

Skin Deep: Onur Mansız and the Body as Canvas, on Canvas

Artsy Editors May 31, 2014 12:42pm [f](#) [t](#) [✉](#)

In the work of Onur Mansız, flames, waves, mountains, and alluring women adorn human bodies. But these are not your standard tattoos; instead, they are images that the artist projects onto the naked bodies of his friends. As skin becomes canvas, light bends according to the bodies' curves and leaves deep black shadows behind. Such an interaction between two and three dimensions, between light and solid form, is a conceptually rich conceit in and of itself, but here the young artist takes the idea a step further and flips the relationship back on itself by creating hyperrealistic oil paintings of the projections. Mansız's powerful works form "Tragedy," currently on view at Turkey's art ON Istanbul gallery.

On canvas, the light images interact with each sitter's form in ways that add haunting emotion and a sense of implied narrative to the faithfully rendered portraits. A projected pair of hands inch up ominously close to clenching around a woman's neck; scissors precariously cut a ribbon from the neck of a woman, projected onto a man's chest; billowing smoke rises from a fire, quite literally, in one man's belly.

Caught in the spotlight of the projector, Mansız's models heighten the psychological presence of these images. Their flesh seems exposed as the beam of light cuts through the darkness and highlights their vulnerability, raising, in some works, questions about censorship and body politics. Yet some of the figures gaze defiantly back, challenging the viewer, or perhaps Mansız himself.

"Tragedy" is on view at art On Istanbul, May 27–July 12, 2014.

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