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SULUKULE IS EVERYWHERE

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One should be careful with comparisons, and so I won't attempt one. However, a few days ago at the Istanbul Biennale when standing in front of a video called Wonderland, I couldn't help but think of Francisco de Goya. At the start of the 19th century, Goya recorded the atrocities committed in the war between the rebelling Spaniards and the Napoleonic soldiers in a series of etchings. He did it in such a way that the pictures became timeless, universal expressions of the horrors of war, applicable as much to the territorial struggles of nationalism as to the current Syrian conflict. The Turkish artist Halil Altindere has succeeded in making a similarly timeless political bugle call with Wonderland. The video, which lasts just eight and-a-half minutes, documents how the hip hop group Tahribat-i Isyan maraud and beat up police officers in the Sulukule district of Istanbul, which is being pulled down on a massive scale to make way for affluent residents. The band is taking up the struggle against the district's demolition on behalf of the residents. And Altindere's video in turn documents the imperative of resistance on behalf of everyone who is at the mercy of arbitrary power.

Halil Altindere was born in 1971 in the southern Anatolian town of Mardin as the son of Kurdish parents. Resistance and advocacy of minorities are constants in his work, which now has the attention it deserves within Turkish society – at a time when there are protests on Taksim Square and among a generation which no longer fears conflicts with the establishment. This short film encapsulates the fractures between rich and poor, and between Orient and Occident, just as the rapper's clear message warns the haves not to mess with the have nots. The spirit of revolt blows through this collage of music video, documentary close-ups and fictional sequences that from time to time remind one of Quentin Tarantino's orgies of violence – so forcefully that it grabs everyone, even those who have never heard of Sulukule.

More on the 2013 Istanbul-Biennale at: www.13b.iksv.org/en

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