



Serdar Arat comes from a part of the world where the West and the East meet in a perpetual collision. A great number of views and values from all sides and times lead a disheveled existence on Turkish soil: It is an overwhelming, confusing, tough traffic one has to put up with. As many fade into grey passivity, floating on random waves, some try to grab onto an idea or two, denying the rest, to adopt a sensible identity. Quite recently, as in many similar locations in the world, some members of new generations have introduced a third choice, embracing everything involved in their formations and letting the sum total of their selves be the "synthesis." Arat is one of these few who have, with improbable tolerance, let their disparate and crowded backgrounds help them carry their lives to a larger but solitary scale. He is a typical New Yorker—his home for the past twelve years.

The most significant mark of Arat's background in his work is a skepticism against the "given." The unique, non-rectangular shapes of his canvasses are neither for difference nor are they touristic shapes he carries in from his Middle Eastern origins: they are the result of a compulsion to question the very idea of painting. The canvasses do not only serve as the surface to be painted but also constitute the starting point, the "problematic," the reason for the painting to be painted. Each work survives off the tension created by the relationship between the canvas and the images placed on it. The product does not allow the viewer to forget about its production, the fact that it is the result of decisions. Indeed, I find myself thinking of what Arat has excluded while viewing what he has chosen to include in a painting.

When it comes to choosing the specific images, Arat seems to be as careful as a tight-rope walker in preserving a perfect balance between realistic depiction and abstraction. His images (hollows, clouds, horizons, water) are rendered enough not to be mistaken for anything else, yet, they maintain an ambiguity to set off the viewer's imagination. These images and compositions, which he may be carrying in from his origins where metaphorical poetry is an organic part of everyday life, save Arat's work from becoming dry discussions on the phenomenon of painting. However, even at the thematic level, he tries to control the level of illusion through the juxtaposition of convincing depictions with irregularities in dimensions, perspective and texture.

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