

HOW I GOT STARTED

Hera Büyüktasçıyan discusses her creative beginnings and how being an artist is not a career but a lifelong journey.

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What are your earliest memories of art?

I think it really began in my childhood. For as long as I can remember, I've had a deep admiration for drawing, not just the act itself but also a fascination with surfaces such as walls, paper and the textures of paint. From a young age, I always wanted to be a painter. I would draw everywhere and spent a lot of time observing the world around me. When I reflect on my current practice, I see many resonances with those early experiences. My way of understanding the world and how I make sense of time, space and memories started then. Growing up in a Greek-Armenian minority household, I was also surrounded by stories, often about people who were no longer there. People whose presence had been erased in some way. This had a profound effect on me that shaped my understanding of absence and emptiness.

At the same time, I was very fortunate that my family had a strong appreciation for art. My mother was a Byzantine art historian, although she couldn't continue her career due to the political climate in Türkiye - as a Greek woman working in that field came with many challenges. I grew up surrounded by her books, visiting exhibitions and historical sites together. My father was a photographer with his own studio, and the idea of having a dedicated space to create had an impact on me. I gained an understanding of what I would love to pursue in the future and that art was a way of seeing and participating in life.

You studied painting at university. How did this help shape your creative path?

I think it was important, especially as a foundation for critical thinking and to develop an understanding of my relationship with form, materiality, space and context. But ultimately, I believe pursuing art is up to you. One needs to have the curiosity, the passion and that inner drive to ask yourself why you really want to go down this path, as well as the internal spark that keeps you going, asking questions, and the courage to take risks. In order to grow, you need to go through stages of uncertainty and even discomfort. Honestly, I think it's a lifelong process. During University, I had two professors/ artists who really shaped this understanding for me. One was Tayfun Erdoğmuş and the other was Mustafa Pilevneli

Being an artist is also a process of undoing. You're constantly undoing things, whether that's responding to surfaces, uncovering traces and matter or unpacking what is going on in the world, politically and socially. To me, the life of an artist is similar to the mindset of a student. You never feel completely certain about what you're doing and it's in that moment of uncertainty that creation can truly emerge. It's where the unexpected crosses your path, and you should always embrace that.

What are you working on right now?

I recently completed a work for the current Bukhara Biennial (see page 126) that opened in September, as well as a piece at the Tenska Konsthall. Coming up, at the Taipei Biennial I'll be showing an older work I created 10 years ago called Destroy your house, Build up a boat, Save life (2015), as well as preparing for my solo show at Arter at the end of this year.

What advice would you offer emerging artists and is there anything you would tell yourself if you could go back in time?

Being an artist requires dedication and time. It's not about quickly achieving something, but rather about building your own language. This takes time, courage and a lot of patience, both with yourself and with your materials, and forms that resurface through you. If I could go back, I would say don't be too harsh on yourself in relation to the thoughts of others.

Taking critique is constructive, however seeking validation can lead to unproductivity and can diminish one's own voice.

However, with that said, I would also advise emerging artists not to seek validation from the art world too much. It's easy to fall into the trap of wanting approval, but art is deeply personal. We all go through phases of wanting recognition, but it's important to stay true to your own path, trust the journey and not to see art as just a job. Being an artist is something organic, almost like an internal system, and it's how you engage with the world. The key is to keep questioning your purpose, your process and why you're doing what you do. That constant cycle of self-reflection is essential for growth in your practice.