

# BALKON SERIES

lectures, screenings & music, organized by STATIONS

## **BALKON #4**

Saturday, 2. April 2022, 6 pm

### **Gürsoy Doğtaş: *Double Imprisonment***

Reading performance (TR, DE, EN) & live music

Only one photograph proves that James Baldwin met the famous singer and actor Zeki Müren in his Istanbul decade (around 1962 – 1972). It is a group photo from 1969 in the foyer of the Gülriz Sururi-Engin Cezzar Theatre in Istanbul. It is not easy to look at. The cropping pushes James Baldwin to the edge of the photo, cutting him in half. Zeki Müren, on the other hand, poses in the middle of the picture. On the one hand, the two men could not be more different. One is fleeing the USA, while the other idealises this very country and especially its entertainment culture. On the other hand–albeit with different intensity– they both deal with two forms of imprisonment: society and the prison cell. This is where they meet.

On 23 December 1969, Baldwin adapted the play *Fortune and Men's Eyes* by the Canadian playwright John Herbert for the Gülriz Sururi-Engin Cezzar Theatre in Istanbul. The entire plot takes place in a prison cell. Several of Baldwin's socio-political concerns are connected in the play. One is his criticism of the racist justice system in the USA, which criminalises and imprisons activists of the civil rights movement and the black population as a whole. Further, there is his fundamental critique of the violent structures of patriarchy. The point that *Fortune and Men's Eyes* makes is that even those damaged by these structures continue to perpetuate them. Baldwin's discourse on homosexuality and homosocial intimacy builds on this idea.

Müren, in turn, was repeatedly the ideal casting for the character trapped in society. His only theatre role in his artistic career sees him become the effeminate, seventeen-year-old college boy Tom Lee in *Çay ve Sempati* (English original: *Tea and Sympathy*) in 1965. In Tom Lee, Zeki Müren recognises himself. "It's as if Robert Anderson had tailored this play to me," he notes in amazement. "A teenager whom his friends parade with tasteless jokes becau-

se they don't want to delve into the depths of his inner life." In 1953, Anderson wrote the melodrama for Broadway. By the time it was performed at the Arena Theatre in Istanbul, the play had already been filmed in Hollywood. Müren had hoped Baldwin would realise *Giovanni's Room* as a play in Istanbul. Even more, that he could embody the role of Giovanni. Like some of the characters in Baldwin's books, Giovanni is a prisoner. One who is waiting in Paris for the execution of his death sentence. However, this theatrical performance would never take place.

Gürsoy Doğtaş

The reading performance *Double Imprisonment* by Gürsoy Doğtaş uses numerous text passages, whether excerpts from the plays, essays, interviews with the two, or autofictional elements, to explore forms of homosocial intimacies at the threshold between freedom and imprisonment.

GÜRSOY DOĞTAŞ is an art historian working para-curatorially at the intersection of institutional critique, structural racism and queer studies.

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