

## Istanbul

## “Apricots from Damascus”

SALT | GALATA

Bankalar Caddesi 11, Karaköy

December 23–February 21

Damascus has long been famous for its apricots. However, as war rages not only on and beyond the southern border of Turkey but also in its eastern provinces, in the form of state violence against the Kurds, Damascus is now no longer quite as readily associated with the fruit. This exhibition's title derives from a Turkish proverb—a token of wishful thinking that roughly translates to “Only apricots from Damascus can be better than this!” Beyond its ludic faux optimism, the name also manages to capture such issues at the heart of the exhibition as dislocation, multilingualism, and the spoils of colonialism.

*Wishful* is one of the many words (along with *cosmopolitanism*, *institutionalization*, and *mustachioed*) that Kamal Abu Dieb had to invent in Arabic while translating Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Here, Fehras Publishing Practices, founded by Syrian expatriates, enlarges all fourteen pages of Dieb's index of definitions into rainbow-colored posters, next to an octopus-like stand covered with copies of *Apricots from Damascus*, a zine that the exhibition's organizers launched in October.

In addition to Dieb, the show revives another historical figure—Ivi Stangali, a Turkish-born Greek artist—here through the archival research of Dilek Winchester and Hera Büyüktaşçıyan. Several of Stangali's primitivism-inspired works, which take the form of illustrations for Turkish translations of Homer's *Iliad* and More's *Utopia*, appear in vitrines alongside a couple of her photographs. (One vitrine also displays passages from a poignant letter Stangali wrote while exiled in Athens.) The subject matter of her commissioned work—the *Iliad*'s unending search for the homeland, and *Utopia*'s descriptive journey through a land that is, in reality, invariably out of reach—mysteriously parallels her later exile from her beloved Istanbul due to Turkey's 1960s ultranationalist crackdown. Perhaps Nadia al Issa's installation *Cultivating Exile*, 2015—a small garden in pots overlooking the Galata Bridge through a huge arched window—complements Stangali's Istanbul longings the most: An audio guide plays the artist's voice reciting the properties of and the myths behind botanical species associated with death, grief, remembrance, and—in one case—resilience.

— Gökcan Demirkazık<http://artforum.com/picks/section=eu#picks57732>

View of “Apricots from Damascus,” 2015–16