MUTLU ÇERKEZ: 1988–2065

Exhibition Dates:
10 February - 14 April 2018

Opening Function:
10 February 2018, 3–5pm
To be opened by Professor Callum Morton, Head, School of Art, Monash Art Design Architecture

Mutlu Çerkez – first ever career survey opens at MUMA

Monash University Museum of Art | MUMA is pleased to present Mutlu Çerkez: 1988–2065, an exhibition and monograph that survey the art and life of Mutlu Çerkez, the Turkish Cypriot Australian artist who lived and worked in Melbourne until his untimely death in 2005.

Çerkez was an influential artist who, during his lifetime, made a strong impact on the Australian and international art worlds. His work incorporated traditions of conceptual art, minimalism and monochrome painting but made its own internal logic its primary reference point while strenuously resisting a reduction to any single style.

During his unique career, Çerkez charted a wide-ranging trajectory that took in accomplished painterly self-portraits, an extensive investigation of bootlegs and artistic copies that also operates as a sincere act of fandom for the rock band Led Zeppelin, an installation featuring live bees, and the minimalist date works the MUMA exhibition is titled for.

MUMA director Charlotte Day says Çerkez blazed his own trail and helped to redefine the artist’s role, making him something of a precursor for artists working in the digital age.

“Never known for loud declarations, Mutlu Çerkez quietly but emphatically went about his business of defining his own art route and debunking many of the accepted conditions of art making and its reception,” Day says. “Çerkez’s artwork is special because of its cool conceptualism but also its warmth and intimacy; its determined logic but also its wilful break away from such thinking.”

Çerkez’s system of dating, where he added a future date to a work’s title to indicate when he would remake it, is one of the defining features of his strongly conceptual practice. Accordingly, it informs the title of MUMA’s project, where it refers to the year of his earliest artwork included in the exhibition, and to the latest year in which Çerkez anticipated the possibility of remaking one of his artworks.

He imagined that at the end of his life there would be “two series of works, the originals and the copies, in two different chronological orders”. Knowingly undermining the art historical convention of listing an artist’s dates (birth and death), Çerkez said that his most interesting works would be “the missing ones – the ones dated after I die”.

Media Kit
The exhibition, curated by MUMA’s Charlotte Day, Senior Curator Hannah Mathews and Research Curator Helen Hughes, presents Çerkez’s works in chronological order, from 1988 until 2005 – those he first presented in nine meticulously crafted solo exhibitions at City Gallery, Melbourne, which became Anna Schwartz Gallery and represented him from his first year out of art school – as well as those first exhibited in public exhibitions in Australia and abroad.

Day explains that the retrospective survey of Çerkez’s work is part of the art museum’s ongoing series of exhibitions focused on important Australian artists, whether living or deceased.

“At MUMA we are committed to contribute to writing, or righting, the history of Australian art through the artists who bring it into being. It is important that we value our artist precedents and the contributions that they have made to defining our culture here and its impact internationally,” she says.

Mutlu Çerkez: 1988–2065, the 300-page monograph that accompanies the exhibition, features newly commissioned essays from Australian Centre for Contemporary Art director Max Delany, emerging art historian Francis Plagne and MUMA curators Charlotte Day, Helen Hughes and Hannah Mathews. It also includes a catalogue raisonné listing all of Çerkez’s known artworks and eight essays published during the artist’s lifetime, which provide insight into the reception of Çerkez’s practice at the time it was produced. The publication features the artist’s own voice, too, in notes for a lecture given at the Victorian College of Arts and an interview with fellow artist Damiano Bertoli.

Media Contact
Annie Carroll
Communications Collective
T +61 3 9988 2300
M +61 439 718 257
E annie@communicationscollective.com.au
Biography

Mutlu Çerkez was a conceptual artist working in a range of mediums including printmaking, painting and sculptural installations. Born in London, in 1964, the same year he and his Turkish Cypriot parents immigrated to Australia, Çerkez received a Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting) from Chisholm Institute of Technology, Melbourne in 1985 and a Graduate Diploma in Fine Art from the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne in 1987.


1. 26980 30 July 2038 1994, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 76 x 50 cm
2. Untitled: 12 June 2017, (Kooyong: 12 June 2017) from the series New album cover designs for bootleg recordings of Led Zeppelin 1996, dot matrix and electrostatic print on paper, 55 x 48 cm (framed), State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
4. Untitled 22109 (29 March 2025) from the series Notes for an unwritten opera 1992, gouache on graph paper, oil on canvas board, 30.7 x 40.8 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
5. Untitled 22102 (22 March 2025) from the series Notes for an unwritten opera 1992, oil on canvas board, 19 x 45.7 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

The publication Mutlu Çerkez: 1988–2065 has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

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