

Mythical and Fairy Tale Protectors from Fantasy to Reality

The sculptures of Başak Cansu Güvenkaya, combined with a plastic balance and alternative materials, reveal the absurd, mythical and real figurative beings between reality and fairy-tale world. The "Protectors" exhibition, opened on 11 January at Imoga Art Space, is presented as the first solo exhibition of Başak Cansu Güvenkaya as a comprehensive monitoring of her sculptures that she has produced for many years. The sculptures, which are produced as an inquiry into existence of the ironic and strange balance between evil and goodness and new and reliable living spaces, are viewed as multi-piece and colourful forms according to the artist's real experiences and intellectual searches. The "Protectors" exhibition, which is based on the artist's search for the spiritual equivalents of the sense of trust and the preservation of human existence between reality and imagination, can be seen at Imoga Art Space until January 31, 2020.

Melike Bayık: First of all, as a young artist, could you tell us about your productions as content and form?

Başak Cansu Güvenkaya: As a young artist, I started to make journeys, following my curiosity. As I grew up and learned, my fears increased, and I felt weak about life. Fear and anxiety of the future pushed me to look for solutions to escape. When I realised that there was no perfect place to live with confidence, I decided that only I could create this dream world myself. With the sculptures that I started to create with the need for protection, I designed a world where fears and evil do not exist. Nowadays, as contemporary humans, we cannot avoid the inevitability that being free and individual as a person also brings loneliness and fear and my sculptures and paintings suggest a playful and colourful way to oppose this situation. You can think of this shelter-like place as a playground; most of these sculptures, with animal or monster-shaped with sharp teeth, can be moved by its viewer and from this moment on, the sculptures come to life and begins to fight with the evil that the viewer wants protected from. In this colourful, imaginary place we can feel as carefree as we did in our childhood. In fact, since ancient times when people were afraid, and they encountered something they do not know when they were sick or making a wish; they used sculptures or paintings to protect or to heal. My work clears a path to reinterpreting guardianship, the original intent of sculptures in many cultures, in the present day. Indigenous peoples have fought with their fears with magic; In my work, replacing magic is "playfulness".

This game is a protected area standing against certain things. My works swallow and destroy evil; they embody an expression and a protection against evils of the world, creating a space where evil and fear do not exist; it is an imaginary world of its own. And it invites its viewer to this safe, sheltered atmosphere. Also, I feel the most free and safe while I am creating and constructing the sculptures and paintings which are a part of the world I try to create. That's why creation is a need for me both to be free and to have fun. The feeling of confidence and relaxation proves how important each of the sculptures is to me.

Monstrous figures with spiky forms and multiple eyes, mouths and tails swallow and destroy evil. My works carry symbolic signs such as; eyes to spot the negativity, mouths swallow fear and evil, snakes help to heal the figure with their special antidote whenever the figure gets injured. In my sculptures, there is a similar defence mechanism that poisonous animals usually have. They have very bright colours or turn bright colours in moments of danger. They push the dangerous ones out of itself, scares them away. These colours are also tearing the viewer away from the real world and makes it easy to switch to the playful space that I try to create.

M.B.: As an artist who works and produces sculpture, in terms of discipline, you experience multiple materials for sculpture at the same time. How do you determine the techniques according to the narratives you create with your wood, fabric or bronze casting sculptures?

B.C.G.: I intend to get out of traditional materials and doctrine without losing form in the sculpture. I experience a wide range of materials in sculpture creation, and anything that can be formed can be used as a material for me. In my recent work, I have experienced the use of recycled materials such as wire, fabric, paper, sometimes connecting them with amorphous materials, such as foam, to allow for a little randomness. I'm trying to preserve freshness and energy in my sculptures, so I usually use fast-shaping materials like clay, wood, wire, paper.

I often design kinetic sculptures in wood, sometimes the pieces of sculpture need to be removed and attached like a toy; wood is a very convenient material for sculpture both by adding the pieces to each other and by subtracting in terms of sculpting. Some of my sculptures are wearable and these sculptures need to be light, so I prefer paper as a material. Depending on the need and story of the sculpture, some sculptures need to be permanent, and I turn them into materials like bronze. On the contrary, sometimes I must choose the material according to my mood. For example, the earthquake and tsunami disaster I experienced in New Zealand in 2016 pushed me to use broken and shredded wood and combine them on my work.

M.B.: As you mentioned, in your sculptures and drawings you are looking for alternatives based on the belonging of an inner world. If we set out on the forms of the figurative sculptures you are working with, what concepts or emotions do your works give references to?

B.C.G.: As an artist I am looking for a place where I can feel that I belong; my travels made me face fears and worries about the future, which threatened my aspirations to exist as an artist. Therefore, I decided to create my own world myself.

Nowadays as contemporary humans become more and more individualistic in the name of liberty, they cannot avoid the inevitability that being free and individual as a person also brings loneliness and fear and my sculptures and paintings suggest a playful and colourful way to oppose this situation. This game is a protected area standing against certain things. My works embody an expression and a protection against evils of the world, creating a space where evil and fear do not exist; it is an imaginary world of its own.

M.B.: So, from the primitive world to the present, you open the discussion to various archaic or contemporary amulets, beliefs or human emotions with your works. How do you determine the direction of fiction while you are taking the issues from realism and bring to the present day? Is it possible to say that the beginning of each subject you describe in your sculptures is depicted from a real story and how do you reveal all these stories?

B.C.G.: When I first met with the art of indigenous peoples in detail, I was working on my Project called "Pit of Evil". While producing this fairy-tale-like work where all evil and fears could be thrown away in to a pit and to ensure it was getting rid of evil and fear; I started researching the sculptures, amulets and paintings of indigenous peoples which are made for similar reasons. Since the past, people resorted to painting and sculpture when they were afraid, when they encountered with the unknown, when they got sick, when they needed to wish for something to protect or to heal. My work clears a path to reinterpreting guardianship, the original intent of sculptures in many cultures, in the present day. My subject is the concept of fear and the instinct of protection, which has always existed from the past to the present and is experienced by everyone. Indigenous peoples have fought with their fears with magic; In my work, replacing magic is "playfulness".

M.B.: On the deformed various animal or monster shaped figurative sculptures, you also use colours in your sculptures. Can you tell us about your choice of colours in the sculptures from neon to pastel tones and their support for the narrative by being included in the fiction?

B.C.G.: The warm colours demonstrate and reveal the power these figures possess. In my sculptures, there is a similar defence mechanism that poisonous animals usually have. They have very bright colours or turn bright colours in moments of danger. They push the dangerous ones out of itself, scare them away.

Also, as a child of the 90s, these eye-catching bright colours, which I was born into, are the equivalent of the positive and worry-free world that I had dreamed and experienced in my childhood. These colours are also tearing the viewer away from the real world and makes it easy to switch to the playful space that I try to create.

Monstrous figures with spiky forms have two or three heads, multiple mouths, eyes. In fact, this is intended to distract the audience from reality.

M.B.: In some of your sculptures, there is an interactive situation with various forms. Can you tell us about your works that gained momentum with the interaction of people?

B.C.G.: Most of my works are interactive, they can be touched and played by their viewer, and as they play, they come to life and get ready to perform their duties. The sculptures made of kinetic materials can be activated by its viewer by lifting the tongue of the figure, moving its fin back and forth or spinning its eye. Some are wearable; when a viewer wears it, they will be transformed into something else.

My works are a reliquary for a force to protect human beings and communities from illness, fear and negativity. They are mystic swords with a double edge. They protect, heal and they attack. All this happens according to the needs of the viewer who activates the sculptures or the figures on their behalf. It invites its viewer to this safe, sheltered atmosphere.

M.B.: So, what kind of method do you follow in your work process, drawing, studies, material selection or starting a sculpture?

B.C.G.: Ideas often emerge during work, when drawing or sculpting. First, when I have a sculpture idea in my mind, I immediately make a sketch and produce many variations of this idea on paper. As I draw, the idea develops and matures. Considering the best and most realizable of these drawn variations; make three-dimensional model from balsa tree, Styrofoam or wooden sticks. Sometimes I do more than one model to find the best possibility. In the meantime, by imagining the enlarged finalised version of the model, I am deciding on the dimensions and materials that it requires.

I choose the appropriate model and start working with the materials. The model is with me when I work; but I do not always stick to my model, I always give chances to randomness. While working I come up with new ideas which are often creative and ideas that fit my work and I don't hesitate to try them but if I don't like the result, I disrupt the sculpture and build it again. At this stage, in order not to lose the freshness of the work I am working on, sometimes I keep this new idea for the next sculpture. This is a process that continues from beginning to end, and after I finish the sculpture that I have worked on, new ideas are added and matured, and new projects are created for new sculptures. The harder I work, the more diverse, creative and fun ideas emerge.

I feel the most free and safe while I am creating these works. I do not notice the hours passing away by during the working process, and I'm really having fun while creating these sculptures.

M.B.: Finally, you construct utopias in an imaginary world of myths, stories and monsters, what are you inspired from when constructing them?

B.C.G.: When I design the characters in my sculptures and drawings, I am inspired from many images that I have in mind, from the cartoons that I watched in my childhood to the shadows I see on the wall. Since I have started researching the art of indigenous peoples, I have discovered how much of these images are like their art. I create the worlds that I have built entirely depending on my imagination and experiences. The desperate situations or happy moments I've ever experienced in my life, allow me to shape the fairy-tale and utopian world I'm trying to create. After all, we cannot talk about white without black or good without bad. What is important to me is to accept this and to deal with it and to create a fun, colourful and free, shelter-like playground for myself. In addition, the researches of Joseph Beuys' myth-creation process and collective consciousness during the fiction phase were sources that inspired me.

It doesn't really matter whether a myth is real or fiction. If I believe in the reality of this world that I am trying to create, this world will be one step closer to existence. I define this world as a positive, colourful, childish, fun and happy place where no evil exists.