

AEOLIAN

Review by H. G. Masters
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Abandoned modernist projects, industrialists' fantasies, quixotic utopias, futuristic landscapes, tropical retreats: these subjects are the raw matter of Emre Hüner's art. An explorer with an interest in the past's visions for the future, Hüner uncovers micro-episodes in history that can be taken as profound and representative—although of what, exactly, can be tantalizingly nebulous.

For a previous body of work, Hüner produced a series of drawings, collages, ceramic objects and architectural replicas based on the story of Fordlândia, Henry Ford's short-lived rubber plantation in the Brazilian Amazon. In "Aeolian," at Istanbul's Rodeo gallery, the work derives from a sojourn at American heiress Doris Duke's Islamic-inspired Honolulu retreat known as Shangri La, yet Hüner eschews the biographical or historical. Instead, there were traces of subjects like scattered residues from a researcher's sleep: dreams of flight, time travel and space voyages, of monsters, of geological transformations, of building and natural destruction.

The exhibition's invitation bore an image from a NASA training operation showing a space capsule splashing down into a pool. Situated near Rodeo's entrance was the diptych *Diamond Head Diving Man* (2012), which pairs an old photograph of a horizontal figure in a swan dive with a lithograph of a black, rock-like form ("Diamond Head" is also the name of a volcanic natural park in Hawaii). Representing the human ambition for flight and exploration in juxtaposition with the geological and terrestrial, Hüner's images are more evocative in their references than concrete. If there is a connection, it is through scientific terms, as "Aeolian processes" are transformations of the earth shaped by the wind—here, the force that connects aeronautics and geology.

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Aerodynamics appeared to be at work in the shape of the mysteriously entitled *Phantom Work* (2013), which lived up to its moniker. The molded aquamarine form, resembling an airplane wing in profile and, oddly, a plastic toothbrush from the side, balances precariously on a thin wooden frame atop a pedestal lined with ceramic tiles. Swimming pools, midcentury industrial design prototypes and futuristic monuments are all equally evoked by the materials. Nearby was *Oscillating Elevations, Erupting Depths* (2013), a color-coded drawing showing the topography of mountains that appear to be partially above and below the waterline—*islands*, in other words. Which? Where? Why? The lone drawing is unyielding. This absent context was mirrored by the close-ups of a decrepit architectural model of Shangri La from the 1920s, seen in the video projection *Diamond Head Diving Man* (2012). Hünér filmed it largely in close-ups, in 16mm, against a blue background similar in color to that used for “blue-screening,” distorting the sense of scale, perspective and place, and evoking a never-to-be-supplied setting.

One gradually realizes that in “*Aeolian*” even the most direct representations were beguilingly abstract. Perhaps therefore it is helpful to think in Homeric terms, as the exhibition’s title intimated. The Aeolian wind blew Odysseus’ ship off course just as he was about to arrive home in Ithaca, leading to many more years of wandering. In this case, that “home” is meaning, and Hünér continually forestalls one’s arrival on a familiar shore.

“*Aeolian*” culminated in the installation *Anthropophagy* (2013), which means to eat human flesh. The room was filled by an arrangement of low plinths on which were 20-odd, roughly hewn ceramic forms glazed in wild colors, placed atop small wooden maquette stands, colorful panels, piles of crushed salt or shards of grey concrete. The archipelagic arrangement was clearly intuitive, precious yet visually alluring. The ceramic pieces themselves looked meteoritic, stalactitic, crystalline, phallic and yonic, ancient and futuristic, organic and artificial.

That Hünér’s works are best described by such medleys of often-paradoxical adjectives suggests their fundamental state of abstraction, no matter how figurative they initially appear. That said, they are plainly not the self-possessed abstractions of modernism, or forms that boldly declared only their own “form-ness.” Hünér’s works are something else, with incipient, morphing shapes and waxing and waning degrees of legibility.

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Perhaps this is a better way to think of what abstraction means today: not simply as pure form, but as information untethered from narrative, arriving disfigured through fleeting impressions, oblique references and enchanting fragments.