

PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

SELECTIONS

ARTS / STYLE / CULTURE FROM THE ARAB WORLD AND BEYOND



THE COLOURS ISSUE

• COLOUR AND MATERIAL • CURATED BY VENETIA PORTER • IMMORTALISING AL-MUTANABBI STREET •
• CHRYSTYNA SALAM'S WORLD OF CERAMICS • IN DISCUSSION WITH MUSTAPHA AZEROUAL AND CAROLINE TABET •

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ART

A FANTASTICAL REALITY

by Marwan Naaman

With his singular style of emotional realism, painter **Taner Ceylan** invites the viewer into a world that transcends life itself



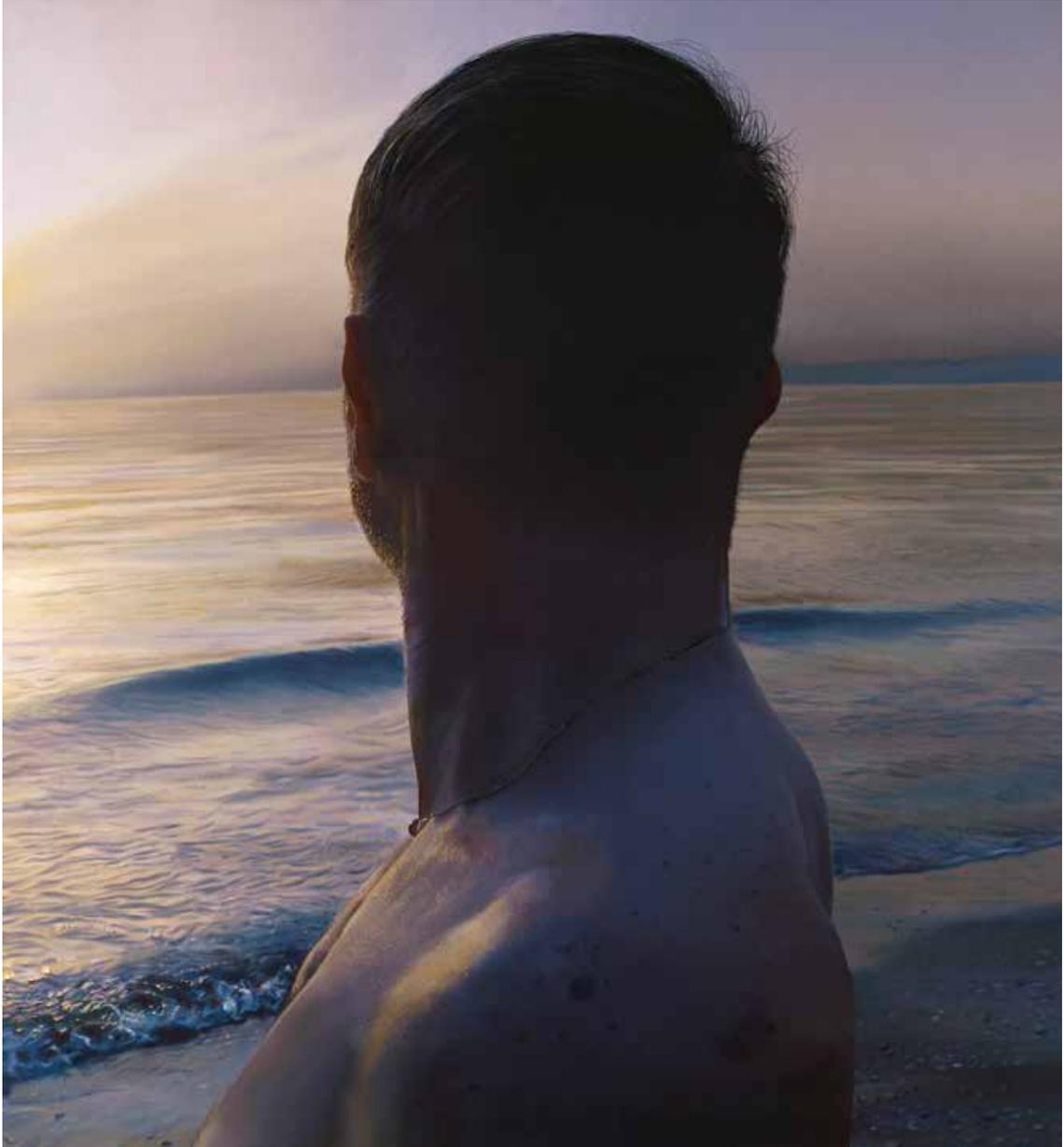
Taner Ceylan's paintings easily fool most viewers. At first glance, virtually every observer believes that he is looking at a photograph, when in fact Ceylan's works are detailed, intricate, breathtaking paintings. Some critics have called his work "hyperrealistic," but Ceylan describes his art in a different fashion. "I call my technique 'emotional realism,'" he says. "My work is different to 'hyperrealists,' such as Chuck Close, who I adore. My aim is to make emotions visible."

For Ceylan, painting is more of a reality than everyday living. "At some point, I felt my painting become real and very strong to me, feeling more real than life

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Taner Ceylan, *Alp*, oil on canvas, 115 x 105 cm, 2009



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left: Taner Ceylan, *John Currin*, oil on canvas, 60 x 58 cm, 2009

below: Taner Ceylan, *Spiritual*, oil on canvas, 140 x 200 cm, 2008



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ART

itself," he explains. "I decided to make my paintings very realistic, so they would assimilate more and more with life. To me, the material world exists only during my eight hours of sleep."

Born in Germany to Turkish parents, Ceylan, now in his late 40s, moved with his family to Istanbul at the age of 16. He attended Mimar Sinan University and had his first exhibition in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1991. He now splits his time between Istanbul, New York and Antalya, the romantic, ancient city on Turkey's southern coast.

From the beginning Ceylan's paintings raised eyebrows in the art world, due to their overtly homoerotic, sexual and violent themes. The contemporary Arab and Muslim worlds had seldom seen such daring works: a masseuse drying his completely naked male client in a Turkish hammam; a man wearing a big diamond brooch and a tarboosh (the traditional tasseled cap of cloth or felt, usually red, worn in Near Eastern countries), and suggestively staring at the viewer while smoking a cigar and blowing smoke through his mouth; a snow-white peacock whose lower half is splashed in blood, apparently from the dead person whose hand lies in front of the bird.

"I do not plan my paintings," Ceylan explains. "I live and I paint. I see something or someone that inspires me to paint. I did choose homoerotic themes because of myself, because I was a witness of homoeroticism, sexuality and life itself."

Over the years, Ceylan has gleaned inspiration from such widely differing artists as Eugène Delacroix, Nan Goldin, Terry Richardson and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. "There are many artists whose work will excite me when I see it, but I am especially inspired by artists working independent of a movement, such as Johannes Vermeer, Balthus and Giorgio de Chirico," he says.

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Ceylan's art has often been described as politically charged. "My art doesn't have to be controversial to be political or have political undertones," the artist says. "However, you must remember that art is a political action. If you are making art, you are already acting, creating and thinking according to your desires and your free will and not conceding to the demands of the system."

This October, Ceylan is showcasing his latest works at New York's edgy Paul Kasmin Gallery. In an exhibition entitled *We Now Must Say Goodbye*, Ceylan finds inspiration in a quote from Oscar Wilde – "Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter" – to create an installation of paintings, drawings and more. "I'm happily questioning what it means to be an artist," says Ceylan. "What do you call yourself as an artist? Does what you paint affect you? Does the artist have a role in society? I am using the art historical archives to create new questions." ■

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