

show there this autumn, which was entitled *We now must say goodbye*.

Ceylan's newest body of work sprang from his head after he enjoyed a meaningful moment at the Metropolitan Museum of Art with the *Ingres portrait Princess de Broglie* (1851-53) 10 years ago, during Ceylan's first solo show in New York, when he says he spent every minute possible at the Met, a practice he is continuing during his current stay in New York this autumn. Eventually Ceylan reached out to an acquaintance in the museum's contemporary department to inquire about ongoing and intimate access to Ingres' princess. "I took my Pantones [colour samples] and my texts about Ingres," Ceylan says, describing the many hours he sat in front of the painting.

Ceylan was attracted to *Princess de Broglie* because he says that in Ingres' day, "The critics said the painting was so glamorous and shiny that it was about Ingres, not about the princess." That criticism predated Oscar Wilde's often cited line that "every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter... [It] is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself."

The artist teased out that tension in the Kasmin show's centerpiece, which comprised two canvases. First, Ceylan painstakingly recreated Ingres' original portrait, but with Ingres' head atop the Princess' body. Then, facing that much larger painting, Ceylan placed his copy of the Princess' head and shoulders. Ceylan thereby reunited portraitist and sitter, but in a discomfiting gesture of decapitation that also disrupts the traditions of the gendered gaze. (In Ingres' day, painter and sitter would have spent countless hours together as she posed; the "goodbye" of the exhibition's title refers to their uncoupling upon the completion of a portrait.)

Ceylan plays all this out in another way as well; the Kasmin show included 10 small works where Ceylan replicated Ingres' drawings but with Ceylan's own head in place of Ingres' subjects. Those works are on paper that Ceylan antiqued using tea and other washes. This exhibition is not a complete departure from an earlier Ceylan series of paintings that revisit Orientalist figurative painting to expose and deconstruct hidden tales in Turkish history (though often with a high level of sexual content).

"Taner is interested in delving deeply into historical paintings and into the cultural and social conditions in which they were painted," explains Olney. "He is asking, 'What are those stories that can be told that are relevant to history and to now?' and using his imagination to question, explore and reconstruct the past."

Those questions are relevant also to Ceylan's commission for the recent Istanbul Biennial. At the behest of organiser Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Ceylan copied Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo's painting *Il Quarto Stato*, a piece 10 years in the making that was considered a failure when it premiered in 1902. Pellizza was devastated and later committed suicide.

Yet Pellizza's painting eventually became a symbol and an inspiration for democratic and workers' movements worldwide. "I find his story very tragic and his passion very beautiful," says Ceylan, who also painted a portrait of Pellizza and installed it, "so Pellizza can see his painting all these years later," he adds. Ceylan says that taken together, "this work gives [Pellizza] a poetic justice."

In some ways, Ceylan's biennial commission also speaks to his stance on Turkey's quashed protest movements that began in Istanbul's Gezi Taksim Park in 2013 and have gone underground until their quasi-resurgence in the wake of the October bombings in Ankara: "It was a utopia in which there was no religion, no



A view of Taner Ceylan's art studio. Photography by Reha Arcan

nationalism, no race, no sexuality: there was a oneness that was the materialising of John Lennon's song 'Imagine,'" he recalls, "It lived only for one week but it is still there as an energy." He pauses for a minute and then adds, "It is the hope of what we have for the future."

When he is not planted with his Pantones in front of Pellizzas and other classics, Ceylan makes time to see the work of his contemporaries too; he says he found this year's exhibitions of Elaine Sturtevant and Robert Gober at the Museum of Modern Art both inspiring and important. John Currin's work is a touchstone for him. "I love his paintings; they are sexual, as mine are," Ceylan says, noting that both he and Currin "paint in a traditional way that needs time, passion and silence," all of which Ceylan feels are scarce and undervalued in today's world. Tapping his head, Ceylan says, "John Currin is always, always here."

His stance towards other peers — especially those who embrace abstraction — is ambivalent. "I love abstract painting but I cannot paint that," he explains, "I don't have that feeling." And while he admires the abstract work of Gerhard Richter in particular, he says "there's a lot of stupid shows and a lot of lazy abstract paintings."

He notes that the market these days demands that artists "must produce very fast and you must be famous and you must be rushed." (Olney says Ceylan makes about a half dozen paintings a year.)

However, Ceylan refuses to bend to the market's pressure to work with haste or to be more completely conceptual. His eyes gleam, his chin juts with determination: "I believe that in my art I am able to do something new using these traditional techniques that have stood up to time." ■

We Must Now Say Goodbye ran at Paul Kasmin Gallery in New York through October 31st. paulkasmingallery.com Taner Ceylan's commission for the Istanbul Biennial was on view at the Istanbul Modern through November 16th



Above: Taner Ceylan in his studio. Photography by Cihan Oncu
Right: *1881* (The Lost Paintings series). 2010. oil on canvas. 170 cm x 180 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York

