

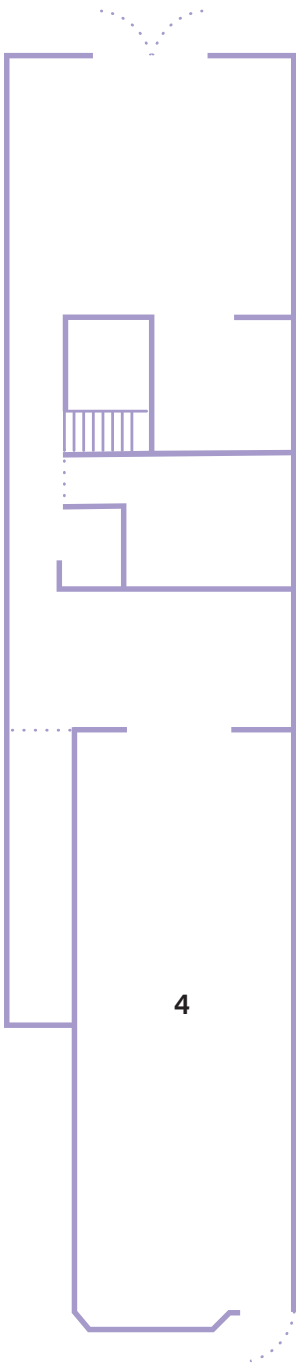
**Baha Görkem
Yalım**

in conversation
with

Dean Bowen

As part of the
exhibition

MULCH SLEEP



3

2

4

1

1.

Three foyer benches from clear-coated folded heavy-gauge sheet steel repaired and reappropriated with suede upholstery and readjusted poster holders.*

Three digital paintings, printed as posters for an oblique media.

Three customised wall lights, aluminium extensions, bath toys, light bulbs, electrical cords, sockets.

Sound piece based on Franz Schubert's Trio No. 2, Op. 100, Andante con moto, 7min looped. **

2.

Two hand-hammered aluminium tables and bowls, sweet potatoes.

Steel warehouse trolley, satin duvets hand stitched in Turkey, video with colour and no sound, 6min looped.

Sound piece based on Franz Schubert's Trio No. 2, Op. 100, Andante con moto, 5min looped.

3.

Artdeco double console marble sink from the 1920s repaired and reappropriated, suction motors, 3D printed extensions, sink stoppers, sage.

Sound piece, 2min48sec looped. **

4.

Six foyer tables from clear-coated folded heavy-gauge sheet steel repaired and reappropriated with six corresponding stadium seats, bee, bubble gum. *

Steel hanging structure, stainless steel butcher's hooks from the 1980s, worker uniform, leather jacket, artificial and dried flowers.

Used EPAL Euro palette, stainless steel cage, video with colour and sound, 7min looped.

* Initially designed by architect Nel Verschuuren (1943-2016) for public space in 2000

** Auxiliary support by Smári Róbertsson

This exhibition is dedicated to my family, Nezihe, Mehmet, and Kerem. Only with them was it possible to learn, and only possible to learn together, to subvert oppression and hardship into an everlasting, nurturing livelihood because there was always so much love, in and between us, between everything, in every emptiness.

Baha Görkem Yalım

in conversation
with

Dean Bowen

As part of the
exhibition

MULCH SLEEP

For more information about this and other projects,
check our website or scan the QR-code.



1646.nl

Baha Görkem Yalım

Görkem Yalım is a Dutch/Turkish visual artist and educator. Görkem's practice is multidisciplinary and defined by being purposefully in flux, refusing to crystallise in any one form or medium. They employ video, sculpture, and performance, sometimes in variations and always as folds of the one and same practice. In all its variations, things come together toward durational proposals and are radically allowed to appear as themselves. Their position at times also crosses to writer, mediator, and curator and includes the production of texts across poetry, fiction, and academic reflection.

Görkem's practice is deeply tied to art history, its readings, re-readings, and misreadings. Objecthood and history (with a particular interest in "the keepsake"), abstraction (as a subversive, revolutionary tool), and contamination (as a form of collaboration) are concepts frequently thematised. Görkem interrogates the concepts through the lens of labour and gender, often summoning questions of ritual, display, and refrain. These open questions come together in a desire to diminish art and artist as unified ontological categories.

Dean Bowen

Dean Bowen (1984) is a poet, performer and psychonaut. He examines the dynamics of the composite identity and how this relates to a political and social positioning of the self. His debut collection *Bokman* is lyrical, passionate and furious; a personal quest aimed at revealing universal patterns, allowing many voices to speak. The chapbook *Ik vond geen spoken in Achtmaal* was published in 2020 in collaboration with literature festival Tilt and the Prins Bernhard Culture Fund – Noord Brabant.

Bowen published on the online platforms Samplekanon and Hard//Hoofd and in journals like nY, Tirade, Revisor and de Gids. His poetry and powerful performance have seen him grace stages both nationally and internationally, bringing him to Belgium, Germany, South-Africa and the US. Bowen won the first ever Van Dale SPOKEN Award and his debut collection *Bokman* was nominated for the prestigious C. Buddingh' Award.

Görkem: It's funny to structure a conversation with this sort of pre-decided beginning and end.

Dean: It is. It is. Where to start?

Görkem: Where to start? I guess 1646 initially had this idea that we might have connections through our concerns over language, over the 'what language is' kind of question.

Dean: I think, well, it's easy to just refer to maybe the baseline, right? Why I was kind of triggered and interested in having this conversation had to do with the bits and pieces I heard pertaining to the possibilities of language, but also to the limitations of language as we are using it every day. I think I would like to start with a question, as an artist, of what position does language itself hold within your practice?

Görkem: Maybe it's easier to answer with what position it had throughout my life, since childhood. Because of all sorts of power structures, I was forced to live in language, a form of companion. It became a space where I could, through learning to manoeuvre it, maybe find possibilities for inhabitation. The safety language can provide is a falsehood when it requires a form of institution to function. But then again, it starts with the family and the school. It's my home, but as Ocean Vuong says, home is a duality, a chimaera, a warning and refuge; it's a lighthouse, so that's the problem and love.

Dean: It's funny because aspects of it ring very true. For myself, language has always helped me as this vehicle full of possibilities. As a child, I was made keenly aware of the beauty of language through stories, through reading. So, I think that my parents often, specifically my mother, put a strong emphasis on the importance of stories. But also, being a child of immigrant parents, I think that I was confronted quite early with how important language is in the ways you are able to conceive of yourself and then present that idea of self, that conceptualisation of self, to the world. From an early age, I've always been interested in finding language to contain, to hold or to gesture towards who I felt like inside. I was quite a demure and quiet child. I had difficulty expressing emotions, and I think that my mother put in a concerted effort to get that out of me. And the way to do that was to trigger into and invite language and gestures to try and shape what the inner world was going through. That started a fascination that I've held throughout my life and even to this day, where I tend to look at language as tools and material that is inherently fractured and limited. But then I think that in my artistic practice, through poetry, I'm always looking for the invocation of new possibilities within language. I think I do that by inviting influences in my linguistic reality that feel new, alien, foreign or other as a way to have those elements in conversation, to explore elements of myself I've never been able to capture in language.

Görkem: Two things are very important to me from what you said. One is this idea of the opaqueness of the self from oneself, which is really, I think, central to my work. But also it is central to autofiction as a genre. There is no heroism; it's not an autobiography; it's just trying to understand but also destroy the borders of the self, a definition of it. This idea of the fracturedness of language is present in the exhibition. Furnishings, furniture, ritual items, objects, support structures are kind of used in place of words. They may be doing more than words because they are so good at displaying fracturedness, the wear and tear of language that often hides itself in plain sight.

Dean: Well, you referenced the exhibition, and I'm really keen to visit it and see what it is about.

Before I ask the question, I think it might be important to ask you what languages you inhabit or what languages inhabit you.

Görkem: I think translation has been an important thing. Growing up, I would read these queer Victorian novels. Often, they would be anonymous, but they would be published as Oscar Wilde in Turkey, where I grew up, but then you would read and realise it's not really Oscar Wilde. That wonkiness in translation that allows transmutability yet generates difference is a form of language that I find close to my heart. Because there is a tenderness to them. Certain poets from Turkey are impossible to translate. So, again, that idea of impossibility appears. To answer it literally, I made a decision a couple of years ago to stop living in Turkish and

completely migrate to English, in a sense, a form of exile that is not necessarily a decision I made willfully. This question of maintenance and such became a bit impossible in Turkish.

Dean: That does make a lot of sense. I also think that a lot of what we're allowed to navigate through has to do with the conditions that we find ourselves in, that we often don't even get to determine for ourselves. So, I do recognise that shifting towards, and it is weird. Because if I were to ask the question to myself, I am very much a Dutch citizen, right? A Dutch-born man. But I was raised bilingual, speaking both Dutch and English, and I think the true language is the hybrid that sprouted from the two. Just an anecdote to illustrate this: a few years ago, it was my sister's birthday, and we went out for dinner. My sister and I, whenever we get together, it just takes 5 minutes and we're just back to our old ways. On that occasion, we just started talking about everyday life, what we were doing, and then one of her friends sitting at the table asked, 'Do you both know what you're doing?' and I'm like, 'No, what are you talking about?', 'well, you're shifting so harmoniously between Dutch and English that it doesn't seem like you're speaking two languages, it seems like you're speaking a singular language.' That was really telling for the ways in which we arrive at language and the ways in which languages inhabit a particular kind of consciousness. Because even in my artistic practice, if I were to extrapolate, I think that a lot of the things that I'm doing within my Dutch work, for instance, in terms of the syntax, the grammatical bending of the rules, even the ways in which I shape verbs, all these things are very much rooted in that hybrid language that I understand to be my own.

So, that idea of the shifting, migrating, from one language to another does resonate with me but manifests in a different way. I asked the question because, without having seen the exhibition, I was triggered by the idea that it was to be entered or viewed as a novel, which I found a very compelling way to frame an exhibition. How did you arrive at that, and how does language meander through it?

Görkem: I had this strange interest in *Moby Dick* that started a couple of years ago. At first, I thought maybe I was interested in its themes, but then it became easily and immediately clear that I was more interested in its structures and how these completely different types of writing hang together in perfection, but beyond that, it is a document of non-compromise. That everything that he wanted to put in it is in that book. It's an arc. So it made me start to think that I don't dare to imagine this kind of work; imagine doing it, allowing myself. So, I latch onto that work and allow myself to question what would be in my arc. And have that lead to start to write a novel without any promise of finishing it. And I guess from there, I began to think about what a novel can be in an expanded sense, maybe also going against this linearity of the novel, thinking of its emptiness.

There is this book, one of my favourite novels in Turkish, called *Time Regulation Institute*, of which I got a copy when I went to Turkey a long time ago, in 2016 or 2017. I didn't flip through it before I bought it, but I realised when returning to Amsterdam that about 12 pages were blank - it was a press mistake - and so maybe this idea of emptiness started there with the empty pages.

But more so, emptiness as an object of its own happens when it is used to hold the familiar and the strange together. Thinking about the emptiness in language allowed me to think about language more spatially.

Dean: So, is the idea an attempt at filling the gaps or accentuating them?

Görkem: This is great. No, it's a refusal to fill in the gaps. I wanted you to ask me this. One of my favourite poets, Solmaz Sharif, does it really well, and one of my favourite poems from her in particular. The title is *Vulnerability Study*. I wanted you to ask this question so I could share my favourite poem with you.

Dean: So what is it specifically in that work that mirrors what you are attempting to do?

Görkem: In that refusal, there is so much. I don't dare to read it out loud to you now - it's a short poem. In the poem, things are standing still in their most fragile, vulnerable state. It is almost like these ancient artefacts that are cracked completely but are still holding their form. I think there is so much in that. It's not a solution to anything, but I'm still discovering what it means, and I just keep thinking, can refusal be a gift? I am trying to figure out what to make of such a proposal.

Dean: It resonates very strongly with me, the idea of refusal being a gift. But the funny thing is that it also has a lot to do with the political work I've been doing. Just for some context, I am part of a political party called 'Bij1', which roughly translates to 'Together', and it is very much the political branch of many activist movements that are going on right now in the country. And what I love about this particular party, but specifically the community surrounding it, is that there seems to be this idea, very much present, of the generous refusal. The generous refusal of the mechanisms and status quo as it is and an attempt at offering alternatives can be a generous gift or gesture towards ourselves and the communities we hold dear, and even those that don't resonate with our political ideas. So I think that, within that scope, I would definitely understand refusal sometimes to be one of the most generous things that we can do, specifically within the scope of language. I think one can refuse to adhere, to structure and fixation, which are often placed on what we understand language to be. I think that this is often where poetics are born. Where the poetic possibility kind of emerges from, and then all of a sudden, we have to deal with that. This is why it took me so unbelievably long to even dare to talk about myself as a poet because I honestly revere poets as the source of language making.

Dean: So, I just typed in the *Vulnerability Study*, so if you have a minute, I would like to read it, just so we have a sense of what we're talking about.

Görkem: Beautiful.

Dean: It also really reminds me of how seldom we talk about language in this way, in a more generalised sense. We all have this kind of free education system, where we grow up with this idea of language being the vessel that contains all that is there to be contained, or that is capable of holding every known thing in the universe or possible thing in the universe. So, often, even in my everyday life, I bump up against that, the limits of its own extent, where I'm experiencing these very human things, but I can't find language that translates what that experience truly holds. I don't think that language is necessarily singular in this way. In a lot of different artistic disciplines and approaches, artists will run up against the limitations of their own material. I do think that language in and of itself has this weird quality where almost everybody has access to it, right? So it becomes this democratised substance that a lot of people hold opinions about, but then there seems to be less of an effort to explore in what ways we can break or expand its usage. I think this will be a little more meta, but I'm still going to ask the question: in what ways do you think we - in a broader societal sense - should or would like to see people in everyday life explore the possibilities of language? In what way do you see this manifest?

Görkem: It may be slightly a longing to Turkey, but using language impractically is something that I'm missing - what I mean by impractical is almost understood as a durational concern, something that can kind of play with time and make shared time, a slower shared time. That, to me, sounds like a beautiful idea. If slowness were everywhere, it would be beautiful, I feel.

Dean: I think so too. I think that what we see happening specifically pertaining to language has so much to do with the values and pressures of capitalism, this necessity for efficiency for the compromising of content to be directly picked up. But what we're losing there in that inefficiency, in that slowing down, is, I think, what we do perceive our human lives to be. They are messy, they are chaotic, and there needs to be a way for us to create access points through which we can navigate those inefficient aspects of what it means to be in the world, to think through the world, to navigate through it and to have a clear understanding of what our relations are between each other, between the universe and so on. I don't know. I think the thing I'm struggling with is that it often feels like these questions - that we as artists are allowed to ask - and the opportunity they bring is often not given to those we hold dear because everybody has got to pay the rent and buy groceries and be able to survive. The question surrounding basic survival often hinders asking these types of questions. A type of question that also doesn't necessarily generate concrete answers. Even the answers we can formulate often end up bringing with them bigger and more complex questions.

Görkem: I wouldn't call myself an optimist, but there is an assumption or a wish such as: if complexity is already, easily and carelessly everywhere, is it inevitable? Maybe then it'll make trust also inevitable. But you know, of course, we are at the same time meandering around this impossible - something beautiful becomes attractive again, but it's probably a trap.

Dean: It might be.

Let me preface the next question. The way in which I've learned to enter and approach new spaces, like the one you are creating now at 1646, is to be just open for whatever that space is willing to grant me. Whatever the novel, the space, the exhibition is willing to gift me. But if there was one thing you could say to help shape the expectations before entering the space, what would that thing be? What is the nugget of information you would want to give somebody before they walked into that space?

Görkem: **Maybe two things. The first thing is more primary, and it may hold to all kinds of experiencing of art because we are creatures of habit, especially habits in thinking. People often think that the only possible relation to art is to resolve it, that it's a puzzle that needs to be solved, that it's about accessing it through a specific kind of knowledge that relies on points of access that are controlled, and so on. Resolving by understanding something is just one way of relating to it. There are so many other ways: to sense it, to refuse it, to have an attraction to it completely corporally... It would be a wonderful thing if, one day, one of my works could propose the change of such habit. And the second thing is, there is a sink in this exhibition, and with a dear friend of mine, Smári Róbertsson, we immediately started to talk about the fascism of the sink, that it drains and drains and drains. It never has enough. Specific to this exhibition, there are possibilities to go against fascism. I have a huge, troubled relationship with sleep. I would have night terrors as a child, and my mother would always**

tell me, 'Go tell your nightmare to the water. Open the sink and whisper your nightmare so it just leaves.' So I often think about how this kind of inversion of love into language and through language to ritual practice destroys that fascism of the sink. So maybe that would be another thing.

Dean: That's beautiful. Thank you for sharing that story as well. It's going to sit with me for quite a while. But I think that story, to me, holds so much of what we in our short talk have kind of touched upon. That reshaping of intention and to find, through translation, a new purpose for something that was interpreted in a singular way. To reshape fascism into this generosity, of something that I can give into that endless pit, something that I need to get rid of. So, all of a sudden, it is something that cares for you or can help take care of you. That is such a powerful idea. Thank you so much for that.

I did have a final question. Thinking of what you said about being triggered by *Moby Dick* and understanding novels also to be a possible arc that can contain many things and how it allowed you to think spatially, is there a limitation to space that might trigger you to find your way onto the page? Does the page, the book, hold any specific significance, or is it a space that you might want to try and inhabit yourself? To play around with?

Görkem: It always starts with space as a limitation. Space is not a generous thing in many ways. I never made this connection between the pages. Maybe I see the page more as a condensed form of time rather than space. I am not a great writer. Writing to me has always been a strange, mystical thing. It never turned into a practice in that way. I don't know if I would dare to turn it into a practice one day, maybe if one day I have the courage to demystify it.

Dean: You still have time.

Görkem: But what does a page offer? It offers a condensed form of time and starts the clock.

Dean: I tend to agree with that. I've been writing ever since I was nine years old. A lot of my writing has found its way to the stage, and so has this understanding of the performative nature of writing and the performative nature of the body and the ways in which they interact. I think that for me, the page signifies a possibility for people to engage on an intimate and repeated level. The engagement with the kind of linguistic gestures that I'm trying gives them the opportunity to have a longer relationship with that condensed time, which I think is an interesting juxtaposition.

I always wanted to write a book, but I didn't know how to get there. So, experimenting with the stage first to understand what my language was doing with other bodies, I think, gave me the opportunity to reshape my thinking – how to think about the functions of the book. And now that I've

had the opportunity to write a book, a collection of poems, it has expanded in a lot of ways. The ways in which I think of language as a material and the way in which I think about the book as a physical object, as a container but also a vessel through which people can build relations, both with the object and the content of the object. That's something which I am still exploring the possibilities of, and it is something I am really grateful for.

Görkem: Exactly. I think it's so courageous to start with the body and how things reflect back from other bodies. I realised I didn't know I had a body until I was, maybe, twenty five. It was something completely abstracted from me. I think for me to dare to start writing a book, in its many forms, became possible once I realised that there is a body because the book has to have a counter body.

Dean: Yes, I think there needs to be an understanding of the physical properties of the thing in relation to the content, in relation to the language gesture that is being made. I think that it is often forgotten. Let me speak for the ways in which I was raised in this Western European context. The ways in which we think about the body, see it solely as a vehicle for our head. There seems to be little to no emphasis on the body or its total consciousness that is a part of it. And the language we shape around that completely informs how we can relate to it. I think that, in a weird way, the book is an abstraction. But because it is very much physical and it offers space, it mirrors a lot of the questions we can ask pertaining to the relationship between body and language and how they inform each other.

Görkem: The metaphysical, the spirit needs an anchor. I mean, there is no separation in a sense; everything is equally spiritually and materially concerned. And I think that the book is a perfect example of that condensation waiting to be unfolded. A great companion too. I think, so is an exhibition.

Dean: I completely agree.

Görkem: I'm looking forward to holding your book.

Dean: I'm working on it. Thank you. This was a beautiful exchange.

Görkem: Thank you. It was.

Dean: Thank you so much for your time. I'm just really looking forward to going to 1646 and seeing, experiencing, and going through whatever your novel contains.

Görkem: Thank you. It was such a nice conversation that I really needed to have.

