

YOURDAYSOFFREEDOMARENUMBERED

By Erdem Taşdelen

In his first solo exhibition in Istanbul, Babak Golkar has embarked on an ambitious site-specific installation inside Sanatorium. Upon entering the space, viewers are faced with an architectural black cube that obstructs their view and are forced to walk the narrow corridors around it in order to find out what else there is to see. The stairs behind the black cube lead up to a slide that allows entry into the cube, in which is found a neon text that reads YOURDAYSOFFREEDOMARENUMBERED. Once inside the cube, viewers can also take the stairs up to the mezzanine to see the inside of the cube from above, but in order to leave it, they will need to climb back up the slide. Although this may not be an extremely difficult task, the audience must nevertheless maneuver through the space in ways that they normally would not.

Black Cube: Moving Toward the Abstract Light is yet another manifestation of Golkar's interest in the ways in which architecture influences social movement. This bleak yet playful installation lures its viewer into the cube without letting them know what exactly they will encounter inside, only to reveal that they are trapped in a structure that dominates and controls them. While this is a literal representation of the power that architecture holds, we can also consider it as a metaphor for an entity that imposes various limitations on an individual, which in turn could be conceived as a political or religious entity that exerts power over subjects. The neon sign that constitutes the "abstract light" in the black cube may be seen to represent a higher authority or divinity that sinisterly declares a vision of a darker future where the freedoms we take for granted are obliterated. Perhaps the work can then serve as a reminder that this dark future is not necessarily an apocalyptic scenario in the distant future, but that we are always already trapped inside power structures that we willingly or unwillingly submit to.

Leaving all metaphors aside, as movements in the gallery space are predetermined to a great extent by the artist, he becomes the figure of authority. He makes decisions on behalf of the audience and makes no concessions, which is perhaps most strikingly evident in the difficulty of moving through the narrow corridors surrounding the cube. While this may be perceived as an arrogant gesture, it also

points to the authoritative position we grant to art. We expect the experience of encountering art to be a moment of rupture where meaning is made and conveyed by the artwork, and therefore by the artist by extension. Though this may indeed be the case every so often, Black Cube lays bare a possible relationship between the artist and the audience where an invisible contract between them is made and a power struggle ensues. The audience may just as well choose not to view the work, but if they do, they submit to the will of the artist, while still maintaining the power to judge and dismiss the work. We might think of this as a productive antagonism where meaning is made through such a struggle, and Black Cube solidifies this tension through a confrontational encounter.