

Huner Emin

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Geruk

History Background of the Performance

Alongside the waves of Arabic Spring in 2011, there was a major protest in Sulaymaniyah demanding political reforms in areas under Kurdish Regional Government northern Iraq. Sulaymaniyah is famous for uprisings as it was the first city to overthrow the Baath Party's regime from Kurdish areas in 1991 and since it was the city most affected by Saddam's brutal rule. I studied my first year of college in Sulaymaniyah and have maintained a great connection to its art community ever since. At the time, many of my artists friends were in the demonstration, while I was in Duhok city, which was as calm as a frozen lake.

Duhok and Sulaymaniyah each is under control of different political party. Each party controls every features of those cities. between 1994-1997 the two parties fought in deadly Kurdish civil war for power and revenue. The Kurdish society is being polarized and divided under the two major powers. However, people's demand and need in both cities is similar even though both cities speak different dialects.

Duhok is located between two mountains, much like Sulaymaniyah. However, Duhok is tribal city in which where people feel shy to ask for even their most basic rights, such as electricity or running water. Unlike Sulaymaniyah where protests are part of life. In both cities people are religious and conservative. People like to go to mosques to pray five time a day, and the number of mosques is probably equivalent to that of elementary schools.

Even prior to 2011, I had been thinking of creating Geruk as a work of art intended to question people's routine of attending religious ceremonies and being submissive to political power.

In order to execute my art idea, I had to get permission from the same political power that controls every aspect of my little town, so I began by asking the Institute of Art in Duhok to give me permission to perform inside their building. Little did I know that the Art Institution was controlled by the major political party unit. The head of the institution, whom I only knew as a colleague and artist friend, refused my proposal. Despite having been denied permission, I did not want to miss the opportunity to do this artwork during the apprising to add extra dimension to the meaning of the work which to examine people's fear from political power and to examine how far those two parties would go to suppress people's voice of reforms or basic needs. I trick the Imam of the Grand Mosque in the city center to execute the piece. Justifying that my artwork is about begging (Geruk), which is an act where homeless sit in the gates of the mosques asking money from people, the Imam accepted my request.

I performed Geruk on February 25th, 2011 in the mosque, while there was a large demonstration being held in the other side of the country. This performance to me was a form of protest against power in general, whether political, religious or social. I held Fredrick Nietzsche's quote "all

truths that are kept silent become poisonous” in a mosque conversing people and demanding that I want the truth. There was something satisfying about bringing philosophy into a mosque. Perhaps, I was lucky that people did not recognize who Nietzsche is. Simply the people who surrounded me as a human shield answered that only God knows the Truth.

Geruk Statement

Geruk is a recorded performance that takes place in a mosque during Arabic spring in Duhok City north Iraq. The performance consists of philosophy quote questioning people attending mosque for their daily rituals. I wore black and white clothes and began to perform Islamic pre-pray purification rituals Wudu, where I painted my face with the black and white opposites sides and as well my hands. This action was a major discrepancy of people’s calm lifestyle. Curious about what was happening, the people observing the performance quickly formed a wall around me to investigate the odd performance that interfering with their environment.

During times of political change, every small movement outside of the ordinary creates suspicion. Therefore, Geruk was not meant to be a performance by me, but by the people. My performance was a small demonstration within the larger one by the people that attended the mosque. I had little interest in planning, as everything was dependent on how people would react to the performance. From the homeless man in the corner of the mosque to the security forces, each had his own interpretation. The homeless man was scared that I might take away his income. Other people were wondering if I had gone crazy, and of course, the security forces thought that I was a secret intruder attempting to organize a protest to overthrow the government.

The performance did not last more than 45 minutes including the preparations before I was arrested by the security forces (Asayish) for interrogation.

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