Selma Gurbuz
Mind’s Eye
24 October – 7 December 2011
“This exhibition mostly consists of works I had made in my studio in Istanbul in 2011. I always put a full stop after each exhibition and begin with a new clean sheet. Actually, the things that should have been said were told in the first few sentences, but the real sentence is still incomplete. What brings me to the process of this second exhibition is the need to complete this sentence. Before that, I held an exhibition called Shadows of My Self at Leighton House Museum in London. Now, with this exhibition, I will continue to form the incomplete sentence. I think that the Western tradition and the tradition of the Eastern pole are actually two separate fluid materials intertwined. I try to imagine the West from the East as how the West would imagine the East.

When setting up my own dream, I generate a view from East to West by knowing both the Western art and culture and using the richness of this region such as being in between East and West. When I interpret Western myths through the eyes of the Eastern, the Eastern myths that I have created show up, too. They also have a nature that occurs with these myths. There is not an indication on a definite location. Geographies are undefined in my pictures.”

Selma Gürbüz.
Selma Gürbüz is nothing if not eclectic. She knows her sources and is not afraid to mix idioms. Just as the mind links remembered images and events, she intuitively weaves together disparate elements in her paintings. Gürbüz’s stated aim is to look at Western art through Eastern Eyes. In her rich and evocative paintings she draws on a broad range of influences and merges them with her whimsical imagination to produce lyrical and very personal works. Each of her paintings is touched by romanticism and her own esoteric mythology. Gürbüz’s works carry echoes of high Ottoman and traditional Turkish folk art, with combinations of motifs that are uniquely Turkish and rooted in the culture of the country. At the same time she introduces elements from the pantheon of Western art, from the Renaissance through the 20th century. Elements of Cranach, Leonardo, Velázquez and Goya, and the formal qualities of Ingres, Manet and Mattise and others are reflected in her paintings.

Gürbüz admits that although dreams are a major component of the subject matter of her works, she treats each as a problem for which she must provide a visual solution. She works on each painting spontaneously at first, but gradually changes features as a narrative crystallizes. Gürbüz insists that each work must have a narrative: in order to satisfy its creator, there needs to be a story. She keeps narrative shrouded in mystery, a puzzle for the viewer to solve. Each story is composed of pictograms, often humorous or absurd, but always symbolic and emotive. Tears, for example, represent rain.

In her earlier works, Selma Gürbüz made bold and simple calligraphic brushstrokes on handmade paper. She focused mainly on animals, especially cats, seen from above from a bird’s eye view. At that stage her works were monochrome and her figures stood on neutral backgrounds. The results were spontaneous and playful, even impish. Gradually human figures became more prominent and, more recently, the details in her work have multiplied. Her figures now stand amidst densely patterned compositions, often of several colours. Oil on canvas became her preferred medium for larger paintings. The mood of these recent works is calmer, more reflective and more poetic. In her recent work animal and human figures often populate the same space. Gürbüz’s worldview is pantheistic. For her, this is an animal world, and relationship between the humans and animals is charged with emotions and eroticism.

Looking East, Gürbüz goes beyond Turkey: Persian, Japanese and Indian art all feed into her work. From Japanese woodcuts we see a strong two-dimensional emphasis and a characteristic tilt of the head; from Persian and Ottoman miniature painting we see strong outlines and stylized figures and her characteristic placement of figures on the picture plane. Meanwhile, her distinctive style, with its silhouetted figures and strong outline is much influenced not just by Turkish Karagoz shadow theatre, but also bears a strong resemblance to American and European silhouette profile portraits of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.
There is something unmistakably “stagey” about her working process. Her paintings often have definite backgrounds and the figures are placed like actors. Gürbüz has sometime dabbled with puppetry: for a show at the Pompidou Centre in Paris she made her own puppets and also used her body in a teepee, which served as a theatre. In Yokohama Art Centre in Tokyo she performed with puppets behind a screen.

Some of her motifs have clear sources of inspiration, especially when from Western painting. Her slender figures, with their curious contortions and incidental details owe much to those of Lucas Cranach the Elder. Gürbüz painted a number of works in homage to his Adam and Eve series. The magnificent attire so often seen on her figures recalls the quiet dignity of Velazquez’s subjects, whilst the seductive faint smile that so often appears on her faces evoked that of the Mona Lisa. The traces of the voluptuous nude of Ingres’ La Grande Odalisque are unmistakable in Gürbüz’s Three Roosters.

The closer one looks at Gürbüz’s paintings the more sources one sees. Do her earlier works remind one of the 18th century Turkish calligraphic compositions in the shape of animals, or is it the inscribed, Ottoman 19th century gilded skeletons of tobacco or ivy leaves? In her figures, is it traces of 15th and 16th century Persian and Ottoman miniatures that one sees, or could it be the Minai ware of the 13th century Turkic rulers of Iran? Gürbüz lists Japanese woodcuts as source of inspiration, but in fact art from the Middle East has looked East for almost a thousand years. In a very real sense, it has been consciously orientalist. The Moon-faced court ladies of Persian wares of the 13th century, the blue and white of Iznik tiles and dishes, and the long-sleeved maidens of Turkish and Persian miniatures are just a few examples of a fascination with the Far East which has long permeated Islamic art. No doubt the Central Asian origin of the region’s Turkic overlords played a major role in bringing about these orientalizing tendencies. So too were the Ottomans instrumental in bringing occidentalizing tendencies to Middle Eastern art, a trend which continues to this day. The second half of their reign coincided with the spread of the Renaissance, and increasing numbers of Western artists were attracted to their capital.

It should be no surprise that it is the art produced in the West from this point onwards that fascinates Selma Gürbüz. She is well aware of this history of cultural borrowing, which explains much of her process of picture making. Much of this is done unconsciously, and it is only in conversation that she retrospectively links the parts. Still a lot is left open to interpretation. It seems that Gürbüz leaves the line that separates intention from intuition deliberately obscured, so that her paintings bear a strangely familiarity through an unfamiliar melding of disparate parts, a kind of fairytale mythology based on our collective cultural memories. Thus her works seem timeless, yet ephemeral; imagined yet real. Selma Gürbüz comes close to touching the paradox that is at the heart of dreams, but to describe her as a surrealist would be missing half the point.

William Lawrie,
Dubai, October 2011
Woman With Roosters
2011
oil on canvas
155 x 230cm

Çivili Isa - Jesus With Nails
2010
oil on canvas
200 x 115cm
Byzantine Angel
2011
oil on canvas
155 x 230cm
Woman With White Cat
2011
Oil on canvas
200 x 115 cm
Zümrüdüanka - Phoenix
2011
Oil on canvas
155 x 230 cm

Still Life with Rose
2011
Ink on handmade paper
163 x 115 cm
Poet
2011
Oil on canvas
200 x 115 cm
Adem ve Havva - Adam and Eve
2010
Oil on canvas
200 x 115 cm
Still Life with Hydrangea
2011
Ink on handmade paper
163 x 115 cm
Flowered Woman
2011
Ink on hand made paper
300 x 150 cm, 118 1/8 x 59 1/8 in
Born 1960, Istanbul, Turkey
Lives in Istanbul

Education
1982 Exeter College, Art and Design, England
1984 Marmara University of Fine Arts, Painting Department, Turkey

Solo Exhibitions
"Kirmizi&Siyah" ("Red&Black"), ALANistanbul, Istanbul
2010 "Arketip" ("Archetypes"), Warehouse (Antrepo) no:3, Istanbul
2009 "Uninvited," Akbank Culture Center, Istanbul, curated by Levent Çalıkoglu
"Sunny Shadows," Gallery Apel, Istanbul, and Tokio Gallery, Tokyo
2008 Galerie Maeght, Paris
Boutique 1 Gallery with Fadi Mogabgab, Dubai
"Cat’s Eye," Milli Reasurans Gallery, Istanbul
2007 "Kamiyama Workshop", Kamiyama
"Safa," MAC Art Gallery, Istanbul
"Sunny Shadows II," Gallery Apel at Istanbul Contemporary Art Fair, Istanbul
"Sunny Shadows I," Makii Masaru Fine Arts, Tokyo
2006 "Feline II," Gallery Apel, Istanbul
"Feline I," Galerie Maeght, Paris
"Go East," Beijing TSls Contemporary Art Center, Beijing
"Artist Residence Solo Show," Tokyo
2005 "Dive into the dream," Gallery Nev, Ankara
2004 "The Fairy and the Genie" ("Tüylü Masallar" ("Feathering Tales"), Gallery Apel, Istanbul
2000 "Yünname", Gallery Apel, Istanbul
1999 "Les Contes de la Peau," Centre Culturel Français, Istanbul
1999 "Karaname," Gallery Apel, Istanbul
1998 "Zodiak’la Hayale Dalı" ("Dreaming with the Zodiac"), Gallery TEM, Istanbul

1997 "Mundus Elementaris," travelling show: Alliances Françaises de Buenos Aires, Mendoza, Cordoba, Bahia Blanca, Rosario, Santa Fe, Mar del Plata
1996 Gallery BB, Houston, Texas
Décor pour la Soirée Futuriste, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
Derimod Art Center, Istanbul
"Magie Grise," Galerie Stepaniska, Institut Français, Prague
1995 "Londres Revisité," travelling show: Espace Mira Phalaine, Montreuil and Centre Culturel Français, London
1994 "La Mille et Troisième Nuit," Galerie Thorigny, Paris
"1003 Nuits," Gallery TEM, Istanbul
1993 "Poème avec 10 Paragraphes," Gallery TEM, Alay Köskü, Istanbul
"Les Trapézistes de l’Infini," Aldebaran-Espace Vigneron, Baillargues, Montpellier
1992 "Jeux de Mains," Galerie Thorigny, Paris
"Meleklerin Cinsiyeti" ("Sex of Angels"), Gallery TEM, Istanbul
1991 Espace Merle-Portalès, St Germain-En-Laye, France
"Meleklerin Düşü" ("Dream of Angels"), Galerie Nev, Ankara
"Le Café de ma Favorite II," Bibliothèque Municipale, Yerres
1990 "Le Café de ma Favorite," Galerie Lacourière-Fré laut, Paris
1989 Mask Art Gallery, Izmir
1988 "Calligraphie de l’Ombre" ("Gölge Hüsnühatları"), Gallery BM, Istanbul
1987 Gallery Urart, Ankara
1986 Gallery Urart, Istanbul

Group Exhibitions
2010 “From Traditional to Contemporary,” curated by Levent Çalıkoglu, Istanbul Museum of Modern Art
Rose Issa Projects at Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair,
Istanbul

2009 Casa Del Arte at Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair, Istanbul

2008 "Modern Experiences," Istanbul Modern, Istanbul
   "Je ma’apel Apel," Gallery Apel, Istanbul

2007 "KAIR 2007," Kamiyama, Japan
   "Modern and Beyond," Santralistanbul, Istanbul
   "Selection 2007 from the Elgiz Collection," Istanbul

2006 "Tenses of the Tulip," curated by The Imperial Mint, Istanbul
   "Visit the Visit," Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair-Gallery Apel, Istanbul
   "Three Contemporary Artists," Galerie Maeght, Beijing, Selma Gurbuz (Turkey), Marco Del Re (Italya), Aki Kuroda (Japan)

2005 "Newroz-Nevruz," curated by Nuran Terzioglu, Diyarbakır
   United Nations 60th Anniversary Exhibition, Genoa
   "Cat’s Eye," Galerie G-Art, Istanbul
   "Where is Istanbul?" curated by Emre Zeytinoglu, IMSG, Istanbul
   "Newroz-Nevruz," curated by Nuran Terzioglu in Diyarbakır
   "50 artists, 50 works," MGS, Istanbul

2004 "Dialogues Plastiques," Grand Place, Hotel de Ville, Brussels
   "More Wind! Four Contemporary Artists from Turkey," Yokohama Portside Gallery, Japan
   "From Hills and Dales," Gallery Apel, Istanbul

2003 "Metal Works," Gallery Apel, Istanbul
   "Fantaisies du Harem et les Nouvelles Shéhérazades," travelling show: Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona and Museum of Natural History, Lyon
   "Cara a Cara," travelling show: Selma Gurbuz with Arden Reed and Marco Del Re, Galerie Maeght Paris and Barcelona
   "Hamam," Swedish Cultural Institute, Stockholm
   "Love Affairs," curated by Rose Issa, (touring exhibition), Stuttgart, Bonn and Berlin

2002 "Chair +", Gallery Apel, Istanbul
   "Basbasa," Selma Gurbuz with Marco Del Re, Garanti Gallery and Gallery Apel, Istanbul


2000 "Garçon, de quoi écrire!" Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen

1999 "Hic Liber est Meus," Mairie du Sixième Arrondissement, Paris
   "Nuit," Gallery Apel, Istanbul

1998 "Les Cafés Littéraires," Institut Français, Barcelona
   "Damak" ("Palate"), Gallery Apel, Istanbul

1997 "Le Cirque," travelling show: Espace Mira Phalaina, Montreuil; Athénée Théâtre Louis Jouvet, Paris; Novomestka Radnice, Prague
   "Ex-Libris," Institut Culturel Français, Barcelona
   "Le Cirque," Les Silos, Maison du Livre et de l’Affiche, Chaumont
   "Le Zodiac," Galerie Mai Olivier, Paris
   "Les Cafés Littéraires," Les Silos, Maison du Livre et de l’Affiche, Chaumont
   "Garçon, de quoi écrire!" Musee des Beaux-Arts, Caen

1996 "Ex-Libris," travelling show: Alliance Française Buenos Aires and Argentina
   "Le Cirque," travelling show: Gérard-Georges Lemaire, Editions Eric Koehler, Athenee-Theatre Louis Jouvet in Paris; Espace Mira Phalaina, Montreuil; and Novomestka Radnice, Prague

   "Ex-Libris," Institut Culturel Français, Barcelona
   "Automatic Games," Biennale de Kwangju, Korea
   "L'après-midi d’un faune," Espace Merle-Portalès, Uzès
   "Tapis Volants," Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris

1994 "Paris est une Fête," Galerie Stepanaska, Prague
   "Double Jeu," Centre Culturel Français, Barcelona
   Frankfurt Art Fair, Galerie Thorigny

1993 "Cumhuriyet’ten Günümüze Kadın Sanatçılar" ("Republic to the Present - Women Artists"), Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul
   "Ex-Libris," Galerie Thorigny, Paris
   "Cartes de Vœux d’Artistes," Galeries XIII, Arles
   Galerie Thorigny, FIAC, Paris

1992 "Cekmeceler" ("Draws"), Galeri MD, Istanbul
   "Parigi," Palais de la Civilisation Itallienne, Rome
   "Vous avez dit Romain?" Espace Merle-Portalès, Uzès
   "Petits Formats," Galerie Thorigny, Paris
   Istanbul 2nd Art Fair, Tem Sanat Galerisi, Tüyap Sergi
1991
- Sarayı, Istanbul
- “L’Orient des Cafés,” travelling show: French Cultural Centre Cairo, Alexandria, Athens, Thessaloniki, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv
- “L’ennemi,” Petit Foyer, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
- “Eros Iconoclaste,” Galerie Vidal-Saint Phalle, Paris

1991
- “Là-bas près de la source,” Espace Merle-Portalès, Uzès
- “N’importe où, Hors du Monde,” Librairie Café Littéraire Le Pavé, St Germain en Laye
- “Mon Salon, mes Haines,” Galerie l’Aire du Verseau, Paris

1991
- “Celebi’den Gürbüz’e Sanatin Hizmetinde Bes Yılı” (From Celebi to Gürbüz,” Tem Sanat Galerisi, Atatürk Kültür Merkezi, Istanbul

1990
- “Les Cafés Littéraires,” Galerie CC, Palace of Congress, Graz, Austria; Institut Français Culturel: Istanbul, Alexandria, Cairo, Damascus, Athens, Thessaloniki, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Amman, Baghdad
- “Heykel ve Desen” (“Sculpture and Drawing”), Gallery TEM, Istanbul
- “Büyük Sergi,” Santral Holding, Museum of Painting and Sculpture, Istanbul

1989
- “Méditerranée,” curated by Beral Madra, Bari, Italy
- “Pangi,” Palais de la Civilisation Italienne, E.U.R., Rome

Public Collections
- The British Museum, London
- Galerie Maeght Collection, Paris
- Santral Istanbul
- Istanbul Bilgi University
- Istanbul Modern
- Project 4L, Istanbul
- Painting and Sculpture Museum, Ankara
2010 Çalıkoğlu, Levent, “Arketip,” Antrepo 3, Istanbul
2010 “Gelenekten Ça da a-Modern Türk Sanatında Kültürel Bellek,” Istanbul Modern, Istanbul
2009 Çalıkoğlu, Levent, “Davetsiz” (“Uninvited”), Akbank Sanat, Istanbul
2008 “Je ma’apel Apel - 10th anniversary catalogue of the Gallery Apel,” Gallery Apel, Istanbul
2007 “Modernity and Beyond,” Santral Istanbul Museum, Istanbul
2007 “Modern Deneyimler” (“Modern Experiences”), Istanbul Modern, Istanbul
2004 “Saman Güncesi-Bayburt Baksı Müzesi için 123+2 Sanaatçı, 123+2 Yapıt,” Bayburt Baksı Museum Publications, Turkey
2003 Issa, Rose, “Love Affairs,” Islamische Welten, ifa-Galerie, Stuttgart
2003 “Cara a Cara: Arden Reed, Marco Del Re, Selma Gürbüz,” Collection Carnet de Voyage, Editions Maeght, Paris
2003 “Fantasies de l’harem et les Nouvelles Scheherezades,” CCCB - Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona and Institut Europeu de la Mediterrània, Barcelona
2002 “Ba ba a - Marco Del Re, Selma Gürbüz,” Garanti Gallery-Gallery Apel, Istanbul
2000 “Siyah Qalam au Présent: Siyah Kalem Günümüzde, Tüylü Masallar, Christine Khondji, Selma Gürbüz, Istanbul
1999 “Karanae,” Gallery Apel, Istanbul
1999 “Les Contes de la Peau,” Institut Français, Istanbul
1998 Gürbüz, Selma and Lemaire, Gérard Georges, “Zodiak’la Hayale Dalı” (“Dreaming with the Zodiac”), Gallery TEM, Istanbul
1996 Lemaire, Gérard Georges, “Magie Grise,” Institut Français Prague and Istanbul

1994 “Antigone,” illustrated by Selma Gürbüz, script by Peter Greenaway, Lédition
1992 Lemaire, Gérard Georges, “Le Sexe des Anges” ("Meleklerin Çinsiyeti"), Galerie TEM, Istanbul
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