



Elif Uras
Art in America review
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Elif Uras: *Kapital*, 2009,
oil on canvas, 72 by 102
inches; at Galerist.

ISTANBUL
ELIF URAS
GALERIST

This exhibition of recent works by Elif Uras, a 37-year-old Ankara-born artist who divides her time between New York and Istanbul, featured eight large paintings and several works on paper, plus an extensive selection of ceramic pieces. The show's title, "Panorama Arcade," refers to *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin's unfinished study of Parisian shopping arcades considered as early 20th-century temples of consumer capitalism. During the period Benjamin worked on his study (1927-40), similar arcades were being built in central Istanbul. Marking the introduction of Western modernism to Turkey, the structures inspired Uras to make a series of large and colorful paintings executed with a quirky blend of Cubist space, Surrealist imagery and Expressionist color. In terms of style and acerbic social comment, her work recalls at times both Otto Dix and Frank Moore.

The largest (approximately 6 by 8 feet) and most striking painting here, *Kapital* (2009), is a flamboyant composition suggesting a wry statement about Turkey's place in the world economy and its current, controversial bid for entry into the European Union. Permeated by a disconcerting whimsy and a theatrical tone, the image shows a raucous, apocalyptic city scene framed on each side by billowing red fabric, like a velvet stage curtain parting to reveal a dizzying yet coherent urban morass. From a skewed perspective, towering buildings on the left appear to undulate as if on the brink of collapse. A diminutive and schematic female figure

holding two children in her arms dashes from a building toward a meticulously painted network of geometric-patterned sidewalks and stairs on the right. She no doubt seeks an escape from the imminent catastrophe. Paved with U.S. dollar, euro and Turkish lira banknotes, one of these routes leads from the cityscape to the distant skyline near the top center of the canvas. There, a small crescent moon, resembling the one on the Turkish flag, looms above the horizon.

Other paintings, especially *The Great Divergence*, *Half Asleep* and *Secular*, are similarly complex and thought provoking. The ceramic pieces are more problematic. Produced over the past few years in Iznik, an ancient town in northwest Turkey well known over the centuries for its refined pottery, Uras's works certainly reflect superb craftsmanship. If many of the vessels—intricately decorated, sensuous hourglass forms that playfully evoke female torsos wearing bikinis and belly-dancing outfits—are provocative by Turkish standards, they never overcome the formidable precedent of Picasso's similarly anthropomorphic ceramic works of the 1950s. An exception, though, is Uras's wonderful *Janet (Mihrimah-Sultan)*, 2009, a realistic and precisely detailed full-size glazed ceramic chair modeled after the ornate furniture designed for the wife of the 18th-century Ottoman Sultan Mustafa III, a Genoese woman and a Sufi responsible for a number of social reforms. A technical tour de force, displayed alone in a room lined with large-scale black-and-white drawings, the work provided a surprisingly effective denouement for this engaging show.

—David Ebony