

ARTSEEN | Banu Cennetoğlu

By Ann C. Collins, March 7, 2019



Banu Cennetoğlu, *1 January 1970 – 21 March 2018 · H O W B E I T · Guilty feet have got no rhythm · Keçiboynuzu · AS IS · MurMur · I measure every grief I meet · Taq u Raq · A piercing Comfort it affords · Stitch · Made in Fall · Yes. But. We had a golden heart · One day soon I'm gonna tell the moon about the crying game*, 2018, installation view, SculptureCenter, New York, 2019. Video, images, sound; 22 parts, 46,685 files. 128 hours and 22 minutes. Metadata: 687 pages, 11.7 x 16.5 inches. Commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London. Courtesy the artist and Rodeo, London/Piraeus. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

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“Dailies” is a film-industry term dating back to a time when footage from a single day’s shoot would be developed overnight in a film lab, then screened the next day by the director and editor. In fiction filmmaking, screening dailies tracks how the piecemeal work of a script in production will cut together; in documentary, where narrative through-lines may not be immediately apparent in shooting, the act becomes one of divination, a ritual performed with the hope that the film’s story will reveal itself.

Turkish artist Banu Cennetoğlu taps into this practice in her first US solo exhibition at SculptureCenter, curated by Sohrab Mohebbi with Kyle Danczewicz, assembling an archive of every video file and photograph she has taken over a twelve-year period into one continuous reel. The show’s linchpin, *1 January 1970 – 21 March 2018 · H O W B E I T · Guilty feet have got no rhythm · Keçiboynuzu · AS IS · MurMur · I measure every grief I meet · Taq u Raq · A piercing Comfort it affords · Stitch · Made in Fall · Yes. But. We had a golden heart · One day soon I'm gonna tell the moon about the crying game* (2018), exceeds 128

hours, and plays chronologically in the main gallery, where visitors can sit and watch the raw material from which the contours of the artist's existence may be discerned. On a January morning, the white line of a road divides the screen, winding its way along a mountainous route dotted with houses and farms. Cennetoğlu's camera is fixed to the dashboard of a car, and she can be heard off-screen speaking with a man. A band of yellowing light glows through the silhouettes of trees as the sun sets behind a ridge. I have no idea where we are, but there is a certain peacefulness to witnessing the descent of twilight in real time. After about 45 minutes, I feel a twinge of motion sickness, but I remain where I am until the car pulls into a darkened town and parks outside of a tavern. I later Google a road sign I noticed in the footage and piece together that we were near Alba, Romania.



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Cennetoğlu's exhibition comes at a moment when the proliferation of personal images for social media has yet to reach its tipping-point, but also at a time when we better understand how such disclosures pose risks—especially for a Turkish artist. Following an attempted coup in 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has removed tens of thousands of academics critical of the regime from their jobs and declared protesters “delinquents.” *The New York Times* reports that students, academics, and entrepreneurs, fearing maltreatment, are emigrating from Turkey in increasing numbers.¹ Cennetoğlu's visual diary exposes the coordinates of her studio and home, as well as information about her husband and her child. The entirety of the data asserts the artist's individual agency but, simultaneously, surrenders information to whatever surveillance forces may trail her. The act is one of vulnerability and rebelliousness. In February, I watch the artist's young daughter sit in a circle of children and make music with some kind of plastic tube. The camera lingers on her endlessly. Some time later, we see police in riot gear marching near Istanbul's Bahçeşehir University. A protest is underway. I believe Cennetoğlu is nervous: her camera swooshes back and forth in unsteady pans, never resting on any one thing. The juxtaposition between family life and politics underscores Cennetoğlu's quiet act of

defiance—any state investigation of her activity is unnecessary; there is nothing to dig up that the artist hasn't already disclosed on her own terms.



Installation view: *Banu Cennetoğlu*, SculptureCenter, New York, 2019. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

Another set of “dailies” lines the wall of a side room—this time, daily newspapers. All of the news journals printed in a specific country on a chosen date are bound into hardcover books and shelved in order. I pull down several volumes from *04.09.2014* (2014), containing papers from the United Kingdom and the Channel Islands. Amidst regional soccer scores and general fluff pieces are stories about David Haines, a British Islamic State hostage who, days earlier, was threatened with a beheading that would be carried out nine days later. What I do not find, as I flip through the papers, is any news of the 130,000 Kurdish refugees who crossed from Syria into Turkey that month to escape ISIS attacks, a story I imagine held great significance for Cennetoğlu as a Turkish citizen.² There is a wonderful satisfaction in the newspaper archive, an ordering of things as if in preparation for a great study. But as I return the books to their shelves, I am left with an empty feeling that time capsules such as these ultimately fail to pinpoint important moments, or to preserve the rush of the days that fall away from us into the past. Both archives confront the evanescence of the stories we extract from the chaos of life, the limitation of our attempts to warehouse experience.

Passing back into the main gallery, I pause in front of *What is it that you are worried about?* (2014), a small mirror made in collaboration with Yasemin Özcan, its title etched across the top. The question feels directed toward the gazing viewer, and for me, the answer lies on a small shelf near the reception desk where Cennetoğlu has placed a white binder holding the video metadata. “Meaningless,” I think to myself, reading the columns of information listing file names, durations, creation dates, and screening dates. That is what I am worried about, the word capturing the unsettling question running through the show: What do the images and articles we gather mean? Do they mean anything?

On screen, the face of Cennetoğlu's husband appears. I hear the voice of her daughter, who seems to be holding her mother's camera, filming her father. He speaks gently, watches patiently as she tries to steady her hand, his face a shining moon in her frame. I want to believe this scene—a father gazing at his child—is what I have been looking for, a decisive moment that infuses all this quotidian footage with deeper meaning, a flash of grace that

gives the work resonance. The video quickly cuts to Cennetoğlu's computer screen, where she surfs around on YouTube. Not much is happening, just a person living their life.

Notes

1. Gall, Carlotta. "Spurning Erdogan's Vision, Turks Leave in Doves, Draining Money and Talent," *The New York Times*, January 2, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/02/world/europe/turkey-emigration-erdogan.html>
2. Hubbard, Ben. "Raids by ISIS Push Flood of Refugees Into Turkey." *The New York Times*, September 22, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/23/world/europe/over-130000-flee-syria-for-turkey-in-wake-of-isis-raids.html>