

## CATALOG ESSAY

### “Depaysage”

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Şirin Iskit is a free spirit. She exuberantly defies convention both in her art and in her life. When she studied at the Academie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, she made up her mind to choose a professor that she liked rather than accepting the system of studying for three years with an assigned professor. When she was invited to create an exhibition for Pi Artworks, she decided to move into the gallery and live there, to make it her “living room” for the duration of the show. In her studio-home, the furniture is as much a part of her art as the paintings hanging on the wall. Her characteristic day-glo colors, spill into table clothes, walls and huge puffy leather chairs that she makes herself. They punctuate the foreground of a magical view of the Golden Horn, the Bosphorous and the Sea of Marmara.

Yet, along with her carefree spirit Şirin is also an obsessive artist who paints on the same canvas for months, using layers and layers of paint, starting with four coats of white followed by many layers of brilliant colors. With these colors she creates a fantastic universe of imaginary creatures and landscapes. Currently, she is also creating virtual landscapes on the web, the scenery of the future. That is why she calls her work “depaysage” which is an invented French word that for Şirin signifies a change of scenery or new surroundings. She is undomesticating the painted French landscape, a predictable set of conventions based on carefully orchestrated spaces that move calmly into the blue- green distance, framed by trees that conveniently droop from each side of the view. In its place she gives us forms that seem to come from underwater or within wild, unkempt, but not unruly, psychic space.

Şirin’s universe reminds us of the psychedelic sixties and the animated world of cartoons, even as it is distinctively her own world. We can reject these landscapes and stay in our dull world of dark colors and restrictions, but if we choose to enter and join Şirin, we can leave all of that behind. We don’t exactly float in this world, it is too full of large, unpredictable objects with various tentacles and irregular curves, but we do surrender and perhaps go limp in order to navigate through these shapes. The brilliant colors give us energy, they propel us, much like a drug. These bright colors suggest heat, energy, dynamism, movement and life itself.

Even as she is obsessed for days on end with creating fantasy worlds, Şirin’s connection to Istanbul is powerful. Perhaps in some ways her fantasy world is Istanbul, transformed through her own rich imagination. After growing up abroad for many years as the daughter of a diplomat (in Iran, Belgium, Egypt, France, and Italy) she was overwhelmed when she returned to Istanbul with her powerful emotional response to the city. She felt that she belonged here and has now made it her permanent home. Şirin has a community based spirit, even as she seems to live in a world of playful illusion. She has also done stage design, art for movies and advertisements. For one ad she single handedly created an entire Museum of Modern Art for Istanbul by painting all the paintings herself in

various minimalist styles and placing them in a big warehouse as a backdrop. For a couple of years she ran an Istanbul art gallery, and for a few more, in Paris, she worked as a manager of a fashion design shop and began designing clothes herself.

Her life is a continuum of creativity between the useful and the useless. A few years ago she pushed a three-wheel cart around Istanbul for three days. But rather than collecting junk, her cart held bright pink, yellow, blue, and green plastic objects like sieves and spoons as well as fantastic whirligigs. Around the same time, she filled an entire wall of a gallery with plastic kitsch from baby dolls to swords. The plastic objects seemed to self-propagate and explode into a collective composition of their own in her amusingly titled installation the “plastic art exhibition.” Was it a celebration or a critique? Was it a commentary or a collection? Şirin is upbeat but subversive at the same time - this crazy plastic world was outrageous in its juxtapositions, completely contradicting a rationally ordered domesticity.

Recently, she made a series of small cutouts in which the colors, physically as well as visually, popped out of a corner. For another exhibition she knitted a densely designed sweater using her trademark rainbow of colors and fantastically complicated patterns. No matter whether she is making large round acrylic paintings, bulgy furniture, or clothing, Şirin Iskit’s exuberant, joyful, and positive embrace of creativity is, above all, energizing. Her imaginary world reaches out to us and heals us of our mundane anxieties by offering what the artist refers to as “the miracle of life.”

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