

frieze

Aslı Çavuşoğlu

ARTER, Istanbul, Turkey

Aslı Çavuşoğlu's work utilizes different media to investigate silenced histories. She has composed rap songs using words censored in the Turkish media; she has made a video of residents from a Turkish town reenacting key events from a socialist struggle in their region that was crushed by the 1980 military coup. In her recent series of sculptures titled 'The Stones Talk' (2013), Çavuşoğlu delves further back into history to grant archaeological finds unearthed in excavations discovered in and around Turkey a new voice. She works with copies of object remnants that are deemed too small or too insignificant to put on museum display, and are thus labelled 'study objects'. Çavuşoğlu enhances these remnants in various ways to lend them a new, decidedly more significant identity.

In many instances Çavuşoğlu's additions and enhancements are so extensive that the fragments themselves turn into mere appendages or accessories of the finalized forms. Two fragments that appear to be clay pot handles, for example, are attached to the top of a large blue ball with a textured surface to lend them the appearance of ears on an abstracted animal's head. In another example, an indistinct flat shard that looks like a piece of shale has been attached to a geometric metal armature that has also been fitted with a light-bulb. The assemblage acquires the look of an elaborate mid-century modern table lamp. In another piece, archaeological remnants have been embedded into colourful pieces of plastic and arranged on what looks like a rubber conveyor belt hanging from the wall to create an industrial looking wall sculpture. Some of the objects on view in the exhibition have mirrored or reflective surfaces that give them the appearance of decorative objects for sale in a high-end designer store. The dusty past seems to have been buffed clean from these archaeological finds and they appear to have been given a new facelift, perhaps to appeal to the tastes and interior décors of those with purchasing power.

The objects are individually situated on pedestals made from grey foam blocks used in archaeology. Clustered together in different shapes and sizes, the foam blocks and their

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Aslı Çavuşoğlu, *The Stones Talk*, 2013, installation view

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gleaming objects form several islands of display. A cloth coloured table on wheels situated towards the back of the gallery holds several more objects, giving the display a clinical look and lending the objects a clinical appearance, as though they are in the midst of being probed and studied. A beautiful catalogue accompanying the exhibition furthers the motif of the archaeological study environment suggested by exhibition's display. It includes pointillist sketches of the original study pieces made by an archaeological draftsman and printed on translucent sheets of paper.

Four different essays by curators and archaeologists discuss the significance of Çavuşoğlu's project in terms of its ability to highlight tangential narratives ignored by dominant themes in historiography. They also discuss the works' role in questioning the grand narratives told through objects in practices of museum display. 'The Stones Talk' does indeed give these stones a voice, turning entities once considered insignificant players in historical narratives into spokespersons that speak of future aspirations. But what makes Çavuşoğlu's project so impactful is its ability to also comment with humour on the actions of those in power today who are attempting to revamp valuable real estate in Turkey, including its heritage sites, through questionable restoration projects that strive to appeal to global financial interests. The project seems to suggest that those in dominance always write and rewrite history, altering her artefacts along the way. Unfortunately, these ventures sometimes eclipse our fragile relationship with the past.

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