

# ‘ERDOĞAN IS THE SAME AS MERKEL AND OBAMA!’ – VOLKER MARZ

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**Volker Marz** says ‘It’s time to paint flowers again’ at İlayda Gallery. The political German artist is in Istanbul ready to show his amazing clay human figures with political subtexts. Although he says that he tried to make it a less aggressive show, you will understand more about his works once you meet his thoughts in this interview. I was honored to meet an artist with such an anti-fascist mind. Great to meet you Volker and hope to see you soon in a more aggressive exhibition      Congratulations!



Mrs and Mr Volker Marz, İlayda Babacan, Gülben Çapan (left to right)

**Is it your first time in Istanbul?**

No, I had some shows here in Istanbul before. But it’s my first show here at Ilayda Gallery.

**People are scared to even come here, so actually I take it that you are a brave political artist. Does this show carry political messages as well?**

Well normally my works are quite political but as for this time, I tried to be more careful and smooth about this exhibition because I heard about all the news in Turkey.

**How can you “smooth the show” unless you know all the sensitive sides to a “Turk”'s viewpoint?**

Believe me the Turks in Berlin are more conservative so it’s not difficult to understand the mindset. The ones I’m in touch here in Istanbul are the open minded ones.



**So you say, you’ve seen the worst?**

Yes, the worst and the best. I know the traditions, what the youth is struggling with and all the other problems mostly.

**How political does your work get, what is the limit?**

Years before I was working with a gallery in Israel and I made a big work about Israel and I criticized the government, as a German. I got arrested. This was maybe the best lesson I ever had.

### **What was the work about?**

My work was based on Kafka and I wrote a fairytale on him. “Franz Kafka who did not die of tuberculosis in 1924 at the age of 41. Instead he and his monkey Rotpeter rowed to Palestine where he lived in Tel Aviv until 2009 aged 126. From this place he commented the global history of the last 85 years and so he also gave little comments to the history of Israel that I’ve extracted from his letters and emails. In August 2009 Kafka was arrested and



executed.

The Israeli justice was able to prove that he was a Nazi. When he arrived in heaven he only met other Kafkas who told him that everybody owns a private heaven where one needs to get along with hundreds of copies of oneself. In 2010 a new government took over in Israel and they felt ashamed for having executed Kafka. The new administration asks God to put in a good word for them and to ask Kafka to return to Israel. Kafka finally tried to fall back to earth but missed a junction and landed in the West Bank close to Ramallah onto the back of a donkey... who carries him to Pina Bausch who is dancing somnambulant with Rotpeter and his son along the top of the wall in Ramallah. Since that day all donkeys in Palastine have red ears.”

### **Wow, its strong. How did the Israelis react?**

Kafka for them is like a holy person, the fact that he was caught and executed really shocked them. I chose Kafka in this sense as a key element and made the whole story on him to



criticize the government. I also published two books on this subject afterwards. But I really loved the Israeli people, they were also very open minded. And they think in images.

### **What does that mean to think in “images”?**

It's a typical Jewish thinking that's why I'm also interested in the Jewish Germans like Kafka and Walter Benjamin who also had the same type of thinking. And so I tried to describe Israel in an image and asked myself what is Israel? I made an artwork, which was the image of Israel as an elephant with its feet cut. So the elephant had to be carried through the desert. And after the work, scholars and politicians had long talks about whether Israel was an elephant without feet, which you had to carry through a desert.

### **So I can see you are fond of aggressive creativity?**

Yes, opening a show in a gallery is more about selling the artworks which is not my favorite subject. I prefer to find hidden places and have artworks there and also museums because then you can be very aggressive.

### **As an aggressive artist, what is your point of view of the Turkish government?**

I don't think the Turkish government is any more special than the American or any other country. Erdoğan is the same as Merkel or Obama. There are Turks in Berlin asking whether Erdoğan will now kill the prisoners. But America is doing this for years, even Obama did it. And you know what, people still love Obama and think he is a gentleman even though he made war. Now because Trump is the leader they point a finger at him and say he is the bad guy and that he will kill people. But its not them who is killing, its the economy. These leaders are all the same.



**So you do not agree with me that all leaders are killers. And moreover you are saying its not the leaders to blame?**

Of course not, they are just puppets. They are like entertainers. I do not think Erdoğan is so mighty. When there is an election you are just electing actors.

**So who is the killer of millions of innocent humans each year?**

The economy. The economy itself is such a strong and powerful system that it doesn't matter who is the leader the consequences will remain the same.

**And as the system has no other power to control it, it can never be taken care of I guess?**

Yes, the system cannot be controlled it is working on its own.



**So in this sense you do not believe that world peace will ever be a matter in politics?**

I think we have more peace than 200 years ago. When we go outside from our homes in Berlin or even here in Istanbul there is a high chance we will not be killed by terrorists. But interestingly, there is a higher chance we will be killed by cars.

**Cars?**

Yes, the statistics in Israel say that more people are killed yearly in a car accident rather than war. But no one does anything to protest cars because its also a source of the country's economy.



**Some countries today are starting to face their problematic history. Like Britain and USA. Britain is trying to face its imperial past with museum exhibitions on the subject as America is trying hard with the #blacklivesmatter movement with artists and singers making videos for support. As an artist do you follow these things?**

I do not believe anybody is facing anything. There is something I have been researching for a long time now and it has been kept silent for so so many years and event scholars have written such few books about: The Arabic slave trade. The richness of Istanbul and Turkey comes from this slave trade and nobody is talking about it. It was a bigger slave trade than the one from Africa to America. It started in the 600's until now and they castrated these people. It's a historical disaster but its a taboo and nobody is talking about it. So I believe that facing history hasn't even started yet.

**Since you are researching on the subject and claim that it's a taboo, are you planning to open this subject with an exhibition?**

I was planning but then I decided not to. I am often in Africa my son lives in Cape Town, so it's best not to open the subject yet.





**You are a humanitarian and I believe you must also be against nationalism. Are you?**

I hate nationalism. It's just to control them by giving them an identity.

**Do you think people will ever wake up and realize that nationalism is a disease orchestrated by governments to give the people an artificial identity?**

Nationalism is a new thing for the believers. Its just like a religion. People feel lonely when they are not in a tribe.

**So I take it you are a non-believer?**

I believe when we go back in history we reach the monkeys that's why most of my artworks are monkey figures. I started a project using the monkeys to refer to humans in order to tell the story of the Arabic slave trade.

**How was the project?**

It was difficult at times as in South Africa I couldn't use black colored monkeys I had to use the white Orangutan. But its not about monkeys its about nature itself and how nature and human beings all come together at the end. And how the animal instinct is significant. Because if you have good instinct you are not civilized like sexuality and other instincts. So the best way to control the human instinct is either by religion or the power of the government.

**I disagree. If religion could control then Iran would be a peaceful country, if government power could control then USA would be peaceful. But humans are killed there too.**

Yes but unfortunately humans are killed everywhere.

**And that's why I guess its time to paint flowers again...**



İlayda Babacan & Gülben Çapan