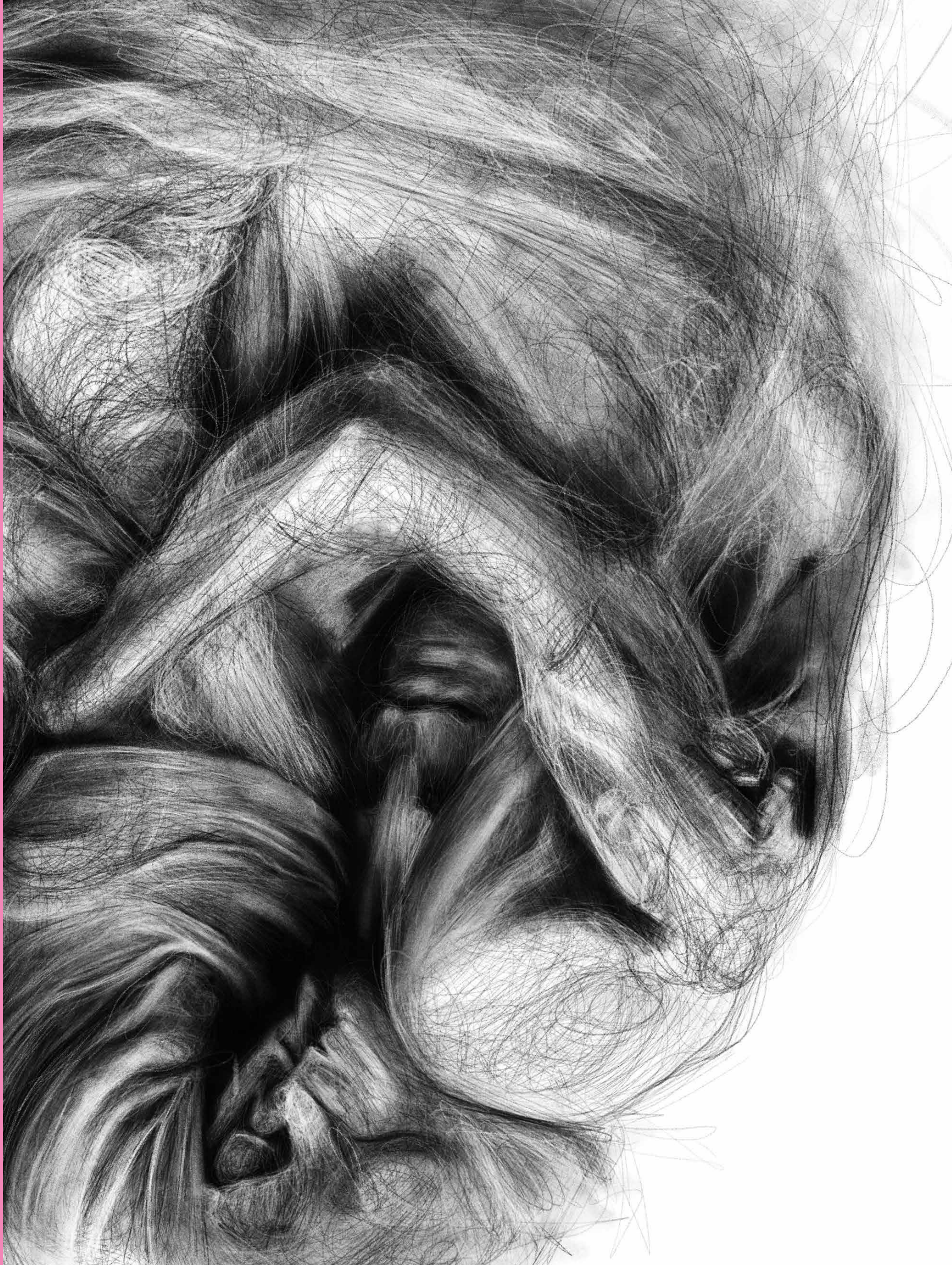
— Mert Öncü  
Odeabank, CEO

HANDE SEKERCILER

saudade

1-12	Artworks
13	saudade
15-18	The Lump
19	Credits
21-36	Artworks
	—Sinan Eren Erk





# Hande Şekerciler saudade

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25.7 - 8.6  
16.8 - 07.00  
12.8 - 07.10  
19.8 - 07.20  
22.1 - 07.15 per. 24

