

Imagining Kur



Drawing is an Act of Conscience

rdistan

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For more than a century, Kurdistan – split across the borders of four different countries – has witnessed all forms of war, varying in the levels of intensity. As a result of the rising authoritarian Islamic regimes in Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, the habitat, nature and, historical texture of many settlements has been and continues to be irreparably damaged. At the same time, Kurdistan's geographical location lies on the route to Europe, meaning that the places we live in have borne witness to the migration of different groups of people.

Violations to the fundamental right to life of those who oppose the dictatorial regime, as well as prohibitions, limits placed on freedom of expression, deprivation, and punishments have spread to every corner of society in Kurdistan. The regime's exclusion of those who are not on its side has been transformed into ever more brutal punishments, starting with the casualties and deaths left behind after more than 100 years of war, through the Kurdish uprising which began in 1980, to the 1990s – the height of the rebellion in Turkey and Kurdish cities – when 17,000 unsolved murders were committed. During this severe period, the paramilitary

forces of the state created a climate of fear that has lasted for years, and which continues to this day. Every moment we continue to live in Kurdish cities and villages, we live in fear.

As someone who has experienced this process directly, I have made it a conscious duty to draw these destroyed places and the textures left behind by displaced people. I was becoming familiar with the collective memory that exists outside of my own, individually acquired memories. At the same time, I was not a distant observer of the process. When the violence increased, I knew that nothing would ever be the same again – and I worried about the aftermath. At the point at which the destruction could no longer be stopped, everything had to be recorded. Drawing was the way I could convey what I saw and experienced, and the way I expressed myself.





The “Saturday Mothers” series

For years and years there have been vigils for justice held by the “Saturday Mothers” in different cities for the remains of disappeared children. A series of atrocities affected the Mothers, who are fighting for the rights (bones) of their children. When, in 2019, hunger strikes launched by Kurdish political prisoners against torture and oppression came close to the brink of death, the Mothers started new street vigils for justice for their own children. As a response, they have been beaten up by state forces, and a new penal system was established. Anyone who raised their voice was punished through arrests, beatings, threats, criminalization, and unofficial punishment methods. As I was witnessing this process, I tried to create an alternative to the violence and intimidation policies

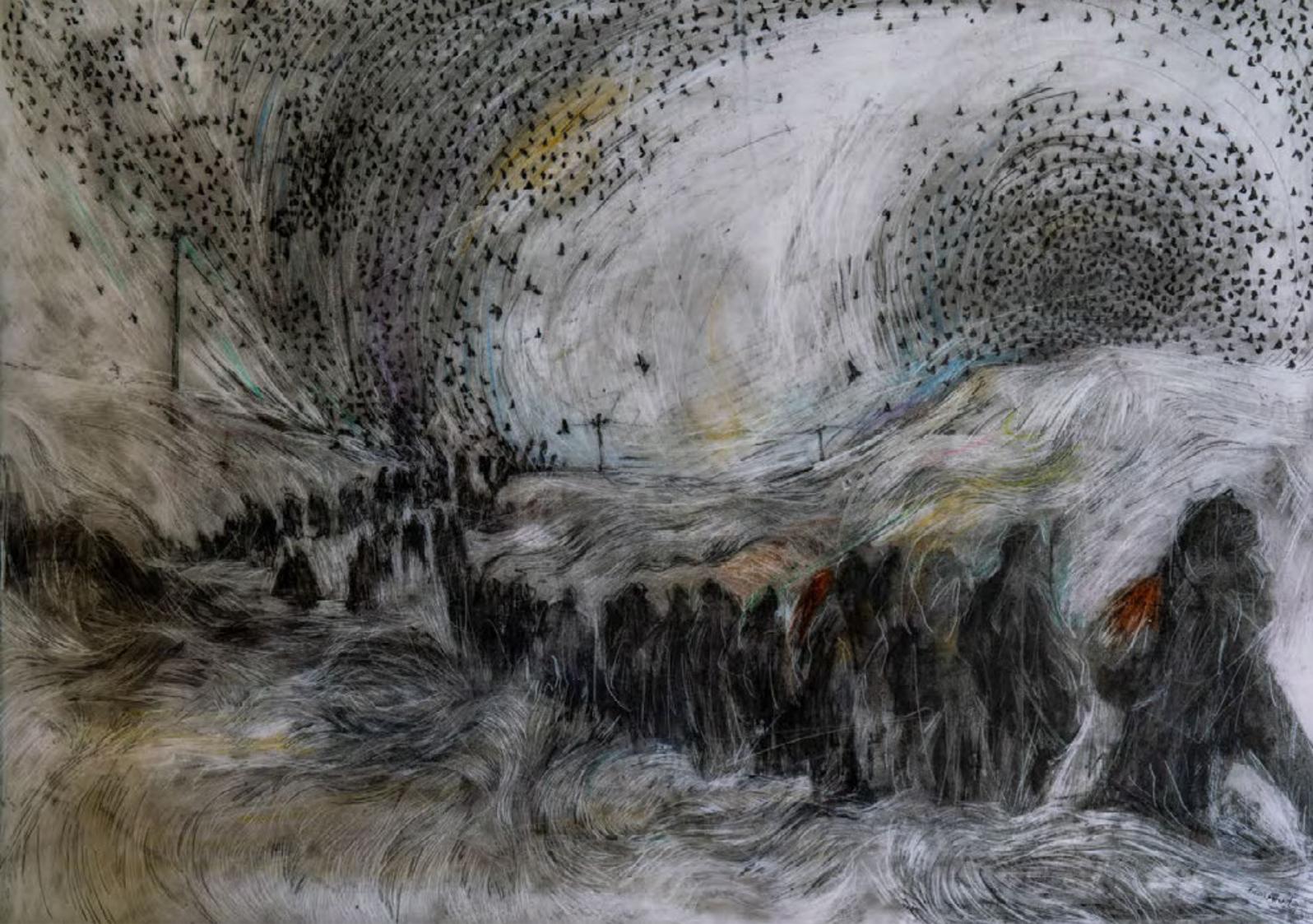
against people defending peace with a white cloth in their hands. I started producing my own drawings in the face of every event that we witnessed in the media. These paintings were not only my effort and my responsibility; they became about creating my own version of reality and my own image of every event that happened and is happening. It was about responsibility of conscience. Every feeling that arose in me emotionally on seeing the image of mothers’ lonely resistance on the street awoke my conscience. I wanted to exist with the conscious responsibility of being part of a reality that lasted for a month by producing a drawing every day. This spiral of violence and oppression will continue in our lives for a long time. As each moment transforms into its own image, I continue and will continue to witness this life with drawn lines.

The “Migration” series

Landscapes of people losing their lives on migration routes under the oppression of authoritarian regimes. The first time I witnessed scenes such as this was when I left the village where I was born and raised. It began with my grandfather’s last word, my separation from home and the land I belonged to. My grandfather came to the mountainside in the middle of the night, looked back at his house for the last time and said, “Look, children, you will never see this place like this again.” Looking back for the last time, he left me with an emptiness that would not be filled for the rest of my life – and an unresolved feeling that would continue.

Hope is the long walk of people huddled around it. These walks, starting from one end of the world and reaching the other, may represent the greatest march and crisis of our time. The deprivations and punishments experienced on these paths created new images. Dozens of human bodies washed ashore. One war after another, especially in the Middle East; Iraq, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, and the Kurdish fragmented country. In the aftermath of each war, people begin new waves of migration, and new issues around race, religion, language, and marginalization arise. The migrant needs a piece of land on this earth, on which to live. Like the seasonal migration of birds. From one end to the other, we pass right next to you, right beside you.





But the brutal colonial system condemns entire societies to extinction. The established orders, from wars to relations of production, are centralized through dictators, states, gangs. Power is a battlefield, and a sword over the whole of society. Baby Artin's journey from the Middle East to the Norwegian coast from the persecution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The story of Alan Kurdi, who fled ISIS terror in Syria and was washed ashore on the Aegean coast. Stories of people swallowed by the sea from Africa, resurfacing on the coast of Spain or Italy. On the journey that started barefoot in Afghanistan, stories of people frozen on steep mountainous roads.

Roboski and the “Sur” series

In villages located at the intersection of the four parts of Kurdistan, people born in the same country are citizens of different nation-states across the decimated borders. In our own geography, in these mountains where we were born and we felt we belonged, the Turkish armed forces bombed and killed thirty-four young people who carried cargo from one border to another. Thirty-four people. Four different countries collecting the remains of people who did not comply with the borders that were forced onto this geography. People went to the mountains one morning in the village of Roboski to collect the remains of their children.

While all kinds of punishments were justified in the genocidal grip, the image of women talking in the windows of their homes was among the most basic sceneries in Sur’s natural texture. Thousands of people found themselves in the middle of a conflict when the city war began among the thousands-year-old historical structure of Amed (Diyarbakır), the largest city of the Kurds. The government gathered all its military and security forces in this city and destroyed a neighbourhood through a conflict that lasted six months. More than a year of curfew and clashes, tanks, guns, flags, destroyed streets, and hundreds of thousands of people made homeless. The sounds of war, the sounds of iron/steel that we listened to with fear from the windows of our own houses with the lights out.

This is a time when our gaze changes, when we leave all our belongings and experiences behind. The street where we grew up was being destroyed day by day with heavy weapons. While trying to draw under the light coming in through the window, being part of this image made it impossible to see what existed. The fear of the constricted time between living and dying, and the image of what was left. The streets no longer carried the sounds of children playing. The image of the colourfully painted streets was changing into the sharpness of black and white. Those women would never have conversations in their windows again. What kept their children

alive was the hope of reaching the days they dreamed of, and what kept their families alive in their homes was the hope of seeing each other again. To believe that life would go on. I wanted to support their hope, to make it visible. A city that had hosted different ethnic groups for millennia was destroyed by the ruthlessness of the state – even its stones and garbage did not escape destruction.

Due to limited time and a lack of materials, I did most of my work either digitally or on portable objects such as small notebooks and paper. As it became difficult to work on large paintings or to use any kinds of paints, I turned to nature as an alternative. I started to draw directly from the colours of nature – to preserve the colour equation and to try new styles to see what I could produce within my narrow means. Searching for ways to respond to the events that took place around me in their own time flow, I came to the conclusion that I could create traces and images with the colours of soil, leaves, and flowers. My work became about creating images in different spheres. On the one hand, I had a conscious responsibility, and on the other hand, I wanted to improve the curative aspects. The fact that my art became visible on social media and in the opposition press made my work much easier, but to produce drawings that are fast and accurate, conveying what is happening to others, has its challenges.

Drawing is a window to the world for me, a way of expressing myself. I do not believe that these works of mine will end. The moments and experiences that appear in my mind and in front of my eyes, that break in the time-space continuum, will continue to make me draw.

