

# AWC NEWSPAPER

## HANGING GARDENS OF BABYLON

Paris / FRANCE

Sefa ÇATUK

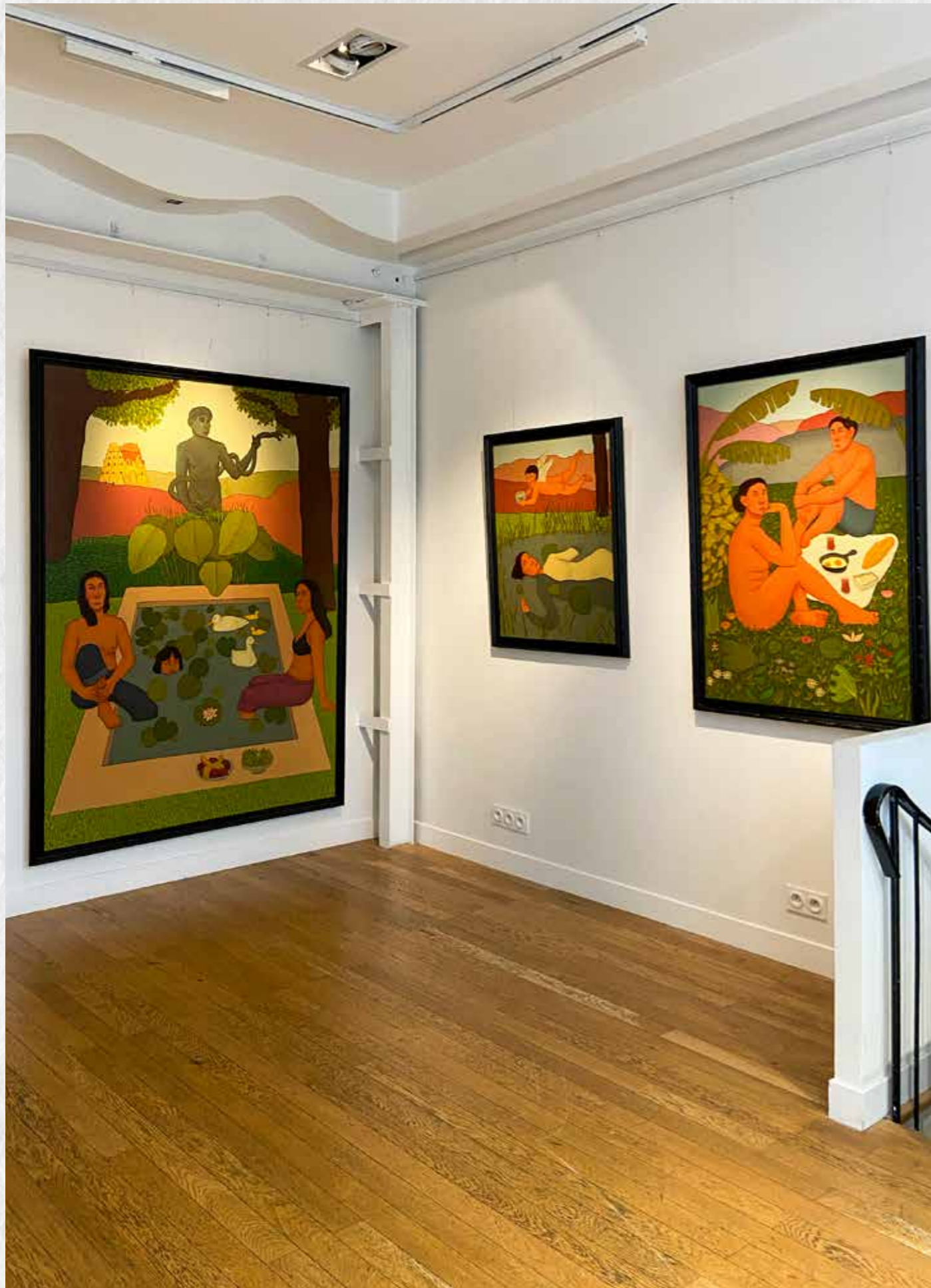
Solo Exhibitor

Curator: Ayça Okay & Sinda Drine



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# HANGING GARDENS OF BABYLON

Is a garden truly only a place of peace, calm, and escape, or is it a threshold where belief, desire, power, the body, and memory overlap all at once?

Today, the fact that Sefa Çatuk speaks from Paris, from within a Western-centered art narrative, makes this question even more meaningful. In Western art history, the garden was often constructed as a surface to be looked at, contemplated, and aesthetically consumed, as in Monet's water lilies. Nature was tamed, controlled, and transformed into an idealized field of beauty. In the geography that includes Babylon, however, the garden was from the beginning metaphysical, cosmic, and spiritual. It was not a landscape, but the spatial form of humanity's relationship with the universe. Moreover, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon have never been definitively proven to have existed; although they are counted among the Seven Wonders of the World, they survive mostly in legends. This uncertainty turns Babylon into a powerful image suspended between history and myth, reality and imagination.

Foucault's definition of the garden as a heterotopia becomes especially significant here. The garden does not merely produce harmony and order; it also reveals power's desire to shape and control nature, and the way aesthetics can function as an ideological tool. Behind the innocent appearance of a landscape lies a regime of representation, a logic of organization, and a network of power relations. The garden is both a space of escape and a space of regulation; it creates a sense of freedom while

simultaneously drawing boundaries. Heterotopia, therefore, is not a space of harmony but one in which contradictions coexist and tension remains constantly present. Sefa Çatuk's Babylon constructs the garden not as a promise of serenity, but as a heterotopic stage where personal mythologies, political irony, and collective memory overlap. The images that appear throughout the paintings offer powerful examples of how this stage operates. A table set in the middle of the garden with two tulip-shaped glasses of tea, eggs frying in a pan, and a salmon sandwich; an olive tree rooted among water lilies; a young goat standing in water; Medusa appearing half-reflected in a pool; ducks wandering between the lilies; Eros carrying a bowl with a Japanese goldfish; shepherdlike figures holding a poisonous snake... All these elements allow the artist's own geography, with its bodily, everyday, and local memory, to seep into the mythological ground of Babylon. These images pull the garden away from a sacred and abstract realm and transform it into a space that is cooked, smelled, touched, and lived. The figures' existence in a primitive temporality removes them from the linear time of the modern world and places them in a mode of being still in direct contact with nature and ritual. Myth meets the kitchen, art history meets personal memory, and the sacred stands side by side with the everyday. For this reason, Sefa's garden is neither sterile nor romantic; it is a space one enters and touches, sometimes smiling, sometimes feeling unsettled, a vivid and deeply political site of encounter.

Ayça Okay



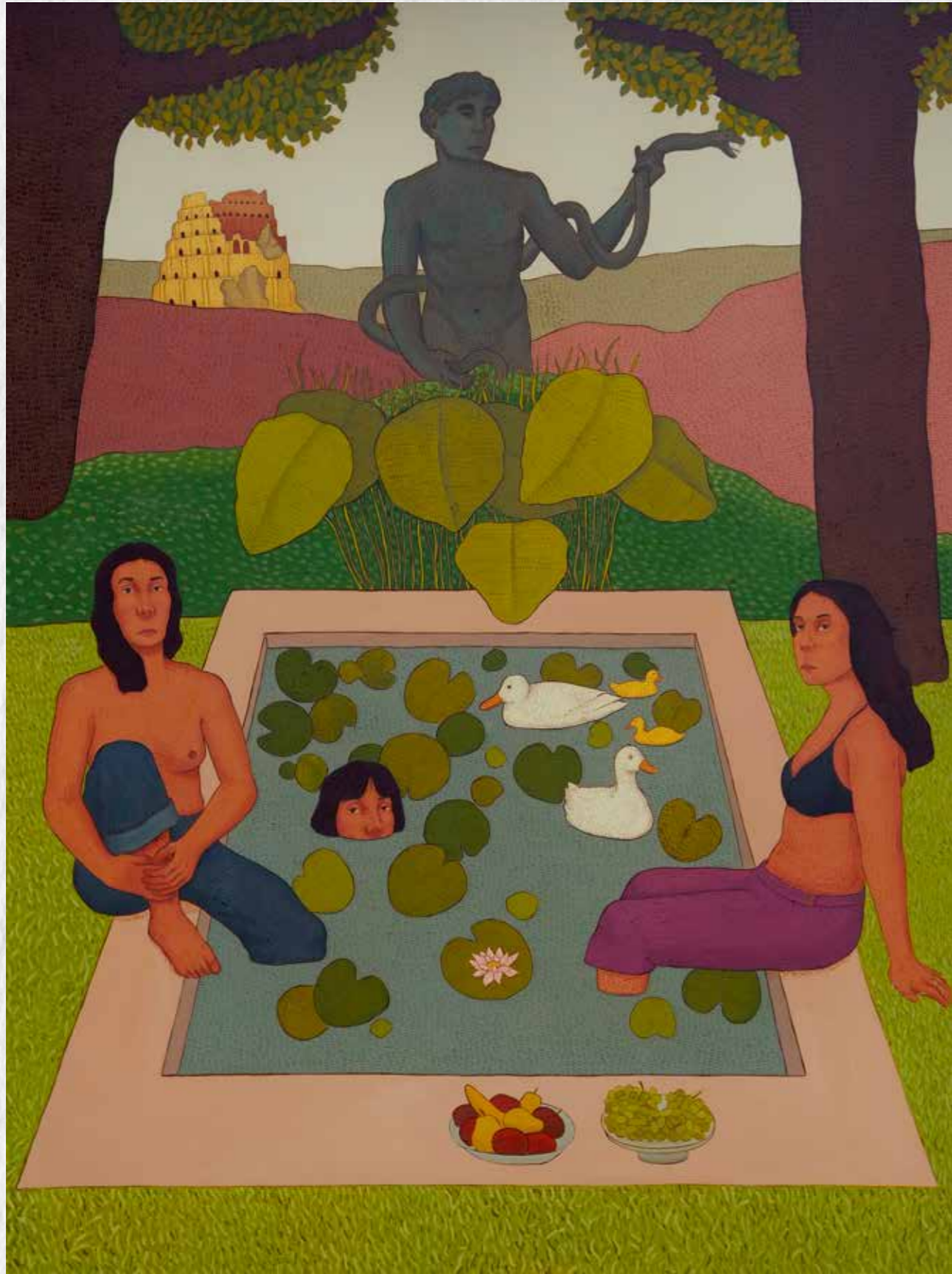
## SEFA ÇATUK

With my academic educations in the fields of art history and mythology, I create my personal mythology by adopting a symbolic and metaphorical language of expression in my works. These mythologies are located at the intersection of individual memory and social memory; they are built on an intellectual ground where universal religious and cultural expressions overlap with contemporary socio-political thoughts. This relationship I establish between the mythological and historical and contemporary phenomena creates an ironic and critical context on the visual plane. In my work, I adopt an approach that examines rituals, customs, traditions, language and religious systems in the public sphere. These structures are considered not only as forms that carry cultural continuity, but also as normative mechanisms that shape the individual-society relationship. In my work, I aim to transform these mechanisms by making them visible and to make the viewer a subject of this transformation process. In my art works compositions, I utilize the horizontal, vertical and diagonal forms of nature to carry the visual construction of space to a theoretical level. These orientations function not only as formal preferences but also as mental and symbolic orientations. Thus, the scenes that emerge in my work emerge as utopian spaces that blur the boundaries between reality and dream and problematize the understanding of time and space. By reconsidering the paintings that constitute a breaking point in the history of art, I reconsider the social and political codes of the period in the context of today's culture.

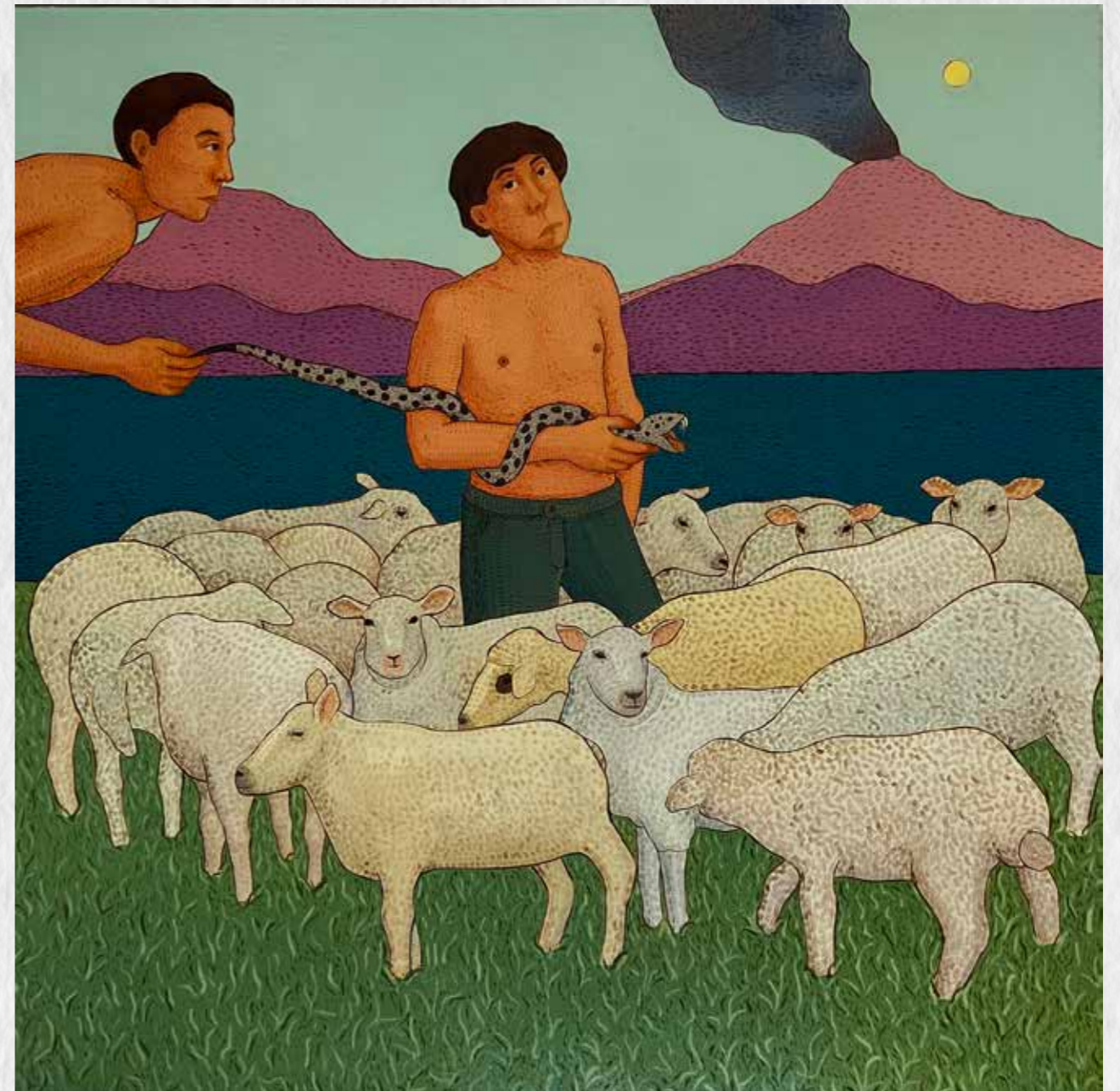


## AYÇA OKAY

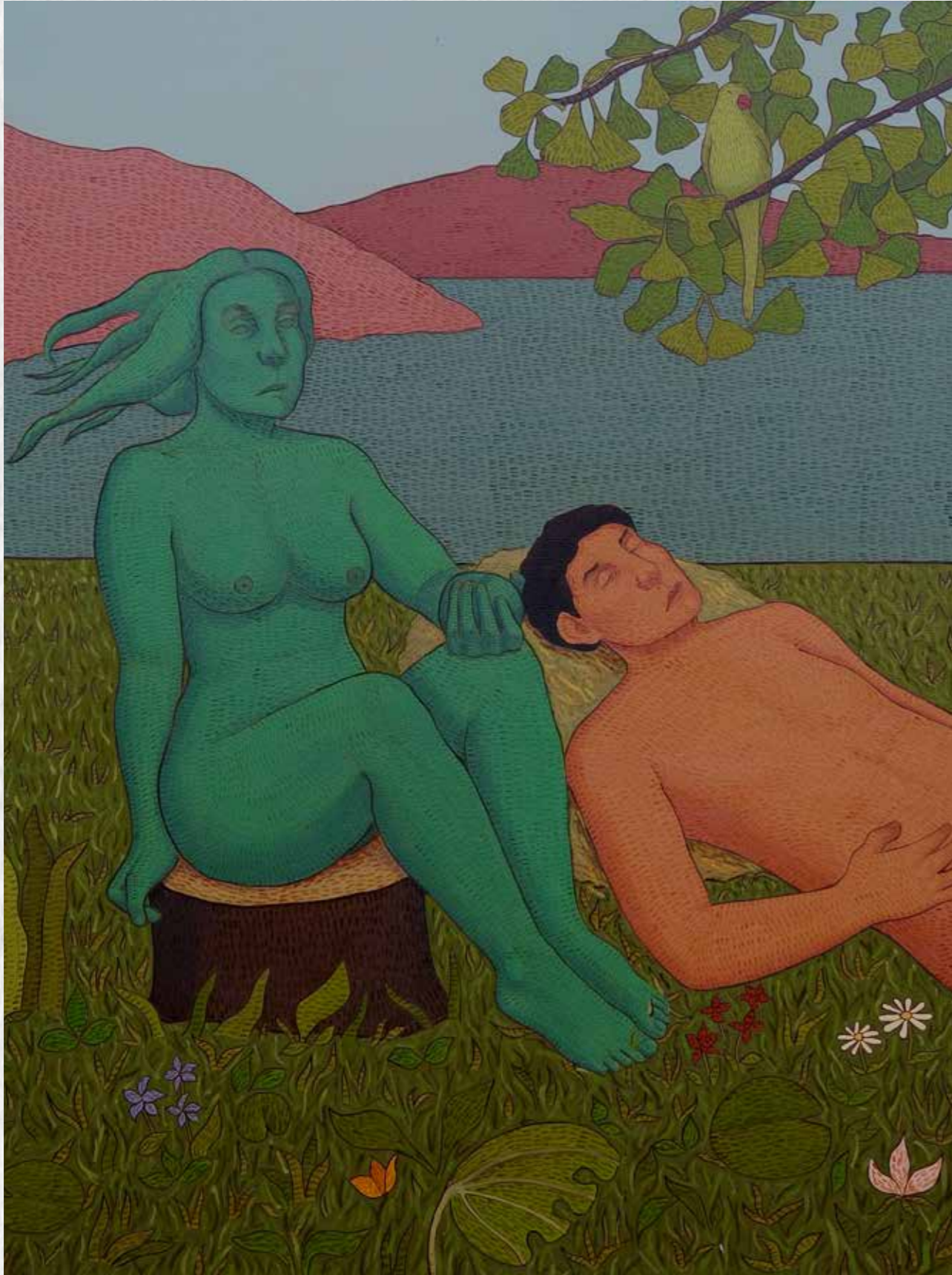
Ayça Okay is a curator, cultural strategist and writer born in Izmir; she is a member of AICA Turkey, CIMAM and ICOM. Working at the intersection of contemporary art and research-based practices, Okay adopts a holistic curatorial approach that aims to develop intellectual resources and promote sustainable support systems in collaboration with individuals, communities and institutions. Her work, which focuses on the SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa) and European regions, reframes art as a product of ideas, theory, and experimental processes, blurring the boundaries of traditional art. Since 2018, Okay has curated exhibitions and collection projects for institutions such as Baksı Museum, Borusan Contemporary, Contemporary Istanbul Foundation, Yves Rocher Foundation, Vorfluter Projektraum Berlin, Scope Berlin, and Somos Arts Berlin; he has also managed art projects for companies such as Turkish Airlines, SANKO Holding, and QNB Finansbank. Okay, who previously served as Art Programmes Director at the Contemporary Istanbul Foundation, has been working as a consultant and researcher for LOOP Barcelona Video Art Fair since 2022. He was invited to the International Curators Visiting Programme, where he conducted research on the Northern Art Ecosystem in Oslo and the EMST Museum Collection in Athens, and was among the 20 finalists at the Crack International Art Camp in the Kusthia region of Bangladesh. Okay is one of three young female curators accepted into CIMAM membership with the support of the SAHA Association and is a member of the Baksı Museum Board of Directors.



2025 / 200 x 150 cm / Oil on Canvas



2025 / 150 x 150 cm / Oil on Canvas



2026 / 100 x 80 cm / Oil on Canvas



2025 / 100 x 80 cm / Oil on Canvas



2025 / 120 x 90 cm / Oil on Canvas



2025 / 120 x 80 cm / Oil on Canvas



2026 / 90 x 70 cm / Oil on Canvas





**AW**  
Contemporary  
Gallery

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