

# Burak Delier

COLLECTOR'S WISH

Contemporary art purports to adopt a critical stance—toward matters of representation, economics, societal mores or politics—as its foundational position and *raison d'être*. Yet, only the most cynical or blithely ignorant viewer can overlook the enormous amount of bad faith (mutually reinforced by players at all levels) circulating in the contemporary-art industry today, as various allegedly discursive discourses are deployed for the consolidation of capital, both intellectual and monetary.

So when an artist receives a commission, how does one reconcile one's integrity with the vested interests of the commissioner? And, whose agency does the resulting artwork ultimately express? Burak Delier explored these questions in *Collector's Wish* (2012), shown in late January at Istanbul's Pilot Galeri, by both documenting his conversations with a well-known art patron and displaying what he was instructed to create.

The structure of *Collector's Wish* is a simple setup. The largest wall of the subterranean gallery was painted floor to ceiling in horizontal strokes of crimson and brick red. Mounted to an adjacent wall was a monitor showing a nine-minute-long video with Delier in conversation with the collector, Saruhan Doğan. Resting on the other side of the gallery was an easel with a copy of a poem by Mehmet Akif Ersoy. From the first words of the video—Delier asking Doğan, “Could you tell me exactly what you want me to do, Saruhan Bey?”—it is clear that this is not a typical commission. Rather, this is an artist subordinating his will to the vision of a collector, who, in turn, proves himself to be an articulate—and, dare we say, conceptual—thinker.

Doğan dictates that he wants Delier to paint a wall red, explaining that this work is about “a story that my grandfather used to tell me when I was a child.” He goes on to describe how the tale derives from an early 20th-century poem by Mehmet Akif Ersoy called the “Painter is Right,” in which a newly rich man wants to decorate his new villa with a mural. One day a man appears out of the blue and offers to do the job. He quickly covers the 18-foot-high wall in red paint, and explains to the rich man that it is a depiction of the celebratory moment after Moses has safely crossed the Red Sea. Though initially baffled, the villa's owner congratulates the painter and says, “It is a lovely mural, and the room is all cheered up.”

Doğan tells Delier how to paint the wall. And he explains why the wall should in real life be much larger than 18 feet: “The vastness of the wall is an indication of the absence of manners of the nouveau riche. We should paint a wall red that is so big that a nouveau riche of our day would say, ‘Wow! That is a big wall!’” This is the moment when one realizes that the commissioner is in fact the one with a critical point to make; Delier never

offers his own ideas, faithfully complying with Doğan's requests.

In the logic (or gamesmanship) of institutional critique, the artist should always maintain the upper hand, as the one who is assailing the system from within. But with the privatization of institutional critique, the artist and collector are, perversely, in collaboration in their mocking of the new bourgeoisie for their “bad taste” and their aspirations to participate in high culture. From Delier's position, exposing this unholy union seems to be the point. So while Doğan quite literally owns the critique, does Delier's extreme passivity in fact permit the artist to have the final word, or retain an external position? Delier certainly exposes the power dynamics of this relationship by self-consciously supplicating himself before the moneyed, intellectual collector—who comes to embody an economic system in which the wealthy embrace their own critique as the ultimate sign of their intellectual and financial superiority. In looking at the vast expanse of Saruhan Doğan's large, new red wall—empty of sentimental value and meaning to the viewer—one does feel compelled to ask: “What's wrong with this picture?”

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