

# Nazif Topcuoglu

Girls Grown Wild













© Nazif Topcuoglu – *Magic Carpets*, 2010, Courtesy Green Art Gallery, Dubai









© Nazif Topcuoglu – *Table Top*, 2009, Courtesy Green Art Gallery, Dubai









© Nazif Topcuoglu – *Consolation*, 2009, Courtesy Green Art Gallery, Dubai





© Nazif Topcuoglu – *Murder Mystery*, 2010, Courtesy Green Art Gallery, Dubai





© Nazif Topcuoglu – *Sacrifice, The Story of Isaac*, 2008, Courtesy Green Art Gallery, Dubai









© Nazif Topcuoglu – *Like Thieves at Midnight*, 2010, Courtesy Green Art Gallery, Dubai





© Nazif Topcuoglu – *Triptych*, 2009, Courtesy Green Art Gallery, Dubai



Nazif Topcuoglu works with no assistants, in his own environment, in his home, with his modest equipment and with the cooperation of college models, who volunteer to model in his work. He says he only makes five or six works a year under these circumstances and this new series consists of around ten photographs. When addressed as a photographer, he corrects and says that he does not necessarily refer to himself as a photographer. Rather, he uses photography to “paint pictures” and describes himself as “an artist who uses photography”.

Born in 1953, Topcuoğlu graduated with a Masters degree from the Institute of Design in Chicago in 1981. Since then he has exhibited widely and has published three books on the history and criticism of photography. His work appears regularly at art fairs such as Art Dubai (2010), Paris Photo (2006-2009), ARCO (2008 & 2009), Scope Basel (2008) among others and at auctions such as the Christies Dubai sale in April 2009, the Sotheby's Turkish Contemporary Art auctions in 2009 and 2010 and Phillips De Pury's Now: Art of the 21st Century display in September 2009. His work is included in several significant publications on contemporary art including *Vitamin Ph: New Perspectives in Photography*, published by Phaidon in 2006, *User's Manual: Contemporary Art in Turkey 1986-2006*, published by art-ist in 2007, and most recently in *Unleashed: Contemporary Art from Turkey* published by Transglobe Publishing in spring 2010.

He has shown worldwide, including the Venice Biennale at the Turkish Pavillion in 2003 and his most recent show was at Green Art Gallery Dubai, which marked his first appearance in the Middle East. His work is included within various public and private collections such as JP Morgan, Sema-Barbaros Caga, Reflex Miniature Museum of Contemporary Art (Amsterdam) and more.

In his artist statement he says, “The underlying thread in my work is a constant preoccupation with time, memory and loss. I worry about the transience of people and things in general, and try to reconstruct unclear and imperfect images of an idealized past...” In this new series, he has evolved from re-creating the past through his childhood memories and nostalgia; now he is more concerned about the future, which

he envisions in a pessimistic manner. He conveys his message, again with a group of young girls. In this new series, his girls have grown, completed their intellectual development and are ready to make their statements to the world and even ready to fight amongst themselves for their own cause. Provocative, sexually charged images at first sight, underneath it all, Topcuoglu conveys his perspective of life, world affairs, political and social life in Turkey as well as in the world, with his compositions of young girls relating to art history and literary references.

In Turkey, his works are described on some web sites as “seductive, where he uses high school girls in mini skirts”. He responds to this perception saying: “Our (Turkish) community is seduced by anything...” In this reply, there lies a conflict between the direction of Turkey's political strategy and the actual social impact on the ground, which he perceives as becoming more conservative as the years go by. This is one of the many issues he is trying to highlight. According to him, (Since his last interview in *EYEMAZING* in 2008), “The girls have completed their education, grown up and have come to a certain point where they differ from each other. Some of them have become more rebellious and some of them are more obedient to the system, into which the whole world seems to be dragged. Now in this series, we see the clash between these two groups of girls,” he says.

He admits to being a political and social artist, utilizing women as his subjects “whom have long been treated as the inferior gender.” He says, “The girls (women) are the downtrodden gender. They became educated and informed so that they could fight for their own rights and claim them.” He criticizes the current AKP government, and why a group of intellectuals do not act on it. Thus, in using these girls (here quotes a John Lennon song, “Woman is the nigger of the world”) he conveys in this series, the clash between the underdogs and rebels. The whole political climate in Turkey and overall political and social situation of the world, which he thinks is getting worse each day, is expressed via these girls’ fight in the *Untitled* series.

Topcuoglu is known for the wide range of art history references he utilizes in his photos. In his most recent

work these references span the Renaissance to the twentieth century, to Bacon to be more specific. He describes his typical working environment as “a school project” for which he mostly uses his house as a studio and his models help him with picking out the outfits and the whole shoot in general. For this series, besides his studio, he moved to a historical power plant, Santral Istanbul, in Istanbul for some of the photographs in the series (for example, the *Triptych* (2009)). Previously, one of the oldest electrical power plants, the space has been renovated and part of it has been converted into a contemporary art space.

He states that “an ideal, responsive audience needs to have a certain level of education and intellect” in order to thoroughly comprehend his works and adds, “In order to be on that level one needs to read, research, and ask all the time.” His work contains references to art history, literature, politics and books. According to Nazif, “If you see a group of girls lying on the floor, if you know how you are looking and at what you are looking, it is possible to see the position of bodies in the *Raft of Medusa* (A nineteenth century painting by Théodore Géricault). Or a Rembrandt inspiration in another one.”

His previous works, during 2002 and 2003 (for instance, the Readers series), were more nostalgic; he went back to his childhood, tried to recapture his childhood memories. As the son of a professor, his childhood was spent in a house full of books... Today, over fifty-five years of age, he still lives in a house full of books, with his Macintosh (computer). Now that the childhood is over, as a grown up, he perceives today as a dystopia. He says, “I am not really fond of the future, I do not envision the future as nice.” This perception of his, is clearly present in this latest series *Untitled*.

Now that they are done reading, the girls are struggling, with or without books, in a former power plant, on large photographic prints, for their own rights...

TEXT BY BÜŞRA ÇOPUROĞLU

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