

## THE DOMINANCE OF IMAGES: ON MURAT PULAT'S TEST BROADCAST SERIES

### FIRAT ARAPOĞLU

*"NOTE: Children who watch violent TV programs tend to be more violent when they grow up. But did the TV cause the violence, or do violent children preferentially enjoy watching violent programs? Very likely both are true. Commercial defenders of TV violence argue that anyone can distinguish between television and reality. But Saturday morning children's programs now average 25 acts of violence per hour..."*

*Carl Sagan*

Different to that of its British counterpart, a Pop Art movement led by Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg had emerged in the mid 1950s. As an outcome of using irony and denying the traditional concept of aesthetics, the expression "Neo-Dada" came to be with those in the 'group' being referred to as neo-dada artists. Jasper Johns's definition of Pop Art is actually the true essence of the movement: *"things the mind already knows"*. There are countless things the mind knows however stars, actors, and pop culture icons are one of the most important.

My excuse for this introduction is my desire to produce a short study on Murat Pulat's most recent exhibition at Alan Istanbul. From the point of view of cinema and TV images, Murat Pulat is actually reflecting or mirroring an interpretation of the viewer's state of mind in terms of its obsession with fame and tragedy (regardless of whether it's the US, Europe, or Turkey). The images are taken from various iconic screen images from films. Featuring a number of figures from Marilyn Monroe to Audrey Tautou, the paintings approach the guided and conditional chaos of the cinema industry. Images that cinema or TV viewers are familiar with become even closer in this series by Murat Pulat because these images were only featured in certain issues of various magazines a few decades ago. These images that derive from mass culture/entertainment culture, act somewhat as fictitious 'ready-mades' in the artist's work - when Nam June Paik transformed TV into a 'ready-made', he had given the start to this in the early 1960s.

By following in the steps of Andy Warhol, one of the most effective artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Murat Pulat once again brings the archaeological starting points of early Pop Art to the surface. As the trend of American/European culture, here he deals with the distribution of popular mass media and the concepts of tragedy and fame that it globally represents. One point of difference with Murat Pulat however is that previous art derived from magazines, newspapers or posters is reflected on canvas as a captured screen image. In this instance then, it's possible to argue that mass culture's corrupt obsession, a type of mediator for the iconic images of the cinema industry, with violence, tragedy and death, find life in Pulat's paintings

after going through a type of filter. This can be noted as one of Pulat's contributions to art history.

Murat Pulat's familiarity with films, ads, and their iconic images is quite clear. "Test Broadcast", a process used by TV channels to inform viewers of a channel before 'real' broadcasting, is like a precursor for a future process with Pulat's paintings. On the other hand, the depolitization imposed on viewers by TV broadcasts and the fictional "lives" represented by cinema and the function of TV can also be added to this. Thus, cinema, advertising completes "incomplete" lives or, results in inadequacies being completed by consumption - remembering that cinema is mostly an object of consumption.

So what are the preliminary-iconographic designs of the images seen in all of these images? As a symbol of pure beauty, images that are reflected simply with glassy glares or smiles, or screams, surprised eyes, outcries, excitements as a sign of fear, helplessness or madness etc... The Test Broadcast series that symbolizes each separately is somewhat a reflection of the desire to "exist" before 'real' broadcast. This performance that should be evaluated within consumption culture should be considered in terms of hundreds of channels and the viewing/rating rhetoric. Together with the founding of private TV channels since the 90s in Turkey, it's been possible to see this whole visual consumption show throughout the nation. TV, which was the most effective mass communication tool before internet became widespread, reminds us of a two edged sword in Pulat's paintings: On the one hand, TV being used as an effective information production, distribution and consumption tool, and on the other hand, it being used to bring the 'masses' or audience, even further down. The second reason was actually what made neo-avantgarde representatives like Yoko Ono, Nam June Pail and Wolf Vostell make a mockery out of TV.

The wealth that relied on the production of these images can be considered as the source of the out-of-focus visions seen in places in Pulat's paintings. Ultimately, the producers of these images are those who receive unrequited loans from the government, the leaders of a mechanism that was produced to amuse society. Let this be the subject of a future speculation; but allow me to conclude with another reality made visible by Pulat in his paintings: As a focal point that draws an individual's interest and perception, TV or cinema also mentions the outside world. In this way, if the individual focuses his/her area of interest on an external perception and/or event, he/she loses concentration on nearby perception, events and individuals. This was TV and cinema for the past generation, today it's the internet and social media. Who knows, test broadcast may in fact evolve into this in the coming process.