

Devrim Erbil

BURCU PELVANOĐLU




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Dr. BURCU PELVANOĐLU

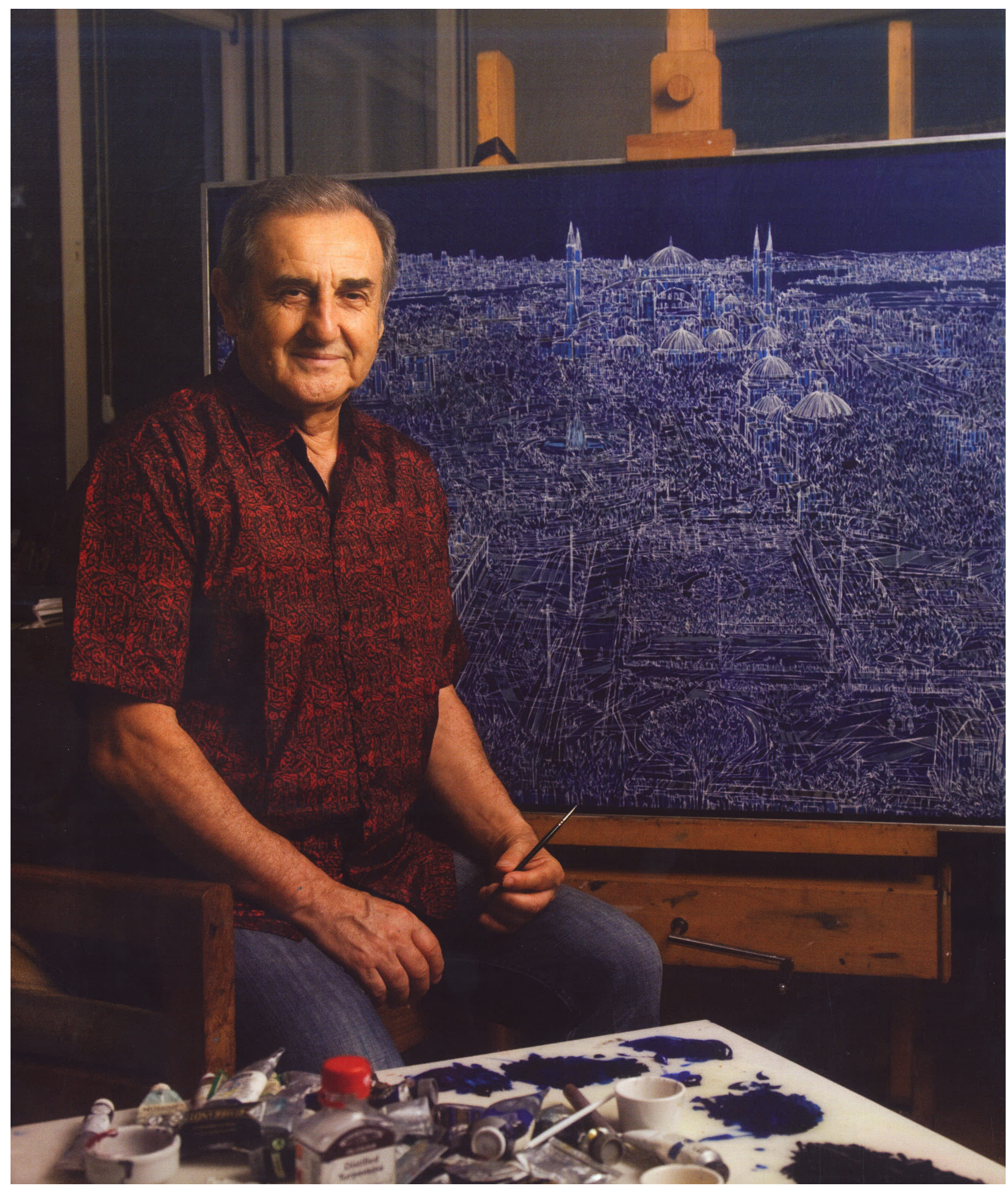
Art Historian and Art Critic

Burcu Pelvanođlu was born in Istanbul in 1980. She received Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Department of History of Art degree in 2002 and in 2005, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University Institute of Social Sciences, master's degrees. Her books Hale Asaf: A Turning Point in the Turkish Painting, Yapi Kredi Publications in 2007 and in 2008 An Introduction to Theory and History of Western Civilization, Ařina Books, with Hilmi Yavuz was published. She was the editor of some exhibition catalogues and books: In 2007, Modern Turkish 2: The 1950-70 Term from Private Collections exhibition book and in 2009 Exhibition's Exhibition: Painting and Sculpture Museum, Opening Collection 1937, with Nilüfer Öndin. In 2009, she completed her Ph.D. thesis entitled Art in Turkey after 1980: Transformations in Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University Institute of Social Sciences, Western and Contemporary Art programme. Since 2003, she is the member of International Association of Art Critics (AICA). She was the Vice-President of the association mentioned between 2004-2008, since 2009, holds the Presidency Pelvanođlu, organizing exhibitions and writing criticism of the exhibition in various periodicals. Pelvanođlu, between the years 2002-2009 worked as a research assistant at Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts Department of Art History at the Department of Western Art and the Contemporary Arts, began serving as Assistant Professor in 2010.

Nevrin erbil



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- 7 Balıkesir Years: His Family, Childhood and First Exhibitions
- 18 Academy Years
- 25 Graduation, Exhibitions, New Groups, Being an Academy Assistant and Spain
- 36 Initiatives of 1960's: Biennials, Awards
- 42 Devrim Erbil Atelier and The Turkish Art Scene Between 1960-1980
- 49 Themes of Erbil's Paintings Between 1960-80
- 54 Erbil Art Atelier and Exhibition Commissaries
- 55 Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum
- 61 1980-1990's: Winking at Pop Art
- 66 Being A State Artist
- 67 1995: Devrim Erbil Accounts for 25 Years of Teaching
- 73 Material Variety
- 78 Turkey's First Monographic Museum: Balıkesir Devrim Erbil Museum of Contemporary Arts
- 79 What They Say on Devrim Erbil's Art and Epilogue

Devrim Erbil was born in the small town of Salihli in Western Anatolia on September 16th, 1937. Oblivious that she would give birth to Erbil prematurely, his mother Nadide was visiting her elder sister Kadriye Akyol in Salihli. Nadide was left with no option but give birth there and then when impatient Devrim Erbil decided to leave his mother's womb at only seven months. At the time the Erbil's were residents of Uşak, so it's not surprising that public registrar's records indicate Erbil's place of birth as Uşak. Erbil's mother Nadide's family had migrated to Anatolia from Hasköy and Kırçali (modern day Haskovo & Kardzhali, SE Bulgaria) following her grandfather's assignment who was a superintendent at the turn of the 20th century. His father Reşat, on the other hand, was a native of Uşak with family roots tracing back to the Turkoman clans. Erbil's father was working for the State Rail Company as a pharmacist. Thanks to his father's position, Erbil had seen most of Anatolia by the age of 15 and had the chance of painting at all their stopovers.

The Erbil's moved to Balıkesir in NW Turkey in 1940 where young Devrim completed his elementary and secondary education. A student at Balıkesir Gazi Elementary School between 1944-1949 Erbil went on to finish his secondary education at Balıkesir High School between 1949-54. Keen on literature from an early age Erbil soon developed a passion for poetry and, at the time, waited eagerly for the periodicals Varlık and Yeditepe to make their way to Balıkesir. Devrim Erbil took his first art classes at this school. His tutors were Sırrı Özbay (1898-1959) and Ahmet Uzelli (1904-1978). According to Adnan Turani "It's simply impossible to make an account of Turkish painting without Sırrı Özbay". A graduate of Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi (modern day Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts in Istanbul) Özbay was commissioned as a teacher to Anatolia. Özbay arrived in Balıkesir in 1926 and remained there as a teacher until his death in 1959. Commemorating Özbay, Erbil once wrote, "He was a polite, sentimental and very refined person. He was an Academy graduate. Originally from Romania he'd gone to France and ended up in Balıkesir as a teacher. I later found out that he had a sweetheart at the Academy who he sadly lost during the great tuberculosis epidemic in the first half of the 20th century. He never married. Years later, after his death in a hospital room from a heart attack they found a photograph of his sweetheart by his bed. He dressed smart. He was a man of medium height with a soft voice. He'd round up all talented students to teach them painting." Özbay had made a habit of reading out a newspaper article about himself by İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu at a time when Erbil was still his student. The piece he always carried in his pocket wrote, "Fortunate painter Bedri Rahmi, unfortunate painter Sırrı Özbay". Devrim Erbil strongly believed being appointed to Balıkesir had prevented Özbay from moving on to history of art. Anatolia had absorbed and depleted him. Taking a lesson from his tutor's dilemma early on Erbil decided he had to paint and create more. Ahmet Uzelli, another of Erbil's secondary school tutors has a reputation in Turkish history of painting for his architectural vistas. Taking his first painting lessons from Uzelli and Özbay, Erbil met İrfan Yılmaz in 1951, the young art teacher who would eventually guide him to enter the Academy. This is how they got acquainted: Erbil was really into table tennis; he spent a lot of time playing with his friends. At one point he noticed a young man watching their game. Back then the high school curriculum lasted four years and Erbil was in his first. Erbil thought this young man to be from one of the senior classes and invited him for a round. It wasn't long before he found out that he was none other than the newly appointed art teacher İrfan Yılmaz. Newly graduated from Gazi Teaching Institute, the young art teacher İrfan Yılmaz was the one who intentionally guided Erbil into painting. Gazi Teaching Institute was initially founded in 1926 as Orta Muallim Mektebi (Secondary Level Teacher's School) which, in 1929, took the name Gazi Orta Muallim Mektebi ve Terbiye Enstitüsü (Secondary Level Teacher's School and Education Institute). As a student at Gazi, İrfan Yılmaz attended the classes of some

Devrim Erbil
in Primary School
1948, Balıkesir



Childhood of
Devrim Erbil
1947, Balıkesir



Devrim Erbil and His Family

left to right:

Uncle
Faik Gündoğdu

Father
Reşat Erbil

Uncle
Bahaettin Gündoğdu

Uncle
Sabahattin Gündoğdu

Mother
Nadide Erbil

Niece
Muammer Çalıkoğlu
and her daughter Ülcay

Grandmother
Adile Gündoğdu

Grandfather
Mustafa Hilmi Gündoğdu

Uncle's Wife
Latife Gündoğdu
and her daughter Saadet

Devrim Erbil

Sister
Berrin Erbil Onur

Brother
Dilaver Erbil





of the young Republic's first generation of artists including Refik Epikman and Arif Kaptan and he was extremely eager to convey his knowledge to the students of Balıkesir High School. The education Devrim Erbil got at Balıkesir High School was critical for his intellectual development. In those years Balıkesir High School was home to very qualified teachers and Erbil remained as one of the most successful students of the school. Erbil only failed in a single lesson throughout his education but he soon compensated for that small hiccup. Actually there is a story behind this failure in physics class: Vahit Bey, the physics teacher had just returned from the States and was on his soap box criticising the Democrat Party's backward mentality packaged under the guise of reform. Arabic had only recently replaced the Turkish language for the ezan (call for prayer). Criticising this change Vahit Bey said, "We're going 360 degrees backwards". Erbil lost no time to correct his tutor by saying "Sir, we'd be back at the same point if we go 360 degrees backwards, I guess you meant 180 degrees" and paid the price of this unwelcome comment with a failed grade from physics. Literature teacher Kadri Kiper was definitely one of Devrim Erbil's favourite in high school. Kiper took great joy in conversing current issues with his students. He contributed greatly to students' public speaking skills by organising open debates. Years later, during the Academy's assistant professor entry examinations these skills made Devrim Erbil reminisce about his teacher. Undoubtedly another important character from Balıkesir High School is school headmaster Hilmi Ziya Apak. An active politician from the Republican People's Party (CHP) in Izmir, Apak was exiled to Balıkesir High School by the ruling Democrat Party. Actually Apak's exile from Izmir was godsend to the students of Balıkesir High School since he pioneered some of the most democratic practices within the school, unseen anywhere else in the country. He led the way for students to establish parties, representation offices and allowed them to participate in the school administration. Influenced by the endless conversations on art with İrfan Yılmaz, Erbil created a considerable amount of paintings in a democratic environment facilitated by Hilmi Ziya Apak. Encouraged by headmaster Apak, Erbil and his classmates Onur Ustomar and Selçuk Karasuil opened their first exhibition at the Turkish-American Cultural Society in 1953. The exhibition coincided with the news of Hilmi Ziya Apak's appointment to Kabataş High School in Istanbul. Apak was due to leave for the big city on the 6:19 PM train. In a way by making the opening at 5 PM, Erbil and his friends used this exhibition as a way to express their gratitude their headmaster. This exhibition carries significance, as it happens to be Devrim Erbil's debut.

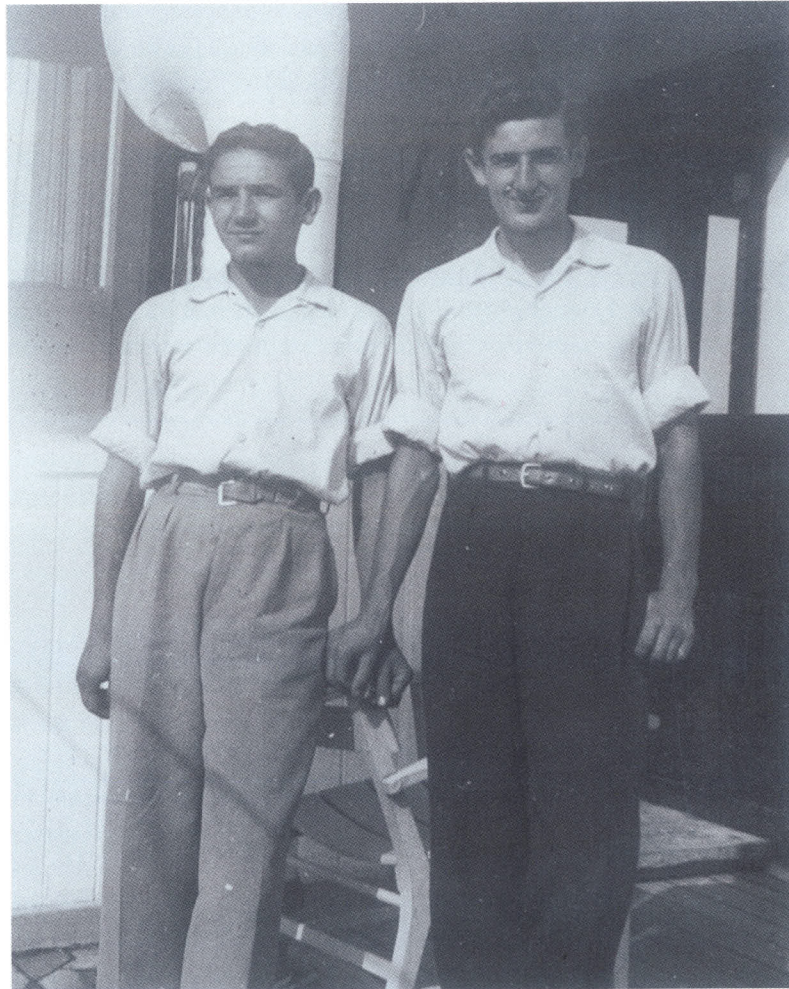
Devrim Erbil's paintings of the time are actually evidence that his artistic outlook had already taken form. In his works "Balıkesir Fairground Gate", "A View from Akçay" and "A View from Havran" dated 1952 Erbil uses coloured Indian ink. There is a loss of sharpness in the contours of figures and each figure-object appears to dissolve into the other figure-object in all three of his works. Erbil's next step would be abstraction. Actually it is quite consequential for Erbil to paint fairgrounds since these fairs accounted for an important part of his childhood. People had to use ration books during World War II. Basic consumer foods like tea and bread were rationed. The vibrant and colourful fairs that opened after those long nights of blackouts were just the thing a child of that age would be yearning for. This is how Devrim Erbil perceives his early works: "At 15, with an array of coloured Indian ink, I was literally trying to convey poetry with my paintings. Actually I can draw analogies between my first works and those I create nowadays. 1950's were the years I was unable to see any paintings. 1940's, times of the ongoing World War II. Times of rationed tea and bread. Where would you see art? How could you even think of painting? I never forget Bedri Rahmi saying that he had only seen two paintings by the time had graduated from the Academy: Van Gogh's boots and a piece from Gauguin... I had chosen by narration to be through colourful lines. This may exist in context of contemporary art

narration however by intention in those years in Balıkesir was to get as close as writing poetry with painting. This was none other than an instrument to narrate rhythm of life, something so exciting for humans. People should think as they observe paintings. For me people should think when they look at a painting. It should stir their feelings; bring out a sensitivity within (...) The magazine Edebiyat Literature) would make its way to Balıkesir. This is how I got to know poetry. It was poetry that brought out this sensitivity. And it was just that reflected back on poetry. Back then they would organise elementary school competitions under Sırrı Yırcalı's name. At fifth grade I participated in an essay competition. My piece was chosen for top prize."²

During his years as a student at Balıkesir High School Devrim Erbil would get immersed in long conversations on art with his art teacher İrfan Yılmaz. This was a source of true excitement for him. There was another art teacher at high school, Perihan Ege, an Academy graduate from Bedri Rahmi Eyübođlu's atelier. Erbil graduates from Balıkesir High School in 1954 and receptive to guidance of İrfan Yılmaz and Perihan Ege he decides to continue his studies at Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts' Senior Department of Painting. Recalling those days Erbil says: "One day I came across small, pocket size booklets on painting. I was ecstatic. We had Varlık magazine back then. We'd eagerly wait for the new issue to arrive on the 6.10 PM train. There would be mini critics on painting written by Zahir Güvemli, which we read carefully. This is where we got our nourishment. I said I wanted to create art; become a painter. The family wasn't late to react: "What's a well educated boy doing at the Academy" they would complain."³

Devrim Erbil and His Teacher İrfan Yılmaz
Balıkesir High School, 1953

Devrim Erbil and Dilaver Erbil
On Tari Boat in Samsun





Selçuk Karasuil,
Onur Ustomar and Devrim Erbil
In the exhibition of Balıkesir
Turkish American Culture
Association, 1954

Exhibition of Balıkesir
Turkish American Culture
Association, 1954



A View from Havran, 1952
Indian ink on paper
7,4 x 14,5 cm



A View from Akçay, 1952
Indian ink on paper
8,5 x 15 cm



In 1954 Devrim Erbil joins Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts' Senior Department of Painting. This period coincides precisely with Neşet Günel's return from Paris to start working as an assistant at the Academy. Neşet Günel lays eyes on Erbil's works from the Balıkesir years at his enrols at the Academy and shows them to his painter friends – according to Erbil, probably to Nuri İyem and his circuit. As a freshman at the Academy, Erbil becomes Halil Dikmen's student at the gallery and subsequently joins Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's atelier. Back then the Academy's senior department – closed in 1960 - was still functioning. Similar to a fine arts high school, students of the Academy were expected to complete three years of beginner training followed by an additional three years in the senior department. Already a high school graduate Erbil's Academy training consisted of a year at the gallery topped by three years in the senior department. Reflecting on his gallery tutor Halil Dikmen, Erbil says: "He was tall, elegant and smooth spoken. An unbelievable person. I think he was a mevlevi. He'd play the reed flute. The Mevlevi Order had given him an unequalled notion of tolerance. He was a wise speaker. I've always glorified him in my imagination. In all his gracefulness he was the ideal character for being a tutor at the Academy. He was director of the museum. We'd go and listen to him play the reed flute with tremendous appreciation and admiration. Later he was appointed director of Fine Arts. He died there, on the job. He's someone I can never forget."⁴

After a years training at the gallery Devrim Erbil faced the question of choosing the atelier he would work for. At the time Academy students completing a year at the gallery were given three months to participate all ateliers and make a decision on the one they prefer to attend. Devrim Erbil was initially sent to Zeki Faik İzer's atelier however Erbil decides to join Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's atelier at the end of the three months. Erbil's aesthetics tutor at the Academy was Ahmet Kutsi Tecer. At Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's atelier Erbil gets introduced to Ahmet Kutsi Tecer's predecessor Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar. Actually, Eyüboğlu's atelier in Narmanlı Yurdu and his home in Salıpazarı were teeming with famous artists of the time. Erbil finds himself in the hub of the art circuit meeting big names like Yaşar Kemal, Aziz Nesin, Sabahattin Eyüboğlu, Eren Eyüboğlu, Ara Güler, Füreyâ Koral, Aliye Berger (Berger's atelier was also in Narmanlı Yurdu), Metin Eloğlu, Nedim Günsür and so many more... According to Devrim Erbil names like Ahmet Haşim, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar and Ahmet Kutsi Tecer played a significant role in the artistic lifeline of the Academy. Erbil says: "All three were at the Academy. Ahmet Haşim taught aesthetics. I didn't make it in time for him. Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar wasn't an aesthetics tutor however he'd come to Bedri Rahmi's atelier. We knew him. Ahmet Kutsi Tecer was my aesthetics tutor. I was at least lucky enough to meet the last two."⁵ As an assistant at the Academy Erbil had close ties with famous tutors like Sedat Hakkı Eldem and Nurullah Berk and also contributed to the preparation of Academy art history tutor Burhan Toprak's latest book on history of art.

Devrim Erbil was really lucky to have worked in Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's atelier during his years at the Academy as a student for his was one of the most liberal ateliers at the Academy. All students admired Bedri Rahmi. He would excite them, motivate them to open exhibitions. Devrim Erbil was no exception, he was tremendously influenced by Bedri Rahmi in his first years at the Academy. Particularly loyal to Bedri Rahmi's traits of observation, impression and patience Devrim Erbil would perpetually perceive the painting's surface as a playground. Speaking of Bedri Rahmi and his relation with him Erbil says: "I was part of his family. I was his assistant. I was very close to him. Together we arranged his 200 m2 mosaic at the 1958 Brussels World Expo. I was team leader. He was a man of emotion. His love affairs, the place of love in his life was unique. Ivy Strangali springs to my mind immediately. She was both his assistant and secretary. She also worked with us in the mosaic arrangements. She left for Greece after the Istanbul Incidents that broke out on September 6-7, 1955 and subsequently died there. Nihat

Ergin and I helped her. Nedim Günsür, Turan Erol, Orhan Peker... We were all in his atelier. His art was fabulous. Those who experienced the true excitement of being involved in art would prefer his atelier. He would value Anatolian art. His writings, poetry and persona as a man of culture was very inspirational. There was a tremendous degree of affection to the West at the time. A westward orientation in art; Paris to be precise. Paris was the centre until the 1950's. It was rather impossible for anyone living there to remain unimpressed with the city. Those who insisted that Paris was the only place of artistic creation became tutors at the Academy. There was an insubstantial, exaggerated infatuation with Europe. This sense of weak admiration had become deeply rooted. But based on folkloric art Bedri Rahmi opened the path for the emergence of different cultures. He would compare life with art (...) He was an exciting tutor. For instance pointing out to the creepers changing colours from green to orange and red with the onset of fall he would say "Did you see the creepers in the Academy garden as you walked in?". He would recommend us to think of art whilst travelling on the tram. He would teach how to look and see. He ensured we had an artistic perspective towards the world."⁶

The atmosphere Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu established at Academy was completely novel. Mehmet Güteryüz, another of Bedri Rahmi's students speaks of the atmosphere at the Academy back then: "There was a lifestyle at Bedri Rahmi's atelier that literally touched life itself. Training at other ateliers were more distant and didactic. They got bogged down in problems like the inexplicable Cézanne's cubism and the teachings of André Lhote. Out of all the ateliers Bedri Rahmi's was by far the most active. He'd spend a lot of time problems of a painting as well as the problematique of colour. Sometimes he would warn those who got trapped by form in an opposing attitude and offer suggestions on colour. (...) One of the most interesting aspects of his approach was that he created paintings from life itself, from his relation with life. He would gather all students and take them to less popular parts of the city like Tophane and make them draw figures inside the coffeehouses of Kabataş. I think it's rather significant for him to have proposed basing painting on reality back then. Something quite similar happened in music with Adnan Saygun and Türk Beşleri. Bartók's studies on folklore offered guidance to our composers. They attempted at making a polyphonic Turkish folk song and compose choir pieces from its motifs. This period focusing on research showed the richness of the resources we sat on. I am convinced that in the process of recreating folkloric colours and motifs, Bedri Rahmi endeavoured to seek the image at the root of our society, not visual patterns. He considered pattern and motif problematique as a whole. In a way he associated traditional Turkish folkloric motifs for some sort of extract, stylised pattern. He'd want students to observe the original motifs in folkloric art and the vibrancy of colours in horse & carriage paintings. I clearly remember them going to Bursa just to observe the craftsmen working on carriages. I really believe these were genuine interests of the time. After all fakes didn't last for long."⁷

Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu said the following for İbrahim Çallı whose atelier he was part of at the Academy, "Eighty percent of painters who've made a name for themselves in Turkish art are Çallı's students. Listen to a few examples: Zeki Kocamemi, Hale Asaf, Muhiddin Sebati (...) After his students, renown as the pillars of Turkish art like Zeki Kocamemi, Ali Çelebi, Hale Asaf and Muhiddin Sebati return to Turkey, Çallı does not hesitate to get back in their circuit. (...) "⁸ . Bedri Rahmi subsequently became a tutor of exactly the same nature. Years later, walking the same path as his tutor Devrim Erbil too became a prominent character in the Turkish art scene, known and admired by people who had no interest in art. This was Çallı and Bedri Rahmi style... In a piece written for his 50th year in art Devrim Erbil openly says that it was Bedri Rahmi that taught him the master-apprentice relation, collective work, love for the master, passion for nature, enthusiasm, poetry, affection to the beautiful, revolting against the ordinary, investigate folkloric

Devrim Erbil
Istanbul State Fine Arts
Academy, 1955

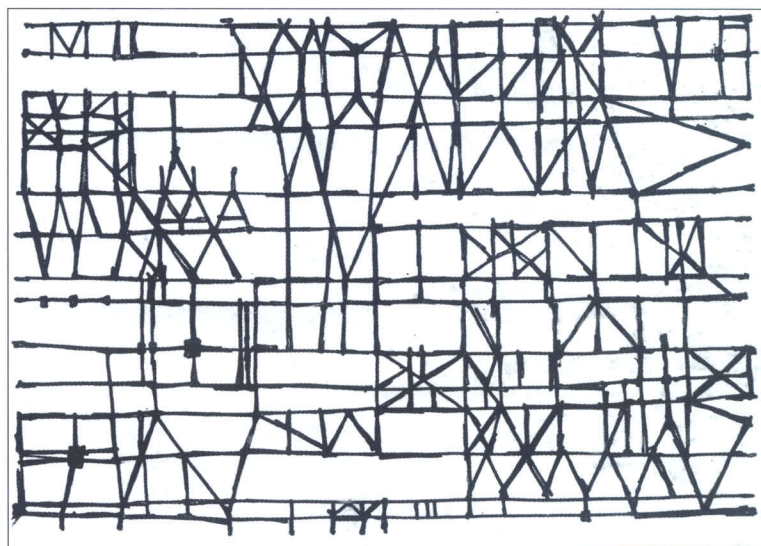
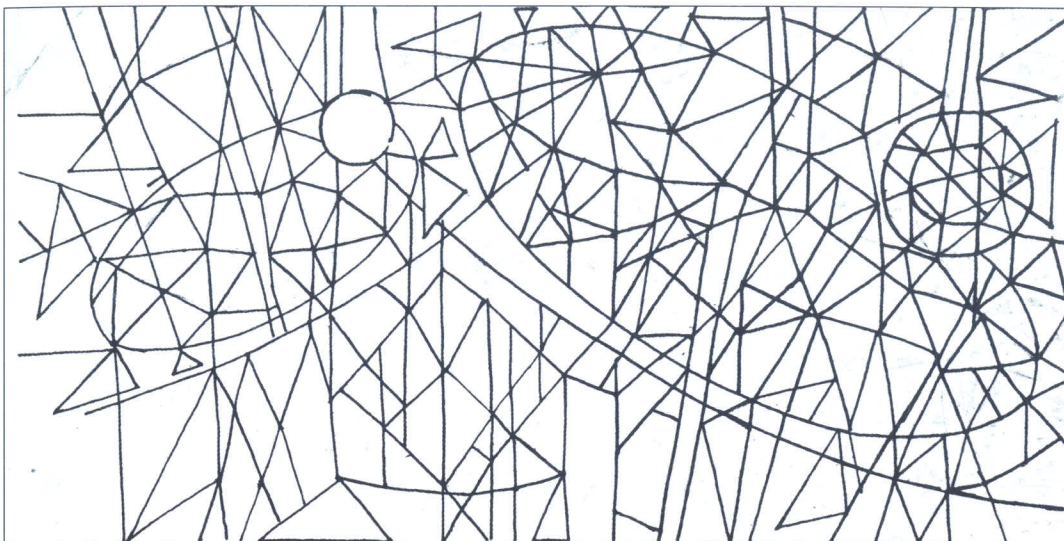


© Orzan Sağdıç

Drawing, 1959
ink on paper
10 x 20 cm

Drawing, 1959
ink on paper
28 x 19,5 cm

Love to Klee, 1959
ink on paper
12 x 17 cm



Devrim Erbil, Gündüz Gölönü,
Cevdet Altuğ, Ferit Edgü and Dorothy
Istanbul State Fine Arts Academy,
in the Atelier of Bedri Rahmi
Eyüboğlu, 1957





art, admire miniatures, mosaics and African statues, fight for what is right and the need to for a bond between art and life and traditional values.⁹

It was September 1956 when Devrim Erbil, only a second year student at the Academy, exhibited his paintings at Balıkesir Children's Library Exhibition Hall. The local Balıkesir Postası newspaper issues a review on Erbil's early period paintings featuring 44 works of different sizes made using different techniques including engraving, oil, water colours, coloured Indian ink and pencil. Written by A. Metin Gerçek this is how the review described Erbil's paintings: "Devrim's recent exhibition is as equally as good its predecessors. Whether academic or cubist all paintings are dominated by excellence in his lines. Without a doubt I can say that Devrim is a master artist of European standards in terms of his lines. His strokes are unique, sensitive and sincere. We see taché smudge added to the excellence of strokes in the engravings he made in the last three months. And it is these stains-strokes that prove his dexterity in engraving. I've known the importance Devrim gives to taché smudge. However, compared to black and whites, succeeding in a good taché smudge is that much more gruelling in oils and watercolours. Success in shape and colour are difficult issues on their own. This is why his oil paintings aren't that great. However, we must give this young man due credit as he is only nineteen years old. (...) I can't finish without naming the works that stand out in this exhibition: All engravings, but especially "Havran Landscape", "Balıkesir Landscape" and the coloured Indian ink works titled "Gerede Landscape" and "Fairground Gate."¹⁰

In 1958 Devrim Erbil worked on a 227 m2 gigantic mosaic arrangement Bedri Rahmi made for the Turkish Pavilion at the International Brussels Expo. Not only did he work as team leader for Bedri Rahmi's mosaic he also made a painting of a door, something he's so familiar from his childhood. The door is the entrance to the fair ground.

After graduating from Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts' Senior Department of Painting in June 1959, Erbil opens a personal exhibition at the National Library in Ankara throughout October and November. Erbil perceives this exhibition as a milestone in his art life. At the time art historian Kaya Özsezgin was a third grade student at the Department of Art History and was writing for a magazine called Dost (Friend). The owners of the magazine Nezihe Meriç and Salim Şengil were also prominent intellectuals of the period. Dost magazine covers the exhibition with critic Kaya Özsezgin.

Certain changes can be observed in Erbil's painting in the late 1950's. Repetitive and sometimes intersecting geometric and strict lines became evident in Erbil's paintings around that period. This is a period where the artist has a closer affiliation with abstraction. Even though not totally extinct from his paintings clusters of colour replace the figure. It was during this period that he made the paintings titled "Fruit Pickers", "Villagers", "Siding With Abstraction", "Mystical Perspective". By the end of 1950's, Devrim Erbil's affiliation with abstraction becomes gradually dominant. His paintings and engravings of this period bear traces of Paul Klee and Piet Mondrian. One of his painting dated 1959 was even titled "Love to Klee". This transformation in Erbil's art appears in the group Abstractionist 7. The artist forms this group with six of his Academy graduate female friends in 1959. Abstractionist 7 includes: Ayça Serimer, Zerrin Kehnemuyi, Ayhan Cerrahgil, Nurhan, Aysel and Devrim Erbil. Erbil said the following about the group Abstractionist 7; "When we formed the group in 1959, our aim was to unite people in the same artistic mindset. One of them subsequently became my wife. Artists from the same atelier, with a similar perspective and enthusiasm had come together. And this is what being a group is." Abstractionist 7's first exhibition opens at the German Cultural Centre situated next to Yeni Melek Cinema back then. At the time of the exhibition Devrim Erbil was doing his military service as a reserve officer in Polatlı, Ankara. Then, Erbil draws attention with geometrical landscapes and his abstractions formed by variation of warm colours. Considering his art life as a whole, though this could be initially perceived as an interim period, his referring to that period in his later works after many years would belie that argument. For example; in 1998 the artist would recreate his work "Mystical Connection" originally dated 1957; and after painting "Abstraction, Anatolian Town" in 1959, "Anatolian Town" would occasionally be the subject of his work throughout different periods of his art life; and he would recall his painting titled "Love to Klee" dated 1959, with his painting titled "Abstraction" again in 1997.

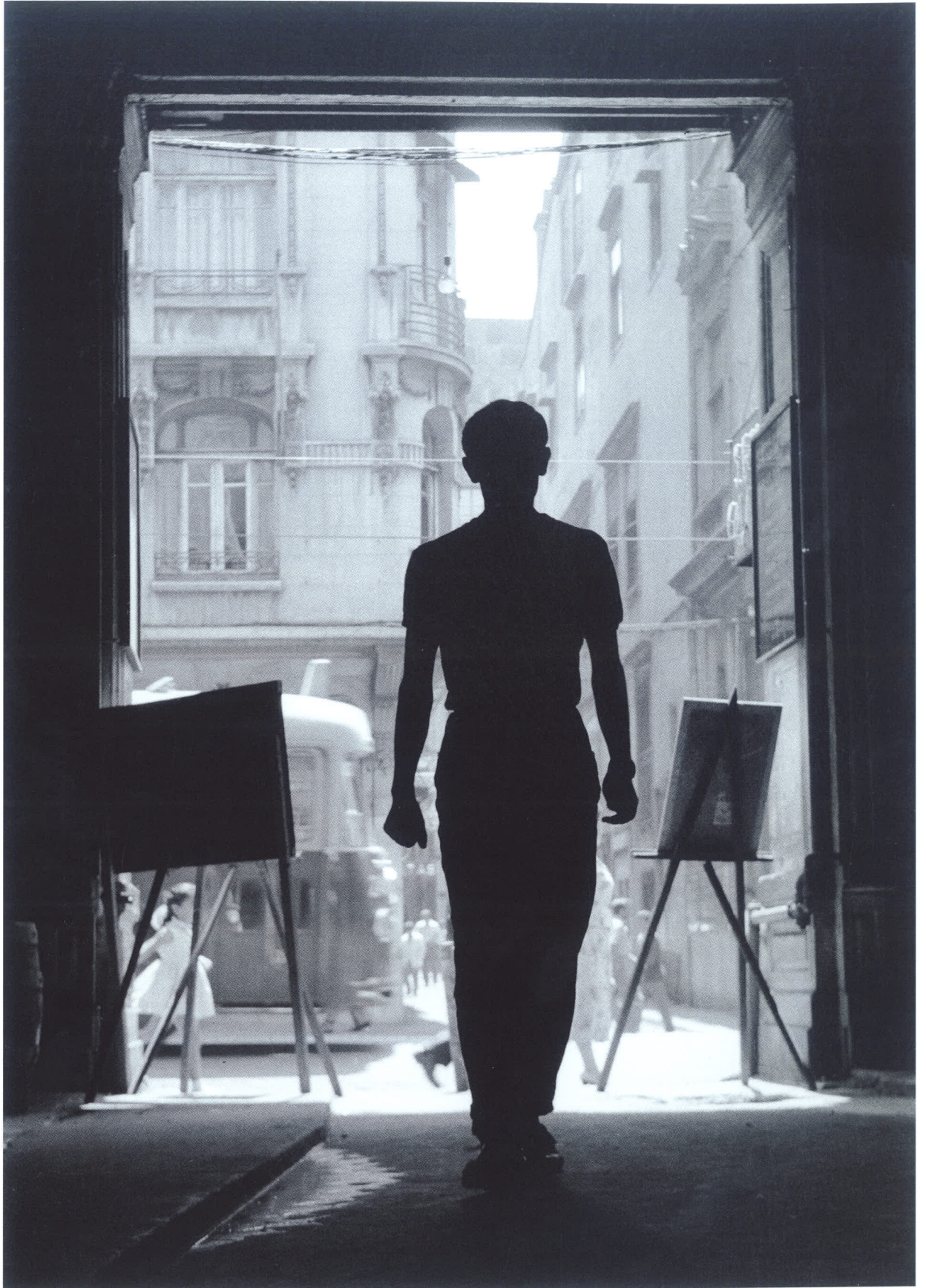
After completing his military service in 1961, Erbil worked as an art and art history teacher at a private Anatolian High School in Koşuyolu and at Kızıltoprak College for Girls between 1961 and 1965. Back then colleges and private high schools had just started to open and majority of unsuccessful state schools students from would end up in these colleges. Devrim Erbil thought these aloof students indifferent to school and lectures. Actually some of them even became inclined towards art. Amongst his students were prominent artists of our time such as Güngör Taner and İsmail Türemen.

The Academy's assistantship exam held in November 1961 is another milestone in Erbil's life. This challenging exam not only required passing a cultural exam but also proving qualifications of both tutorship and being a painter. Erbil was successful in this examination that lasted 3 months. Thirty people applied for the exam and Devrim Erbil, Dinçer Erimez and Fethi Arda were the names that remained for the finals. Erbil came in first amongst three candidates. Erbil's tutorship and therefore his vigorous rhetoric played a significant role in leaving other contenders behind. When announcing the exam results Cemal Tollu said: "There were two openings for academic staff but we chose Devrim because we believe his virtues as great tutor." Later Özdemir Altan and Adnan Çoker were employed as teaching assistants at the Academy in 1962.



Devrim Erbil, 1959
Istanbul State Fine Arts Academy

Devrim Erbil, 1962
During the Exhibition of
State Fine Arts Gallery
(opposite page)



© Ozan Sağdıç

Fruit Collectors, 1959
oil on canvas
50 x 44 cm
(his graduation sketch)

Fruit Collectors, 1959
oil on canvas
116 x 89 cm
(his graduation painting)

Linear Rhythm, 1964
oil on canvas
73 x 60 cm
(opposite page)





Erbil continued to teach at Koşuyolu Anatolian High School once by special permission from the Academy. Özdemir Altan and Tülay Tura Börtecene were also teaching art at this school.

After his appointment as a teaching assistant at the Academy, Devrim Erbil works at the gallery and the ateliers of Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Cemal Tollu, Cevat Dereli. He opens a personal exhibition at the Turkish-German Cultural Centre in Istanbul in February and at the City Gallery of Istanbul Municipality in November 1962. The latter would become one of the exhibitions he cherished most.

In 1963 Devrim Erbil formed the “Blue Group” with Altan Gürman, Adnan Çoker, Sarkis and Tülay Tura (Börtecene). Blue Group opened an exhibition at the Turkish-German Cultural Centre between April 9th and 20th 1963 but this bond did not last for long. Here is what Erbil said about the occurrence of the group: “Blue Group was formed in 1963. Tülay Tura is a colleague and a good painter. She is a talented friend and married to Ahmet Oktay. Back then Adnan Çoker had just arrived from Paris. It was his enthusiasm for art, Altan Gürman’s creative, energetic attitude that brought us together. I have been involved with artist organisations; this is another side of me. I always said ‘let’s improve social and economic conditions; let’s form an artists association’. There was Higher Painter Association headed by Ercüment Kalmık. Why High? Let’s make it Contemporary Artists Association, we said. Ercüment Kalmık was from Nurullah Berk’s generation. He was culturally the most well educated, the most elegant and extraordinary. I deeply loved him as a father rather than a tutor. He was giving lectures on Basic Design at the Department of Architecture. When I came back from abroad I started to work as his assistant and met Altan Gürman at the same time. Our friendship with Altan started then. Sarkis was studying decorative arts. We were a visionary group. Adnan and us disagreed on western impression and eclecticism. Altan passed away and Sarkis went to Paris. Each of us went our own way. Perhaps we could have done a better job of enrooting theoretical thought.”¹²

It’s possible to see Klee’s influence in Erbil’s art in those days, which lasted up to 1966. Erbil uses flat surfaces in this period and demonstrates an abstractionist approach. Again around the same time, the words “variation” and “rhythm” come to gain dominance and reflect as titles in his works such as “Rhythmic Fiction”, “Linear Rhythm”, “Variations on Passion for Nature”, “Interpretation of Nature”, “Anatolian Variations”... This was the first time that he used blue intensely. Subsequently Erbil came to use blue throughout his art life. Those years also defined the themes he used through his art life: Anatolian themes, trees and rhythm. The Anatolian theme emerged at a time when Republican People’s Party organised Country Tours between 1938 and 1943. The theme gained further importance with the ruralistic discourse. The migration from rural to urban became articulate by the 1950’s and its bringing the rural to the artist who could not go to the countryside influenced the accession of the theme Anatolia in those years. Art has also come into terms with an inner confrontation in this period and nourished upon arguments of locality-universality. Then during the same period, a melancholic approach to Anatolia was felt sporadically. This does not apply only to the art of painting but to literature as well. Orhan Kemal’s ‘Birds of Exile’, Yaşar Kemal’s ‘Memed, My Hawk’ and ‘Iron Earth, Copper Sky’, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar’s Five Cities, all these novels carry this influences.

During this period, the Ministry of National Education (which governed the Academy back then) was organising exhibitions in order to introduce Turkish art. ‘Turkish Art of Today’ was first held in Paris Musée d’Art Moderne in 1964, then in Berlin, Vienna, London, Rome and Brussels in 1965; and a ‘Turkish Graphic Design Exhibition’ was organised by UNESCO in 1965. A prominent critic of the time Jacques Lassaigue was allocated as a curator for these exhibitions. Back then Devrim Erbil’s paintings were exhibited throughout Europe and attracted much attention. Realising the absence of a publication in 1965, Erbil strived for the Academy to

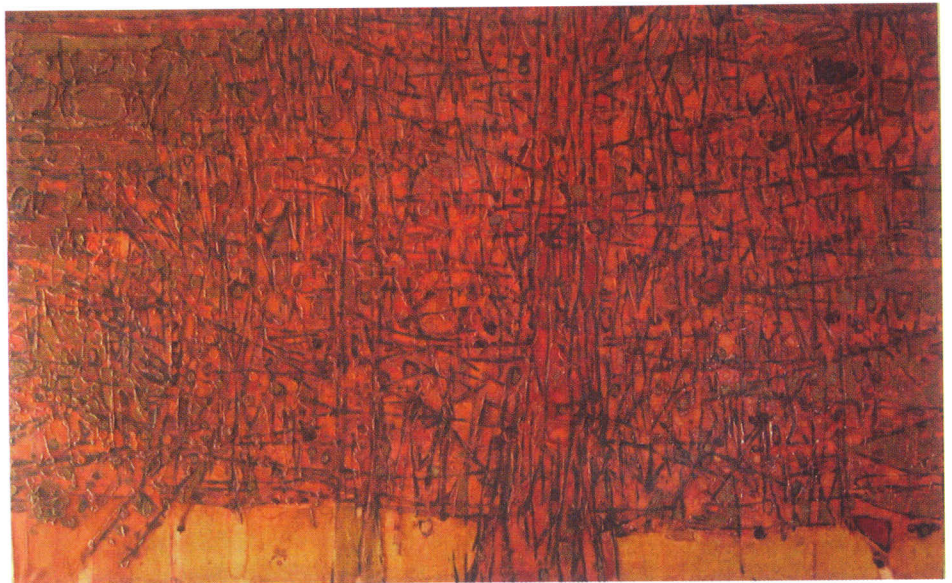
have a journal of its own. He contributed to the journal as an author and worked at the editing committee for a long time. The same year, assistant tutor Erbil and the students of Academy formed a group called “Five Young Painters”. The group included Mehmet Güteryüz, Oktay Anılanmert, Utku Varlık, Necati Ayden and Devrim Erbil. Here is Mehmet Güteryüz speaking of the group: “Four people obsessed with figure and Devrim, who joined us although he was on a different path. We all gave importance to express our art and avoided discussing our traits whether common or different. A collective opposition to academic aesthetics was enough for us. Later this opposition fell into perspective. Today’s driving force in painting appeared within that generation. (...) We were introduced to American Cultural Attaché Sam Cortny at the opening of an exhibition held at the Academy in 1965. He was interested in our paintings and offered us an exhibition. (...) American News Bureau was a building of character across Atlas Movie Theatre. We couldn’t mention of an anti-American mindset in those days. Cortny wanted us to repeat the exhibition in Ankara. We were very excited because it would be our first time in Ankara. But on the opening day President Cemal Gürsel fell into a coma. So the opening reception had to be cancelled. Five Young Artists survived the duration of two exhibitions. Yet art critic Gültekin Elibal’s review “paintings powered by storytelling...” started a new topic for discussion.”¹³

Around that time, influenced by miniatures, Devrim Erbil was creating scenes from Anatolia, dominated by aerial perspective while he drew rather than paint. Just like his work titled “Variations on Life in an Anatolian Town”. Repeating the same painting with more warm colours in 1966, Erbil uses the same composition scheme for his painting titled “Abstraction II” in 1981. Those paintings of Erbil bear traces of the stacking method with resemblance to urban plans. Sense of time and space disappears within those flat surfaced paintings, in a way they reinterpreting urban plans of old times.

A scholarship by the Spanish Government in 1965 allowed Devrim Erbil to get educated at Madrid’s Escola Diplomática, learning Spanish for a year. The scholarship also gave him the opportunity to travel other Spanish cities. Erbil chose Spain for the simple fact that everyone was going to Paris at the time. His passion for artists such as Goya, El Greco, Miro and Picasso, the flamenco, bullfights and Gaudi’s architecture that turned cities into open air museums. It was Spain’s colourful culture that influenced his decision. This is what Erbil said about his decision to go to Spain and his days travelling the country: “I did not want to go to Paris. Spain is warmer. Orhan Peker had been there before me. The land where Goya’s Velasquez’s were born, El Greco lived in... It is a different place with Toledo, Prado. I learned Spanish for a year, enough to give interviews. Opened an exhibition. I opened an exhibition at the Editora National Gallery. (...) Neşe Erdok followed me. Prado Museum is so rich. It was one of the first museum buildings that had been built as a museum in the first place. Spanish emperors collected the paintings. They ask Rubens, an ambassador in Madrid “Do you paint in your free time from being an ambassador? He said “ No, I’m an ambassador in the free time I have left from painting” Tiziano lived and passed away at the age of 94 in Madrid.”¹⁴ In 1966, on his way back from Spain, Erbil travelled Italy and eventually ended up in Paris. In the meantime Özdemir Altan and Oya Köker, Müşfik Kenter’s former wife, were in Paris and Erbil joined them to visit the museums. The time he spent researching museums is very important for he could admire real masterpieces instead of the reproductions he had seen until then. He was also aware of actual developments of the same time. Erbil points out that his art remained unchanged after his return from Spain but he intuitively chose the path of early stylising.

Variations on an Anatolian Town
Experiences 1, 1963
oil on canvas
130 x 180 cm

Variations on Passion
for Nature, 1965
oil on canvas
60 x 95 cm



Anatolian Variations, 1966
oil on canvas
85 x 95 cm



Abstraction, 1965
oil on canvas
71 x 91 cm





Erbil attended 31st Venezia Biennial in 1962 and 3rd Paris Young Artists Biennial in 1963. The year 1966 is very important for him because he received his first international award that year: His canvas titled "Composition I" received the Imperial Court First Prize at the 5th Tehran Biennial. He shared the prize with Abidin Elderoğlu. Attending artists were from Turkey, Iran and Pakistan and the jury was an international one. The members of the jury included Zainal Abidin (Dacca, Arts & Crafts College), Charles Estienne (Aica Paris), Giorgio de Marchis (Roma, National Gallery of Modern Art), Adrian Heath (Art Critic, London), Tony Spiteris (Aica General Secretary), Mohsen Foroughi (Former Dean of Tehran University), Mohammad-Amin Mir Fenderesky (Tehran University), Parviz Moayed-Ahd (Tehran Cultural Affairs Director), Akbar Tajvidi (5th Tehran Biennial General Secretary) and Sabri Berkel from Turkey (then Head of Art Department at the Academy). Describing Erbil's prize as jackpot Berkel said to him: "Dear Sir, you received a stroke of luck" Alongside Erbil, other Turkish artists attending the Tehran Biennial were Oktay Anılanmert, Şemsettin Arel, Mustafa Ayataç, Ferruh Başağa, Nurullah Berk, Sabri Berkel, Ali Çelebi, Adnan Çoker, Cevat Dereli, Abidin Elderoğlu, Refik Epikman, Dinçer Erimez, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Eren Eyüboğlu, Ragıp Gökçan, Hamit Görele, Neşet Günal, Zeki Faik İzer, Ercüment Kalmık, Arif Kaptan, Hasan Kavruk, Fethi Kayaalp, Zerrin Kehnemuyi, Osman Oral, Cemal Tollu, Tülay Tura, Eşref Üren, Turgut Zaim; lithography category Mustafa Aslier, Aliye Berger, Eren Eyüboğlu, Mehmet Gülerüz, Zeki Faik İzer, Fethi Kayaalp, Orhan Peker, Utku Varlık; sculpture category Zühtü Müridoğlu, Nusret Suman and İlhan Koman. Erbil attended the Biennial in two categories: painting and lithography. He presented "Composition I" (82 x 110 cm) and "Composition II" (81 X 111 cm) for painting category and three "Tree" works (23 x 31 cm, 23 x 31 cm and 31 x 23 cm) for lithography category.

Erbil was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1967 and hospitalised for eight months at the Validebağ Sanatorium. This was a hospital offering treatment to teachers and students. A great art lover and friend of the artist Safder Tarim, renowned art collector, was a doctor at that sanatorium. When Erbil got bored at the hospital he went up to Dr. Tarim and brought up the idea of treating patients with art. Backed by Tarim he organised art classes and theatrical plays at the institution.

Following a scholarship abroad and the award from Tehran Biennial, Erbil opens his first personal exhibition in April 1967 at the Turkish-German Cultural Centre. That was followed by the exhibition at the Academy hall on January 1968. His academic tutors had written essays for the exhibition catalogue. For example Nurullah Berk praised Erbil's art in these words: "Besides an abstract or semi abstract character Devrim Erbil's explorations in painting reveal a continuous relation with nature. Constructing the relation of form and colour on certain themes reveals the powerful effects of his nature sceneries. Tree and branch are the prominent motifs that Erbil persistently uses even today yet he's able to perpetually construct different forms over such a background. Although dry or leafing out tree branches webbing out in every direction, plant forms within the rectangular frame remind Klee or Kandinsky sometimes, the persistency to work on the same motifs over and over is a manifestation of a certain personality rather than courage and he's courageous for not denying influences."¹⁵

In the same exhibition catalogue Erbil's atelier tutor Bedri Rahmi listed him amongst leading artists and praised him in these words: "I closely observe and frequently contemplate Devrim Erbil's development for he's the pioneer of the young generation. Where was European art when our dear tutor Çallı İbrahim was Erbil's? Where was our generation at his age? This is a story of eighty years on average! Our tutors are in their eighties now. We are almost in our sixties. Today's young generation is aged between 25-35. I've spent my life in the middle of three generations. I know the characteristics of these three generations and feel happy for all of them.

What separates young ones from us and our tutors must be this characteristic: they follow what is happening in the world day to day... We already missed the boat due to circumstances beyond our control (World War I and II). (...) Language of painting is like music - it is universal. Painting will go beyond borders in the blink of an eye, with a brush stroke. Those who closely follow Erbil's progress know that he did not come to a brand new understanding of painting from out of nowhere, they knew very well what was good in the past, and its substance. Today's talented painters do not boast about knowing the past very well. Today's new is not built on the foundations of the past but on a brand new foundation immediately next to the past!"¹⁶

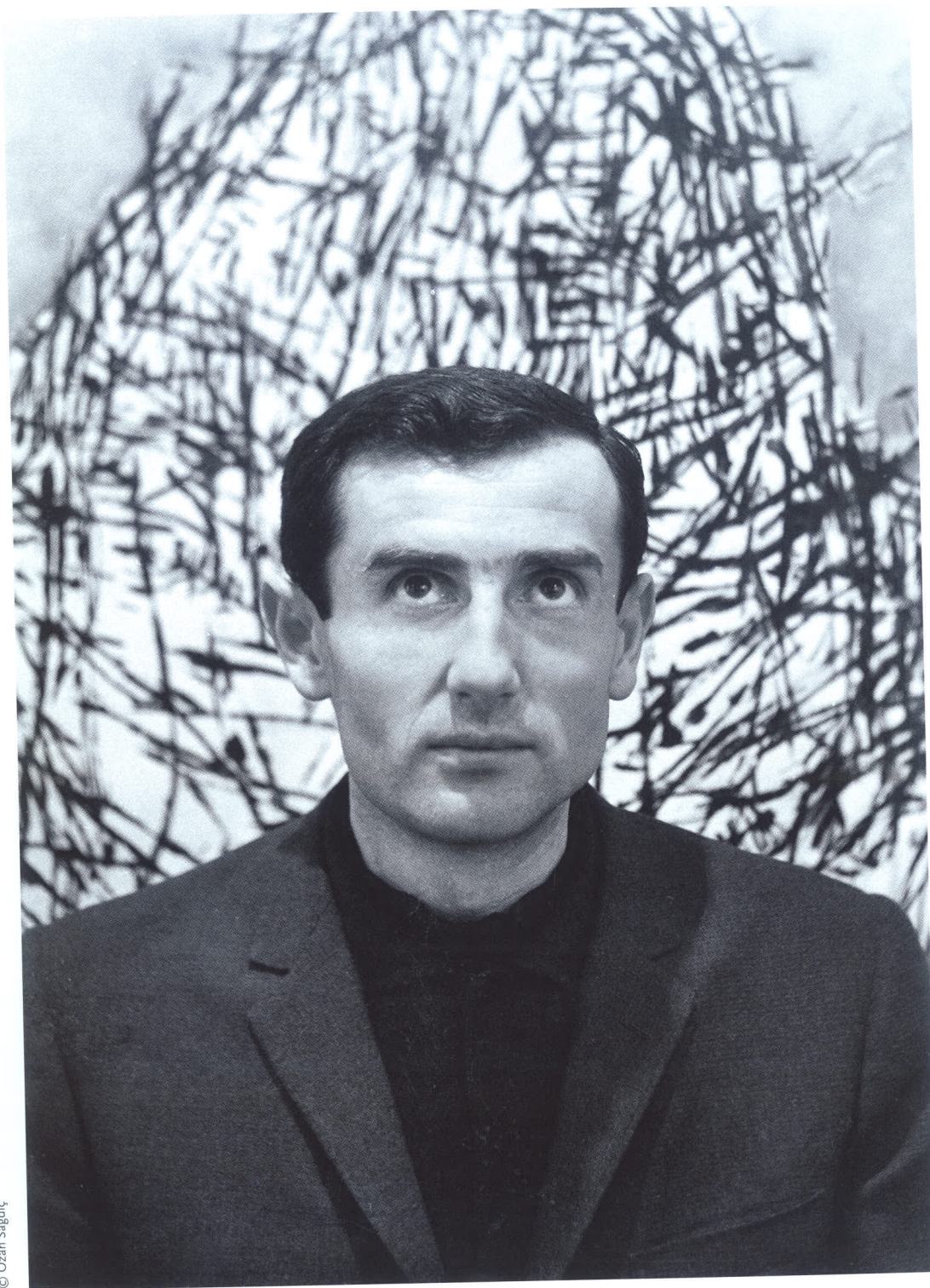
Between 1966 and 1969 Devrim Erbil worked at Istanbul Kadıköy Engineering and Architecture Faculty and besides his duty at the Academy he taught "Basic Art Education" with Ercüment Kalmık. Following his lectures at Engineering and Architecture Faculty Kalmık founded a Basic Education Chair at the Academy with his assistant Altan Gürman. Basic courses started at the Fine Arts Academy Department of Sculpture in the 1969-1970 academic year by Basic Education Chair. Following Ercüment Kalmık's death, Zühtü Mürtoğlu became head of the department in the 1970-1971 academic year. Besides Altan Gürman, lecturers were Ali Teoman Germaner, architect Erkal Güngör and painter Özer Kabaş. Declaring its aim as design unique to basics, the Department of Basic Art Education started teaching students. This also translates as art education entering a phase with orientation towards contemporary art.

In 1968, Erbil received an important national award from the Contemporary Painters Association - the Young Painter 1st Prize at the Young Painters of the Year exhibition. Devrim Erbil contributed to changing the name of High Painters Society to Contemporary Painters of Turkey and was the head of the association in 1969. The same year, he won third prize at the Young Talents Painting Contest organised by the Art Critics Society (established as part of UNESCO in Paris, 1949; Turkish branch of this Association Internationale d'Critiques des Arts/ International Art Critics Association, Aica was established in 1953) The artist was deemed worthy of "Atatürk and Republic Award" at the painting-sculpture contest held in scope of Republic's 50th Year Celebrations in 1973.

Turbot Tree, 1966
oil on canvas
116 x 89 cm
Selçuk Yaşar Museum
Collection, Izmir



Devrim Erbil, 1966
In Front of Turbot Tree



© Ozan Sağdıç

Murat Eriç,
Ataman Demir,
Oya Boyla,
Sümer Saldıray,
Bülent Erkmen,
Devrim Erbil,
Altan Gürman,
Özdemir Altan,
Önder Küçükerman
Istanbul Validebağ
Sanatorium, 1967

Turkish Contemporary Painters
Association Awards of Young
Artist of the Year, 1968



Devrim Erbil and
Ercüment Kalmık, 1968



While some Academy tutors namely Zeki Faik İzer, Nurullah Berk, Ali Avni Çelebi, Cevat Dereli had retired in 1970, Devrim Erbil became associate with his thesis titled “Techniques and Colours in The Art of Painting”. During that period having the title associate professor meant to gain right to give independent lectures. So Devrim Erbil Atelier was established in the Academy educating hundreds of art students.

The time Devrim Erbil started teaching at the Academy was the most turbulent years of Turkey - politically, socially and culturally. This period can be roughly dated between 1960-1980 and is an outstanding process where the art scene sought a new direction. During this two decade period, well established art institutes were questioned and we see the emergence of endeavours reflecting on the dynamics of the art per se.¹⁷ There was an effort to find alternatives to state supported activities of art. Autonomy in the art scene emerged as an outcome.

The year 1980 refers to a breaking point yet the change in the art scene had already become apparent by the middle of the 70's. Following the first initiatives in 1950's and 1960's, new art galleries opened up by the mid 70's and their increasing numbers beginning with 80's stand out as good example for this. Thanks to those galleries the first steps were taken towards forming an art market and thus a connection between the art scene and capital. More so other new ventures within other fields were just as remarkable. In this context “Art Towards the Millennium Symposium” held at Istanbul State Fine Arts Academy between October 24th and 28th 1977 and its declarations can be cited as examples. According to the final declaration art gradually becomes a phenomenon embracing all aspects of life and must exist for everyone. In a holistic art concept everything must be considered as artwork. This manifesto also underlined the necessity for art to be free from academism and ideological pressures of the state.

State Painting Sculpture Exhibitions, only major exhibition since 1939, loses its effect parallel to the art scene's transformation to the autonomous in the 1970's. While the state was gradually losing power over the art scene, collective exhibitions started to appear during the period. Open Air Exhibition held in the court of Istanbul Archaeology was the first in a series of collective exhibitions. The event was organised by Istanbul Archaeology Museum Fan Club between 1974 and 1977. Subsequently this Istanbul Art Festivity New Trends Exhibitions took place biennially in Istanbul State Fine Arts Academy in 1977. Those exhibitions were organised six times from 1977 to 1987. There was a pause in 1987. Though organised once more in 1994 the initiative had lost its effectiveness. Collective exhibitions such as Istanbul Contemporary Artists Exhibitions held since 1980 and A Profile of Leading Turkish Art Exhibitions held between 1984-1988 ended up pioneering biennials and themed-curated exhibitions. Those exhibitions can be seen as events aimed at transcending beyond the ordinary; showing the possibility of artistic production beyond accepted artworks and tastes. It can be said that they reached their aim.¹⁸ Devrim Erbil was part of the Art Festivities organisation team and he started Istanbul Contemporary Artists Exhibitions in cooperation with Painting and Sculpture Museums Association during his time managing the Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum. Erbil also put tremendous effort to push the art scene beyond the ordinary.

Certain changes can also be observed within the state's perception of art in the 1960's.¹⁹ The state could differentiate art and entertainment sectors until the 60's however; this differentiation disappeared especially in the late 60's and early 70's. A new movement confronted debates on universality with the National Front Government in 1970's.

Politics based on traditions and customs was at stake and this reflected on art too. The reflection of this perspective into art manifests essentially itself in two ways: First is the use of Anatolian landscapes and Anatolian people as the subject of art in conjunction with the ruralistic discourse dominating the transition from the 1950's to 1960's.¹⁹ In this context

tradition becomes mentioned more frequently by art and this view gains popularity. This is the genesis of anti-government art.²⁰ Besides anti-establishment trends that laid the foundations of the 1968 movement, student movements, and closer ties between student and worker unions meant that art took on an anti-establishment attitude.²¹ This could be considered as another aspect of National Front Government policies reflecting into art of the 1970's. This situation also manifests within the artists/ateliers defending figurative and abstract art in Istanbul State Fine Arts Academy. During 1970's Academy witnessed a prolonged debate on favouring the figurative or abstract. Those defending figurative painting were also discussing how figure should be (whether satiric or a reflection of Anatolian panorama).

The 1970's... a time of political instability and financial crisis. Following the military memorandum of March 12th 1971, the government headed by Nihat Erim initially dealt with economic and political restructuring but proclaimed martial law in 11 provinces on April 27th, 1971 to cope with widespread public opposition. This period witnessed closure of political organisations, banned union activities. Newspapers Cumhuriyet and Akşam were closed for ten days. Following the constitutional amendment ratified on October 6th, 1971 a group of writers including Yaşar Kemal, Fakir Baykurt, Mümtaz Soysal was arrested on orders of the Nihat Erim government. Probations, confinements and executions of the period caused national and international uproar. According to Feroz Ahmad, right wing violence was reborn again during this period with the coalition government²² and democratisation process was halted using militants of MHP's (Nationalist People's Party) youth movement. In Ahmad's opinion the reinvented political terrorism of the period intensified throughout the 1970's and became a significant aspect of Turkish political life.²³

The political, social and economic atmosphere in the period following May 27th 1960 and the military memorandum of March 12th 1971 heavily influenced the cultural and artistic realm. Similar to the 68 Generation artists, unification efforts with Europe and the impact of National Front Government on art, efforts to adopt national values brought with it arguments on locality-universality in art during this period. Actually all this indicates the presence of an identity crisis and the debate began on whether "identity" is to be surpassed by returning to national origins or embracing universal values. Those debates became popular with Kemal Tahir's theories after 1960 and influenced many disciplines. After 1970, localist and socialist tendencies gained strength parallel to social turbulence²⁴ whilst on the other hand artists educated in Paris sought ways of personal expression due to their affiliation with Existentialism. In fact this issue (debates on locality-universality) setting the scene for the 1980's and continued until today. In other words, locality-universality discussions confront us as an actual issue for today's art as well.

Looking at the 1960's in terms of gallery ownership and art market we see that such initiatives being taken in the second half of that decade. Though backed by the state, Taksim Art Gallery established in 1967, made an effort to give opportunity to young artists of the time. In 1967 İlhan Koman's wife Melda Kaptana opened the Kaptana Gallery in Nişantaşı. The opening hosted Mübin Orhon's exhibition. The gallery used a small part of a store and managed to remain open only until 1977. Another gallery that operated for a short period is Galeri 1. Opened on Bekar Street in Beyoğlu in 1968 the gallery was owned by Mefkure Şerbetçi. It remained functional until 1972 and hosted exhibitions of Abidin Dino, Kuzgun Acar, Ömer Uluç, Adnan Çoker, Orhan Peker, Turan Erol, Leyla Gamsız, Selim Turan, Ercümen Kalmık and Devrim Erbil.

The introduction of liberal economy in the second half of 1970's changes the profile of art purchaser. As of this period purchasers go through a transformation from the state to bourgeoisie. The social upper class like company executives started to consider artwork as an investment. Istanbul Painting Sculpture Museum cut down on the volume of purchased

Atelier of Devrim Erbil
Istanbul State Fine Arts
Academy, 1972



Composition from Nature, 1968
oil on hardboard
100 x 130 cm



Anatolian Variation, 1973
oil on canvas
97 x 194 cm



Devrim Erbil, 1973
Working on
Anatolian Variation



artwork. Instead they focused on publishing books on Turkish art, something needing much attention since the last one was Nurullah Berk's "Art in Turkey" dated 1939. Back then the emerging art market was mainly raving about Ottoman painting and the 1914-generation. The Contemporary Turkish Painting series by Tıglat who started a gallery in those years, Hüseyin Gezer and Nurullah Berk's books on "Turkish Painting and Sculpture" written for Republic's 50th anniversary were all published around this time. Therefore we see market emergence bringing forth the publishing of books on Turkish Plastic Arts. These books written by painters (except Günsel Renda and Kaya Özsezgin) were subsequently followed by essays and translations about the emergence of the market published in periodicals of the time.

Galleries of the period included Aydın Cumalı's Cumalı Art Gallery opened inside a bookstore in Moda, Istanbul in 1973; Ertan Mestçi's Artisan Art Gallery²⁵ in Ankara open between 1973-86; Yahşi Baraz's Galeri Baraz in Kurtuluş, Istanbul in 1975; Rabia Çapa's Maçka Art Gallery opened with the motto "for art not for sale"; painter Feride İnci Bengiserp's Hobi Art Gallery in 1978 and Ulufer Oğuzcan's Ümit Yaşar Gallery in 1979. Between 1956 and 1980 Erbil opened 15 personal exhibitions and participated 12 mixed exhibitions with another 20 exhibitions abroad. His works were exhibited in places such as Turkish-German Cultural Centre, Beyoğlu City Gallery, Galeri 1, Akbank Art Gallery, Vakko Art Gallery and Aydın Cumalı Art Gallery.

In the 1960's Erbil adds new themes to his scenes of Anatolia. Erbil's 1967 work "Istanbul", Indian ink on paper, representing scenery from Galata is like the foreteller of his Istanbul series. Since then using different techniques like silk imprint, oil on canvas, etc. Erbil's created hundreds of works on Istanbul. Developing a rhythm for his city and space compositions on Istanbul Erbil usually depicts multi-cultural areas like Süleymaniye, Galata and the shores of the Bosphorus. These paintings often presenting an aerial perspective are influenced by topographic studies like Erbil's Anatolian sceneries from the 1950-60's. A passionate Istanbul lover Erbil's only other depiction of urban scenery is of the town of Marmaris in Muğla. We would have to wait for 1990's for Erbil's paintings titled "Marmaris Port" and "Moonlit Marmaris".

Another theme he started using in the 1970's is "Birds". Abstract bird figures in his painting titled "A View from Havran" dated 1952 is a proof that Erbil went through stylising sometime earlier. The birds of the "A View from Havran" turned out to be themes and forms he ended up using throughout his life. Birds are seen as a flock not as individual and by this Erbil gives the feeling of rhythm recognisable in all his paintings. He reinforces this feeling of rhythm by combining birds with his other theme "Trees". His work "Tree Birds" dated 1978 can be considered as an example.

White Line of Nature, 1974
oil on hardboard
60 x 50 cm

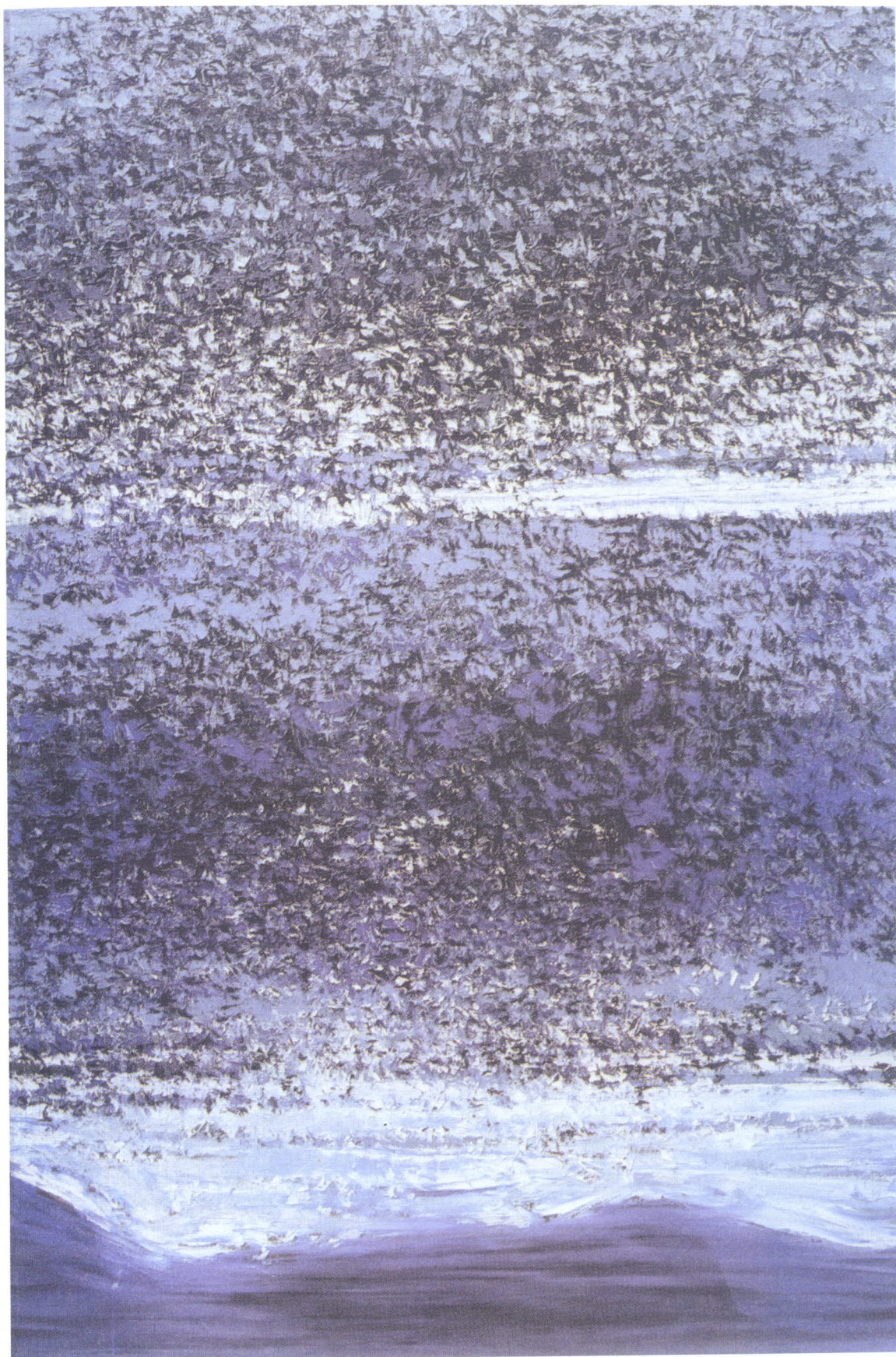


Abstraction, 1976
oil on canvas
70 x 50 cm



Rhythmic Nature
Abstraction, 1975
oil on canvas
180 x 85 cm
*Istanbul Painting and
Sculpture Museum
Collection*





Rhythmic Nature
Abstraction, 1979
oil on canvas
150 x 85 cm

Devrim Erbil opened Erbil Art Atelier in Caddebostan in 1971 with his wife Gülsün and held exhibitions there until 1977. Artists of the period were expected to be sophisticated. They had to simultaneously create art, publish give lectures and conferences, establish associations and so on. Devrim Erbil joined this sophistication and worked as an exhibition commissary according to his learning's from his tutor Bedri Rahmi. First of those exhibitions was held in scope of Erzurum Culture Week, organised by Unesco National Plastic Arts Committee in 1969. Erbil gave a conference at the event and worked as a commissary for the exhibition introducing Turkish Art whilst at the same time presenting a selection from Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum. Culture Weeks were also organised in Kayseri, Trabzon, Van and Balıkesir. Erbil also attended the events as a speaker and exhibitions commissary. He was also an exhibition commissary for the Turkish section of the 9th Alexandria Biennial in 1972. Erbil won the 2nd prize for painting category with his canvas titled "Variations on Life in an Anatolian Town". Headed by Hussein Sobhi, the jury members were Andreas Chrysochos (Commissary of Cyprus), Ceferino Moreno Sandoval (Commissary of Spain), Michel Hoog (Commissary of France) and Giuseppe Zigaina (Commissary of Italy). The Turkish pavilion at the Biennial included Şadan Bezeyiş, Ali Çelebi, Gülsün Erbil, Leyla Gamsız, Hamit Görele, A. Türkoğlu, Oya Katoğlu for painting category; Mustafa Aslier, Aliye Berger, Gülsün Erbil and Gündüz Gölönü for engraving category. Erbil exhibited two canvases of identical size "Variations on Life in an Anatolian Town" (132 x 100 cm) in the Alexandria Biennial. After receiving an award at a biennial attended incorporating Mediterranean countries he travelled Egypt in January and February and met prominent intellectuals of the period in Cairo including Mahmut Hilmi and Şevki Vanlı.

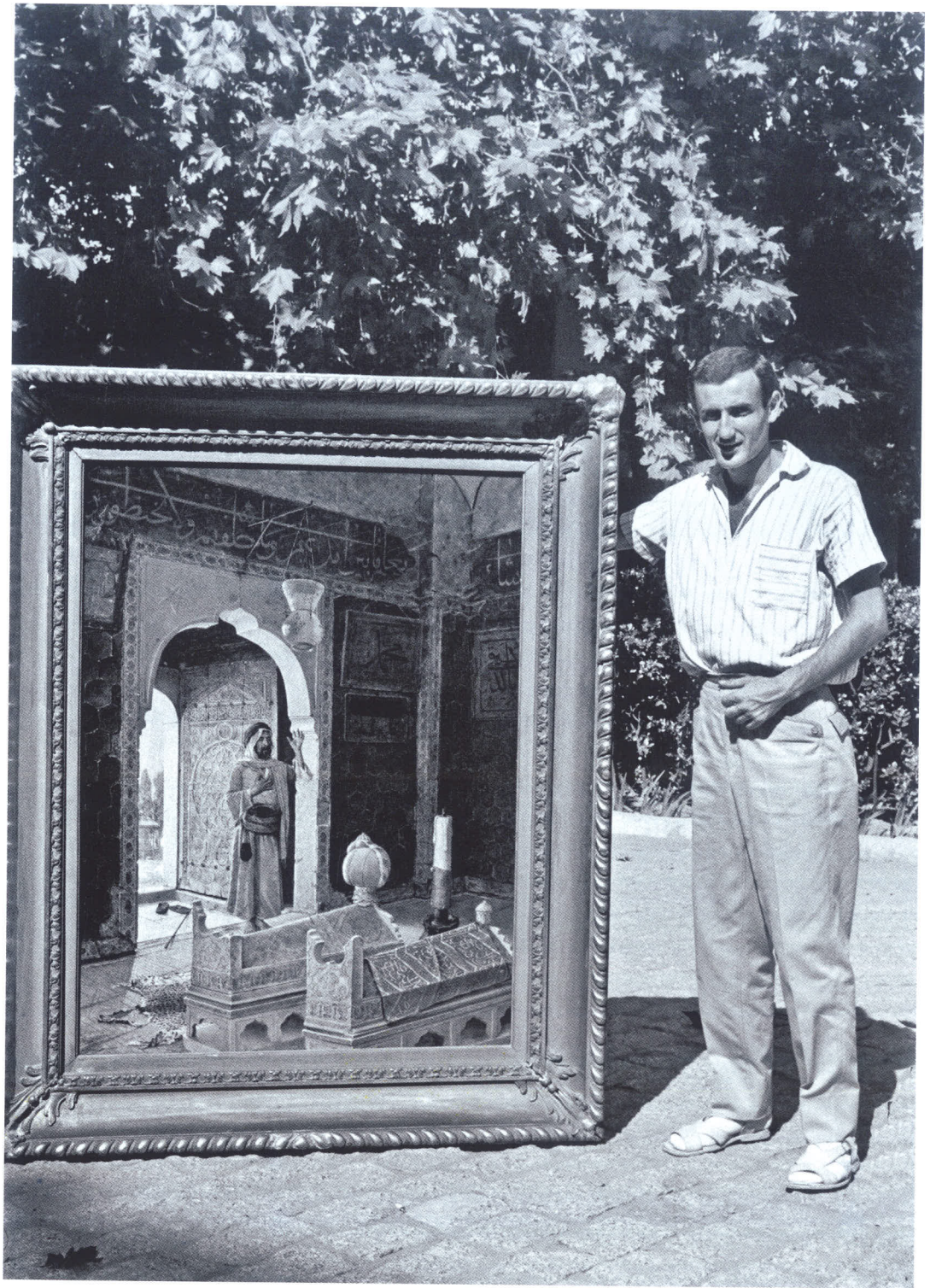
At the opening of Belgrade Modern Arts Museum Devrim Erbil participated as the commissary of the Turkish Section for the plastic arts exhibition titled "International Belgrade 77". Some of the exhibited works were also selected from the Istanbul Painting and Sculpture collection in attempt to promote Turkish Art. There he met many famous artists and was subsequently appointed as a commissary of an exhibition titled "Republican Era Turkish Painting" held by the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Sofia, in 1980 and worked as a curator for "Contemporary Turkish Painting" in Kuwait also organised by the MoF in 1983.

He was elected as head of Visual Artists Association and gave Basic Art Education, Design and Art History lectures at the Applied Industrial Arts Faculty in 1975.

1979 was a very remarkable year for the Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum. Closed for several years the museum reopened with the appointment of Devrim Erbil as director on May 24th. Erbil speaks of this adventure: “We had meetings on the 100th anniversary of Atatürk’s birth and talked about the matter. Hüseyin Gezer was the director of the museum in 1976. He was at the end of his tether and held a meeting on a rainy day to declare closure of the museum. The most significant pieces of Turkish art were in there. He’d complained of the impossibility of running a museum under these circumstances. He gave this decision based on this idea. He assumed a powerful reaction as if Louvre would be closed. But no there was no reaction. Neither the intellectuals nor the media. Nobody at all. They appointed me as the director of this closed museum merely because I was directing those Art Festivities. Aydın Ayan and Kemal İskender were my assistants. Within those events we organised very important projects. Another emotional bond of mine was this: Museum was opened on September 20th in 1937. Atatürk was ill at the time. Halil Dikmen took him and Ülkü (Atatürk’s adopted daughter) around the museum. She was a little girl back then. There are photographs of that day. And I was born on September 16th 1937. I identified with it. I started working with great enthusiasm. No fire alarm, no staff. Akbank General Manager Hamit Belli was printing posters. I formed a museum association with the participation of people like İsmail Tunalı, Beral Madra, Sebla Eczacıbaşı, Gül Derman, Prof. Nurettin Sözen, Ayşe Kulin, Dr. İhsan Fahri. We had 1600 visitors per day. Closing a museum is easy but opening it is difficult. It was martial law headed by General Naci Şekerefeli and even he supported us. The first time I went up to him I said: “We need to introduce today’s living art to the visitors of Topkapi Palace Museum. We must represent the contemporary face of the Republic.” He gave a great support. Organised the cleaning of the backyard. There we held open-air exhibitions and organised conferences.”²⁶ The success of opening the museum is critical since the museum was closed and re-opened many times throughout its history. It had become a perished institution. The following year, Devrim Erbil pioneered the establishment of Painting and Sculpture Association. Headed by Leyla Belli, the association with the cooperation of Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum decided to organise an exhibition event to support contemporary art and artists. Thus Contemporary Artists Istanbul Outdoor Exhibitions were held in the court of Istanbul Archaeology Museum as an extension of Open Air Exhibition organised by Istanbul Archaeology Museum Fan Club between 1974-77. (The first three of the exhibitions were held outdoors with the aim to provide opportunity for different applications; but this idea was ditched as the artworks could not be protected from the elements. Then the title of the exhibition was changed to Contemporary Artists Istanbul Exhibition.)

Devrim Erbil directed the museum until April 29th 1982. He had troubles within the stressful days following the coup d’état on September 12th 1980. He speaks of his memories: “You cannot believe the things I experienced! There were denuncements and complaints. When Hadi Bara’s Atatürk bust made by was taken indoors to be cleaned witnesses thought it was put away. They jailed me in Gayrettepe blindfolded. At that time you were detained for three months and there was nothing anybody could do. They raided my home at the same time. I stayed there for 24 hours. I was a victim of denouncement. Orhan Şahinler and Cihat Aral came to pick me up. Naci Pasha summoned us the next day. He asked; “Why didn’t they inform me instantly?” He said “Look! There are three other denuncements!” One of them is a student’s parent. One is a retired tutor from the Academy. But the other is someone still teaching at the Academy... I won’t disclose his name. Supposedly it was about Orhan Şahinler, Hüseyin Gezer was a red communist. They checked Sadun Ersin. There were complaints from the Mayor’s office. The place was where we held Art Writers Association meetings. When Aziz Nesin and his friends came over they investigated the presence of left-wingers. Files were opened just because Osman

Devrim Erbil, 1980
During the management of
Istanbul Painting and
Sculpture Museum

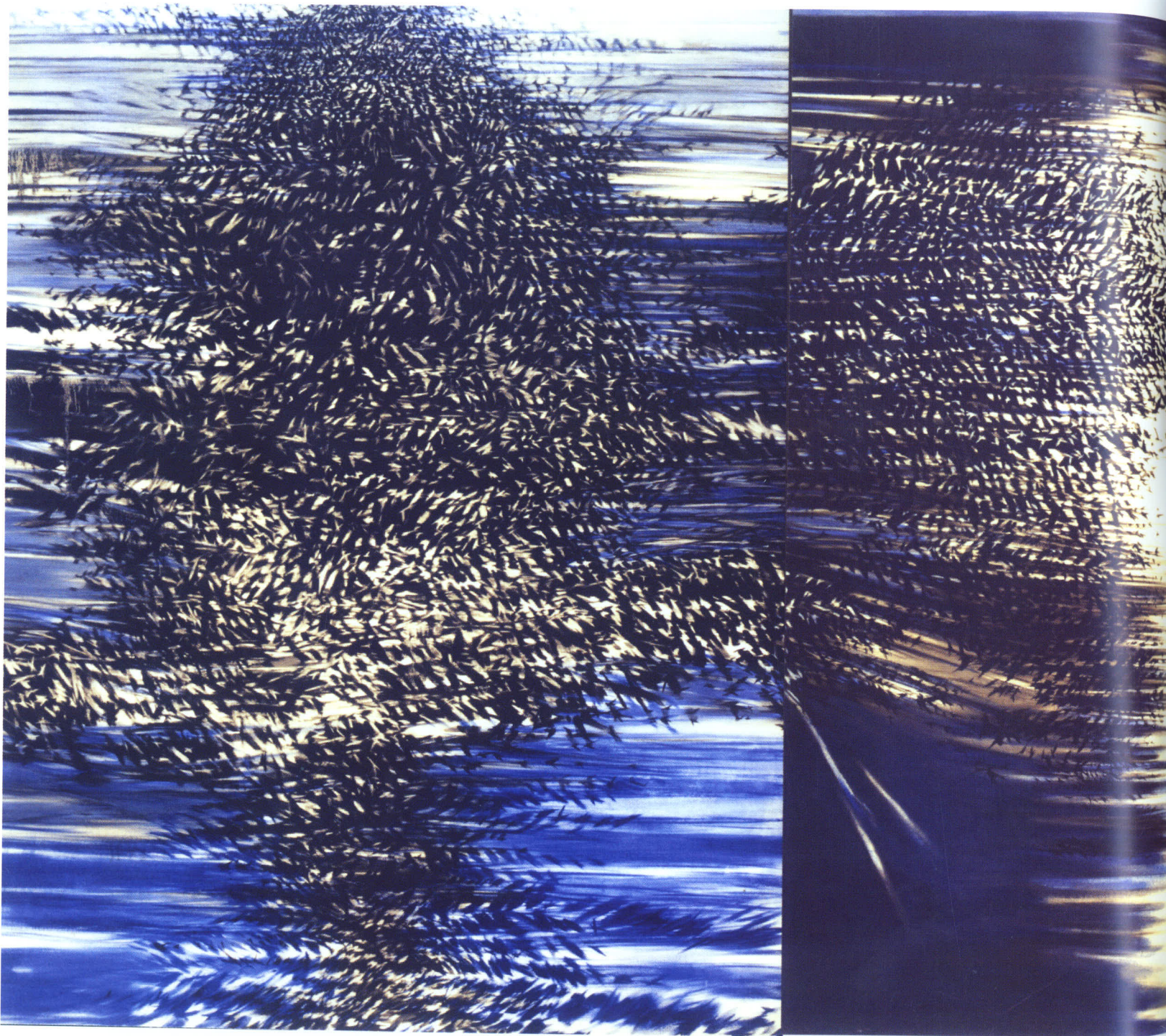


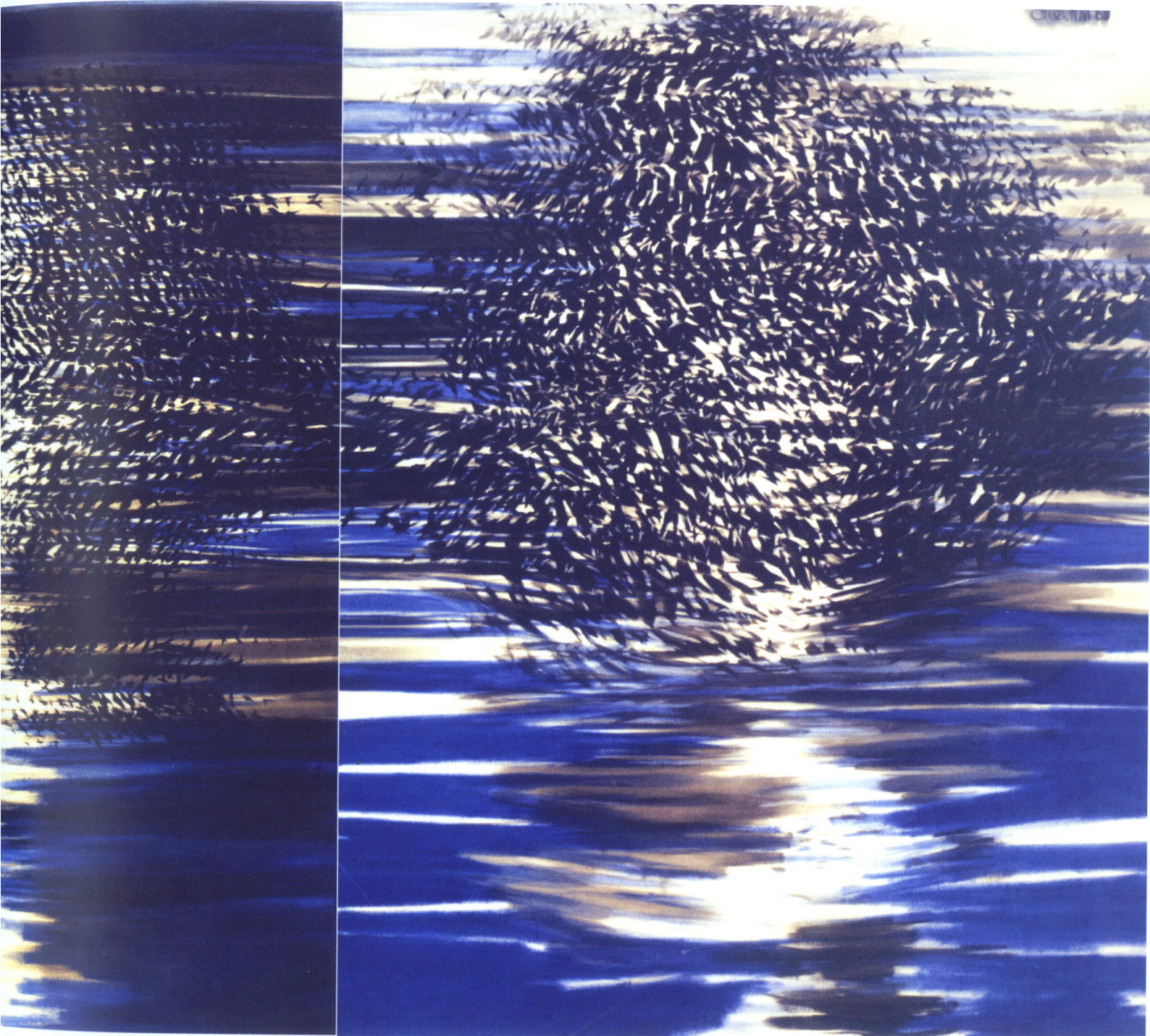
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Variations on an Anatolian
Town Experiences, 1963
oil on canvas
60 x 80 cm

Abstraction (tryptyque), 1989
oil on canvas
183 x 450 cm
Yildiz University
Collection





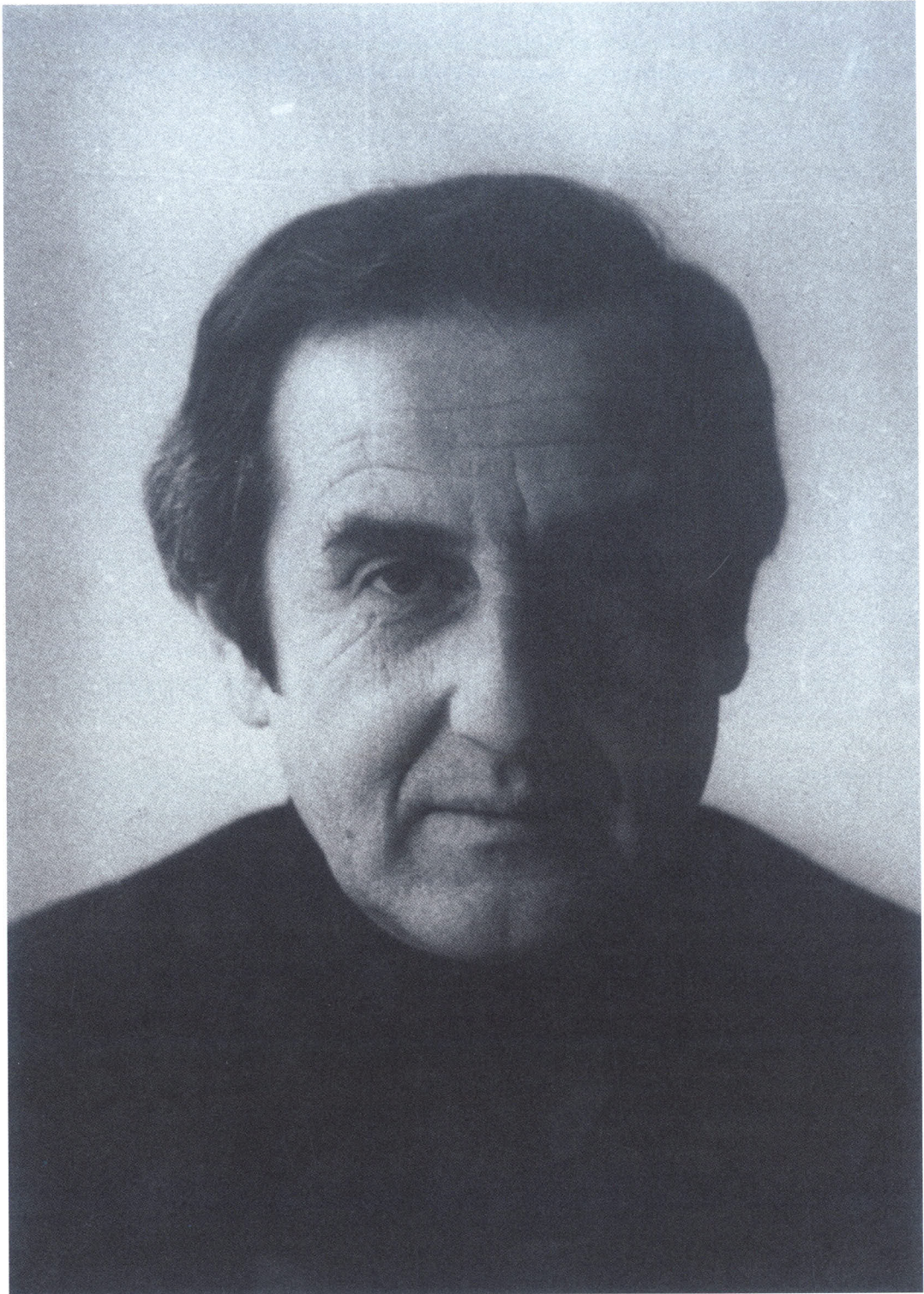
Dinç had a sculpture with chains and we were exhibited Mehmet Aksoy's artworks in the garden. Incredible things happened to me."²⁷

Erbil's success at Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum, his rendering the place a living venue in a very short time had drawn attention and Ankara offered him the position of Fine Arts General Director. After some hesitation he conferred the subject with family friend Aykut Kazancıgil. In the end he turned down the offer deciding to concentrate on his artistic personality.

Devrim Erbil created his works within the tradition of American Pop Art. His work "Self-portrait" made using monotype print method in 1980 was created using a black and white photograph of the artist and was one of Erbil's first works in Pop Art. Superimposing this portrait with his tree series he composed the branches of the tree with his respiratory system. The photograph, the source to both of Erbil's paintings, is also a reference to Andy Warhol. Because Andy Warhol's black and white photograph was repeated with its pose and posture. Erbil was loyal to Pop Art to a great extent and came together with the masters of Pop Art. Being in the same photograph with İsmail Tunalı, Robert Rauchenberg, Özer Kabaş, Kemal İskender is a proof of this.

After achieving professor degree in 1981, Devrim Erbil became the victim of YÖK (The Council of Higher Education) Law. Speaking a foreign language was the precondition to be appointed as a professor. Erbil learned Italian for two years at the Italian Cultural Centre. There was a 'triple decree' at the time meaning that the professor appointments had to be confirmed by the school, YÖK and Kenan Evren. It was the article 44-B of YÖK Law. The cancellation of one approval meant that Devrim Erbil was temporarily discharged. Dinçer Erimez and Murat Eriç were also in the same boat. To satirise the situation there was a name for the academicians in that status: "Proçent" meaning in between associate and professor. Erbil's assignment as a professor demanded he had to go to Eskişehir and then to Uludağ University in Bursa as a dean but this never happened, as he had no intention of leaving Academy. Later, in 1985 he was appointed Vocational School Restoration Department to Yıldız Technical University. Later he received his professorship from the Mimar Sinan University and was assigned to be Head of Painting Department at Mimar Sinan University between 1985-87. In 1988 he was appointed as Head of Fine Arts Department at Yıldız University and became director of "Serigraphy" opened in scope of Yıldız University Vocational School Technical Programmes in 1989. Appointed to Mimar Sinan University Fine Arts, Performing and Visual Arts Department's Cinema-TV Erbil, gave lectures on "Visual Aesthetics, Art History, Contemporary Art and Interpretation and Fine Arts" in 1989. He was appointed as professor in 1990 and, the same year became assistant dean at the Fine Arts Faculty for two years.

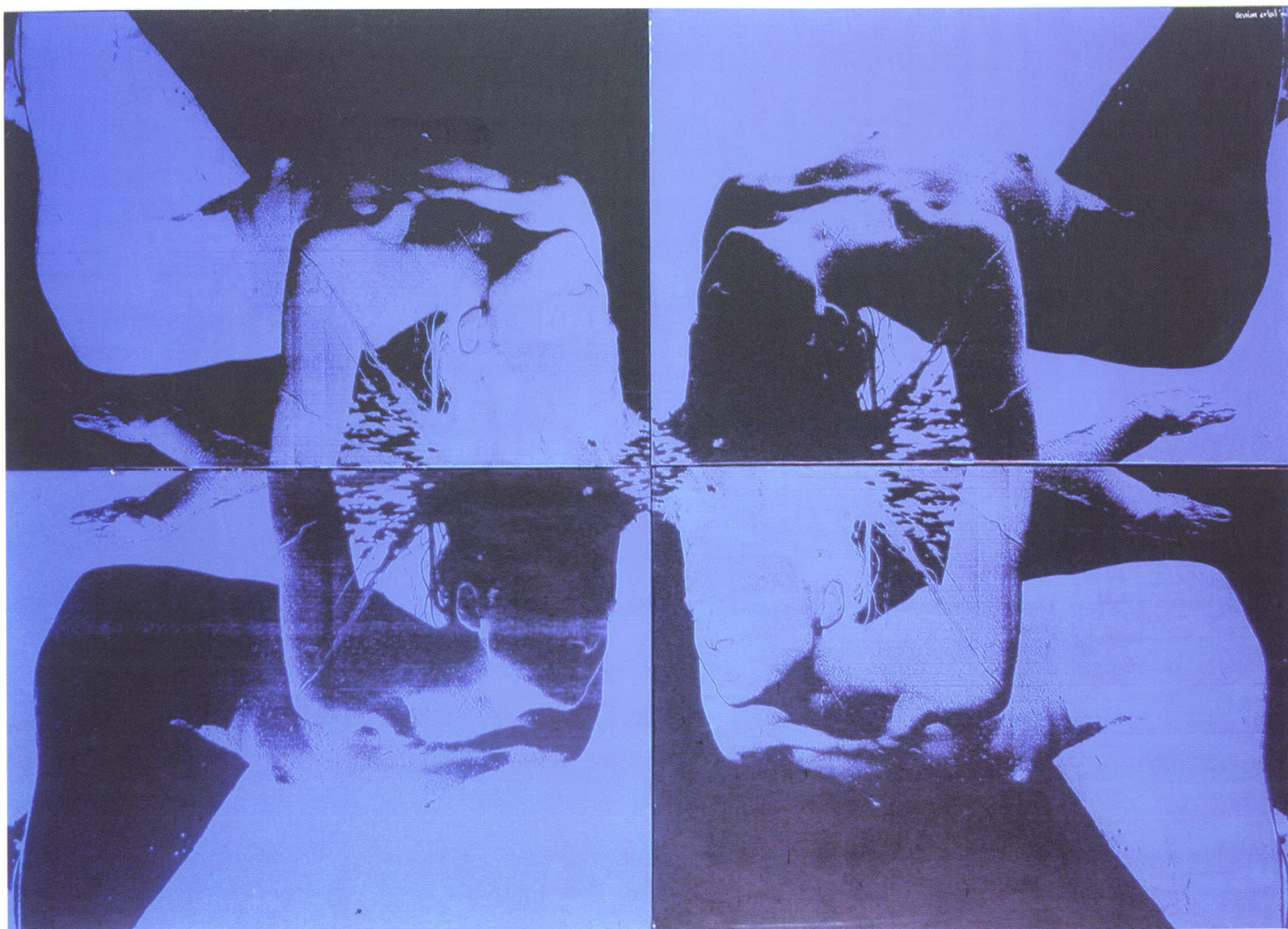
Devrim Erbil, 1990





Self-portrait, 1990
mixed media on canvas
140 x 100 cm

Flying, 1990
mixed media on canvas
100 x 140 cm



Blue Relation, 1991
mixed media on canvas
140 x 100 cm



Honoured with the title of State Artist in 1991, Erbil received Kyrgyzstan National Science and Arts Founder Member Honour in 1998 and Sedat Simavi Visual Arts award from the Turkish Journalists Society. This is Erbil's opinion on the controversial state artist title:

"I was a jury member for Adana Cement Factory's Painting Contest when I heard that I was chosen for the title. Ergin İnan whispered me the news. There were four of us: Ali Çelebi, Sabri Berkel, Turan Erol and me. The basic criterion was to hold an international award. I had received the Imperial Court Award 1st Prize at the Tehran Biennial in 1966 and was worth of the 2nd Prize at Alexandria Biennial in 1972. All the Mediterranean countries participated. A Spanish artist got the 1st Prize and Yvaral and I shared the award. He was the son of Vassarely, a well-known Pop Art artist. After that the condition of holding an international award was scrapped. The state seemed more conservative. An award was given by the state but they said, "do not accept it!" I think that was wrong. Why would I be against that? I can't be an antagonist of the state. I didn't request anything on behalf of being a state artist. What did I get out of being a state artist? We are taken to VIP hall at the airport. And when dead, they send a band playing at the funeral. But I won't be there to see it. If I am not mistaken some hotels apply discount but I never attempted using it. A diplomatic passport might be given. Even in Egypt they give privileges to State Artists. They are given a huge place with a courtyard and all. They say "it is yours' you can do an atelier or a residence whatever you feel like. That is Egypt's understanding of encouragement. That was an honorary award. But what can be done as encouragement reward here? Now they miss the meaning of the artist. There are already singers with that title. The definition of being an artist has been hollowed out."²⁸

In 1995 Devrim Erbil opens an exhibition with student artists from his atelier and organised a panel on art education in scope of this exhibition. Erbil became an associate in 1970 entitling him to the right of giving independent lectures. Completing a quarter of a century as a teacher Erbil thinks he needs to give account of what he's done over this period. That's why he organises this exhibition-panel. In his book "25 Years in Art Education", a supplement to this event he wrote: "A quarter of century has passed since the foundation of our atelier. More than two hundred artist candidates were educated here. I later shared this responsibility with my friends at the atelier. Today our atelier is one of the five ateliers functioning inside 114-year-old well-established and traditional institution – the Fine Arts Academy Painting Department. When I became an associate in 1970 my duty as a teacher at Nurullah Berk's atelier, who passed away that year, gained another dimension. This was a State Academy and of course we were obliged to provide art in accordance with a curriculum. In a sense personal attitudes and tendencies were limited. Although the atelier was practicing a common curriculum the atelier was considered different because of the management and tutors. Yet this did not mean unlimited freedom. Concept of academism is generally normative, monotonous and dogmatic. There is this principle of continuity of tradition with the repetition of known truths. Whereas contemporary and creative art can only be attained by transcending those barriers. Those were my conflicts when I was given the responsibility of educating artists independently. Besides we were in an atmosphere in which artworks could not go beyond western spectatorship for the sake of being contemporary. I learned the significance of creating enthusiasm within art education from my tutor Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu. The strict rules of academism could be overcome by adding love, sincerity, attention and respect to personality. Rather than only transferring current Western trends I adopted the idea of embracing the universe and the human being based on fundamental principles of art. This must be the source of creativity and uniqueness. 25th year exhibitions was organised in order to examine to what extent this idea reflected on education. In a sense these exhibitions are self-criticism. It is a responsibility towards history and time. These exhibitions are an example of working spirit, love for the atelier, friendship and cooperation. It has always been a pleasure for me to work with my students and to be together with them. Most of them are precious painters now. If I ever contributed on their training I feel honoured. This is the meaning of life."²⁹

Artists taught by Erbil, academicians, masters or art or proficiency students graduating from Devrim Erbil's atelier participating the event titled "The Masters of the Master Quarter of a Century in Art" included: Fuat Acaroğlu, Murat Mete Ağyar, Murat Akagündüz, Merih Akçam, Muzaffer Akyol, Mehmet Alagöz, Sadık Altınok, Cihat Aral, Bala Arıduru, Memiş Aslan, Nüvit Artu, Lolita Asil, Tomur Atagök, Aydın Ayan, Can Ayan, Şen Aytaş, Zerrin Arıkaya, Eda Bahadınlı, Şadan Gençbeyen, Mahmut Bozkurt, Bike Burak, Faruk Cimok, Sibel Çakar, İsmet Çavuşoğlu, Yıldız Çiftçi, Emin Çizenel, Tanju Demirci, Mustafa Dulda, Rafet Ekiz, Zerrin Elmas, Devrim Erbil, Gülsün Erbil, Serap M. Eyrenci, Selçuk Fergökçe, Bahri Genç, Umut Germeç, Selçuk Günay, Taner Güven, Dilek Işıksel, Türksal İnce, Kemal İskender, Yalçın Karayağız, Gülseren Kayalı, Şeref Keskin, Aysun Kırdar, Bahar Kocaman, Temur Köran, Rıza Kuruüzümcü, Mehmet Mahir, Hüsnüye R. Mencek, Emin Mozakoğlu, Mustafa O. Müftüoğlu, Taylan S. Oğuzkan, İrfan Okan, Nihal Okçetin, Aydemir Ökmen, Hüseyin Özdemir, Ahmet Özel, Ayşe Özel, Cumhur Özer, Feza T. Özer, Çiğdem Pakcan, Türkan S. Rador, Gonca Sezer, Sevil Soyer, H. Ercan Süelden, Cem Şahin, Sibel Şems, Sevgi Tan, Nuri Temizsoylu, Hülya Toksöz, Füsün Selen Tunca, Mehmet Uluhan, Alp Tamer Ulukılıç, Mete Utkuğu, Demet Yersel, Sevim Yeşilbursa, Mehpare A. Yiğit, Asaf Zeki Yüksel.³⁰ At the panel organised in scope of the exhibition event Devrim Erbil states that the Academy was going through a transformation in 1970 due to the retirement of Cevat

Ismail Tunalı,
Devrim Erbil,
Robert Rauchenberg,
Özer Kabaş,
Kemal İskender
Istanbul Painting and
Sculpture Museum, 1996

Devrim Erbil, 1998
Honorary Founding Member of the
National Academy of Sciences and
Arts in Kyrgyzstan



War of Independence and Reforms
(tryptyque, center panel), 1973
oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm



Variations for Nature, 1990
silk screen on paper
50 x 70 cm





Dereli, Nurullah Berk, Ali Çelebi and Zeki Faik İzer who were replaced by Adnan Çoker, Özdemir Altan, Dinçer Erimez and himself. There was Neşet Günal's atelier at the time. Those four new associates started a research initiative to build a new education system. According to Erbil continuing academic education by a single person's criteria was replaced by common basic principles. Along with masterpieces - the source of nature and art education, those basic principles included the identity of the student and a belief that it needs to be developed. Erbil was a strong believer of teamwork in the atelier. And if this team agreed on the basic principles Erbil thought the identity of the atelier would emerge naturally. Thus, students graduating from his atelier had a common denominator and a certain team spirit despite their different styles and artistic-aesthetic considerations. The secret to this is Erbil's teaching, which was also expressed by the students in that panel. For example this is how one of Erbil's students, İrfan Okan expressed his experience: "We were offered a chance at Devrim Erbil atelier. We had the opportunity to meet several tutors. In a sense there were tutors coming to give lectures. They transposed their own individual approaches. We had the chance to utilise them. In this context I can say I was educated from almost all tutors. Looking back I now see that we were taught by twenty or more tutors at the Academy. We owe it to Mr. Devrim Erbil."³¹ Emin Çizenel, another of his students adds: "I can easily say that we witnessed the most experimental approaches with no rules. An openness which can be explained as without limiting a candidate painter's search for identity. Very similar to what I experienced at academies in different countries."³² These words underline Erbil's tolerant and open-minded education system. Erbil already talked about the Academy's post-YÖK status and his suffering from YÖK law, sending him from pillar to post between new Mimar Sinan University and Yıldız Technical University due to the academic staff issue. He had a confession regarding this: "I would like the young generations to have more saying on education. If only democratisation trends that began in art education much earlier than any other university had not been limited today. Youngsters have a certain energy, a know-how. Therefore I believe that education with the young generation would contribute utterly different dimensions to all of us. Nevertheless when the academy became a university and began to deliver certain titles, a suspicious, timorous attitude started amongst people in this institution. However, I would like academic education to unify with the young generation's enthusiasm rather than fighting for those academic titles. I would like it better if I could connect with my students to a wider extent. It would delight me if they could study in a better environment. As a conclusion I would love to reconsider the issue from a different angle, in five or ten years, putting a distance for a certain time and then have the opportunity to look at things, at education and the world from a different point of view. That is my dream. Just like art. You never stop to long for being more competent in art education!"³³

Devrim Erbil worked with a vast variety of materials from canvas to imprint, from wood, ceramics, stained glass and mosaics to carpet. Having a father was from Uşak, in Western Anatolia carpet is a special material for the artist. He distinctly remembers his aunts weaving carpets in their house when he was three or four years old. This sensitivity reflected on him, too. When Erbil had his circumcision ceremony with his cousin Dilaver in 1947 one of his aunts gave them a carpet as present depicting a donkey and two camels although she'd never draw a picture in her life. After so many years Devrim Erbil thought about contemporary artists like Vasarely, Mannesiér, Bissiéw weaving carpets and questioned why Turkish art had not utilised this. Finally he established a carpet atelier at the Academy with Neşet Günel. But the carpet atelier did not attract the attention they hoped for. Özdemir Altan was the only person using this atelier other than Devrim Erbil. Erbil still orders his paintings to be weaved as carpets. The women's weaving his compositions as carpets at Balıkesir People's Education Centre in 2010 for instance...

Devrim Erbil also worked on engravings. According to him his passion for the art comes from his linear style and engraving's contribution to the popularity of art. His tutor Bedri Rahmi's being a sophisticated artist who works with different materials has an effect on Erbil's liking and inclining towards various methods: "Lines have always been significant parallel to my own painting technique and approach to painting. One of the best applications for lines are engravings. I started to work with it during my first years as an assistant tutor after I admired the engravings of Ercüment Kalmık whom I loved and respected as my father. The late Kalmık made extraordinarily beautiful, large sized imprints on linoleum. Their moulds are with me now. He printed 3 to 5 items from those moulds. Because for imprints you need an atelier. My tutor could not manage large scale production under the current circumstances. He numbered them up to 50, thinking that he could complete the series one day. More so what would happen if he could print 50 items then? I mean the imprints are not completed. However in original imprint such as engravings, lithography and serigraphy the important thing is to complete the series. Because the main objective is to complete the series... Print has a feature to become widespread. Artwork is one and only. But if the same artwork has 50 or 100 numbered imprints, someone unable to afford the original artwork but still after owning an original imprint numbered and signed by the artist can do so. This is easier than acquiring the original painting. My inclination towards imprint art is based on this as well... Making art widespread and reaching more people... I love imprint because someone can like and acquire it. That's why I gave my years in to it. And I will be occupied with making imprints as long as I live. Moreover I like the application methods and I worked with several different techniques. There are two reasons for this: First, the opportunity it serves for several people to see the painting as it is in engraving. (...) Secondly, being Bedri Rahmi's student played a great role on this. When I was a student he made a mosaic board sized 200 m² for the 1958 World Expo. I worked as team leader from the very beginning to the end and learned mosaic technique. I acquired the enthusiasm for mosaics when I worked with the tutor on several works such as Doğubank İşhanı. His love for "Large Scale Painting" permeated into me. After finishing school I made several artworks using the mosaic technique. Then I met ceramics. In 1970's I won the ceramics contest for Turkish Embassy in Lisbon. I made a 2 by 25 meters long, 50 m² ceramic board. It was a painting of Istanbul using the map-painting technique. Additionally I made many ceramics and mosaics for several official buildings and banks in Ankara between 1970 and 1980. Famous stained glass artists applied my drawings for their works in several banks or private spaces. With all these works I aimed for engraving, mosaic, ceramics and stained glass to be seen as artwork by many people."³⁴

Neşet Günel and
Devrim Erbil, 1991

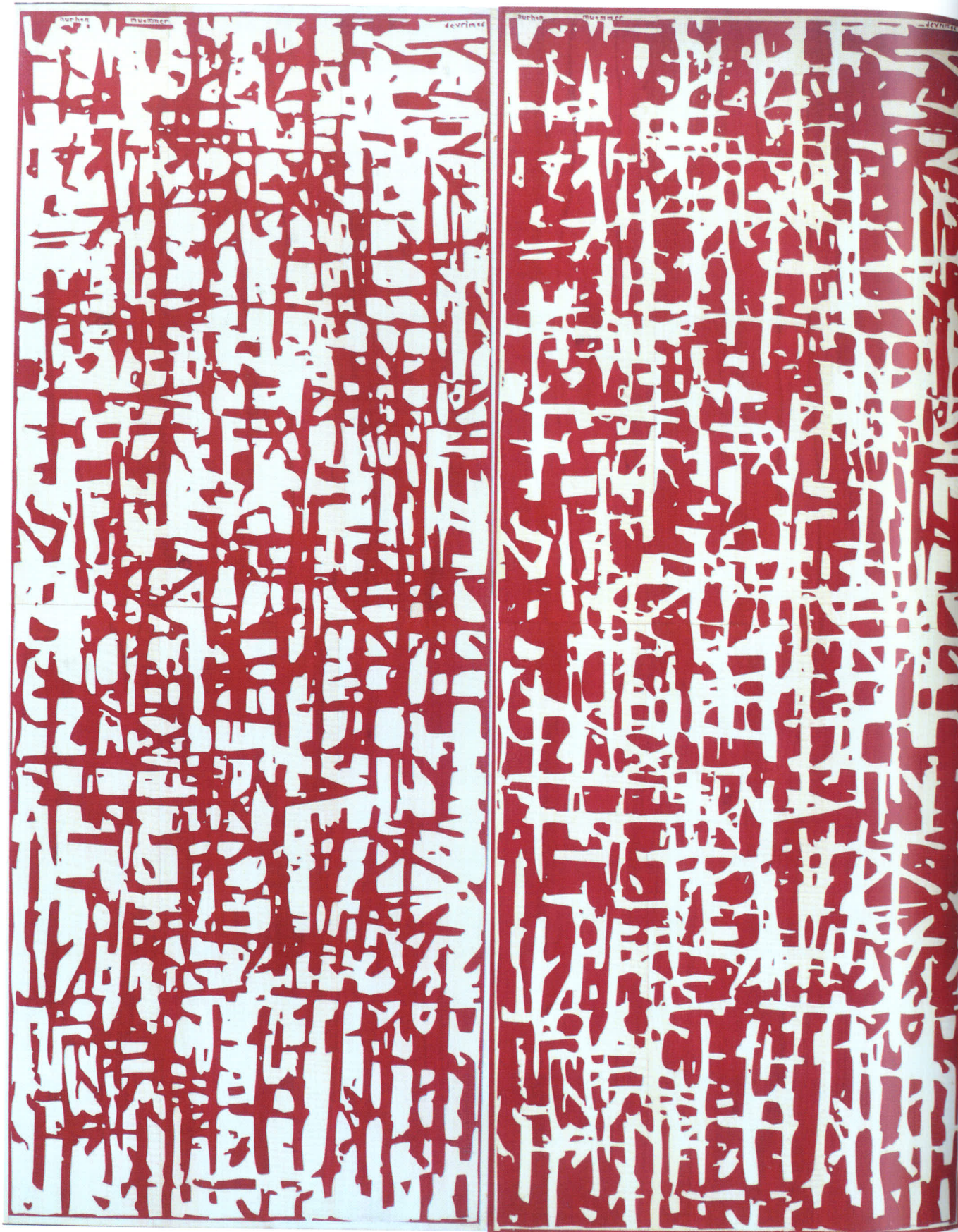
Abstract Variation 5, 2009
carpet-painting
230 x 145 cm



Call for Love, 1991
carpet-painting
165 x 185 cm



Rhythmic
Abstraction, 2006
wood marquetry
130 x 200 cm





Devrim Erbil stands out for founding Turkey's first monographic museum. He opened Devrim Erbil Museum of Contemporary Arts in Balıkesir, his birthplace on May 24th 2004. By the 2000's banks, private institutions, individuals started to show a tendency to open museums for their private collections. Single collection museums and monographic museums started to grow in numbers. Selçuk Yaşar Museum in Izmir, Sadberk Hanım Museum in Istanbul, Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Istanbul Modern, Pera Museum were established as collection museums but then some of them turned to be more than that. Burhan Doğançay Museum, Devrim Erbil Museum of Contemporary Arts, Şefik Bursalı Museum, Feyhaman Duran and Güzin Duran Museum at Istanbul University can be shown as examples of monographic museums. It is possible to include Hüsamettin Koçan's Baksı Museum, Süleyman Saim Tekcan's Istanbul Graphic Arts Museum (IMOGA) amongst institutionalised collections. The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present by Karsten Schubert signifies that both monographic and single collection museums take place at the very edge of museum typology. According to Schubert, successful single collection museums ordered to an understanding architect by an individual with inspiration are exceptions just like single artist museums. Schubert refers that monographic museums are owned by key individuals, who influenced art history in a different way, catching the imagination of people with their life style. He gives the most outstanding examples of this as Musée Picasso in Paris and Warhol Museum at Pittsburgh.³⁵ The status of monographic museums and single collection museums considered as exceptions by Schubert is just the opposite of his theory. Both types of museums are exceptions but with a difference: Both artist museums and single collection museums refer to the absence of a comprehensive museums and to a great extent try to fill this gap.

Throughout his art life Devrim Erbil was at the periphery of certain themes: Life in an Anatolian Town, Passion for Nature, Interpretation of Nature, Trees, Birds, Istanbul, Rhythmic Composition, etc. Still Erbil has a denominator as rhythm whatever theme he focuses on. According to Tomur Atagök, this rhythm is his signature, character and vibrations coming from the surface of this artwork to the spectator.³⁶ The rhythm of Erbil's art is based on repetitions and repetitions remind of decoration of Islamic arts based on horror vacui. In most of his paintings Devrim Erbil abides to the geometric compositions of traditional Ottoman architecture, decorative arts and logic of stacking, then combining it with an abstract expressionist exposition.

A new space manifests itself in Devrim Erbil's paintings. Özer Kabaş, a colleague of Erbil drew attention to this: "Another significant phase in Devrim's paintings, is his trial of a new place by keeping hidden the flatness unique to painting surface itself. This determines the period BIRDS. In this period's paintings, a strange, positive spatial dilemma takes place. Abstract birds ornamenting the painting space as a straight visual texture carry the feeling of a space that denies being decorative only. We can interpret this breath of fresh air for the paintings' surface of the period in terms of building some new acrobatics with European painting tradition. I don't see any harm in that. While Devrim's paintings improve issues of form and space skilfully within the following period, it already invites to new confrontations for content and form."³⁷

Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's influence on Devrim Erbil's art and his understanding of art is undeniable. Devrim Erbil says that miniature and folk art were frequently mentioned in Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu atelier. He was attracted by miniature because according to him the distinction of Eastern artist and Western artist is evident there. The reason for that is Eastern philosophy and Western philosophy being essentially different from each other. Erbil underlines that East is inclined to create images out of reality and represent reality through images rather than capturing the reality; one is inclined into analysis whereas the other is into synthesis. Perspective, anatomy, the phenomenon of space, light and shade elements which are valid since Renaissance in Europe are not seen in Eastern art, yet this does not mean that East has no unique art of itself. He expresses that he wants to seize this uniqueness in that sense. Rather than values of Western painting Erbil adopts condensed perspective, surface painting, groups organised with nuances but in a hierarchical logic of Eastern art. With his own words, he tries to see how an object, an idea participates at the phenomenon as a symbol not as a real form. This was the fundamental basis for his tendency towards abstract painting in the second half of 1950's.³⁸

Made with colourful Indian ink, Erbil's sceneries from Balıkesir, Akçay, Havran he created in 1952 when he was a student foretell that he would be a defender of a linear surface painting. In the second half of 1950's Erbil's inclination towards abstract, was occupied with surface painting in those years and made research based on colour. "Villagers" and "Fruit Pickers" are examples of that period. Heading for research on Klee and Mondrian towards 1960's, Erbil started to create abstract urban sceneries in 1962-63. He talks about his love for Klee as follows: "According to Paul Klee our aim was "to make the invisible visible" and we seized this progress at mid century. Paul Klee became a great master for me then. Even after exhibiting some of my works seeking certain rhythmic movements was considered as "Islamic Klee" by some critics. Later on along with primitive art and miniatures I discovered the structure of line into abstraction. And then I headed for expressing this line by colourful lines. I had felt these when I made drawings at the age of 14-15. It was the first time I discovered that the line acquires meaning by unifying with colour. An artist's attitude changes with knowledge but there are some unchangeable, fundamental things in one's nature. For instance my discovery of lines with my intuitions."³⁹ This linear attitude he talks about is characterised as textual by Adnan Turani.

Devrim Erbil and
Governor Utku Acun, 2002
Opening of Balıkesir Devrim Erbil
Museum of Contemporary Arts

Opening of Balıkesir
Devrim Erbil Museum of
Contemporary Arts

Prof. Dr. Necdet Hacıođlu
Rector of Balıkesir University

Utku Acun
Governor of Balıkesir

Prof. İsmet Vildan Alptekin
Rector of Mimar Sinan
Fine Arts University

Ziyaettin Tan
Mayor of Balıkesir

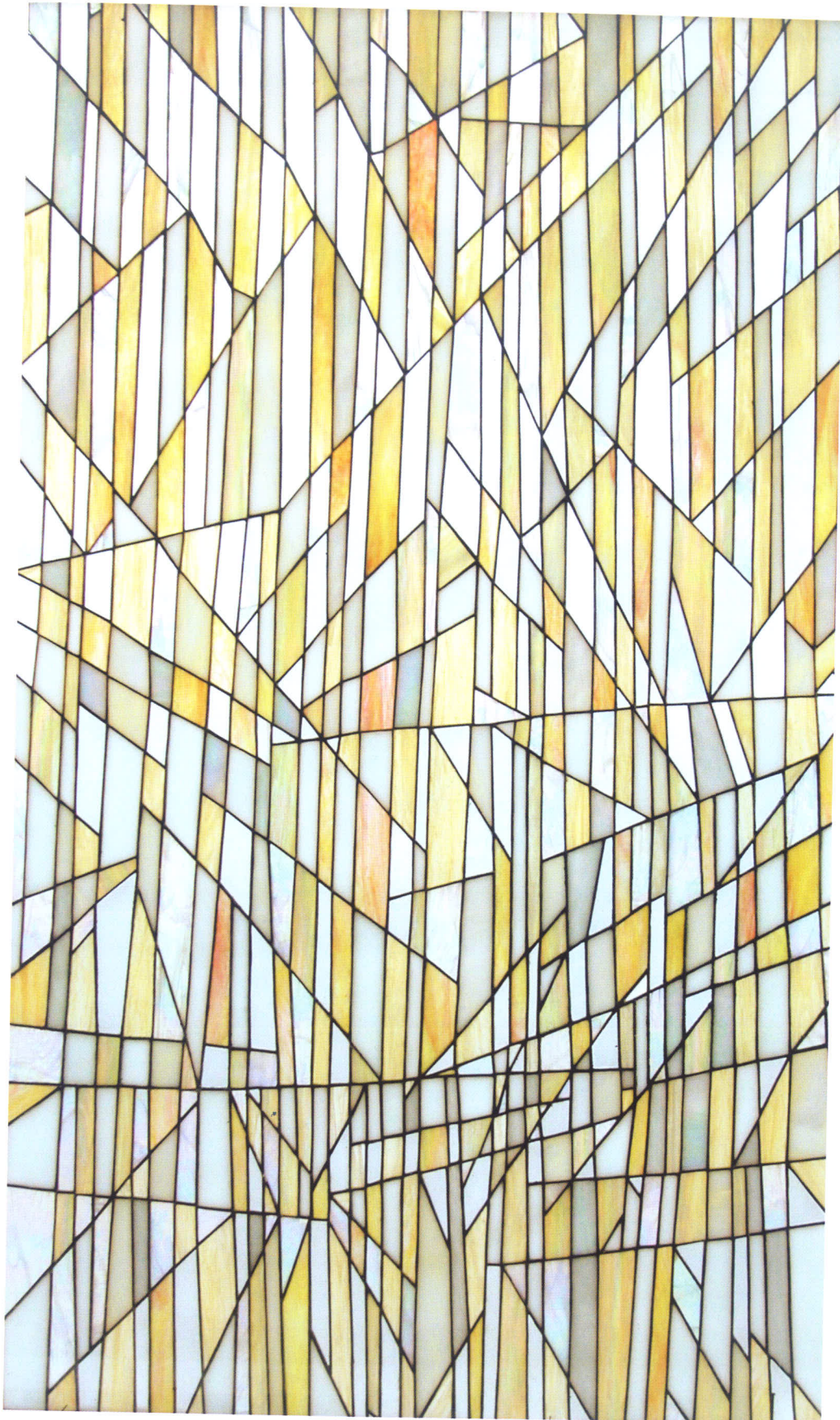
Devrim Erbil





Red Border, 2003
stained glass
121 x 73 cm

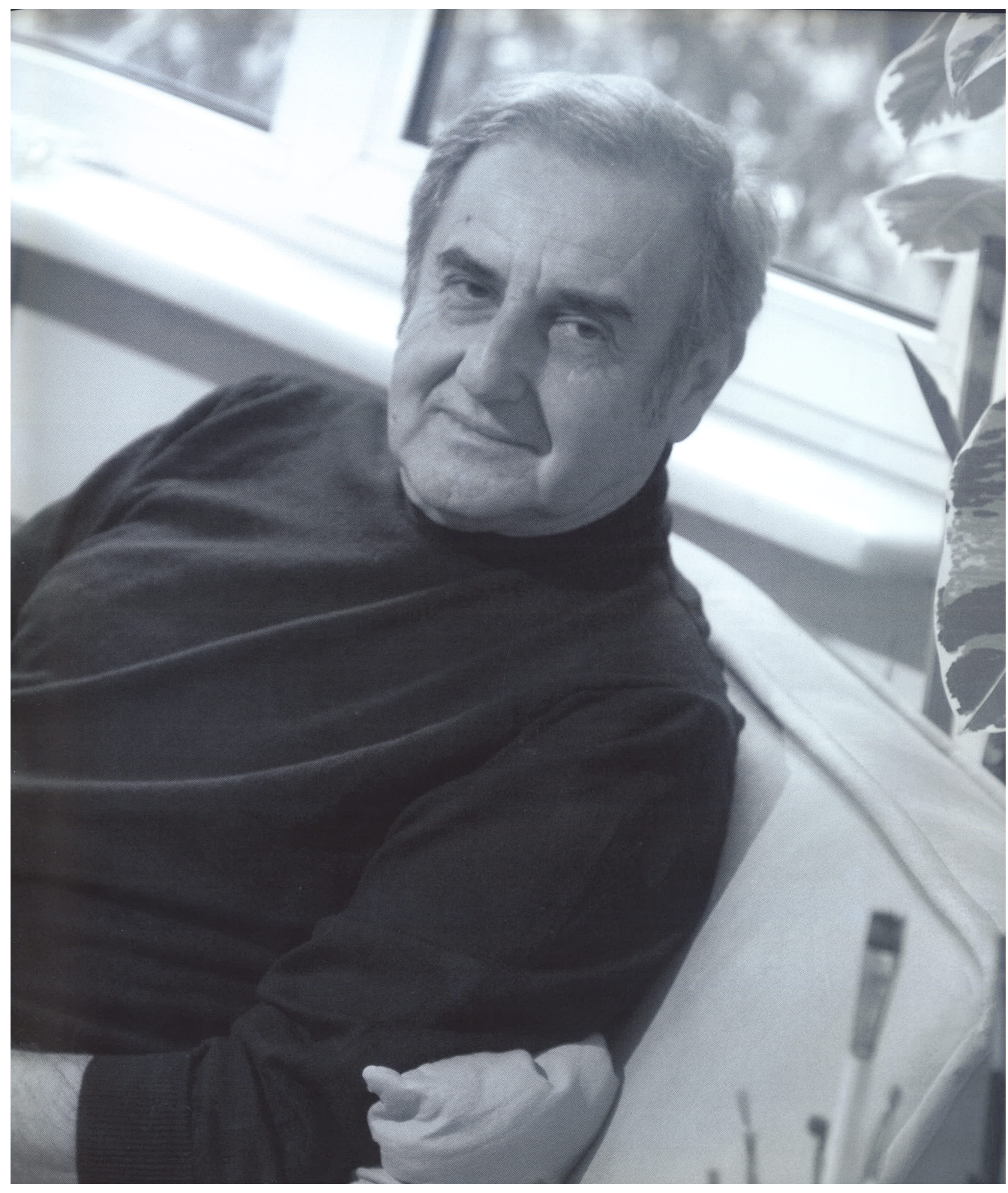




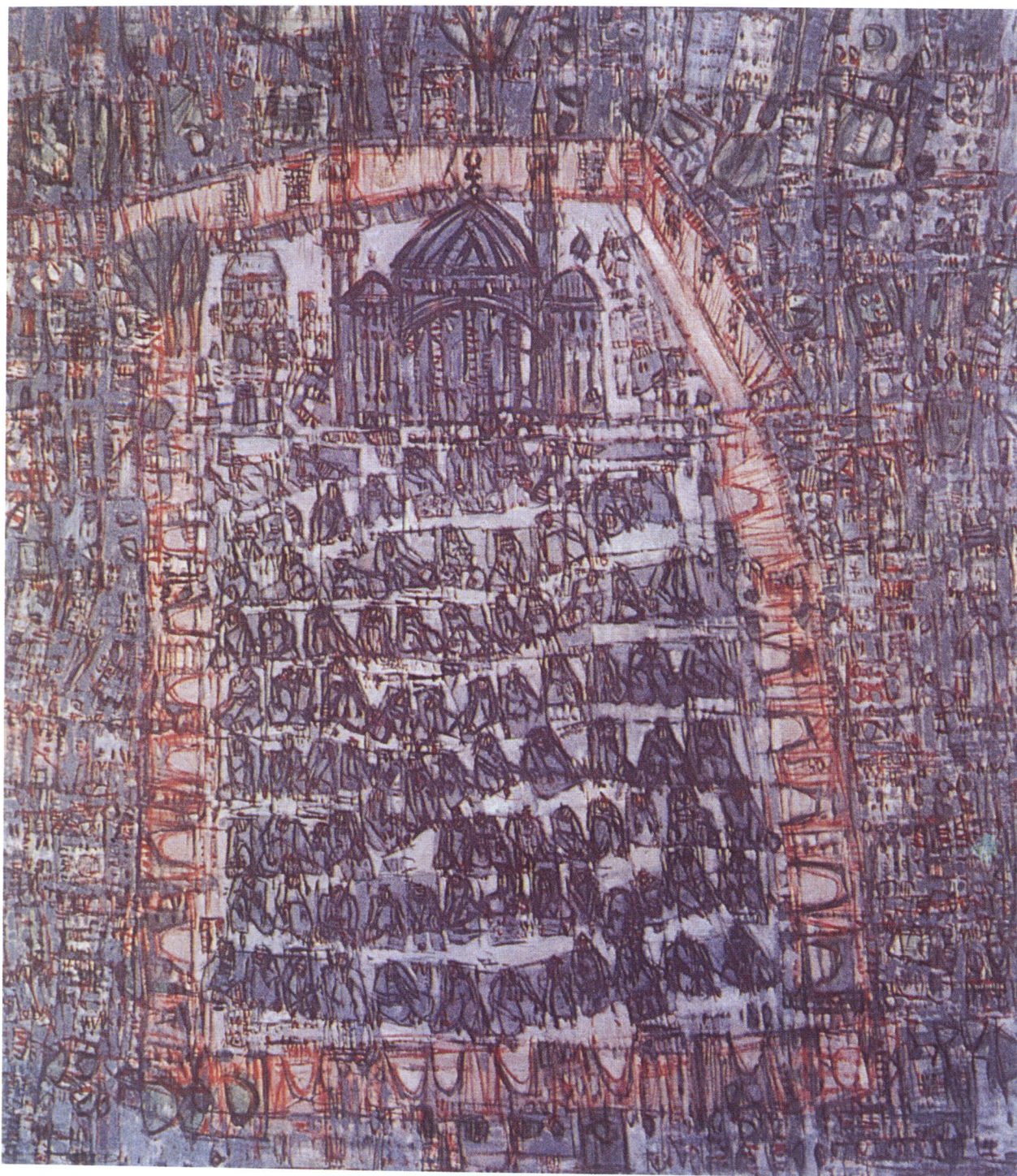
White Border, 2003
stained glass
121 x 73 cm

Turani states that those pictorial abstract urban compositions are the textual texture of his painting and aligning these textual notes laterally and horizontally on a flat surface is the most significant of Erbil's considerations on painting.⁴⁰ The themes or titles he used in the period between 1960 and 1970 are as follows: "Linear Rhythm", "Yellow-7", "Tree Passion", "Geometric Nature Abstraction", "Abstraction-2". These titles refer to essential element in Erbil's art that is rhythm.

Devrim Erbil, creates a painting titled "Holiday Prayer". This is a foreteller of his aerial viewed Istanbul sceneries, especially the historical peninsula scenes made with stacking logic. In 1970's Erbil continues abstractions with variations of colours blue, yellow, red and green. Following those abstractions he reached to the series "Trees" and "Birds" which he is so passionate about. "I am trying to catch that dynamic, that vibration. I depict the flapping of a bird's wings, flying and disappearing into the sky. I want to write poem by painting, want to write picturesque poems."⁴¹ These words reveal that his art is based on this enthusiasm and the feeling of rhythm. Influenced by American Pop Art in 1990's he composed his self-portrait and some anonymous figures on canvas with silk screening method. Still these figures are decorated with his birds just like his painting titled "Blue Yellow Red" dated 1990. In other words they gave the same feeling of rhythm to the audience again. If we look at Devrim Erbil's production process starting from 1952's, we see that lines determine the rhythmic setup in his art. Considering the line as an independent plastic element and putting it on the base of painting setup, Erbil stayed outside the traditional or academic attitude from the beginning. Perhaps it is possible to summarise his artistic attitude as standing against tradition within tradition. Because what Erbil does is to combine Western painting tradition by taking its fundamental methodology with the tradition of Islamic art, miniature art and folk art. Utilising the stacking aspect of miniature and parallel to Matrakçı Nasuh's urban sceneries Erbil has not avoided the repetition aspect of Islamic art. So much so that Erbil using the same setup for his compositions Erbil reminds this aspect of Islamic art by referring to his own paintings. Erbil's vast reservoir of materials from mosaics to ceramics; carpet to marquetry; marquetry to stained glass; canvas to imprint painting could be interpreted as his respect to folk art. Admiring folk art's capability of being popular, Devrim Erbil adopted popularity of art based on his two tutors (Fortunate painter Bedri Rahmi, Unfortunate painter Sırrı Özbay) and decided to be very productive throughout his art life. For Erbil, the painter of lines, the lines became verses, lines of poetry and his compositions became poems on their own. Today he has an entire corpus. His art life has been amidst the struggle of painting and poetry... And the successor of this struggle is Erbil's poetic paintings!



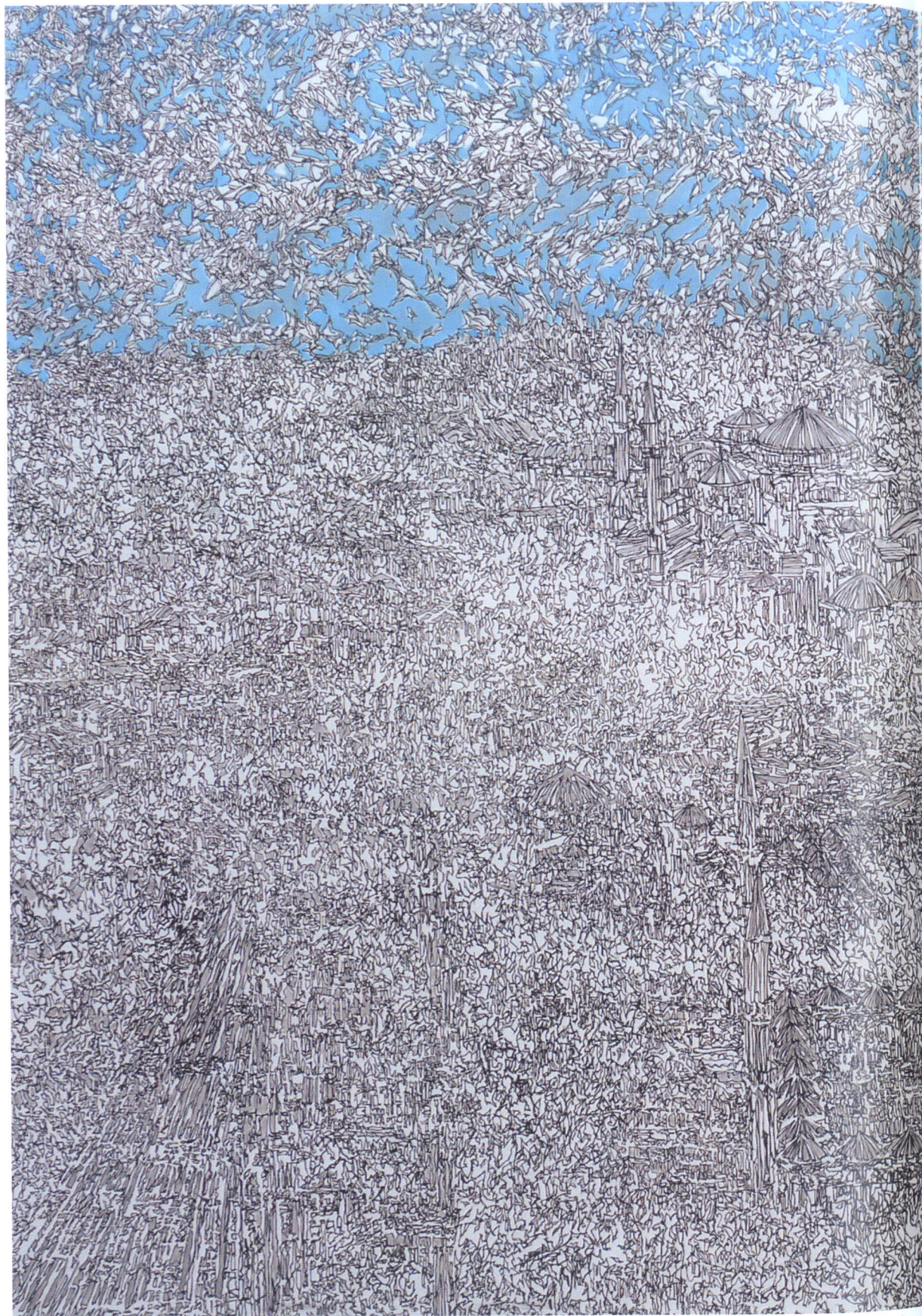
Feast Prayer, 1970
oil on canvas
100 x 81 cm

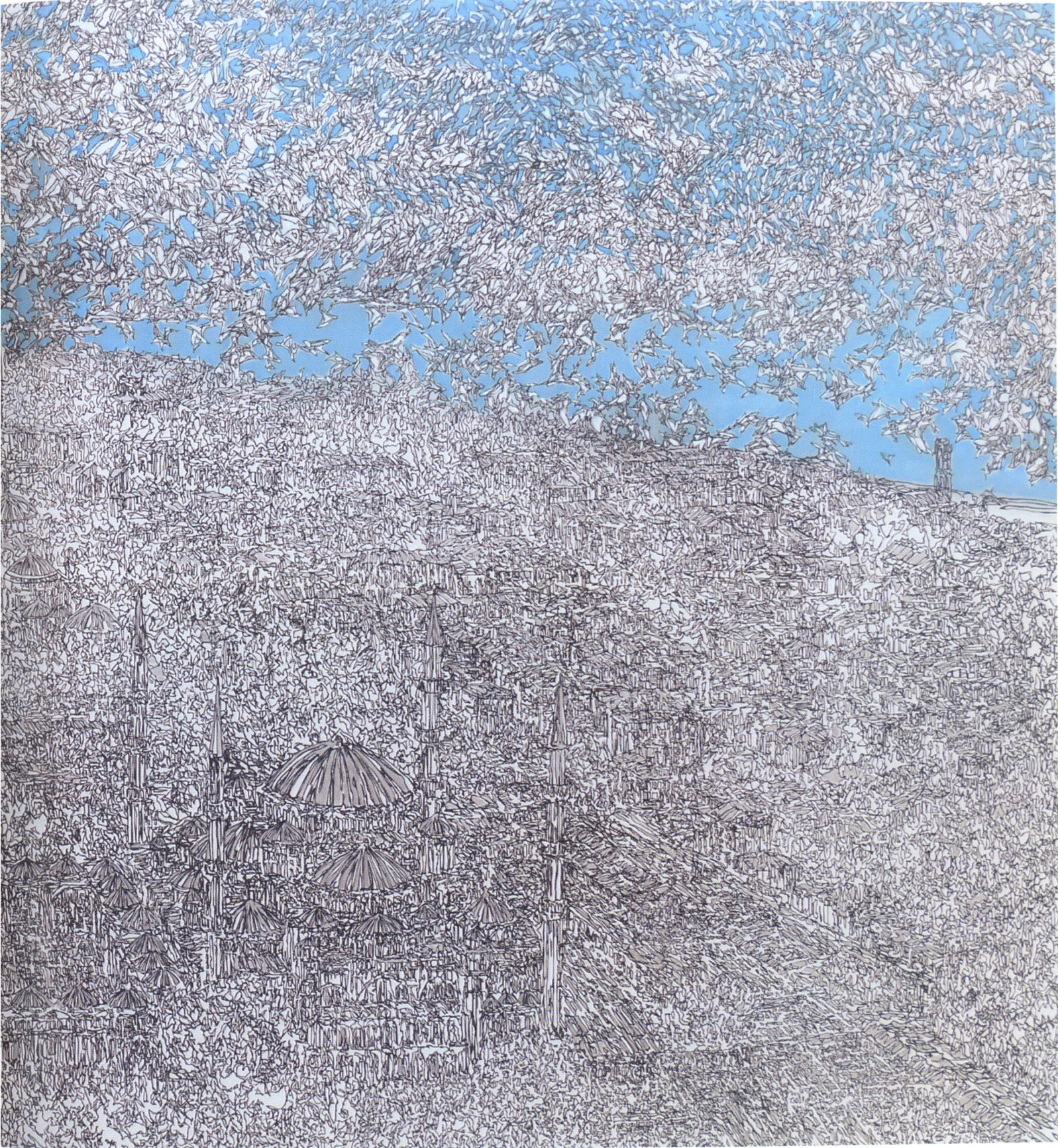


Variations on An Anatolian
Town Experiences, 1972
oil on canvas
100 x 81 cm
Istanbul Painting and
Sculpture Museum
Collection



Istanbul Linear Abstraction, 2010
oil on canvas
150 x 250 cm





Ceramic Panel of
Lisbon Embassy, 1971
2 x 25 m. (detail)



Ceramic Panel of
Lisbon Embassy, 1971
50 m2 (detail)





Deep Blue, 2006
wood marquetry
217 x 142 cm

Anatolian Variation, 2008
wood marquetry
217 x 142 cm
(opposite page)

MURKAN MUSMÜR

Qeyri 2006



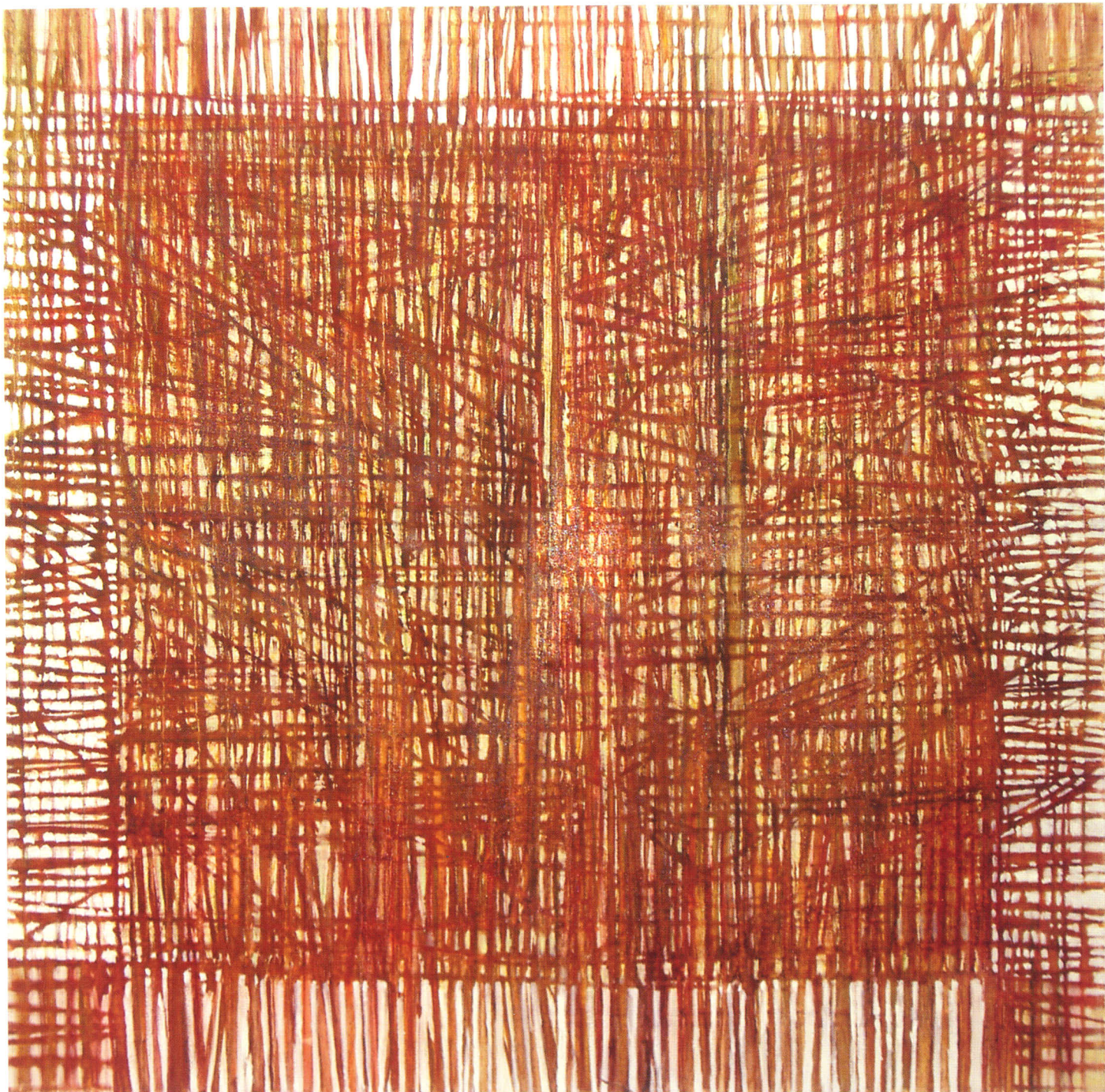
Nature and Rythm, 1986
oil on canvas
90 x 70 cm



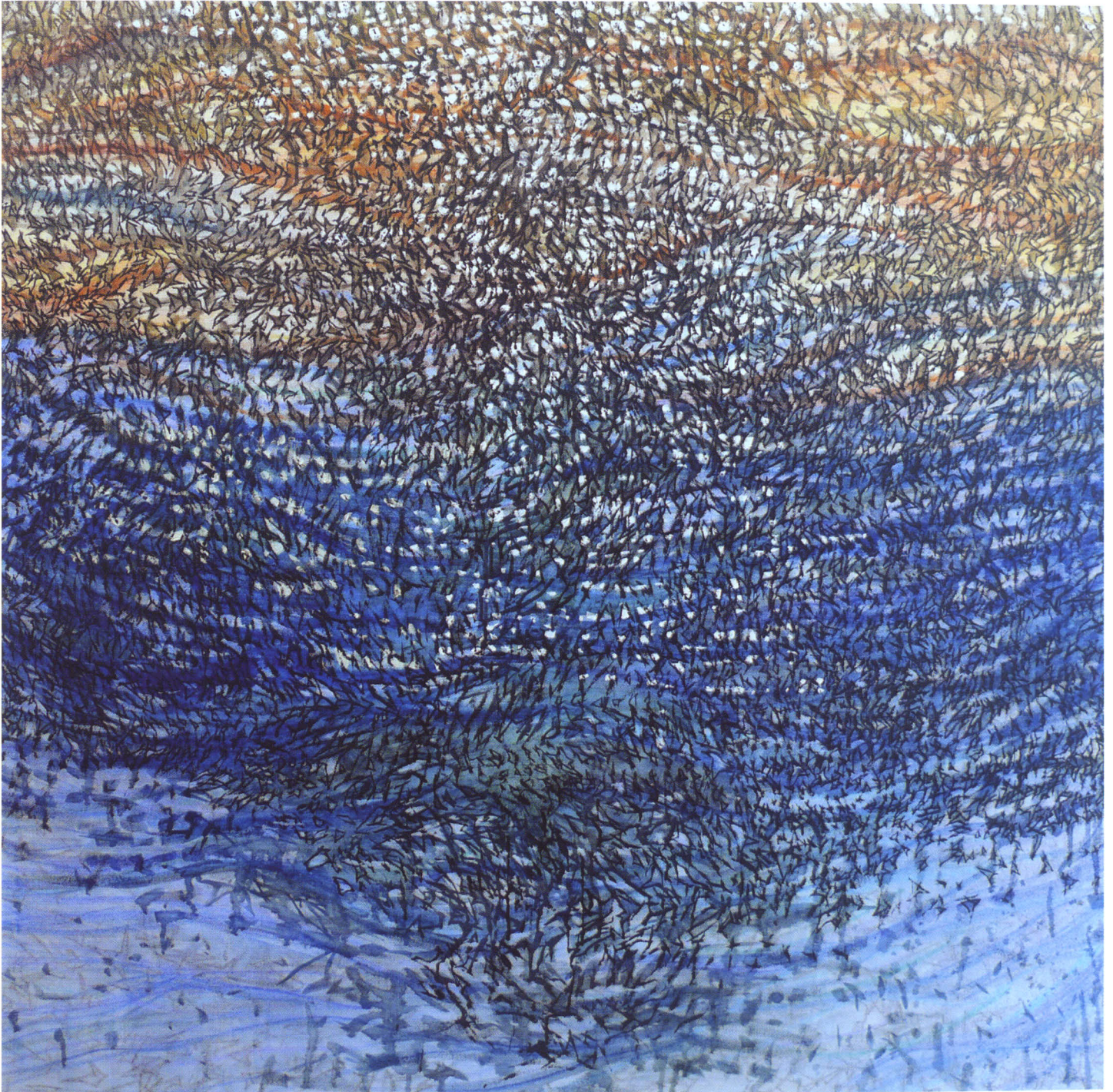


Rhythmic Vibrations, 1988
oil on canvas
116 x 89 cm

Abstraction, 2004
oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm



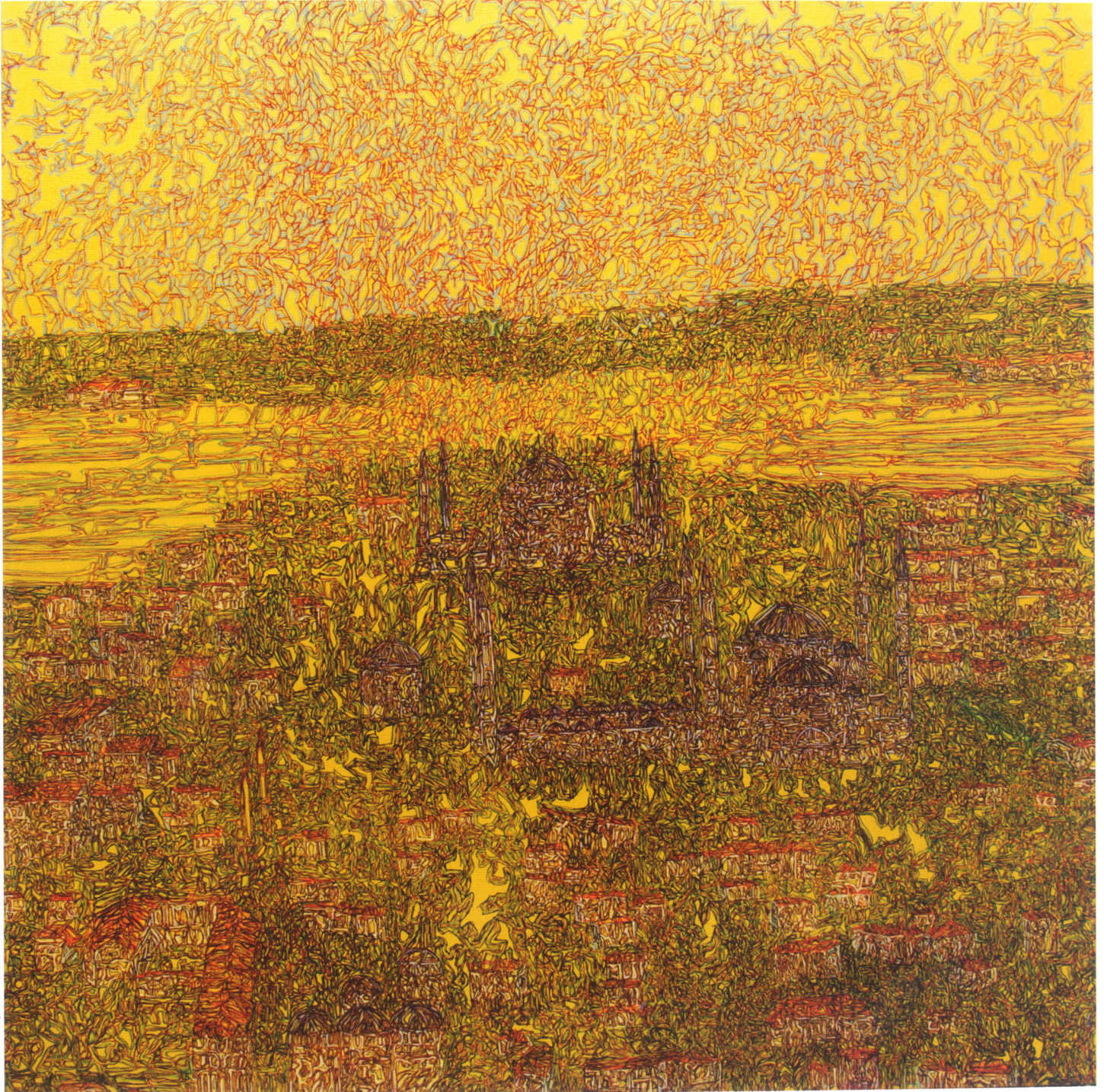
Lyric Abstraction, 2008
oil on canvas
125 x 125 cm



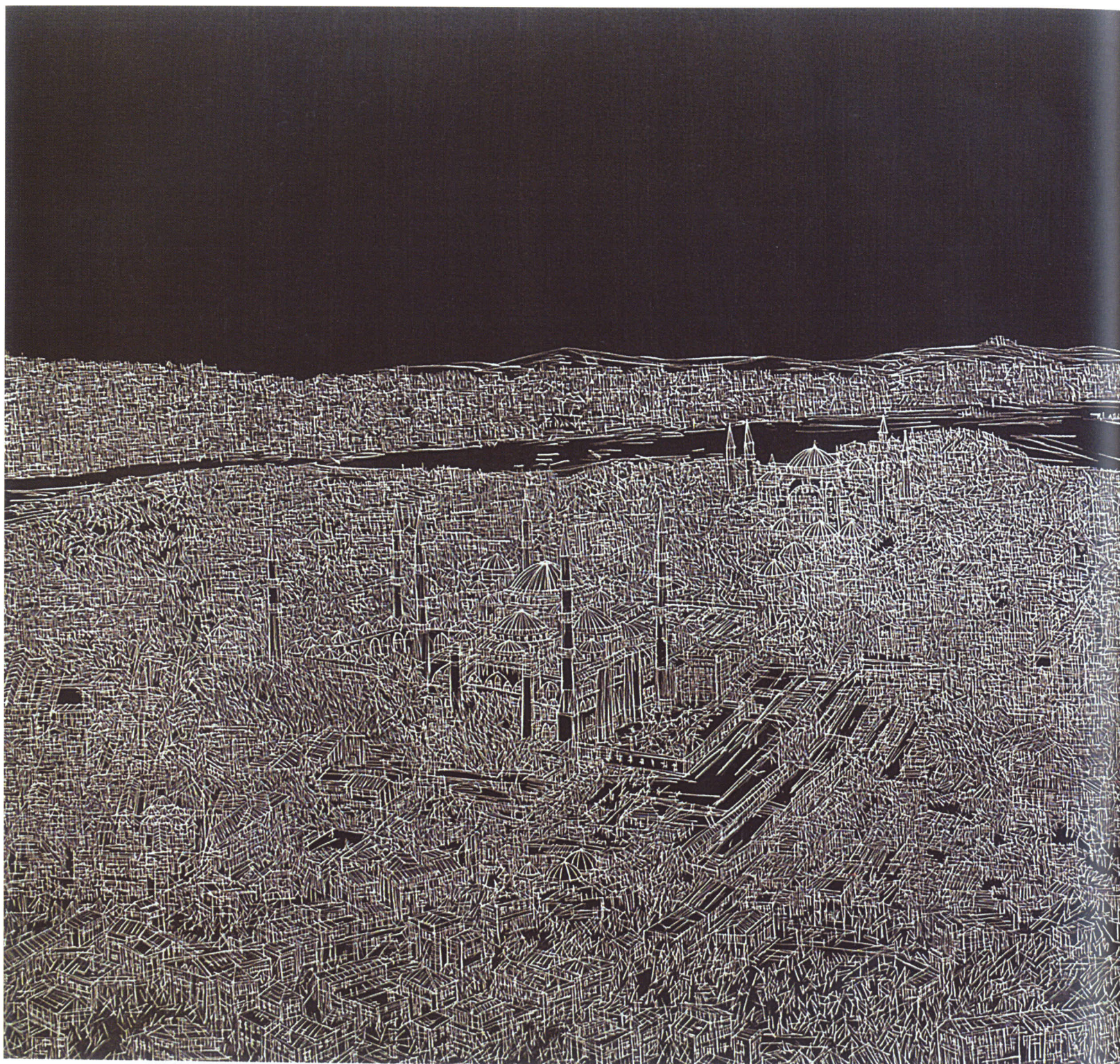
Istanbul with Burgundy Birds, 2006
oil on canvas
125 x 125 cm

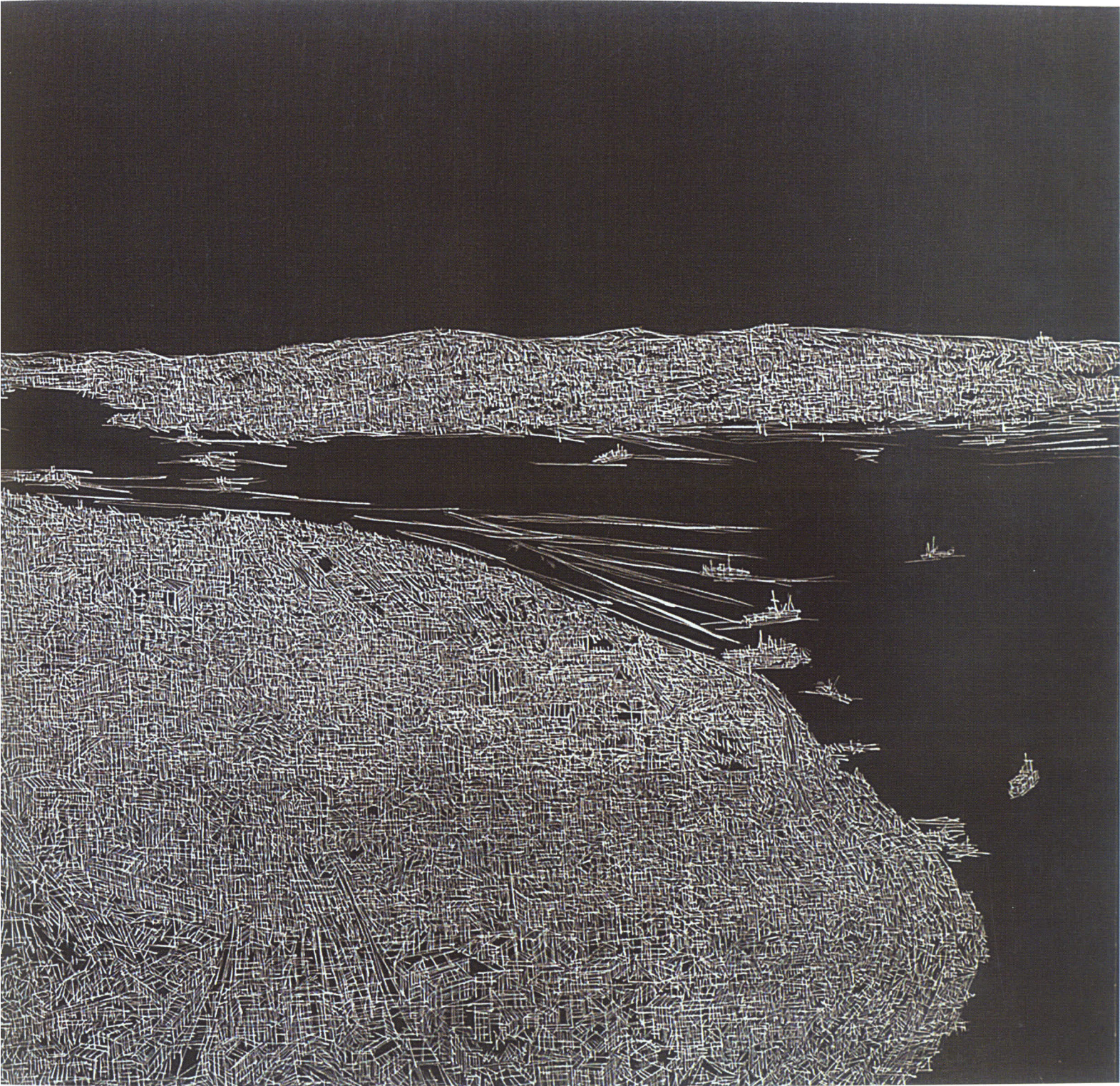


Istanbul in Yellow, 2010
oil on canvas
125 x 125 cm



Istanbul Black and White, 2010
oil on canvas
120 x 250 cm
Bekir Olcay Collection





Istanbul Bird's Eye
View 1, 2010
oil on canvas
140 x 90 cm





Istanbul Bird's Eye
View 2, 2010
oil on canvas
140 x 90 cm

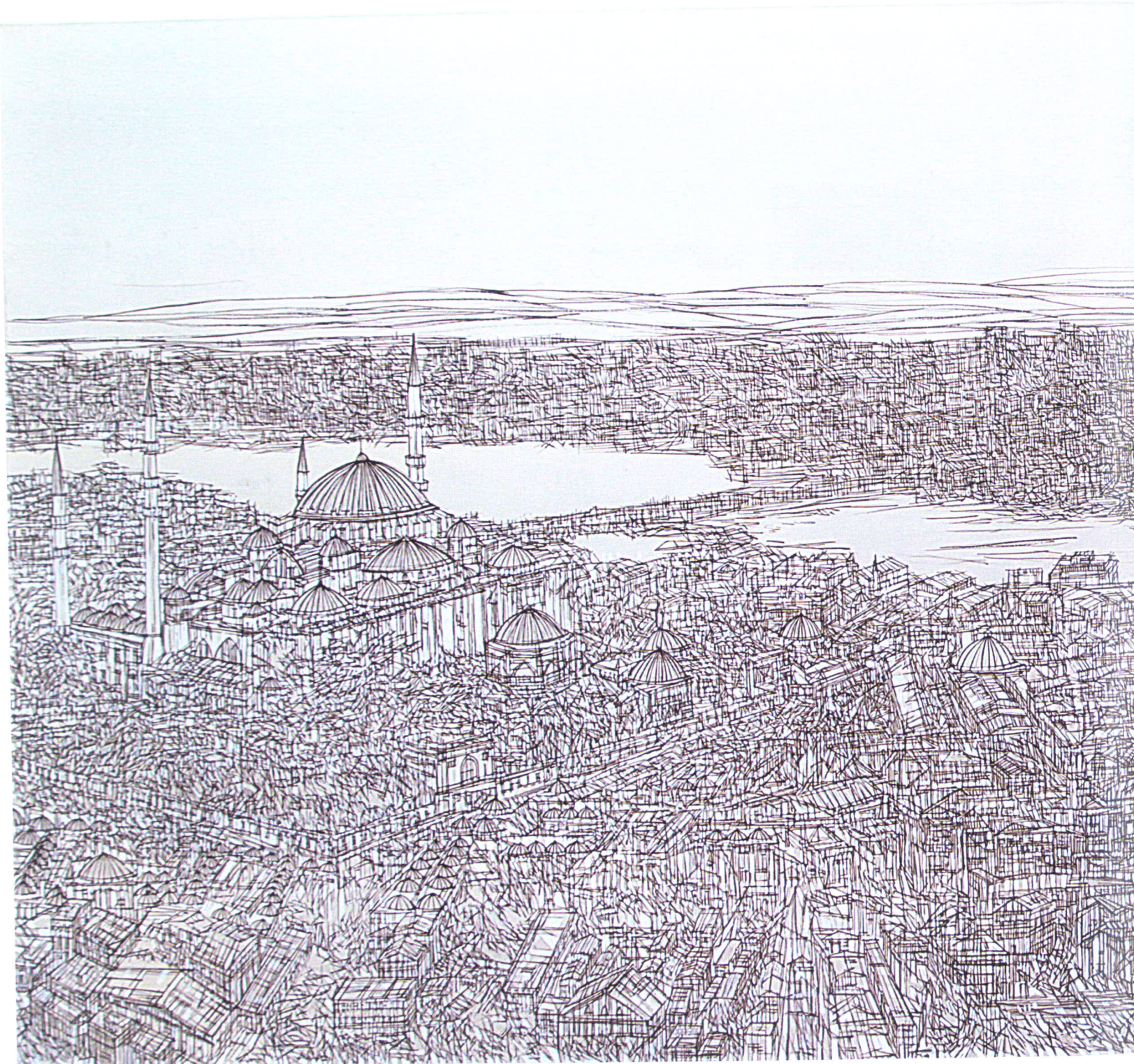
Istanbul Red, 2010
oil on canvas
100 x 140 cm

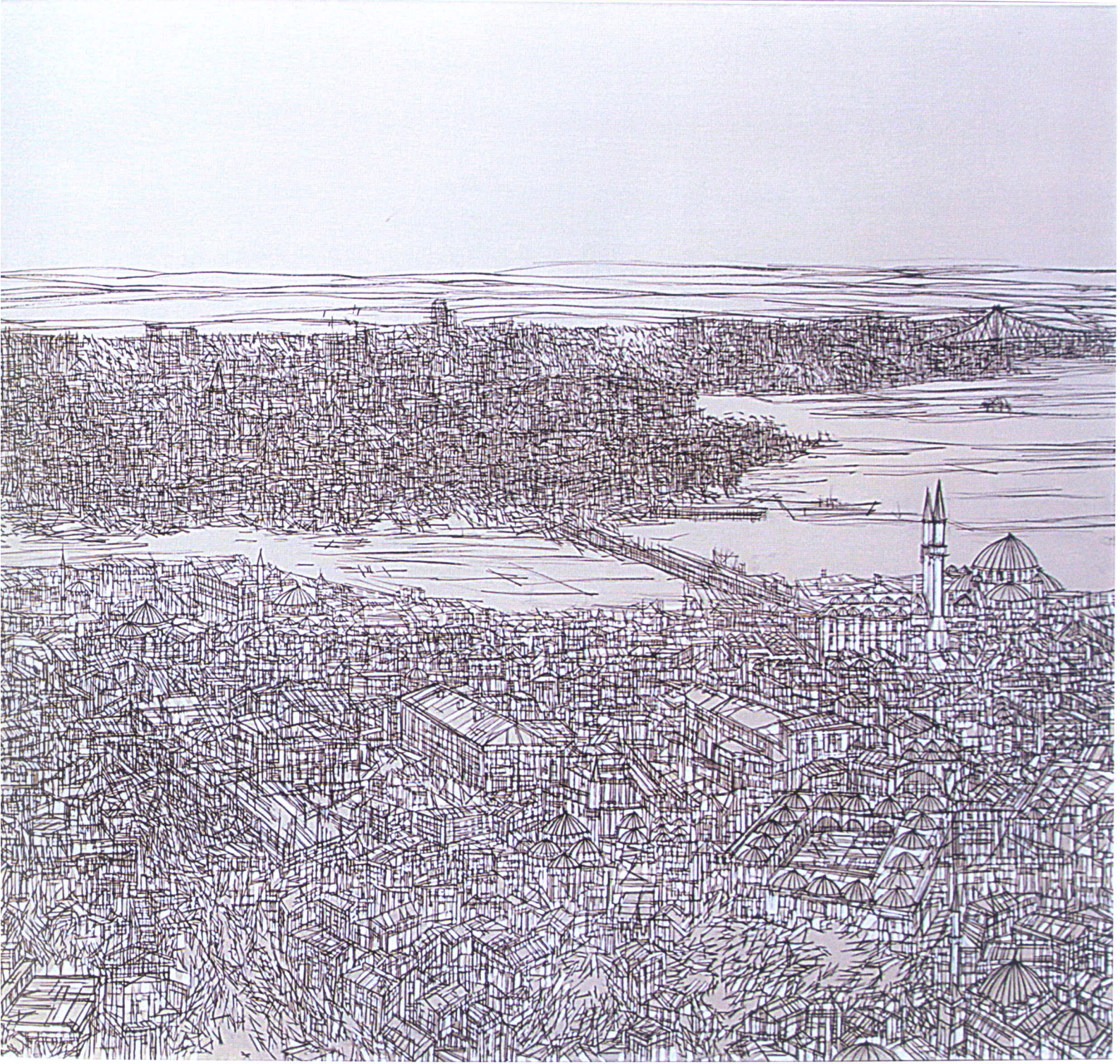


From Golden Horn, 2009
oil on canvas
80 x 130 cm
M.K. Collection



Istanbul, 2009
oil on canvas
115 x 260 cm
Ömer Olcay Collection





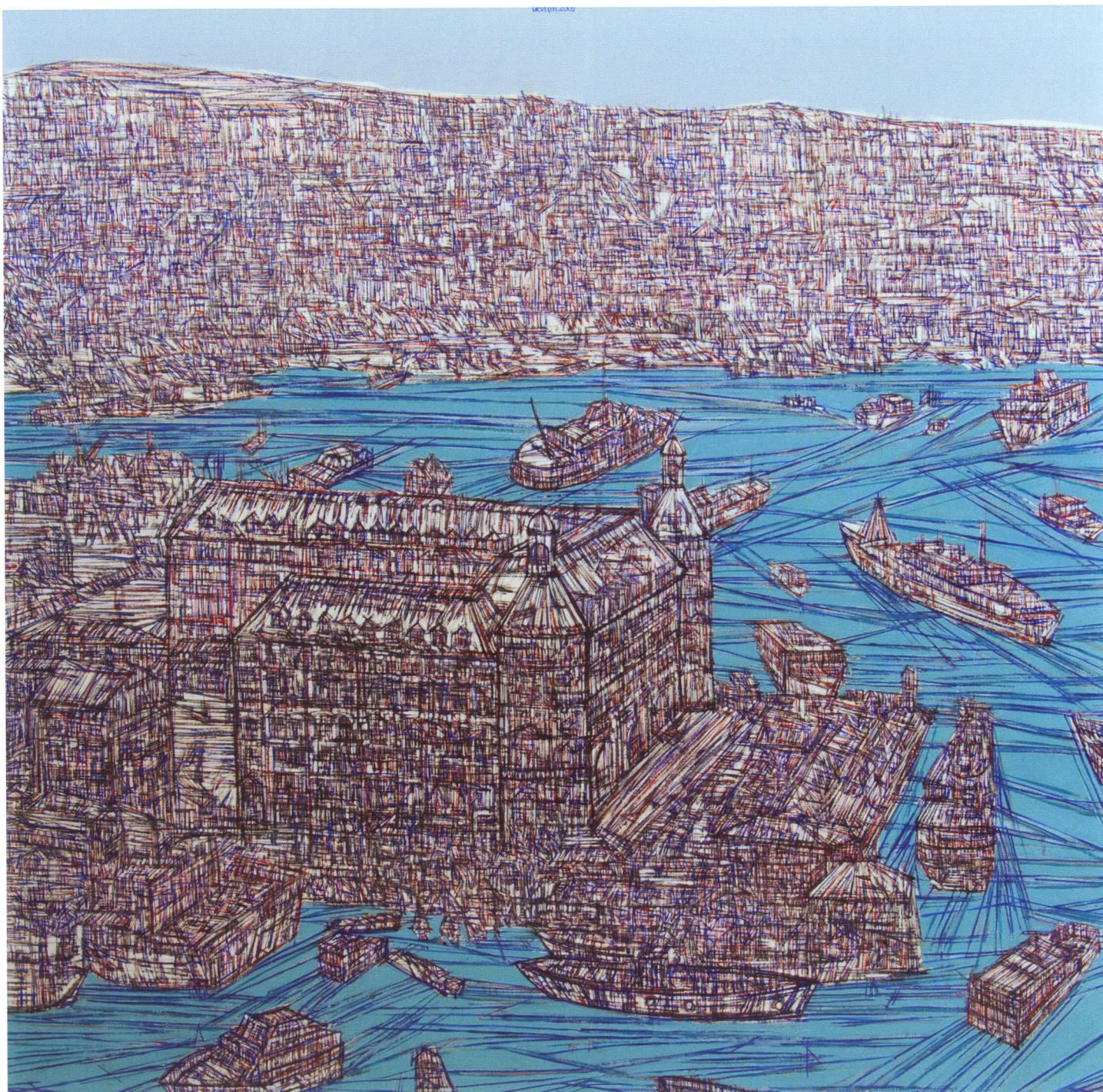
Istanbul Blue, 2010
oil on canvas
150 x 250 cm



Istanbul Gamlı Hazan, 2009
oil on canvas
160 x 180 cm
Berrin and
Mehmet Baldöktü
Collection



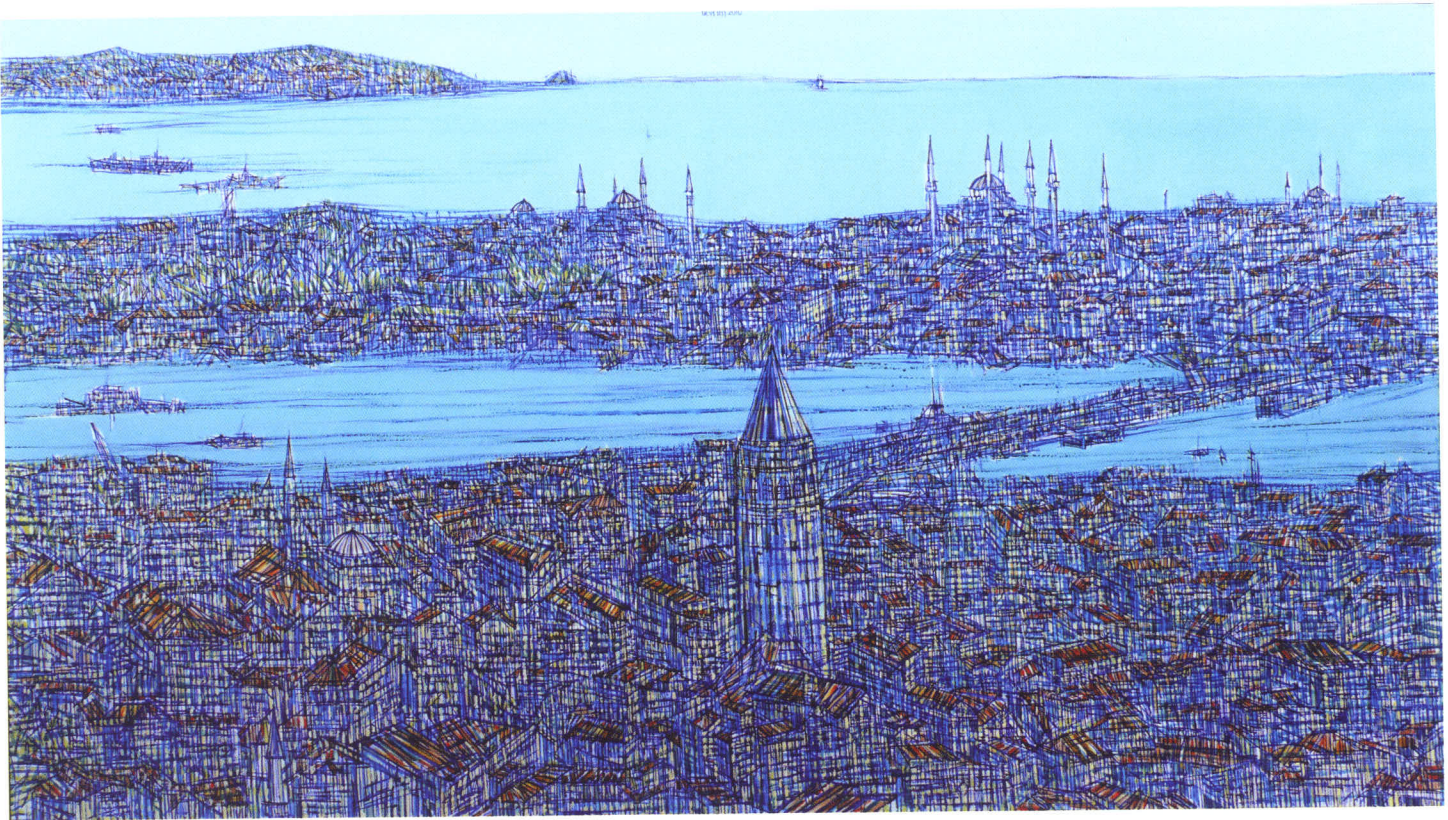
Haydarpaşa, 2010
oil on canvas
125 x 125 cm



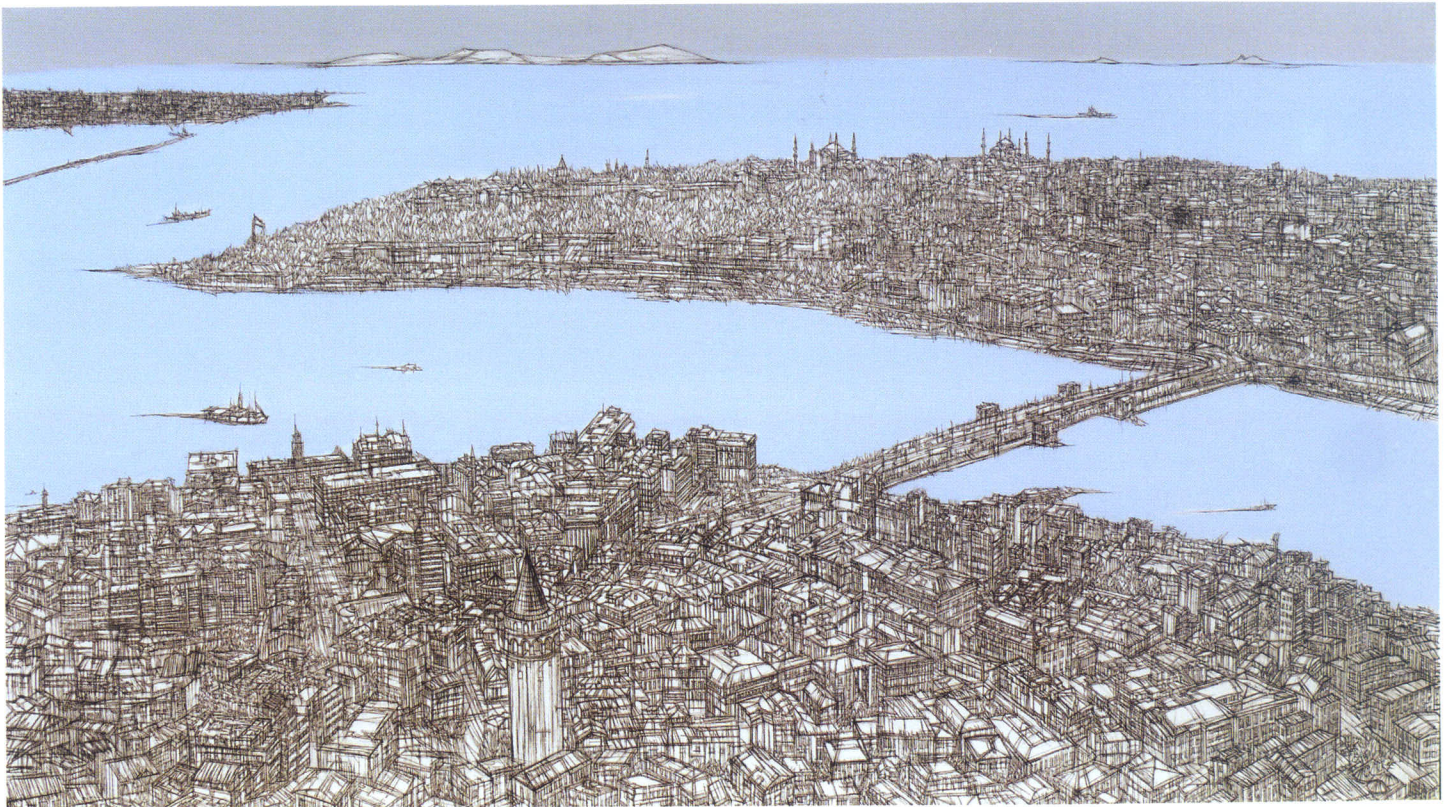
Istanbul Blue Light, 2009
oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm
Çakmak Turgay
Collection



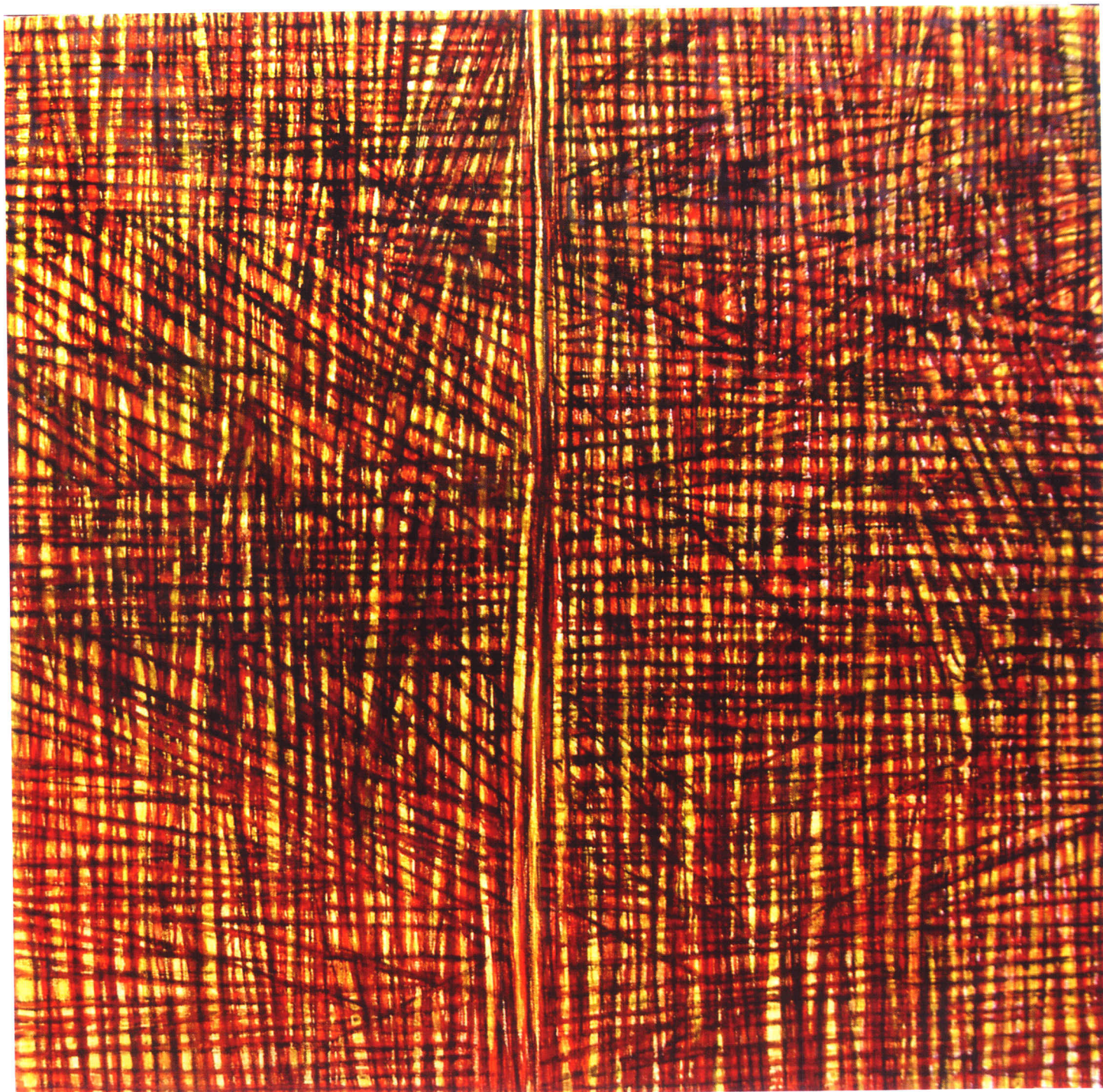
Istanbul Galata Blue, 2010
mixed media on canvas
100 x 180 cm
Ömer Olcay Collection



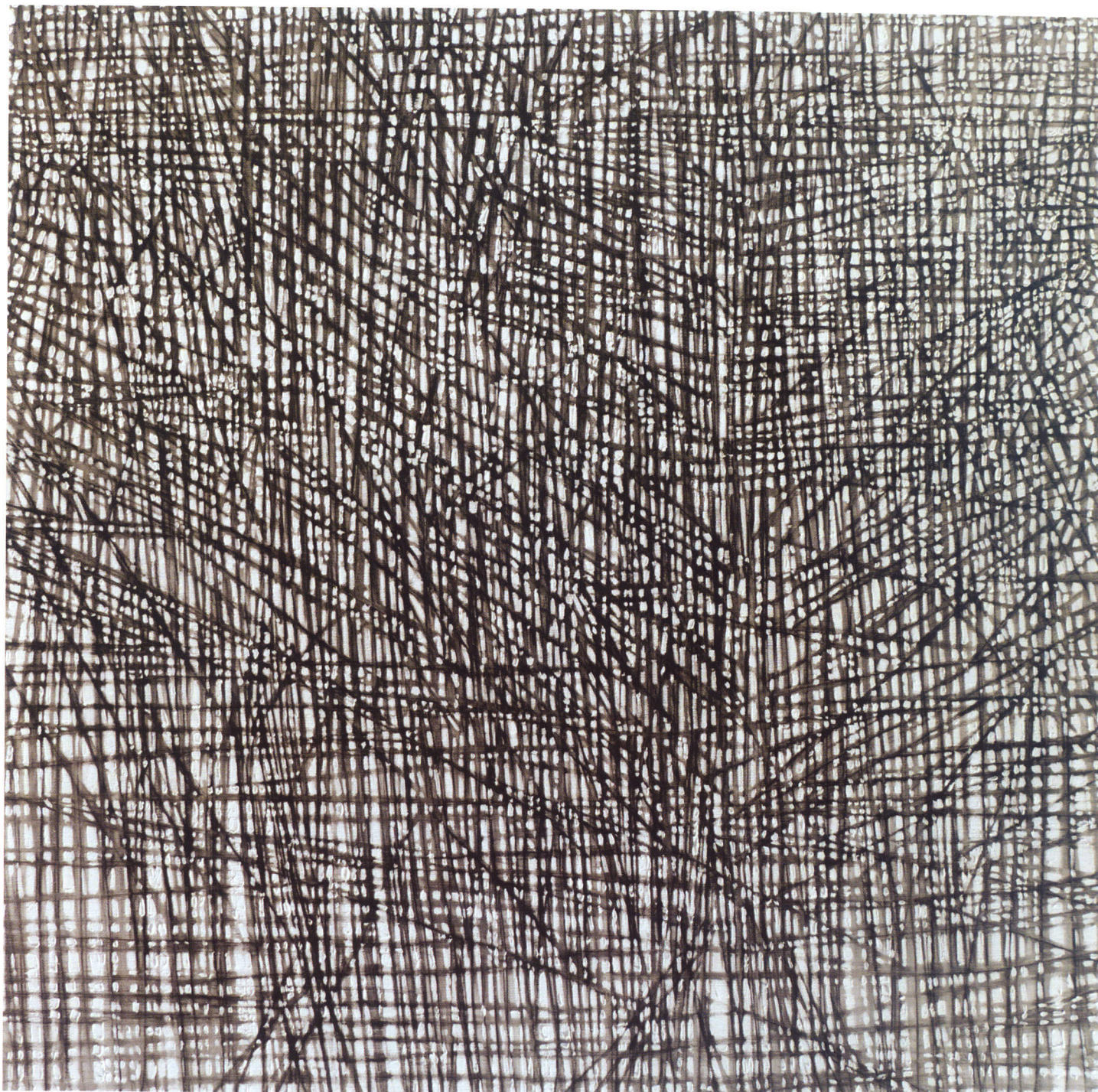
Istanbul from Galata to
Old Peninsula, 2009
oil on canvas
120 x 225 cm
Bekir Olcay Collection



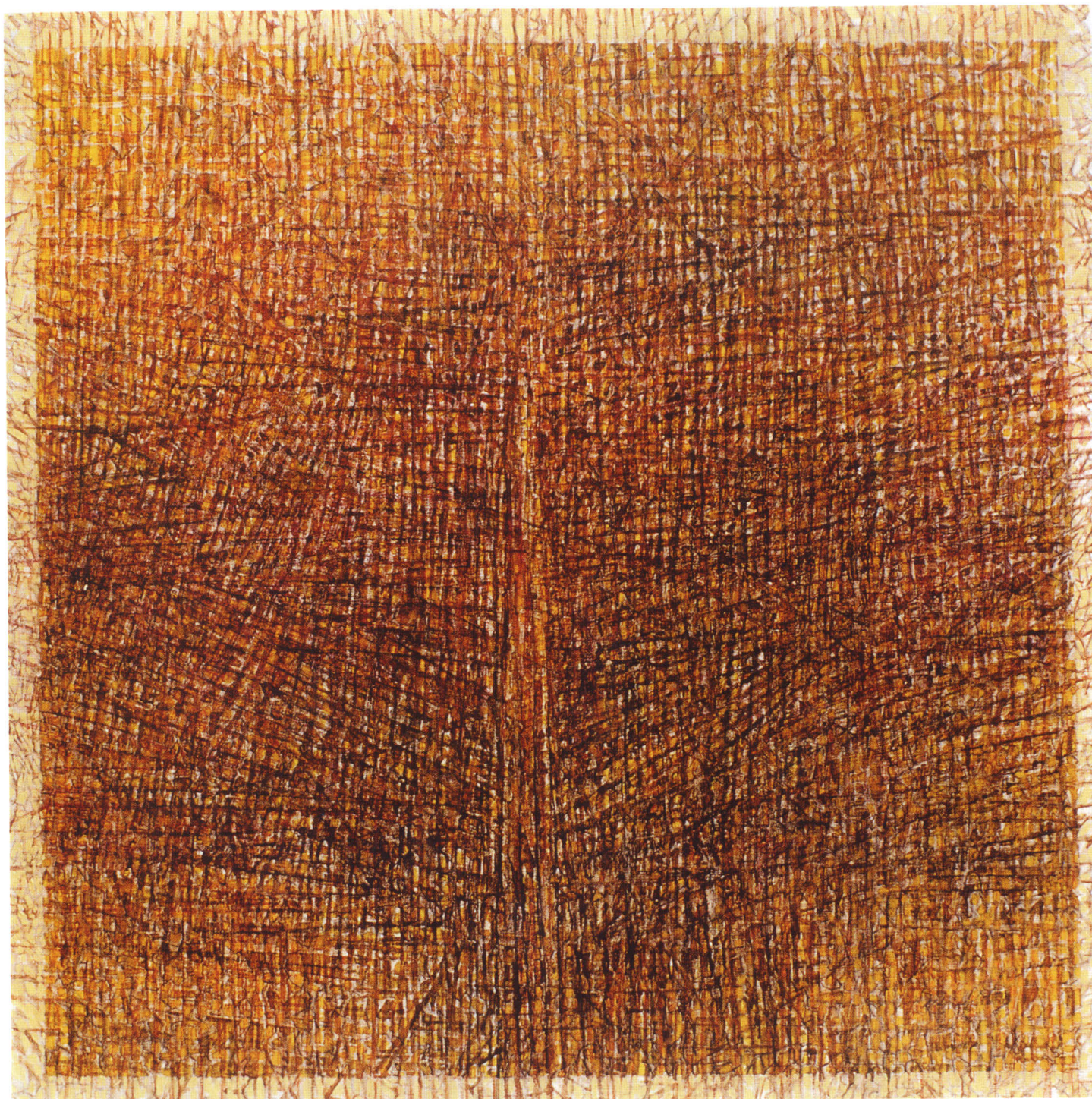
Autumn Melody, 2004
oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm



Austere Nature Melody 2, 2009
oil on canvas
140 x 140 cm



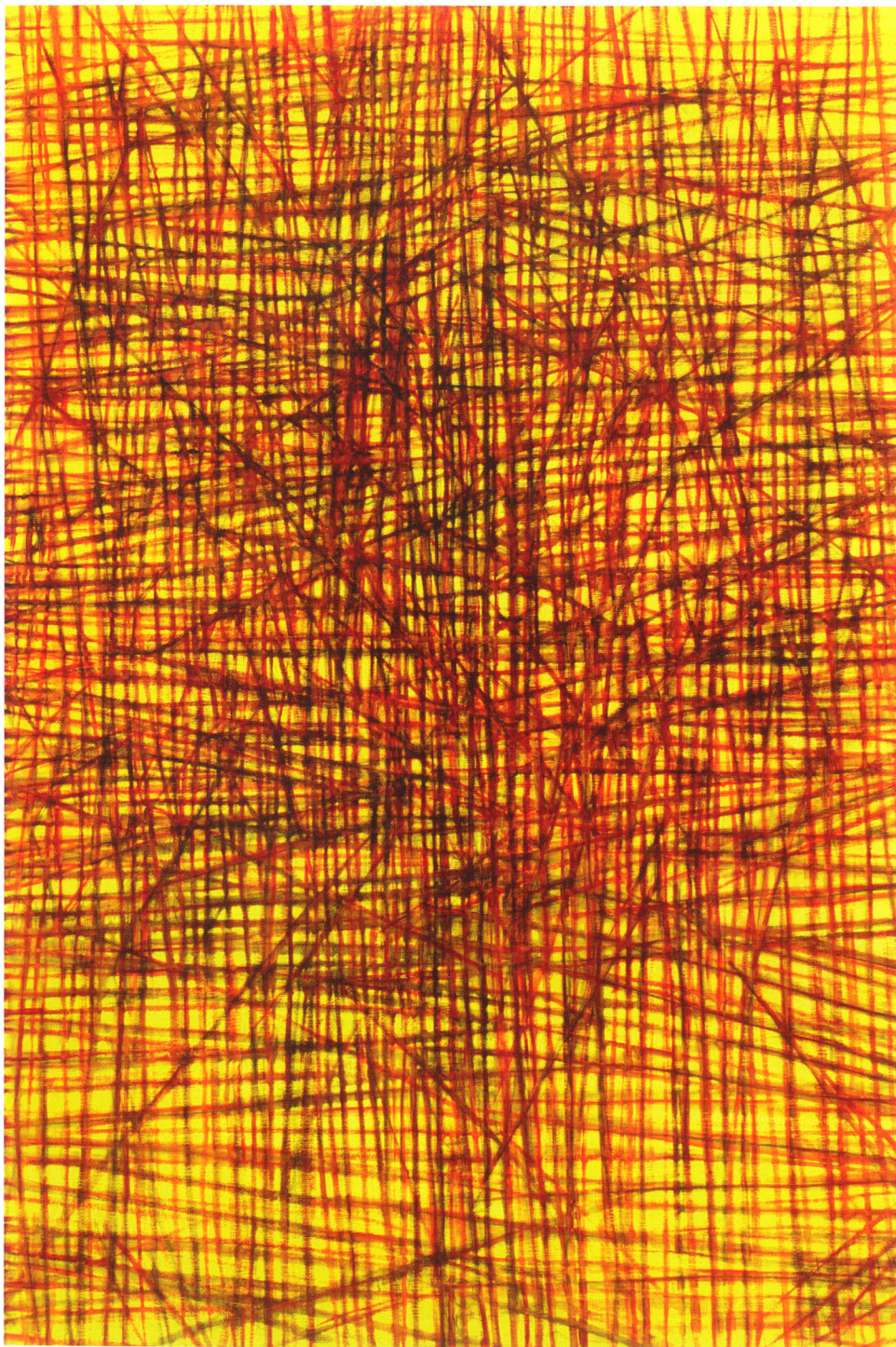
Wraparound, 2001
oil on canvas
140 x 140 cm



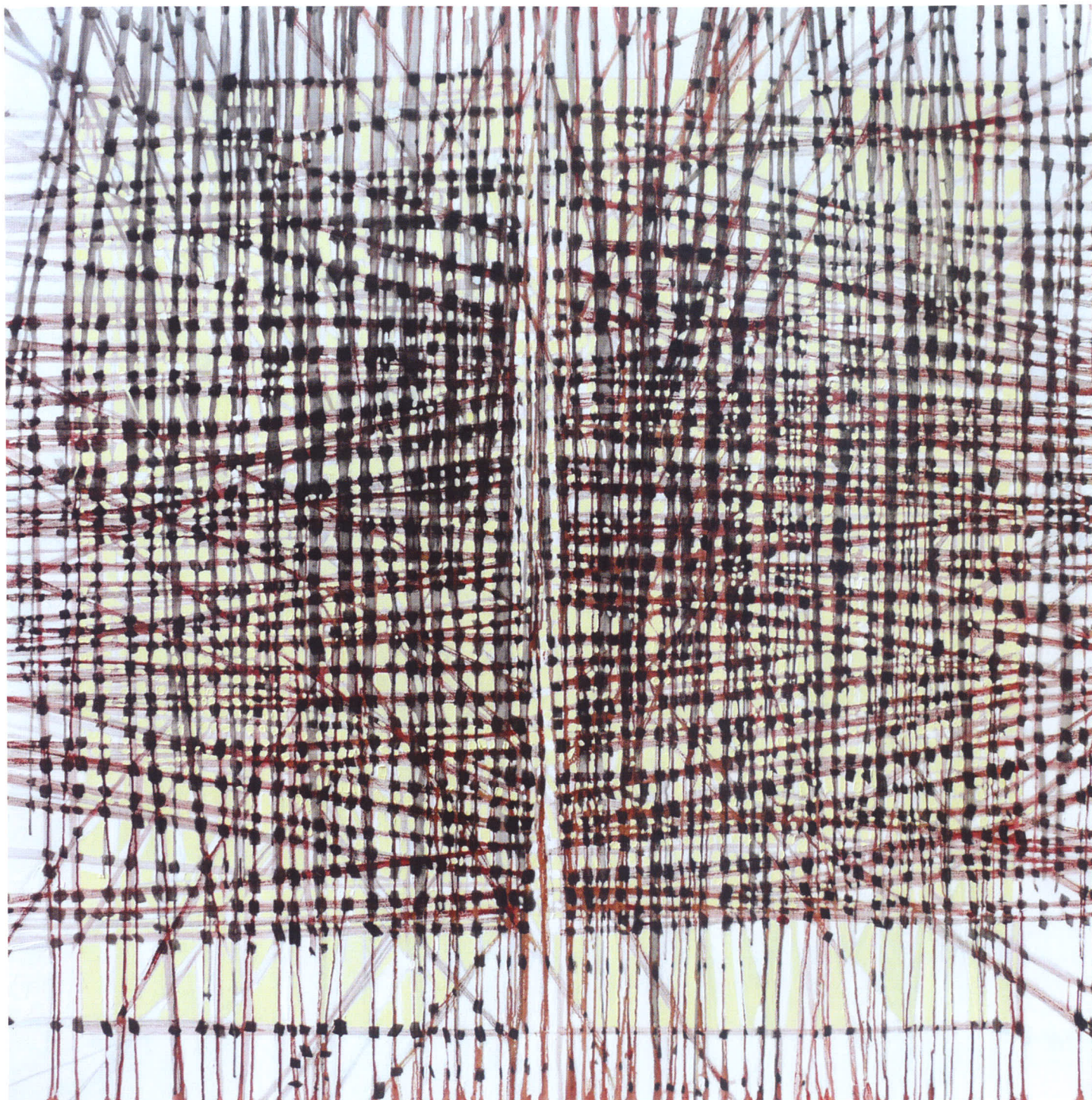
Rhythmic Abstraction
Yellow Green, 2010
mixed media on canvas
140 x 90 cm



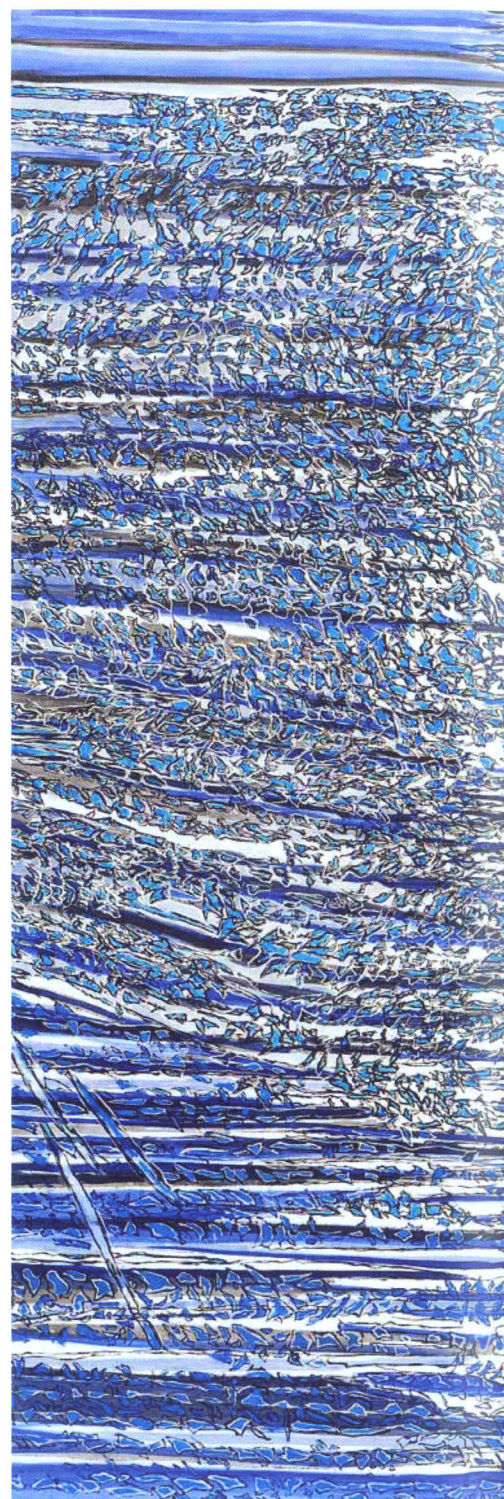
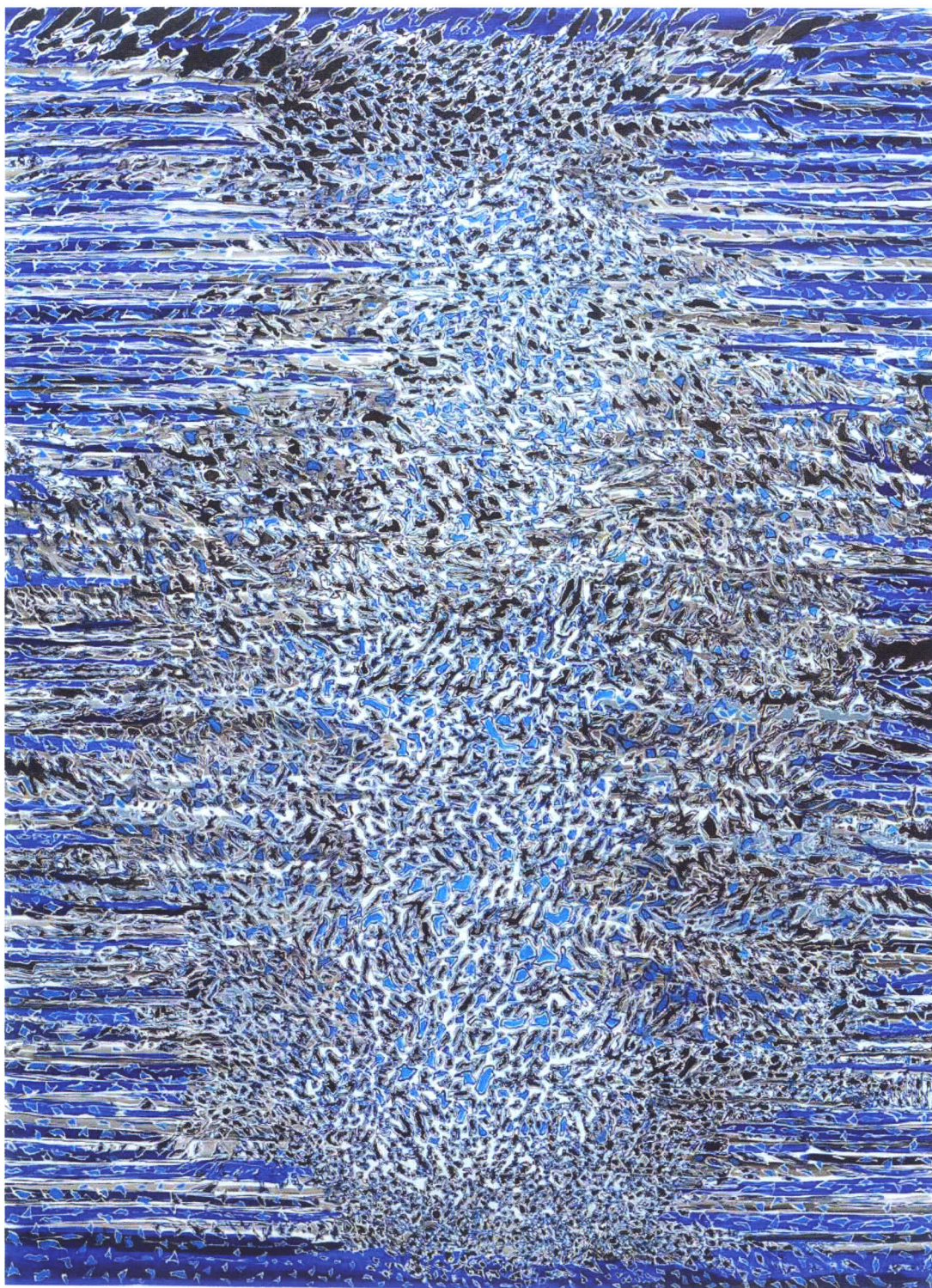
Yellow Rhythmic Motion, 2009
oil on canvas
140 x 90 cm

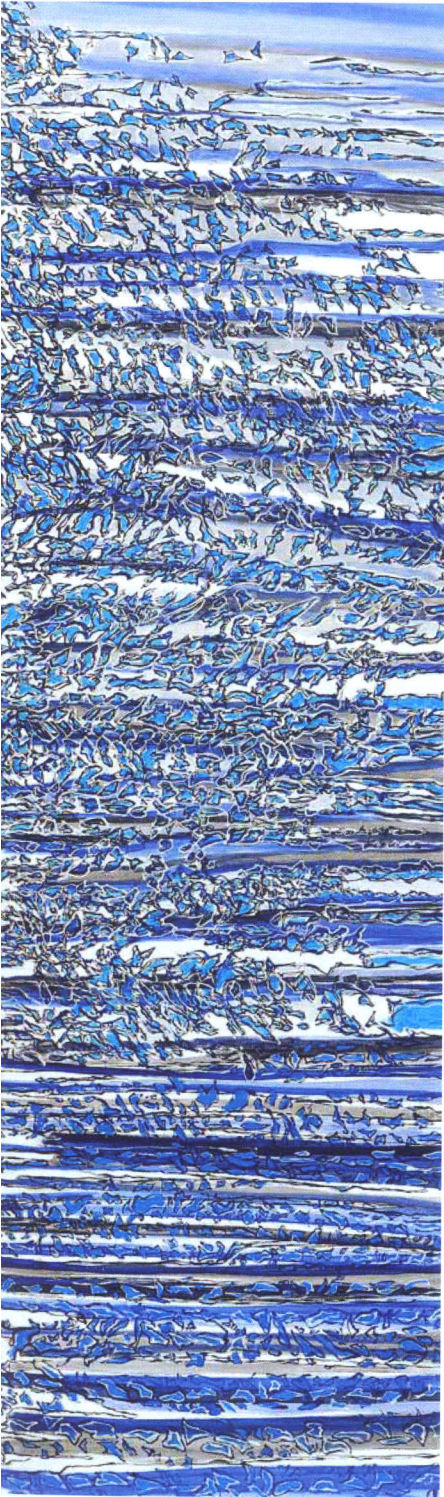


Rhythmic Abstraction, 2009
oil on canvas
140 x 140 cm



Enchanted Vibrations (tryptyque), 2008
mixed media on canvas
180 x 390 cm
Olcay Art Collection

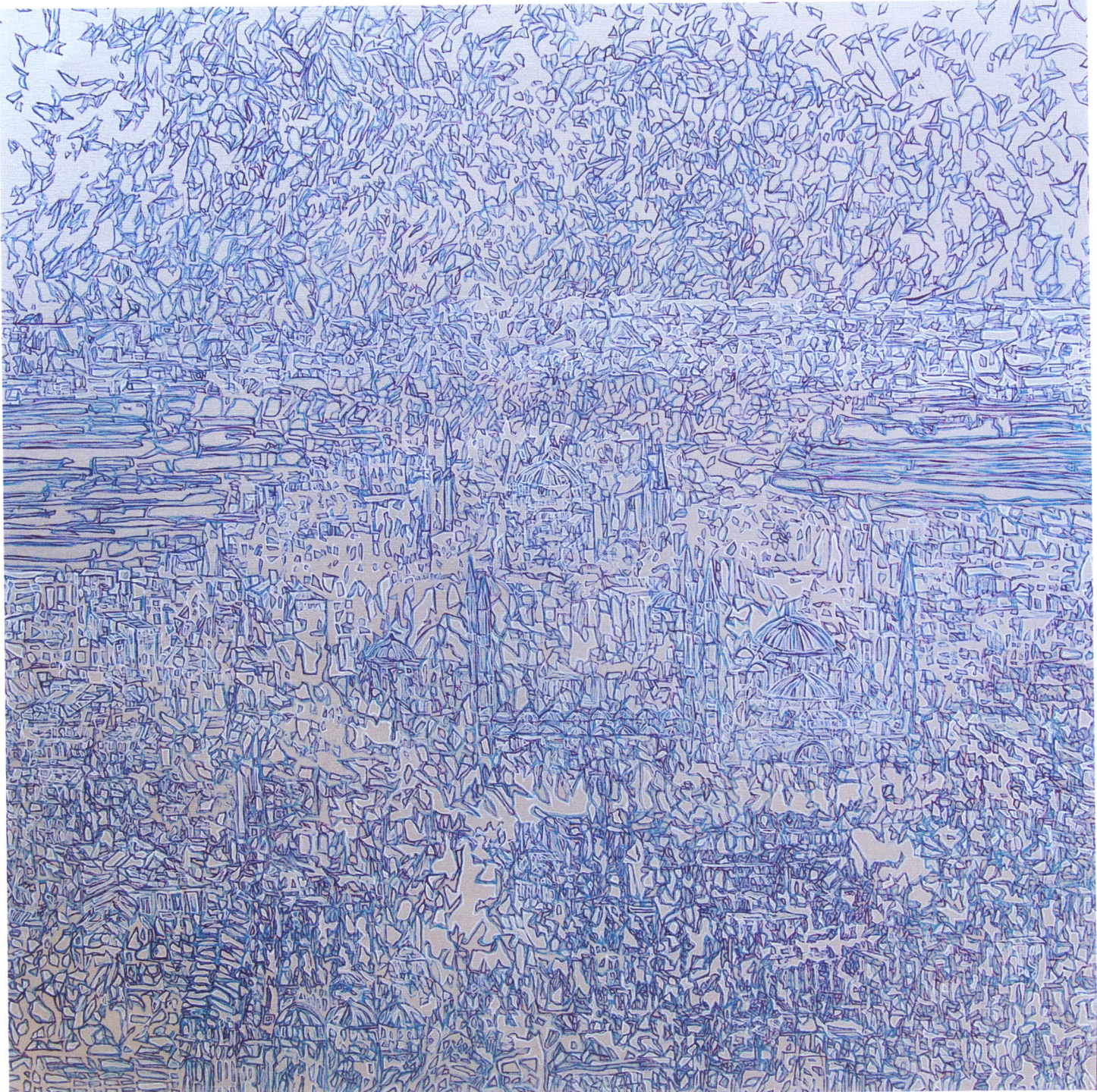




Mystery of Istanbul, 2010

oil on canvas

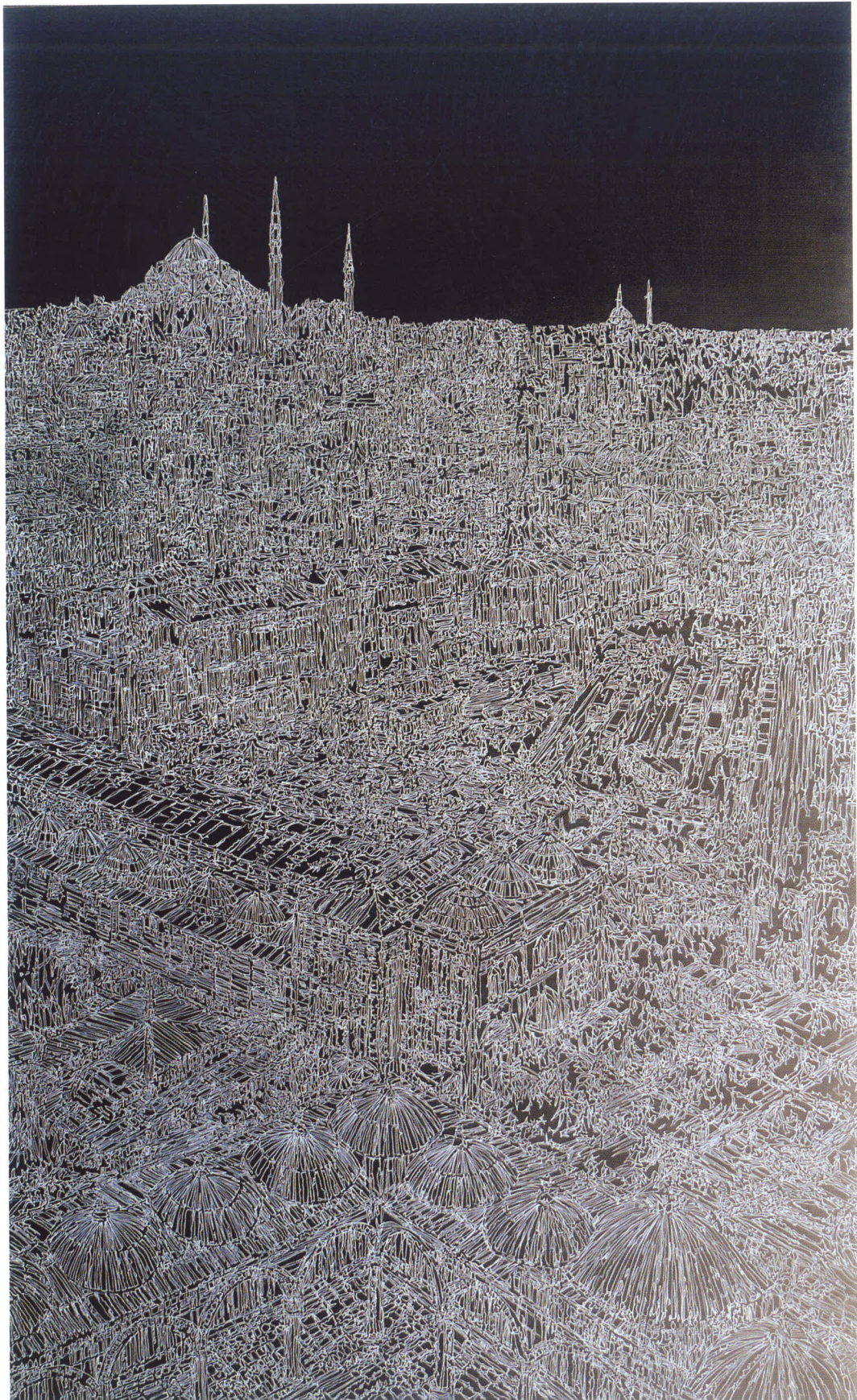
125 x 125 cm



Istanbul Red White, 2010
oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm



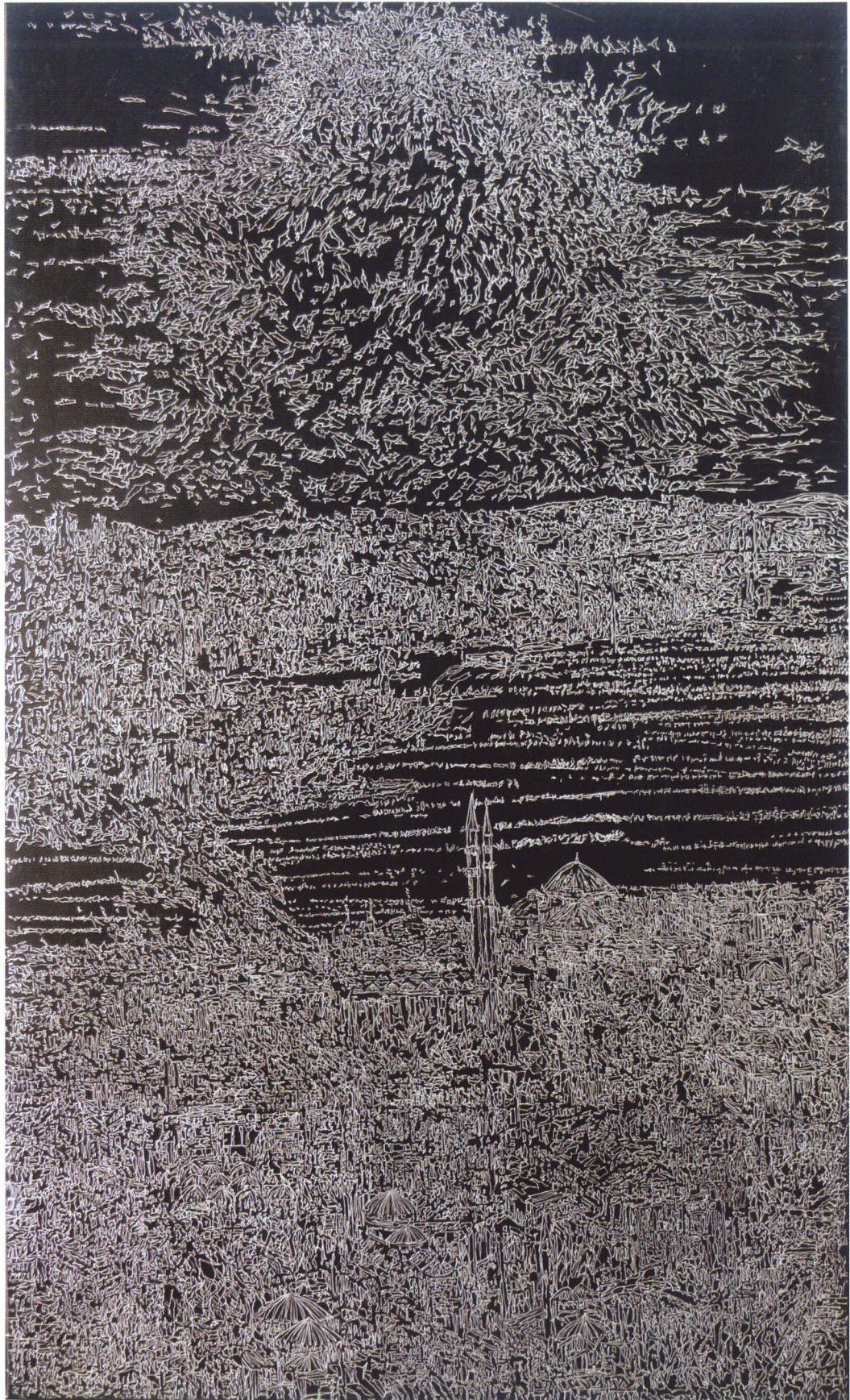
Istanbul Line A, 2009
oil on canvas
250 x 150 cm
Olçay Art Collection

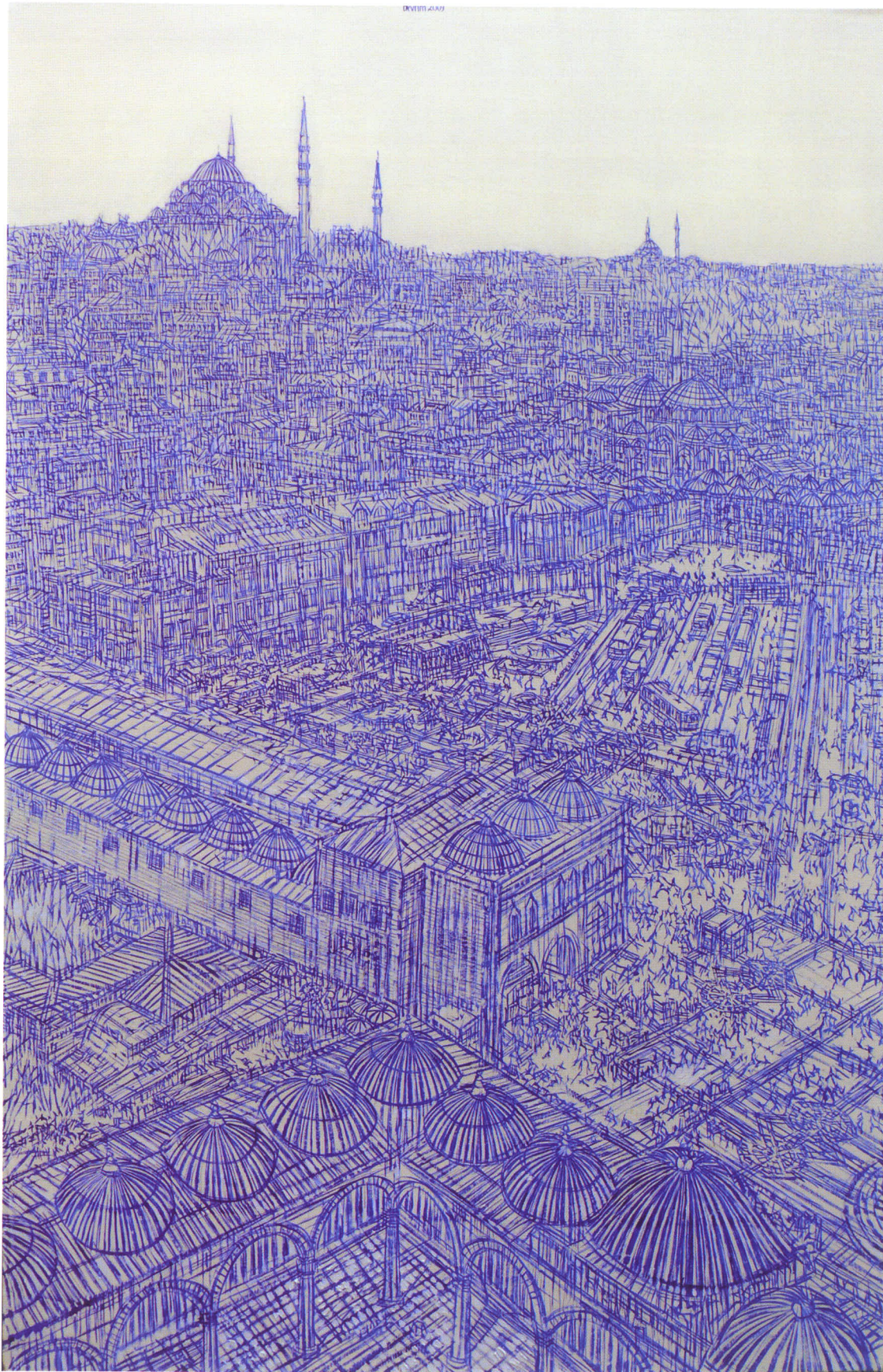


Istanbul Line B, 2009
oil on canvas
250 x 125 cm
Olcay Art Collection



Istanbul Line C, 2009
oil on canvas
250 x 150 cm
Olcay Art Collection





Istanbul, 2009
mixed media on canvas
140 x 90 cm
Burak Karabacak
Collection

Istanbul Line, 2009
oil on canvas
140 x 140 cm



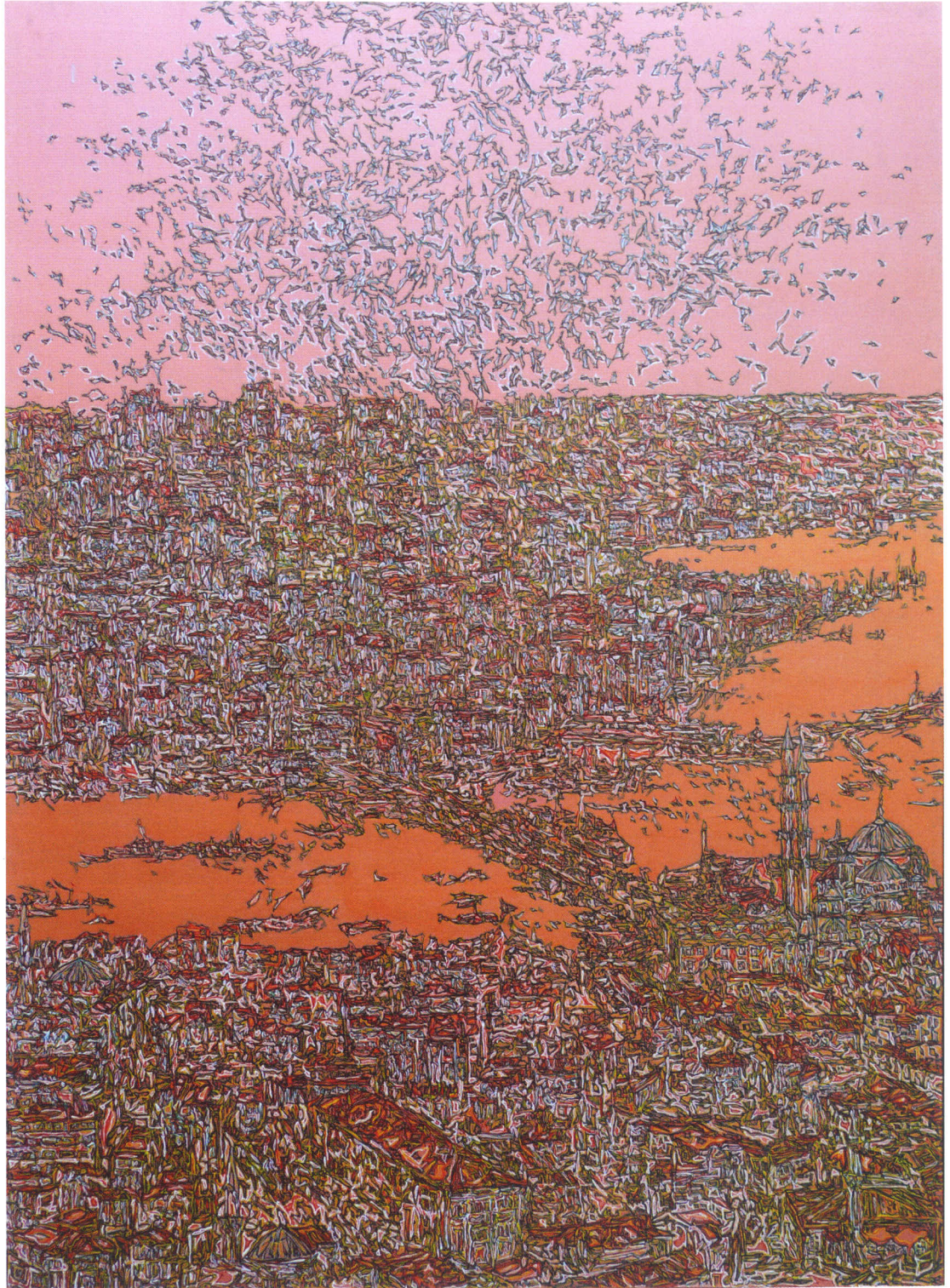
Istanbul, 2009
oil on canvas
225 x 180 cm
Aziz Karadeniz
Collection



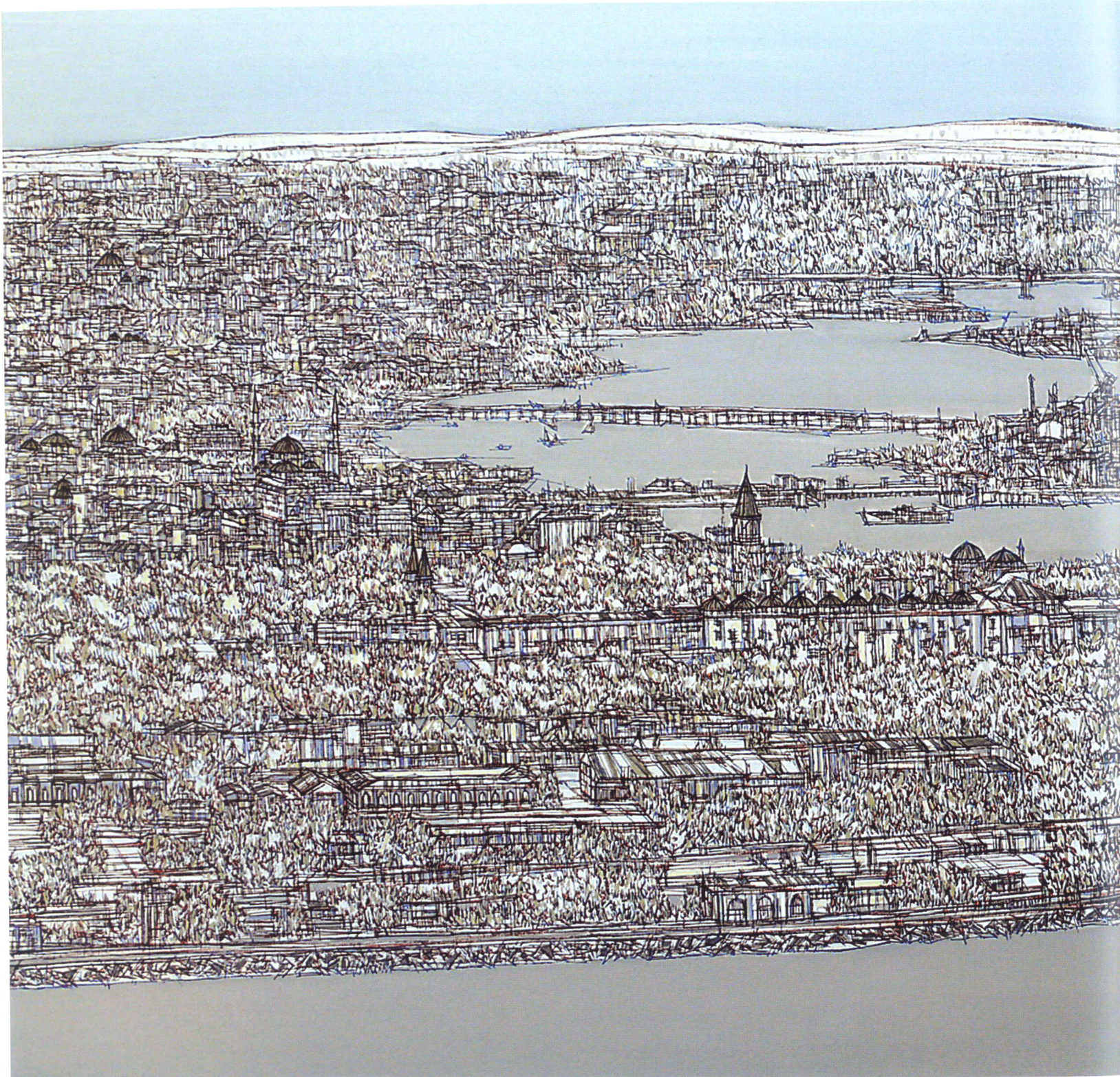
Mystery in Istanbul, 2010
oil on canvas
160 x 140 cm

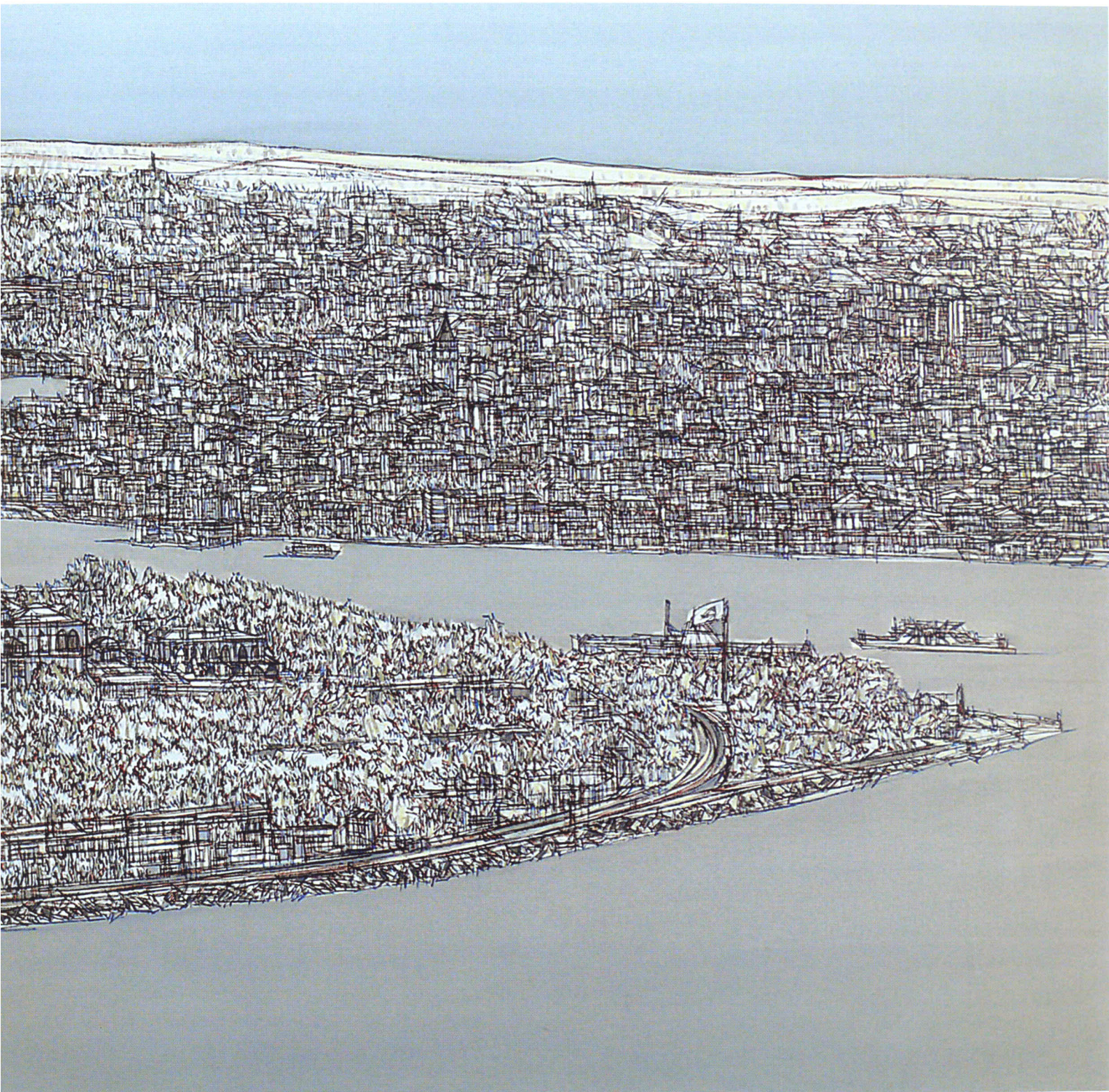


Istanbul - A Glance From
New Mosque, 2010
oil on canvas
180 x 130 cm

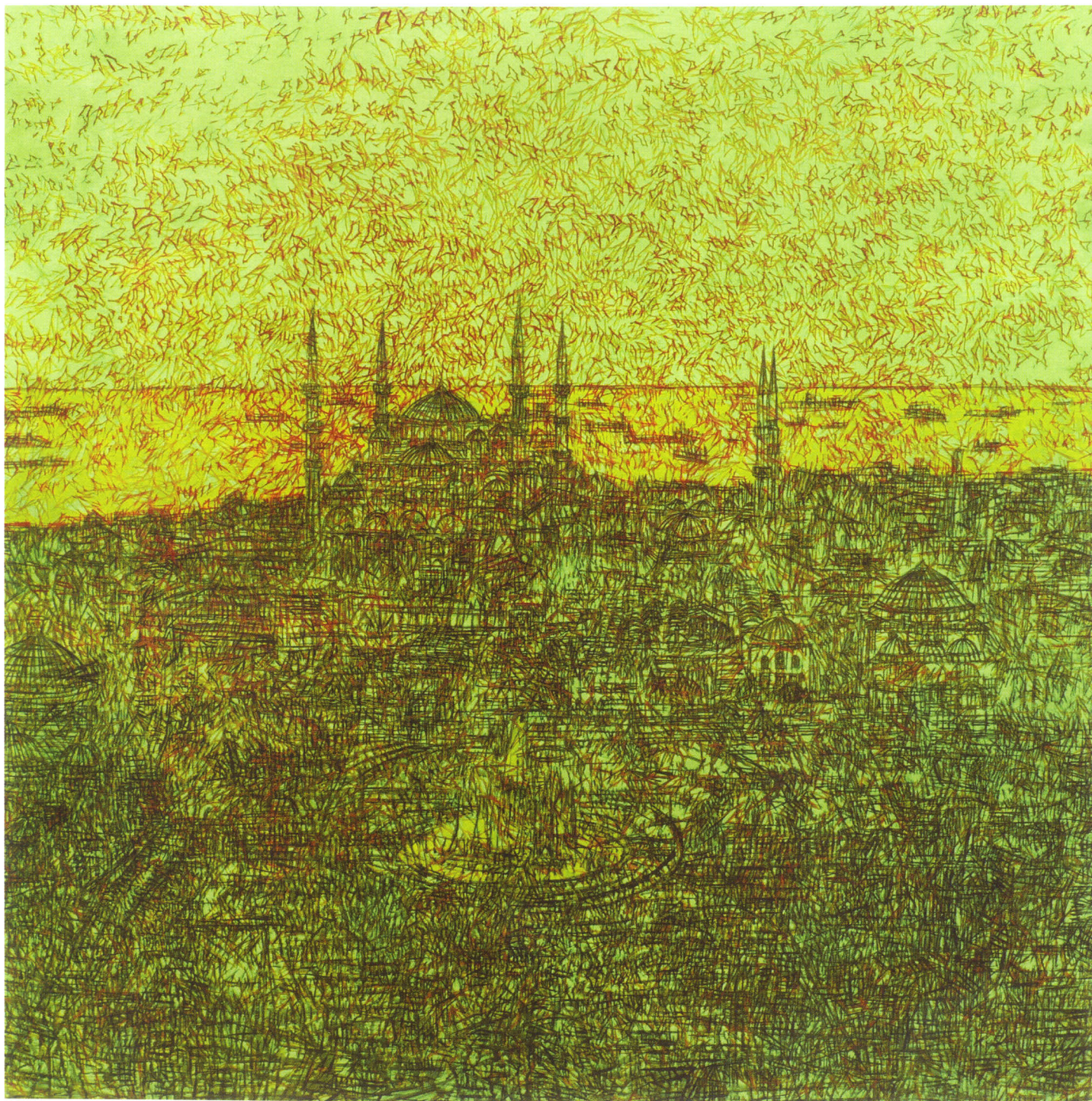


Mystery of Istanbul, 2010
oil on canvas
90 x 190 cm

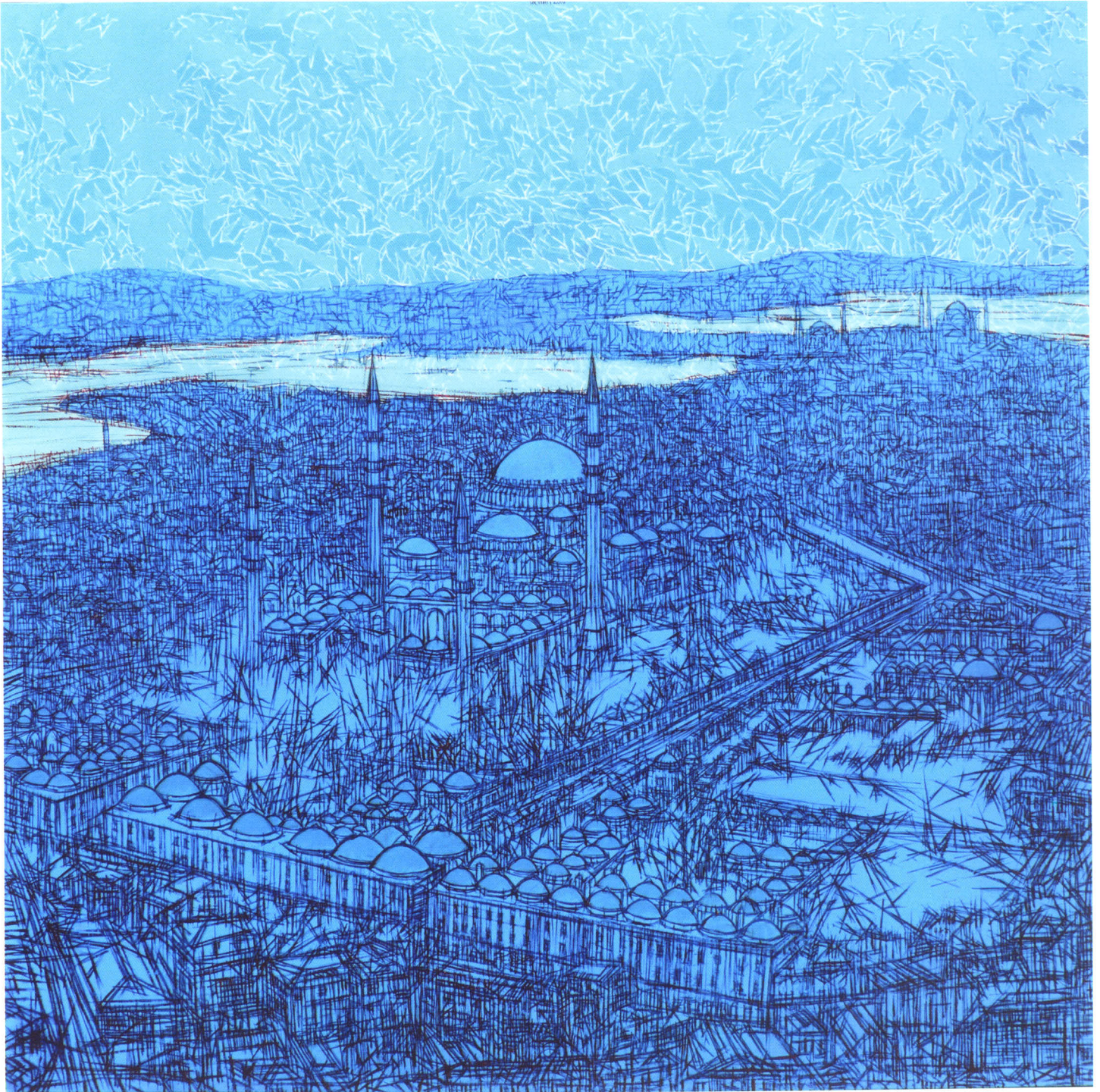




Green Istanbul, 2006
mixed media on canvas
125 x 125 cm



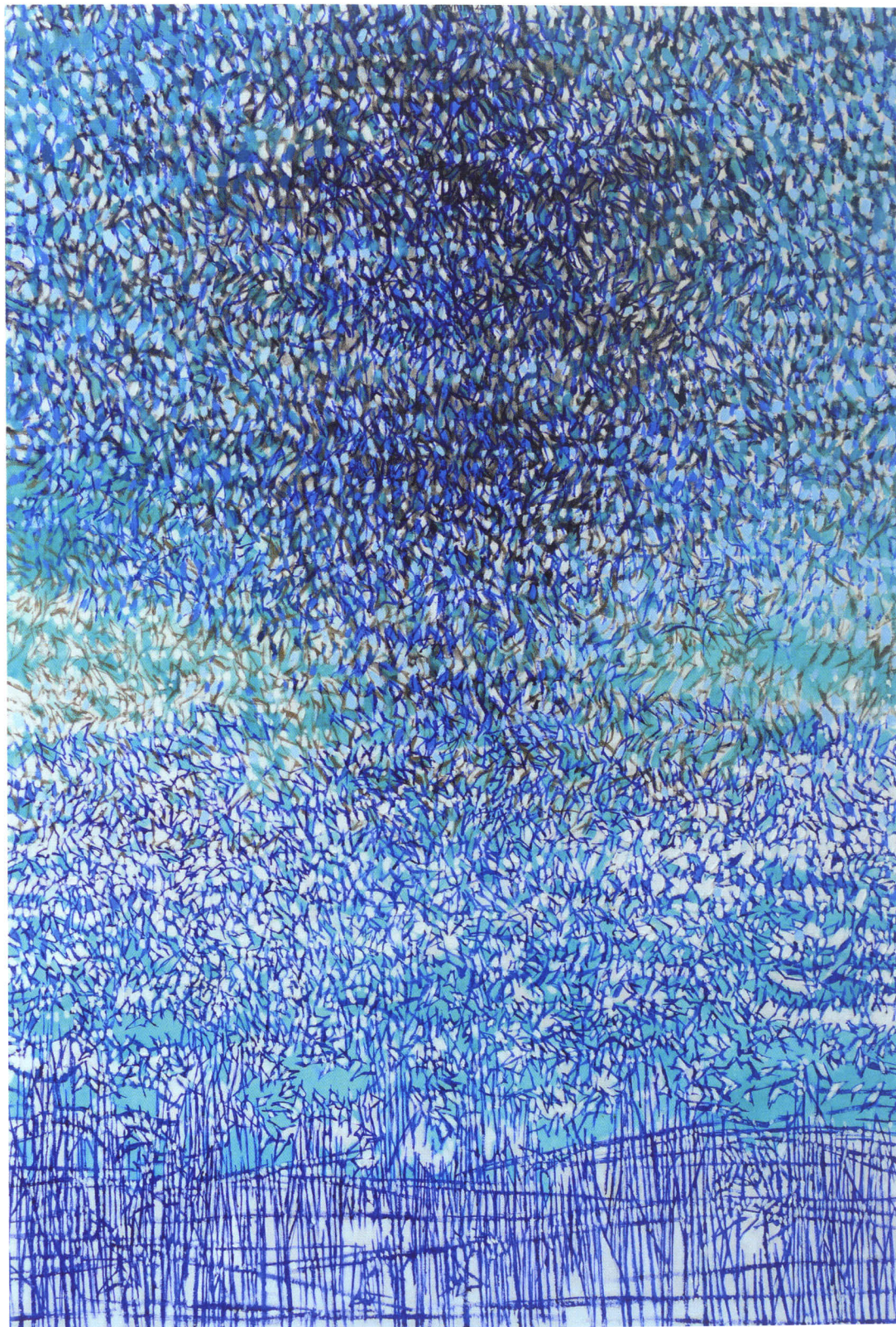
Istanbul Blue, 2010
oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm



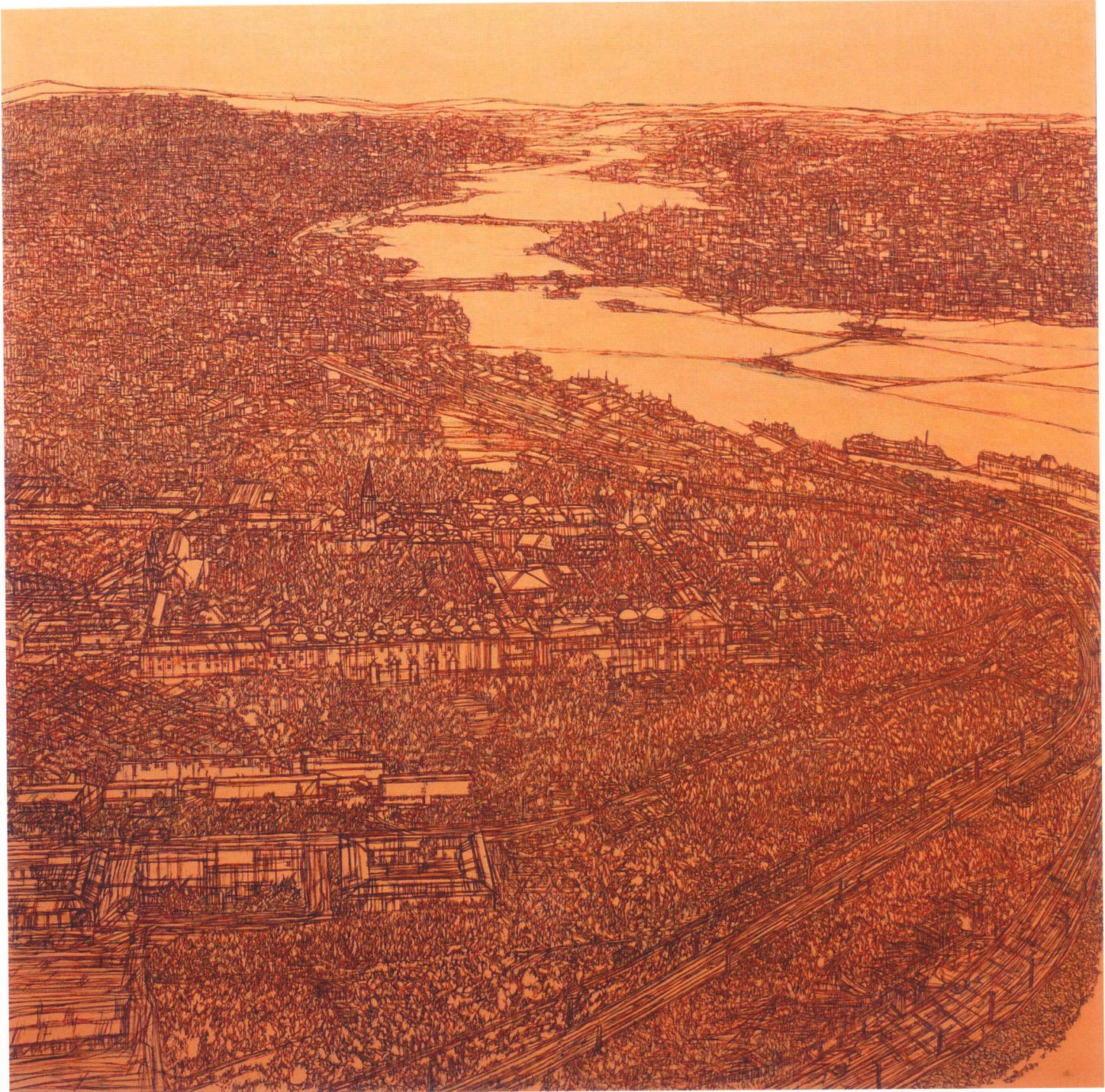
Storm, 2010
mixed media on canvas
130 x 100 cm



Vibration and Rythm, 2010
oil on canvas
120 x 80 cm



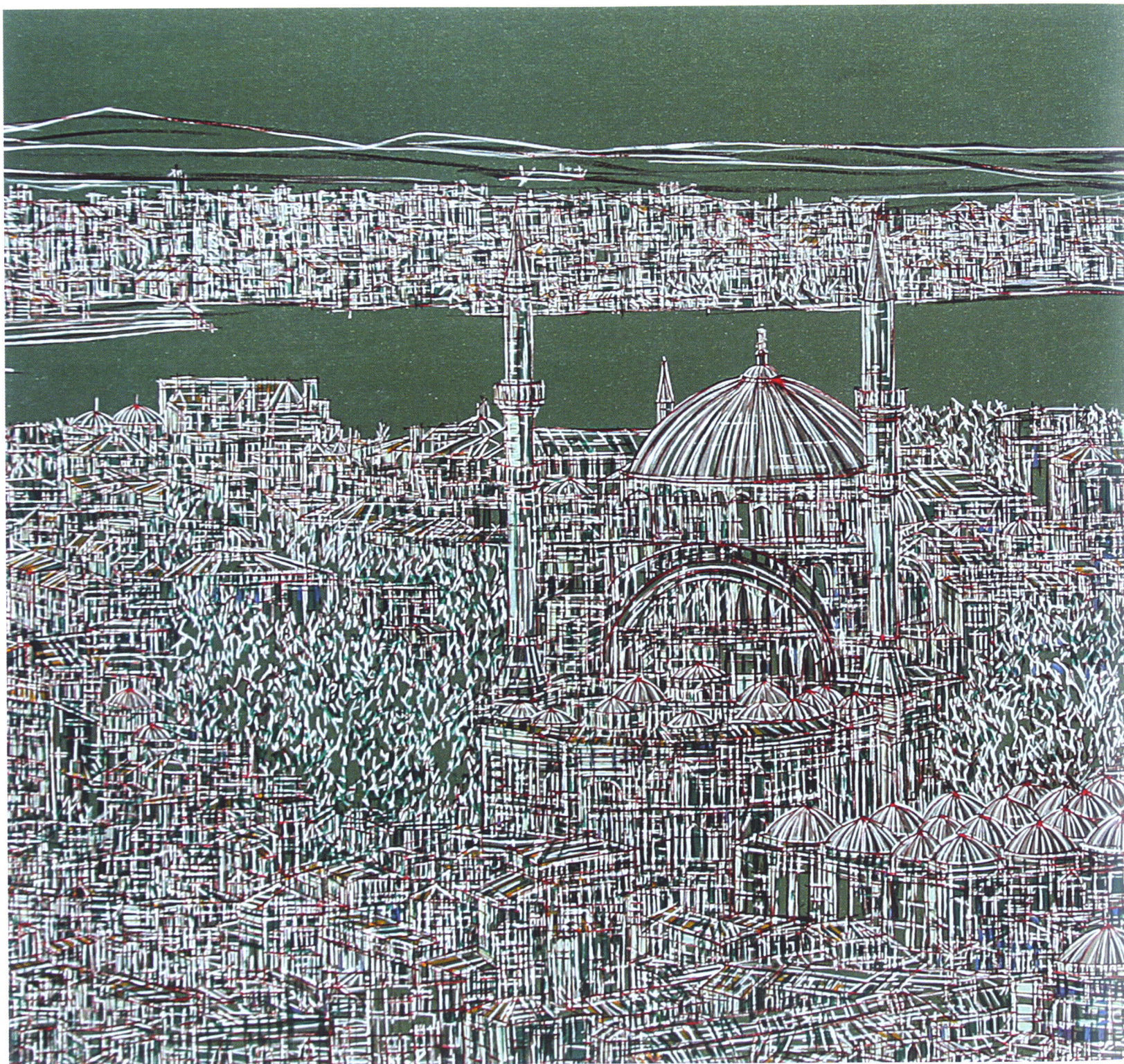
Istanbul Autumn, 2010
oil on canvas
180 x 180 cm

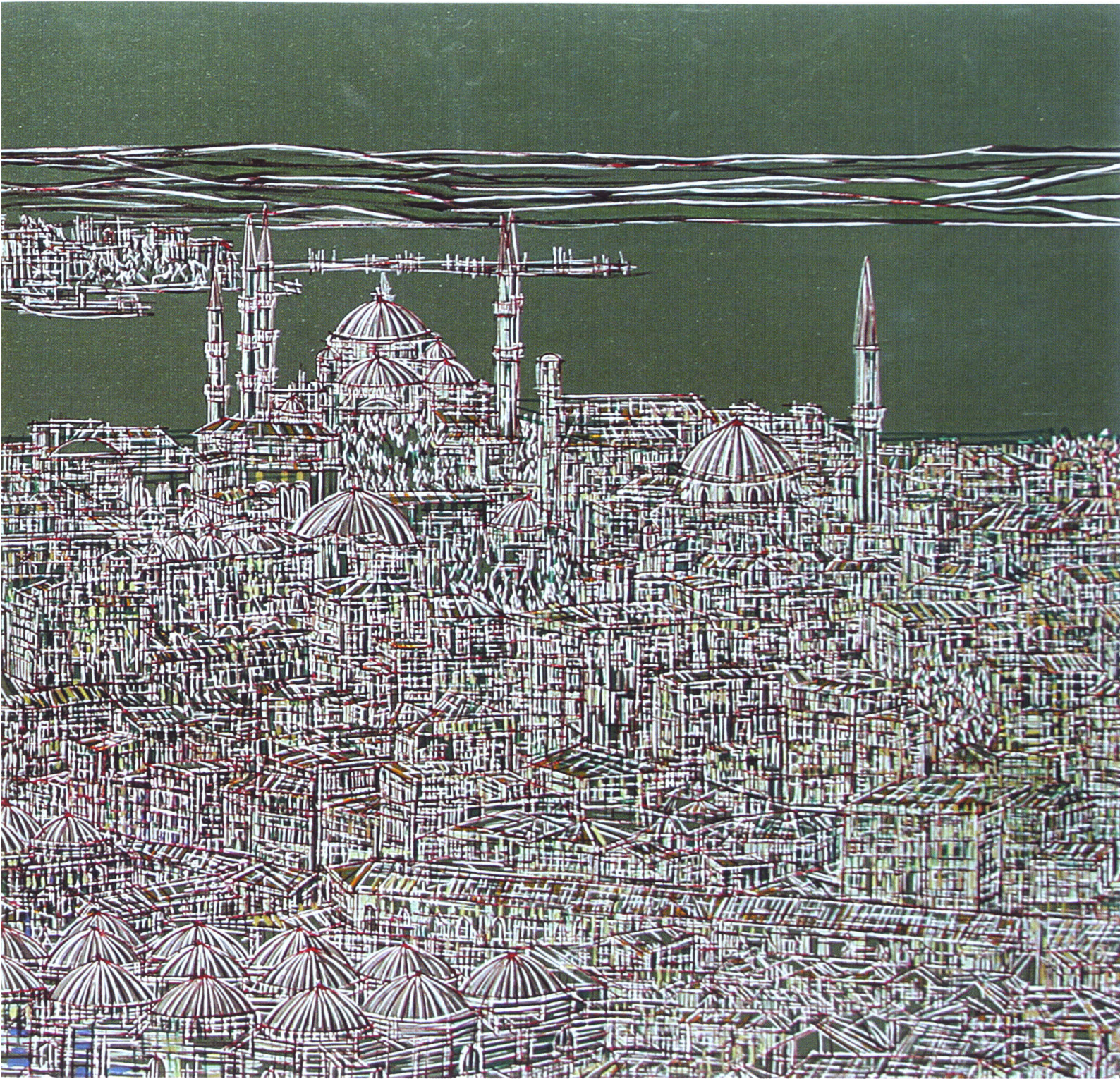


Autumn Yellow, 2007
oil on canvas
125 x 125 cm



Istanbul in Green (detail), 1990
oil on canvas
80 x 250 cm
Private Collection





1. ANONYMOUS, "Devrim Erbil Under the Spell of Vibrations ...", Fine Arts Magazine, P.26, March 2009.
2. ANONYMOUS, "Devrim Erbil Under the Spell of Vibrations...", p.25-26. Sırrı Yırcalı, a businessman from one of Balıkesir's respected families. He's also the brother of Sıtkı Yırcalı, one of the founders of the Democratic Party and the mentioned competition is organised in the name of this famous businessman.
3. ANONYMOUS, "Devrim Erbil Under the Spell of Vibrations...", p.27.
4. ANONYMOUS, "Devrim Erbil Under the Spell of Vibrations...", p.27.
5. ANONYMOUS, "Devrim Erbil Under the Spell of Vibrations...", p.24.
6. ANONYMOUS, "Devrim Erbil Under the Spell of Vibrations...", p.27-28.
7. Ayşegül SÖNMEZAY (Interview), Don't Look When I Laugh - Mehmet Gülerüz Book, Turkish Is Bank Culture Publications, Istanbul, March 2004, p. 179-180.
8. Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, "On Çallı", Samples from Contemporary Turkish Art, Ak Publications Culture Books Series: 5, Istanbul, 1982, p.36.
9. Abdülkadir Günyaz, Devrim Erbil, 50th Year In Art, Istanbul, 2009, p.9.
10. A. Metin GERÇEK, "Devrim Erbil's Painting Exhibition", Balıkesir Postası, relayed from 1956 by Devrim Erbil Art Museum Balıkesir, Science Art Gallery Publications, Istanbul, 2002, p. 15.
11. ANONYMOUS, "Devrim Erbil Under the Spell of Vibrations...", p.30.
12. ANONYMOUS, "Devrim Erbil Under the Spell of Vibrations...", p.30.
13. Ayşegül SÖNMEZAY (Interview), Don't Look When I Laugh Mehmet Gülerüz Book, p.192-193.
14. ANONYMOUS, "Devrim Erbil Under the Spell of Vibrations...", p.30.
15. Nurullah Berk, "A Young Artist: Devrim Erbil", Devrim Erbil Art Museum Balıkesir, Science Art Gallery Publishing, Istanbul, 2002, p.21-22.
16. Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, "Erbil's Messages", Devrim Erbil Art Museum Balıkesir, p.23-24.
17. Ahu ANTMEN, New Ventures in Turkish Art: 1960-80, unpublished doctorate thesis, Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts, Social Sciences Institute, 2005, p. iii.
18. For detailed information on the issue see Burcu PELVANOĞLU, Turkish Art After 1980: Transformations, Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts, Social Sciences Institute, unpublished doctorate thesis, Istanbul, 2009.
19. Nilüfer ÖNDİN, Republic's Cultural Policy and Art 1923-1950, Insancil Publications, Istanbul, 2003, p.217-218.
20. Semra GERMANER, "Painting in the Republic Era", Colours and Forms of the Republic, Social History Foundation Publications, Istanbul, 1999, p. 8-25.
21. Ali AKAY, "Art Market-Labour Market: Improvisation", Art and Sociology, Bağlam Publications, Istanbul, 2005, p.10.
22. CHP and Justice Party coalition government was formed after 1973 elections. The crisis that broke out after the Cyprus Peace Invasion and the subsequent elections of 1975 created the right environment for a multi-party coalition. Headed by Süleyman Demirel the government was formed of Nationalist Front Party, Justice Party, National Welfare Party, Republican People's Party, Nationalist Party and independent candidates.
23. Feroz AHMAD, Development of Modern Turkey, Sarmal Publications, Istanbul, 1995, p.194.
24. Funda BERKSOY, Social Realism in 20th Century Western and Turkish Painting, Istanbul, 1998, p.128.
25. Artisan Art Gallery relocated to Istanbul in 1986.
26. ANONYMOUS, "Devrim Erbil Under the Spell of Vibrations...", p.30-31.
27. ANONYMOUS, "Devrim Erbil Under the Spell of Vibrations...", p.31.
28. ANONYMOUS, "Devrim Erbil Under the Spell of Vibrations...", p.31-32.
29. The Masters of the Master Quarter of a Century in Art, Science Art Gallery Publications, Istanbul 1995, p.7.
30. These exhibitions started in November 1995 and continued until January 1996. Exhibition programme was as follows: 20-30 November 1995 HP Gallery, Lefkoşa, TRNC; 21-30 November 1995 Atatürk Cultural Centre, Lefkoşa, TRNC; 1-17 December 1995 Kadıköy Municipality Culture and Art Centre, Caddebostan-Istanbul; 11-26 December 1995 Yıldız Technical University Sabancı Cultural Centre, Istanbul; 12-26 December 1995 Mimar Sinan University Osman Hamdi Exhibition Hall, Istanbul; 22 December 1995-10 January 1996 Tayyare Culture Centre, Bursa; 26 December 1995-10 January 1996 İzfaş Art Gallery, Izmir; 27 December 1995-17 January 1996 Mimar Sinan University Istanbul Art and Sculpture Museum; 5-30 January 1996 State Fine Arts Gallery, Beyoğlu-Istanbul; 8-19 January 1996 Uludağ University, Görükle Campus Faculty of Medicine Exhibition Hall, Bursa; 15-30 Ocak 1996 Izmir Art and Sculpture Museum; 16-30 January 1996 Arda Art Gallery, Ankara.
31. The Masters of the Master Quarter of a Century in Art, p.12.
32. The Masters of the Master Quarter of a Century in Art, p.13.
33. The Masters of the Master Quarter of a Century in Art, p.17.
34. Erdoğan TANALTAY, "Devrim Erbil", Devrim Erbil Art Museum, p. 68-70.
35. Karsten SCHUBERT, The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution, Trans. Rana Smith, Istanbul Art Museum Foundation, Istanbul, 2004, p.100-103.
36. Tomur ATAGÖK, "Devrim Erbil's Rhythm of Life", Devrim Erbil Art Museum, p.39.
37. Özer KABAŞ, "My Colleague Devrim Erbil", Devrim Erbil Art Museum, p.40.
38. Feriha BÜYÜKÜNAL, "Interview with Devrim Erbil", Devrim Erbil Art Museum, p.61.
39. Levent ÇALIKOĞLU, "Line/Colour/Vibration", Devrim Erbil Art Museum, p.100.
40. Adnan TURANİ, "Devrim Erbil's Artistic Adventure", Devrim Erbil Art Museum, p.85.
41. Esra ALİÇAVUŞOĞLU, "Art, A Measure for Civilisation", Devrim Erbil Art Museum, p.83.



Bekir Olcay, Devrim Erbil and Ömer Olcay, 2010

