

JANUARY 30–MARCH 26, 2016

KÖKEN

YOUNG TURKS

ERGUN



Köken Ergun. Young Turks – The Look. Photo by Ethem Onur Paflar.
Көкен-Эргун. Молодые турки – Взгляд. Фото Этем Онур Пафлар

GARAGE

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**Garage Museum of Contemporary Art presents:
KÖKEN ERGUN. YOUNG TURKS
January 30–March 26, 2016**

The result of a four-year-long research and production process, Köken Ergun's new work *Young Turks* explores cultural expansionism today. Consisting of a film, seven video interviews, a sculpture, and an illuminated world map, the work focuses on Turkey's global influence through a network of schools in more than 100 countries.

Using an intimate documentary style, Ergun shot footage during his research in Turkey, Kenya, and Indonesia, focusing on the *Turkish Olympics*, organized annually through the network of schools. Following the preparations of the students to participate in Turkish folklore, poetry, and song competitions, Ergun's film also captures the final event in Turkey. This includes a fairground with country stands, which is reminiscent of a World's Fair in its scope and exoticism for local visitors, who are equally intrigued at seeing the international students speaking Turkish fluently.

Continuing Ergun's long-term focus on communities that are not known to a greater public and the significance of rituals in such groups, *Young Turks* is a research-based project that prioritizes individual stories to explore how the role of education impacts both neocolonialist and intercultural dialogues.

EXERCISING ETHNOGRAPHIC DISTANCE IN ARTISTIC PRODUCTION

It is impossible to imagine a place in the world that has not experienced the gaze of research. In this regard, the age of exploration ended a long time ago. We are now living in an era of reconstruction, restoration, and re-imagination. Moreover, it is not much of a confession to say that any act of research, particularly in the social field, is, indeed, an announcement of (re)creating a (new) space for negotiating the conditions and components of this reconstruction, restoration, and re-imagination. Thus, I suggest that any social research, not by definition but by practice, is a collective and collaborative performance to rebuild the world as we know it.

Like any collective performance, social research also has multiple actors. The first actor is the researcher, who designs the field by choosing the framework and asking questions. Meanwhile, the person or group, being subjected to social research, most probably takes that act of research as space for performance of his/her/their presence. Lastly, the audience of the research takes a role in all processes as the party being expected to consume and reproduce the research outcomes. Therefore, any research process is a multi-level performance for the mediation of the meaning of a social phenomenon subjected to the inquiry.

Nevertheless, it is very hard to perceive the research as a collective performance for academic disciplines because the institutionalism of universities paradoxically obstructs the collaborative and performative potential of the research. Fortunately, as a re-invented act of research, artistic research provides excellent guidance for those researchers who tend to try the limits of those academic/institutional environments. In this sense, Köken Ergun's *Young Turks* is an accomplished example of the genre of artistic research conducted as a collaborative and collective performance of mediation toward a social/

political phenomenon. Since the beginning of his project, Ergun has negotiated each level of his research with not only scholars, journalists, or specialists, but also with those people who were interviewed or visualized in this project.

Dealing with a religious group, for a secular researcher like Ergun, produces several dilemmas in the research process.¹ First and foremost, conducting research on religion or religiosity means being ready to examine the existential and historic clash between the religious and secular perceptions of the world in your mind and body. Thus, anyone who attempts to conduct such research develops—consciously or unconsciously—a set of defense mechanisms to immunize himself/herself against the side effects of this examination.

In journalism, for example, the primary defense mechanism is the rule of “contact and distance.” With this rule, journalism resembles those traditional dances, in which the partners revolve around each other instead of dancing together. Together with the traditional “law” of objectivity, this principle authorizes the reporter to say, “This is what I learned from the documents, conversations, and observations.” Although a journalist has to ask the who, what, why, when, where and how questions, “what” and “why” dominate the investigation. Despite the fact that the speed of journalistic production creates further dangers in research and reporting processes, the temporality and the truism of journalistic reporting—in most cases—generate another shelter for both the reporter and the subject of research.

In ethnographic research, however, this journalist’s shelter can sabotage the research. Revolving around the subject is never enough because ethnography deals with the questions starting with “how,” which reporters ordinarily prefer to dismiss, due to the long answers given. There is never enough time and space in a newspaper for such lengthy explanations. In that sense, ethnographic research resembles those ancient dances tribes perform jumping above a fire. However, the ethnographer, not being an experienced member of the tribe, would be burnt in the fire. The outcome of such a research emerges not before the injuries heal. The ethnographic knowledge is what the researcher reads on those stains on skin after they heal from the burn. That is what I call ethnographic distance.² This distance cannot occur before and during the field research but is constructed afterward by the theoretical framing of the field outcomes.

Ergun spent weeks in Turkish schools in Indonesia and Kenya, and he worked with the footage for months. Meanwhile, he read books and articles on the background of those schools. Instinctively, he merged this story with the Western colonial memory and showed us how those schools recast that colonizers’ mind by “softly” imitating the imperial strategies to absorb the wealth of the world. The most painful—yes, painful—side of this story emerges when one remembers that a particular and renovated political agenda—Islamism, arisen in the last century and the last territory of the Ottoman Empire, another colonial power that failed to reproduce itself—promotes those schools.

¹The people who started the Turkish schools around the world were essentially a religious community that appeared in the 1980s as followers of a religious leader who resisted the modernization and secularization project of the young Turkish Republic until he died in 1960. Ironically and paradoxically, this contemporary and young religious community has affected all other traditional communities on their way to modernization since the 1990s.

²For the different usages and definitions of the term look at Loring M. Danforth, *Firewalking and Religious Healing: The Anastenaria of Greece and American Firewalking Movement*, Princeton University Press, 1989 and Ju Hui Judy Han, “Neither Friends nor Foes: Thoughts on Ethnographic Distance,” *Geoforum* 41: 11-14, 2010.

As a witness to his editing process, I could see how his approach to his field and findings transformed on his way to artistic production. While his skin healed from jumping over a fire in a tribal dance, the meaning of the material, and the outcome of his research cleared. The individual stories of those people interviewed and filmed consolidated into a collective performance. However, they don't lose their visibility, being a substantial part of the overall narrative. Because they are the ones carrying that collective and imperial "dream" all over the world. Although they come from different backgrounds and search for different futures, they act in the same scene that has entirely different meanings for all the performing parties. Ergun becomes a part of this performance by decoding those differences using the visual references of that precisely (neo)colonial lingua franca reproduced in the scene. He constructs an aesthetic criticism toward this language and this criticism not only derives from but is also a unit in his personal story.

After all, Ergun did not have to examine the historical clash between secular and religious understandings of the world on his mind and body. The ethnographic distance enabled him to recognize and explain to us that it is not spiritual ambition forcing all those people to sing and dance together. The response of the "field" to the question "How?" designates that there is not a spiritual contest over the world. It is just a banal settlement among different-sized actors of a profane imperialism reconstituting the world as a synthetic space, a makeshift scene, for that colonial performance. The cheerful tone of the song and the coherence settled in the choreography of the dance performed on the stage of *Young Turks* constitute a fathomless pain. Yes, I insist, it is painful. Besides, who can say there was something different before? Don't you think that what we call colonialism is nothing but our collective and collaborative performance?

Ayşe Çavdar, independent anthropologist and journalist
Istanbul, November 2015

EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR KÖKEN ERGUN'S *YOUNG TURKS*

Globalization, as a primarily economic process of normalization effacing regional differences, remains the main evolutionary trend of today. However, it has also provoked a counter movement, reviving debates around the question of national identity. New forms of globalization now emerge, which develop from state policies and adopt national models of modernization based on traditional religious and cultural values.

The education program for Köken Ergun's exhibition will put his work in a broader cultural context. In a series of lectures and discussions, leading Russian and international historians, anthropologists, and culture theorists, including Konstantin Bogdanov, İřtar Gözaydın, Arif Dirlik, Vyacheslav Morozov, Ayře Çavdar, and Viktor Shnirelman, will touch on a range of subjects that are present in *Young Turks*, starting from the proliferation of religious movements and the growing popularity of religious groups and conservative views in Russia and Turkey, and ending with the elites' use of folklore in order to invent national values. The program also includes a round-table organized by Garage Teens Team that will focus on the nationalist turn in Russian universities.

Films selected by the speakers to go along with the education program will be screened in Garage Auditorium, and on weekends visitors will be able to take part in *One-Work Talk* group discussions in the exhibition space. Hearing impaired visitors will be able to take part in *One-Work Talk* group discussions in Russian sign language scheduled twice a month.

For those willing to learn more, a selection of sources prepared by the artist and the curator will be available at Garage Library.

DISCUSSION PROGRAM

Admission Free

YULIA AKSENOVA AND KÖKEN ERGUN

Discussion

Saturday, January 30, 16:00

West Gallery

VIKTOR SHNIRELMAN

**Three Conspiracy Theories: “The End of Times,”
the Misfortunes of the Aryan Race, and the Cunning Khazars**

Lecture

Friday, February 5, 19:00

Garage Auditorium

VYACHESLAV MOROZOV

Postcolonial Russia: The Policy of Cultural Isolation and Sterile Politics
Lecture

Friday, February 19, 19:00

Garage Auditorium

GARAGE TEENS TEAM

National-Patriotic Upbringing. A Look From Within

Panel Discussion

Moderator: Natela Piliya

Saturday, February 27, 16:00

West Gallery

KONSTANTIN BOGDANOV

Spiritual Bonds: Folklore Metaphors and Modernization Traumas
Lecture

Wednesday, March 2, 19:00

Garage Auditorium

KÖKEN ERGUN

Artist talk with screening of Ashura/Binibining Promised Land

Thursday, March 10, 19:00

Garage Auditorium

ARIF DIRLIK

Religious Enterprise: Thoughts on the Gülen Movement in a Global Perspective
Lecture

Moderator: Ayşe Çavdar

Friday, March 11, 19:00

Garage Auditorium

ISTAR GOZAYDIN

Religion in Turkey: From the “Management of Religion” Approach to Where?
Lecture

Moderator: Ayşe Çavdar

Saturday, March 12, 16:00

Garage Auditorium

Priority booking for GARAGE members.

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PARTICIPANTS

Köken Ergun was born in Istanbul in 1976. He studied acting at İstanbul University and completed his postgraduate degree in ancient Greek literature at King's College London, followed by a master's degree in art history at Bilgi University. After working with American theater director Robert Wilson, Ergun became more involved in video and film. His multi-channel video installations have been exhibited internationally at institutions including Palais de Tokyo, Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, KIASMA, Digital Art Lab Tel Aviv, Casino Luxembourg, Protocinema, Queensland Art Gallery, SALT, and Kunsthalle Winterthur. His film works have received several awards at film festivals, including the Tiger Award for Short Film at the 2007 Rotterdam Film Festival, and the Special Mention Prize at the 2013 Berlinale. Ergun's works are included in public collections such as the Centre Pompidou, Stadtmuseum Berlin and the Kadist Foundation.

Yulia Aksenova is the curator of *Young Turks*. After graduating from the Russian State University of the Humanities in history of art (2002), Yulia Aksenova worked at the Department of Current Trends at the State Tretyakov Gallery from 2004 to 2007. She attended the international Curatorial Programme of de Appel in Amsterdam in 2007, and held a curatorial position at Garage Museum of Contemporary Art from 2010 to 2014. Her recent curatorial projects include *Sots Art. Political Art in Russia*, Tretyakov Gallery, 2007; *Masters Hamfrey's Clock*, de Appel, Amsterdam, 2008; *New/Old Cold War*, Red October, 2009; *Russian Utopias*, Garage, 2010; *The Phantom Monuments*, Garage, 2011; *Necessary Art*, Gorky Park, 2011; *33 Fragments of Russian Performance*, Performa, NYC, 2011; *Nathalie Djurberg Jan Švankmajer*, Garage, 2013; *Personal Choice*, Garage, 2014; *Russian Performance: A Cartography of its History*, 2014; *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Theory*, Garage, 2015; *Our Land / Alien Territory*, Moscow Manege, 2015.

Arif Dirlik is a former professor at Duke University (United States). He has written extensively on historical and political thought in 20th Century China, as well as issues in globalization, postcolonial criticism, and cultural studies. His most recent book-length publication is *Culture and History in Postrevolutionary China: The Perspective of Global Modernity* (Chinese tr., 2015).

İştar Gözaydın is a professor at Gediz University, Izmir specializing in legal and political theory. The main focus of her research is on the relations between the state and religion, the similarities and differences between Anglo-Saxon and European secularism, and the formation of modern religious groups. She is a founder of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, a human rights organization in Turkey. Gözaydın was a research fellow at the University of London, Birkbeck College in 2009. Her recent publications include "Management of Religion in Turkey: the *Diyanet* and Beyond" in Özgür Heval Çınar and Mine Yıldırım (eds.): *Freedom of Religion and Belief in Turkey*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2014, 10-35; "Ahmet Davutoğlu: Role as an Islamic Scholar Shaping Turkey's Foreign Policy" in Nassef Manabilang Adiong (ed.): *Islam and International Relations*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2013; "Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı" in John L. Esposito (ed): *Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, Oxford University Press 2009.

Ayşe Çavdar is an independent anthropologist and journalist specializing in the questions of religion, secularism, urbanism, and social justice. She received a degree in communications from Ankara University, followed by a master's degree from Bosphorus University and a PhD from the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder). She is a frequent contributor to several periodicals.

Konstantin Bogdanov is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Russian Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Pushkin House), a doctor of philology, and the author of many publications on the history of culture, sciences and humanities, including *O krokodilakh v Rossii. Ocherki iz istorii zaimstvovaniy I ekzotizmov* [*Crocodiles in Russia. Essays on the History of Loans and Exoticism*] (2006); *Vox Populi. Folklorniy zhanry sovetskoi kultury* [*Vox Populi. Folklore Genres in Soviet Culture*] (2009); *Iz istorii klyaks. Filologicheskiye nablyudeniya* [*From the History of Blots. Philological Observations*] (2012); and *Peremenniye Velichiny. Pogoda russkoi istorii I drugiye syuzhety* [*Variables. The Weather in Russian History and Other Stories*] (2014).

Vyacheslav Morozov is a historian and political theorist, and professor at the Political Science Institute of the University of Tartu. He is the author of *Rossiia I drugiye: identichnost I granitsy politicheskogo soobshchestva* [*Russia and the Others: Identity and the Borders of a Political Community*] (2009). His main area of interest lies in postcolonial theory, ideology and political discourses in modern Russia. He also conducts comparative studies of political processes in Russia and Europe, as well as in Russia and Asia.

Natela Piliya is a student at the History Department of Moscow State University. She lives and works in Moscow. As a member of Garage Teens Team, she took part in the preparation of the *Points of Intersection* exhibition. She also took part in Dozhd TV's President-2042 project. Natela Piliya is interested in contemporary art's political potential and its possible use in mitigating today's most urgent problems.

Viktor Shnirelman is a doctor of history, and the head of research at the Ethnology and Anthropology Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He is the author of over 400 publications, including over 300 books on sociocultural anthropology and contemporary ethnic politics. Recently, he has been specializing in the questions of ethnicity and nationalism, ethnocentric histories, ethnic conflict ideologies, racism and xenophobia in modern Russian.

SCREENING PROGRAM

Garage Auditorium

Admission Free

Films will be screened with simultaneous translation into Russian

I, SOLDIER/THE FLAG

Screening and artist talk

Sunday, January 31, 15:00-16:00

Director: Köken Ergun

Duration: 7 minutes/9 minutes

Turkey 2007/Turkey 2008

A PASSAGE TO INDIA

Sunday, February 7, 15:00-17:40

Director: David Lean

Duration: 163 minutes

United Kingdom 1984

CONCERNING VIOLENCE

Saturday, February 20, 15:00-16:30

Director: Göran Olsson

Duration: 78 minutes

Sweden, Finland, Denmark, United States 2014

THE ACT OF KILLING

Sunday, February 28, 15:00-17:30

Director: Joshua Oppenheimer

Duration: 159 minutes

Norway, Denmark, United Kingdom 2012

ASHURA/BINIBINING PROMISED LAND

Screening and artist talk

Thursday, March 10, 19:00

Director: Köken Ergun

Duration: 20 minutes/38 minutes

Turkey 2012/Israel, Turkey 2011

BELLS FROM THE DEEP/LET'S SIN

Sunday, March 13, 15:00-19:00

Director: Werner Herzog/Onur Ünlü

Duration: 60 minutes/110 minutes

Germany, United States 1993/Turkey 2014

THE COUPLE IN THE CAGE: GUATINAUI ODYSSEY

Saturday, March 19, 15:00-15:40

Director: Coco Fusco, Paula Heredia

Duration: 31 minutes

United States 1993

SHIVA DANCES WITH THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Saturday, March 26, 15:00-16:45

Director: Adrian Piper with Sam Samore

Duration: 103 minutes

United States 2004

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Young Turks was initiated in 2013. This exhibition—developed by Garage Museum of Contemporary Art (Moscow) and Protocinema (Istanbul and New York)—is the most comprehensive presentation of the project to date. The film *Young Turks* was made possible with support from Akademie der Künste der Welt (Cologne), Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, and SAHA (Istanbul).