

Phil Tarrant, 'HEAVY GROUND: Özgür Kar at Emalin'

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Gallery going is a daze-inducing ritual, torn of sturdy relations and taciturn when it comes to holding the door for entry. Özgür Kar's done extra work to shut the door behind him, leaving those who come after to open it again – heavy pull – wobbling a way through rooms placed with drawings of ladders encased in Perspex. The ladders are unmountable, in two senses: as drawings they literally cannot be mounted, and also they are not mounted to the walls – instead propped lengthways and sideways, stage-props out of use. There's even one in the dim lit attic, next to a fire-extinguisher, as if in storage. Long wait.

A commercial gallery is a storage space in its own strange way, pit-stop in a circulation of commodities. Any romantic idea of 'dematerialising' art as an anti-establishment gesture – casting a resistant pebble against the rushing waters of capital – is no longer tenable. The art market and gallery system has become its own airborne transaction: Instagram post, installation view, pdf, holding unit for the next flight to the next art fair.



Özgür Kar, 'Heavy Ground', Emalin, 118 ½ Shoreditch High Street, London, 29 November 2024 – 22 March 2025. Courtesy the artist and Emalin, London.

Perspex poses its own object question mark, creating a furred barrier between inside and outside. Its perceived advantage over glass – that it can, with the right treatment, absorb rather than reflect light – is also what blurs distinctions, providing neither complete transparency through to an aura-giving artwork inside, nor the dance of reflections on glass of the outside (ie, the viewer) looking into that inside. Instead of catching a glimpse of one's own face caught mid-rapture and mid-witness to artistic brilliance, all is absorbed in the slurry and mire of acrylic, like a fly in a glue trap...

It takes close looking to make out Kar's pencil lines, long mud-coloured threads that, though hand-drawn, take on a stolidness in which the human hand is lost. The

same can be said of the film HEAVY GROUND after which the show is named: a hand-drawn animation of two flies fucking and dying, stuck in a glue trap. The pencil detail is hair-like and repetitious, the background a general wash of watercolour. Despite drawing on Existentialist common-places: we fuck and die, aimless and absurd creatures with no exit (no climbing a ladder up and away), these drawings lack anthropomorphic tenderness, too alien to be affecting portrayals of human alienation.

They are flies with strangely-imagined mouths, singing a soundtrack made by synthesisers. It's funny. They are stuck to heavy gluey ground, yet the film is ironically light. Light airy pencil marks. Humorous animation. The high tech screen stands in the middle of the room emanating square hovering light – post cinema and its comforts, a one-to-one aspect ratio ready to tumble and turn over.



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Call it post-Existentialist, a numbed electronic echo of lament for some universal human condition, a crisis these art-objects no longer have the ability to claim. Instead of the tragicomic crawlings of a Gregory Samsa turned to an insect or one of Beckett's protagonists trawling through unrelenting mud, Kar's is a ketamine kind of stuckness, the body dissolved in numbness, stuck suspended mid-air with ensuing loss of consciousness. A crisis of art-objects demounted, propped to the wall, lights out. Long wait.

It comes at a time when wholly AI-imagined images are feared to warp away human creativity to one big slosh among algorithms, with the art film and its physical gallery setting as unsettled as ever. But maybe we are more than capable of bringing that numbness upon ourselves without any outside robot invasion. We're good enough at creating our own obsolescence, drawing our own lifeless ladders in post-ironic memed-to-death boredom. There is a difference between trying to climb a plastic illusion of escape, slipping and sliding in humour and pathos (that's old school Existentialism); and knowing, even while drawing up that illusory ladder, that there is not and never was a chance of escape: a self-making type of cynicism.

So after such circles, where next?

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