



Belinda Grace Gardner

## Releasing the Magic in the Mundane

*Time is a clock without hands.*

Georges Hugnet(1)

*An object arouses the supposition that there are others behind it...*

René Magritte(2)

In 1996 time temporally altered its customary calibration at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. Sakir Gökcebag, then holding a scholarship at the Academy, transposed the wall clock in the hallway at the entrance of the school building into a vibrant, incalculable state of dissolution. Indeed the rigidly defined circle of units did remain in its original place; but the artist had multifariously reduplicated the angular segments of the clock face and spread these out in an explosive pattern all across the wall. The existent markings were superimposed with an abundance of additional signs – a picture puzzle resulting from a highly precise creative treatment of the formal elements present in the site. Gökcebag entitled his installation, for which he was awarded the Markus-Lüpertz-Prize of the Düsseldorf Art Academy, „Timeless.“ In this connection the melting watches of the surrealist master Salvador Dalí may come to mind. Gökcebag's intervention in the visual appearance of the wall clock also has surreal features as well: The artist's buoyant maneuver of optical illusion makes it tangible that time is in constant flux everywhere and – in opposition to what our established devices for tallying seconds, minutes, and hours suggest – will not permit itself to be irrevocably channeled into a fixed system.

Although at first appearing to be extremely divergent, the various approaches of the Hamburg-based Turkish artist Sakir Gökcebag revolve throughout around a liberation of the magical potential of the commonplace through specific transformations and subtle disruptions of the given order. Proceeding from the graphic arts, which he studied in Istanbul, the artist turned to painting and drawing, before focusing on the genres of installation and photography. „Timeless“ – one of his first installation pieces – already contains strategic aspects that remain vital within his work. Gökcebag finds the inspiration for his interventions in his immediate environment: In architecture as well as in nature, in the concrete everyday object as well as in the abstract rules of geometry. In his manifold reflections, multiplications, and permutations he opens up surprising, humorous perspectives on the phenomena of ordinary life. Pivotal in his art is a play upon the contrasts between stringent structuring and unharnessed organic energy, the two-dimensional surface and three-dimensional space, the object and its representation, nature and culture. Not all is as it seems in Gökcebag's baffling scenarios and spatial constructions. Even the most incredible situations the artist brings to view are often grounded in tangible reality disguised as an illusion.

The paradox of the factually rendered illusion also plays a central role in Gökcebag's photographic works. Thus, for example, in an earlier complex of C-prints on aluminum with sewings: self-portraits and shots of urban spaces and buildings, in which the artist inserted linear structures with needle and thread – in the shape of seemingly three-dimensional objects or reticular intertwinings as well as heightenings of existing contours within the image at hand. At closer view it becomes apparent that the graphic elements are not components of the photographed reality or indeed results of digital magic, but rather externally unfold a parallel dynamics on the surface of the picture. In a slightly different sense the levels of reality merge in a series of five C-prints from the year 2003, representing leaves from various trees and shrubs from a close-up angle. Horizontally through the graceful prints glowing in luminous hues of green, which placed side by side on the wall constitute a frieze of three meters in length, runs a slightly irregular line. This line creates the impression that these are constructed images manipulated and transformed on a computer. In fact, with a pair of scissors the artist has 'brought into line' selected leaves growing in the city park of Hamburg before producing his photographs. For further works from the larger group of photographic images relating to this theme he cut delicate geometrical shapes into the foliage, which he then captured on film. In contrast to employing high-tech methods, Gökcebag by means of – quite surreal – low-tech procedures creates the counter-logical semblance of a natural phenomenon that follows exact mathematical laws, which in turn appears to the viewer as an enigmatic mirage, oscillating between the abstract and the concrete.

Gökcebag's gentle shifting of symmetries and perspectives, causing the unexpected, also extends to sculptural works and entire installation ensembles. The artist leaves his traces in many places, for example in a poetically bizarre succession of shoes that have been sawed apart – all of them worn specimens, which in turn have left

symbolic traces of their former owners in the world. They have been linearly arranged on the floor in a tightly linked row. Between the two pieces of the severed shoes a gap remains, yielding a narrow elongated interstice that transverses the space as if Gökcebag had drawn a line in the air. The translation of graphic gestures into other materials and media is a consistent principle within his multi-dimensional work: On the wall or freely suspended, wooden coat hangers form curved arches, evoking the notion of stylized birds in flight or ornamental streams of signs. The tradition of Ottoman calligraphy, from which Gökcebag draws in his conceptually oriented art, is equally perceptible here as it is in his inspired transformations of simple electric cables and sockets into interlacing graphic compositions. In a new series he creates abstract drawings from cords growing out of the pictures and up to the ceiling. "The wit in picture puzzles, their dangerous technique that grazes a very particular kind of humor, their revealing mysteries, their surprising solutions, extending to the answer, read in transparency, they always touch on the miraculous," as the surrealist author and Dada-chronicler Georges Hugnet has stated.(3) In the artistic charging and transmuting of the banal, peripheral, and unspectacular Sakir Gökcebag brings to light the wonders which are hidden behind the objects.

Notes:

- (1) Cf. Georges Hugnet, "Bilderrätsel," translated from the French into German by Karlheinz Barck, in: *Surrealismus in Paris 1919-1939*, with an essay by Karlheinz Barck (ed.), Leipzig, 1990, p. 224.
- (2) Cf. René Magritte, "Die Wörter und die Bilder," translated from the French into German by Eva Kaden, in *ibid.*, p. 217.
- (3) Cf. Georges Hugnet, "Bilderrätsel," in *ibid.*, p. 223f.

*(This text was published in the catalog from Kulturstiftung of Sparkasse Stormann in Marstall - Schloss Ahrensburg.)*

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