



KUNSTPAVILLON  
24.11.2023 – 20.01.2024

## UNFIXED PLACE, AMBIGUOUS TIME

Vigan Nimani

curated by Seda Yıldız



TIROLER **KÜNSTLER:INNENSCHAFT**  
TYROLEAN ARTISTS' ASSOCIATION  
KUNSTPAVILLON

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## **Painting multiple temporalities**

4 The multifaceted practice of Vigan Nimani defies easy categorization. Educated as a painter, his artworks span drawings, photography, sound works and most prominently, painting, which sits at the heart of his artistic practice. Nimani plays in the experimental & improvisation band *Tetris*, works as a cultural worker (co-initiator of Kino Armata foundation) and runs a café — an extension of his studio, also housing some of his paintings. Since the early 2000s, the artist has been an active figure in shaping the local art and cultural scene in his hometown Prishtina, the capital of Kosovo, which has been developed by the experimentation and self-organization of the inhabitants. This biographical background provides an entry point to the artist's solo exhibition in Innsbruck; Nimani's close relationship with his hometown is evident in his shown works.

The artist explores the changing image of the city through creating meticulously crafted compositions often from found imagery. His practice is based on a process of collecting, documenting, and transmitting. Nimani explores the legacies of modernist architecture in Kosovo and studies the changing image of the city in particular. Beginning as an abstract landscape painter after his graduation in 2006, Nimani soon developed his own personal visual language, moving away from natural forms. As of 2010, he has been focusing on documenting the modernist heritage in the region, through compiling images, old books and his own photographs. The artist creates compositions through manipulating these images and then rendering them as paintings, or drawings. He owns an archive of hundreds of

images which become source material for his paintings, providing glimpses of the region's changing urban identity before the wave of privatization that followed the war in 1999 in Kosovo. Factories, architectural landmarks, interiors, and scenes from everyday life often appear in his paintings, covering themes such as cultural identity, collective memory, loss and erasure.

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Vigan Nimani engages with critical strategies of artistic practice for dealing with precisely disappearing images and narratives, of socialism and modernist architecture. By appropriating figures from the past and present, the artist uncovers layered histories. For a long time, Nimani considered the archive from an aesthetic point of view, using photographs as a source for his paintings. However, the archive today, with the rapid erasure of modernist heritage under turbo-capitalism, takes on a new meaning — a resource for understanding the country's changing urban identity. Nimani's paintings therefore are studies of the changing image of the city; they hold a certain level of distillation with references to past times and of the present.

There is an intrinsic performative nature in Nimani's artistic practice; a created narrative thread, a relationship between found imagery and paintings. The artist first chooses a fragment of a photo from books, catalogs, or postcards, and appropriates them to his canvas, playing with their scale and reframing, manipulating certain figures; and hereby creating a new imagery. This new image is then rendered to oil paintings on canvas and wood, small-scale watercolors, or drawings. Minimal lines, soft-faded colors, cropped frames, and a dreamy atmosphere all build the aesthetic style of his paintings.

6 Although the original images might have strong references to a specific era, in the paintings they appear in non-explicit ways, unattached from their original contexts. What viewers encounter is an ambiguous result, which embodies multiple temporalities between the past and now; juxtapositions of historical sources and geographical references. Being not tied down to any particular time nor to any particular place; these paintings circulate, and in the process, they connect people, places, and stories.

Can we consider 'painting' a method of resistance, a crucial source of cultural memory? For Nimani, the answer is affirmative; the imagery of Kosovo's modernist architecture obsessively appears in the compositions of Nimani. By capturing and conserving the images of diminishing tangible architectural heritage at risk of disappearing, his paintings enable a form of collective memory. Such erasure is portrayed in non-explicit forms; he crops images, adds filters, manipulates colors, and enhances details, or gestures. Symbols, in particular, or any other time reference are removed; in this way, they create a timeless feeling. Yet some titles of paintings unpack their background story: For example, **25.05.1980** (2017), the painting has a rather unusual preference for a cropped composition and portrays dozens of men in black suits, and military uniform. The composition (sourced from archival material) is taken from the funeral of Josip Bros Tito, former President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. If not the title, all this doesn't immediately suggest itself; where we are, or what time we are. As is often the case, the faces as well as symbols in the uniforms are unclear. The political stories that Nimani's paintings inevitably tell are of secondary importance to him.

Most appealed by the aesthetics in modernist architecture, as well as the faded color photographs, the artist says his motivation comes from a desire to “create a timeless feeling that offers viewers different flavors and moods”.<sup>1</sup>

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The paintings *Cinema* (2022), *Workers Resort* (2018), *Hotel Božur* (2020), or *Milk Factory* (2018) cover the urban and architectural destruction followed by the war in Kosovo in 1999, mostly due to the process of privatization. Not being legally protected and considered national heritage (with only a few exceptions), these architectural landmarks are examples that are either already erased or potentially will be removed soon. Kosovo has been a case study of erasing the rich regional urban culture in the name of modernity since the beginning of the XX century, referred to as “imposed modernity” by the Kosovar architect Gezim Pacarizi.

Pacarizi explains that similar to how the socialist government destroyed neighborhoods built on a human scale to make way for new buildings, enlarged streets, and straightened the rivers. Making room for large modern structures took place in the 1950s; today another erasure is taking place: “Modernity has been a synonym of destruction and foreign aesthetics”.<sup>2</sup>

It is in this destruction that Nimani’s paintings become a form of aesthetic resilience; while the artist’s archive creates dependable documentation, his paintings enable circulation of cultural memory.

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<sup>1</sup> Vigan Nimani in a call with the author in October, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> 14. Internationale Architekturausstellung La Biennale Di Venezia, 2014.  
<http://www.pacarizi.com/exhibitions.html>

8 **Hotel Božur** (2020), a specific “time-space” par-excellence, makes connections with the past and perhaps, the future. Designed by the architect Boris Pozdnyakov in 1954, the hotel building “marks the beginning of the urban modern city in Kosovo”<sup>3</sup>. With its marble mosaics of warriors covered at the façade, the building became an early important landmark. Followed by the 1999 war, the hotel was privatized and underwent a renovation with major changes in volumes and materials in 2006. With an added extra element of a blue glass facade, neoclassical treatment of the indoors, and removing the signature mosaics on the facade, the building has been removed from its socialist heritage entirely. Now it bears the name, Swiss Diamond Hotel. In the painting **Hotel Božur** (2020), Nimani extracts a close-up of the mosaics of warriors at the façade that was once the signature of the building yet destroyed during the reconstruction process. By appropriating and repeating such figures, the artist here acts as a middleman, a performer, “an agent of exchange, linkage and transformation” of multiple temporalities.<sup>4</sup>

Though the paintings of Vigan Nimani might be citational, to call them mere representations of the socialist period would not do justice to the work. For they acquire subjectivity by an act of mediation; not tied down to any particular time nor to any particular place. What they create instead are imagined temporalities that invite viewers to draw their own connections between what is present, as well as what is absent in these paintings. The imagery of Nimani appears here and now, always in fragments, never portraying a full narrative, to arouse the curiosity of the viewer.

<sup>3</sup> [https://oralhistorykosovo.org/points\\_of\\_interests/hotel-bozur/](https://oralhistorykosovo.org/points_of_interests/hotel-bozur/)

<sup>4</sup> Lars Bang Larsen, Søren Andreasen, „*The middleman: beginning to talk about mediation*“, 2007.



It is the circulation of imagery that, in the process, connects people, places, and stories. In this movement of time and place, repetition, beyond restless nostalgia, is an active gesture; “a movement forward instead of backwards”.<sup>5</sup>

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Still, there is a certain contradiction to Nimani’s work. After years of striving to place his paintings outside of time or place, the nature of both the archive and his work has changed with the rapid erasure of modernist heritage under turbo-capitalism. The archive, no longer a source of material, has become a crucial source of resistance, depicting the region’s changing appearance from the first decade of the 2000s. The artist welcomes these two realities that coexist in his paintings. Moving beyond intention, he is aware of this newly acquired documentary value of his photographs; and this, gradually has become the main goal for his photography.<sup>6</sup> However Nimani never imagined the same for his paintings; it is not crucial for him to make these references explicit, as he is not opting for creating correlations other than aesthetic ones; “Some get inspired from technical pictorial aspects, some from their apocalyptic, dreamy atmosphere. For some, it raises attention toward socialist architecture and aesthetics of that time. And this is exactly what I wanted to achieve through my paintings — to not be explicit in any way.”<sup>7</sup> These coexisting realities ensure the work’s openness; the process of approaching the artist’s practice is not contained by a single framework.

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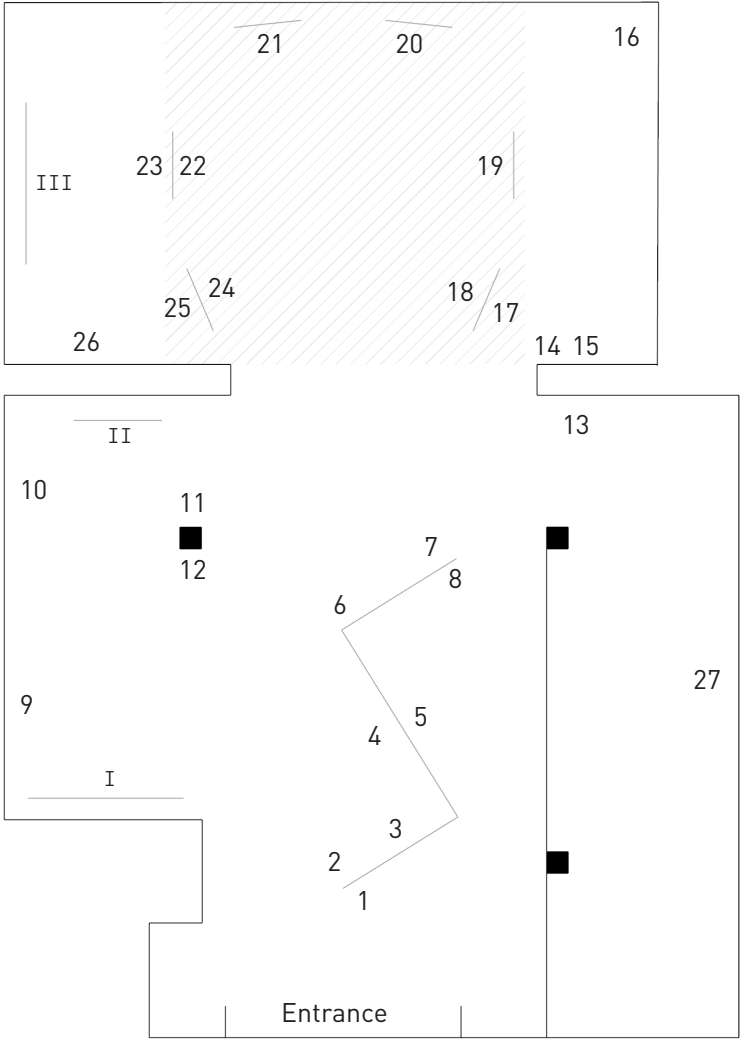
<sup>5</sup> M. G. Piety: “On Repetition”, 2016, in: Piety on Kierkegaard. Exh.ex <https://pietyonkierkegaard.com/2016/02/17/on-repetition/>, accessed May 26, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Vigan Nimani in a call with the author in October, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

10 Throughout his work, Vigan Nimani crafts multiple temporalities and viewers are invited to get close to them without the need to unpack further references. Their minimalist visual language which is free of overabundant symbolism further mediates the experience. Still, sketching out several cases of instances of erasure, these paintings enable the circulation of cultural memory. Such reveals the artistic practice's capacity; painting, beyond time and space, is both a tool of resistance and is also a discipline that allows for hope that bolsters the resistance.

Seda Yıldız, 2023



## LIST OF WORKS

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- 1 *Cityscape*, oil on canvas, 70x80cm, 2020
- 2 *Battle of Neretva*, oil on canvas, 75x81cm, 2017
- 3 *Air*, oil on canvas, 40x50cm, 2015
- 12 4 *Office Interior II*, oil on canvas, 100x130cm, 2018
- 5 *City Maquett*, oil on canvas, 100x130cm, 2022
- 6 *Man on Suit*, oil on canvas, 105x119cm, 2019
- 7 *Workers resort*, oil on canvas, 90x120cm, 2018
- 8 *Rest House*, oil on canvas, 90x120cm, 2022
- 9 *Red Dress*, oil on canvas board, 28x21cm, 2015
- 10 *New Home*, oil on wood, 25x14cm, 2015
- 11 *Amber*, oil on wood, 20x20cm, 2015
- 12 *White Sky*, oil on wood, 26x16cm, 2015
- 13 *Palace of Youth*, oil on wood, 20x14cm, 2015
- 14+15 *Wolfen + Wolfen II*, oil on wood, 25x14cm, 2015
- 16 *Fang*, oil on wood, 17x11cm, 2015
- 17 *Cinema*, oil on canvas, 80x80cm, 2022
- 18 *Hotel Bozhur*, oil on canvas, 80x80cm, 2020
- 19 *Book Card*, oil on canvas, 84x110cm, 2019
- 20 *Milk Factory*, oil on canvas, 100x100cm, 2018
- 21 *Reflections*, oil on canvas, 100x120cm, 2020
- 22 *Bankos*, oil on canvas, 95x95cm, 2017
- 23 *25.05.1980*, oil on canvas, 95x95cm, 2017
- 24 *Office Corridor*, oil on canvas, 80x80cm
- 25 *Kebab shop*, oil on canvas, 80x80 cm, 2017
- 26 *Winter Morning*, oil canvas, 30x40cm, 2016
- 27 *Institute of Albanology*, oil on canvas board, 24x33cm, 2018

I

- a) *M*, 23x30 cm, 2021
- b) *PARK*, 34x26cm, 2018
- c) *Untitled*, 13x21cm, 2018
- d) *Untitled* 13x21cm, 2018

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II

- e) *Untitled*, 31x23cm, 2021
- f) *Parlament*, 19x24cm, 2019
- g) *Untitled*, 26x18cm, 2018

III

- h) *Untitled*, 23x30cm, 2019
- i) *Untitled*, 30x40cm, 2021
- j) *Untitled*, 30x21cm, 2018
- k) *Untitled*, 21x30cm, 2018
- l) *Untitled*, 11x13,5cm, 2018
- m) *Untitled*, 25x17cm, 2018
- n) *Untitled*, 21x21cm, 2018



*Reflections*, oil on canvas, 100x120cm, 2020





*Banksos*, oil on canvas, 95x95cm, 2017

16 **Vigan Nimani** (b.1981, Prishtina) is a visual artist, musician and cultural worker based in Prishtina, Kosovo. Mainly working with painting, drawing and photography Nimani's practice deals with the notion of memory and past from a non-nostalgic, progressive point of view. His work, which is developed through fragmentations and abstraction, invites the viewer to actively engage in the meaning-making process of the past, at present. Nimani exhibited his work in Kosovo, Belgrade, Ljubljana and Amsterdam, including Manifesta 14: Prishtina, National Gallery of Kosovo, Gallery Space Motrat, Stacion Center for Contemporary Art, National Museum of Slovenia, Tirana Institute of Contemporary Art (TICA) and Rijksakademie. Vigan Nimani holds a BFA in Painting, from Academy of Fine Arts in Prishtina (2006). Nimani is also a member of Tetris band.



**Seda Yıldız** (Istanbul, 1989) is an independent curator and writer based in Hamburg and Istanbul. Having educational background in art practice, design, and literature, her transdisciplinary practice spans curating, writing, editing and publishing. Her research interests comprise artist collectives and self-archiving practices, focusing on collaborative approaches to publicizing art. Conviviality and friendship are central values in her artistic work. Her recent curatorial projects include *SOFT Critique* (2023) at the Škuc Gallery in Ljubljana, Slovenia, public program *Well Beings in Times of Climate Anxiety* at the Museum of Art and Design Hamburg, Germany; podcast *Radio Otherwise* at Manifesta 14, performative exhibition of the artist and musician Vigan Nimani, *Unfixed Place, Ambiguous Time* (2022) at Kino Armata and the Grand Hotel Prishtina, Kosovo; the archive exhibition *Memory of Kundura: The World Within a Factory* (2021) at Beykoz Kundura in Istanbul, Turkey, as well as a roller disco weekend *We Live Together, We Dance Together* (2019) at Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof in Hamburg, Germany. A member of AICA Turkey, she occasionally writes on contemporary art. Yıldız is the editor and co-author of the book *Building Human Relations Through Art: Belgrade art collective Škart, from 1990 to present*. (Onomatopee, 2022)

**[www.yildizseda.com](http://www.yildizseda.com)**

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**Exhibition Technique:** Paul Irmann & Lukas Klestil

18 **Curator:** Seda Yıldız

**Exhibition Booklet:** Milena Thurner

**Exhibition Booklet Editorial:** Bettina Siegele & Cornelia Reinisch-Hofmann

**Graphic:** Annja Krautgasser

The exhibition **UNFIXED PLACE, UMBIGUOUS TIME** by **VIGAN NIMANI**, curated by **Seda Yıldız**, is one of three exhibitions selected by the board of the Tyrolean Artists Association and the curator and managing director Bettina Siegele for the annual programme for Kunstpavillon and Neue Galerie 2023 as part of the Open Call 2023.

## DATES

### **Opening with Audio Performance**

with Vigan Nimani & Dritëro Nikqi

Thursday 23.11.2023 at 19.00 Uhr

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### **Exhibition tour Art & Coffee**

02.12.2023 | 20.01.2024 at 11.30 Uhr

### **Guided tour with managing director Bettina Siegele**

14.12.2023 at 17.30 Uhr

Current information on the events and outreach in the realm of the exhibition can be found on our website:

**[www.kuenstlerschaft.at](http://www.kuenstlerschaft.at)**

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Kunstpavillon: Mittwoch – Freitag 12.00 – 18.00 & Samstag 11.00 – 15.00

Neue Galerie: Mittwoch – Freitag 12.00 – 17.00 & Samstag 11.00 – 15.00

Künstlerhaus Büchsenhausen: Auf Anfrage

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