

## Melike Kara

by George Vasey



The characters that populate Melike Kara's enigmatic canvases are regularly put through their paces. While some images seem relatively sedate, others are full of figures performing an array of impressive choreographies featuring gravity-defying somersaults and backflips. The contorted bodies, all long arms and legs, offer a casual articulation of human anatomy: with their outstretched hands and legs akimbo, the figures literally let it all hang loose. Typically, the Cologne-based artist's canvases are sketchy and spare, economically painted in one or two colours on bare white background. With no depth of field, the flat graphic quality of each painting provides a rudimentary articulation of the figure. The paintings are archetypes rather than direct descriptions, and one can see the characters as a shorthand for an emotional interiority, or perhaps phantoms of people half-remembered. Often the face is merely an outline, and sometimes two lines are used to articulate eyes. The body is often left half-painted, and a torso can resemble something vegetable or geological as much as an anatomical form. It is not clear whether the characters are clothed or naked, appearing asexual yet resolutely carnal.

### Scenes of archetypal, libidinous bodies desperately seeking the viewer's attention

In her nascent career, Kara has quickly established a formal idiom across painting and sculpture that is curiously focused, re-working the same iconography across each painting. While the body is the main attraction, sometimes a well-placed plant pot or cactus intrudes on the libidinous activity. Kara has a thing for tongues as well. In her paintings, they become formal devices—distended and elongated, sometimes intimate and playful, at other moments highly aggressive. The tongue, of course, is where the inside of the body meets the exterior; it is the motor of language and kissing, as well as eating and swallowing. It is continually lubricated, except when one becomes nervous or flustered, the anxiety of a job interview or public speaking manifesting itself as a dry mouth, affecting the subject's ability to remain articulate. The tongue is the strongest muscle in the human body and is central to what makes us human—when it fails us, it induces a moment of trauma. In Kara's paintings, its ubiquity amplifies the inherent muteness of the painted image. It's as if, encumbered by an inability to be vocal, the painted body has become a hyperactive semaphore, desperately seeking the viewer's attention in other ways.

In Kara's recent paintings, the tongue becomes an umbilical cord, connecting bodies and objects across the canvas. One can draw parallels between Kara's work and Jean Dubuffet's stylised primitivism or, more recently, Nicola Tyson's elastic anatomies. The artist's sculptures continue this bodily obsession in three dimensions. The squat and intimately scaled figures have previously been displayed on glass plinths and hung on wires installed across the gallery space. The sculptures look like they've been recently hatched from the egg of an unknown monster, their hands and lips sprouting out of their embryonic body.

Since graduating from Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf in 2014, the artist has held a quick succession of solo exhibitions at Salon Kennedy, Frankfurt and Open Forum in Berlin. With an upcoming solo exhibition at Peres Project Berlin in 2016, Kara's progress shows no sign of abetting. It will be fascinating to see where she takes her impressive cast of characters next.

Melike Kara (German, b. 1985) is an artist who lives and works in Cologne. She is represented by Peres Projects, Berlin. Her upcoming solo exhibition "In Your Presence" will be presented at Peres Projects in Berlin from 13 February–12 March.

George Vasey is a writer and a curator at the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland.

Image: TBT, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Peres Projects, Berlin. Photo credit: Trevor Good.