

Accompanying programme:

24 September, at 18:00

A guided tour of the exhibition with the curators and artist



Občina Škofja Loka



REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA  
MINISTRSTVO ZA KULTURO

**Exhibition Colophon:**

Borga Kantürk: »In the deathcar, we are alive«

24 September – 16 November 2025

Ivan Grohar Gallery  
Škofja Loka Museum

Represented by: Saša Nabergoj

Curators: Anabel Černohorski, Ezgi Ceren Kayırcı

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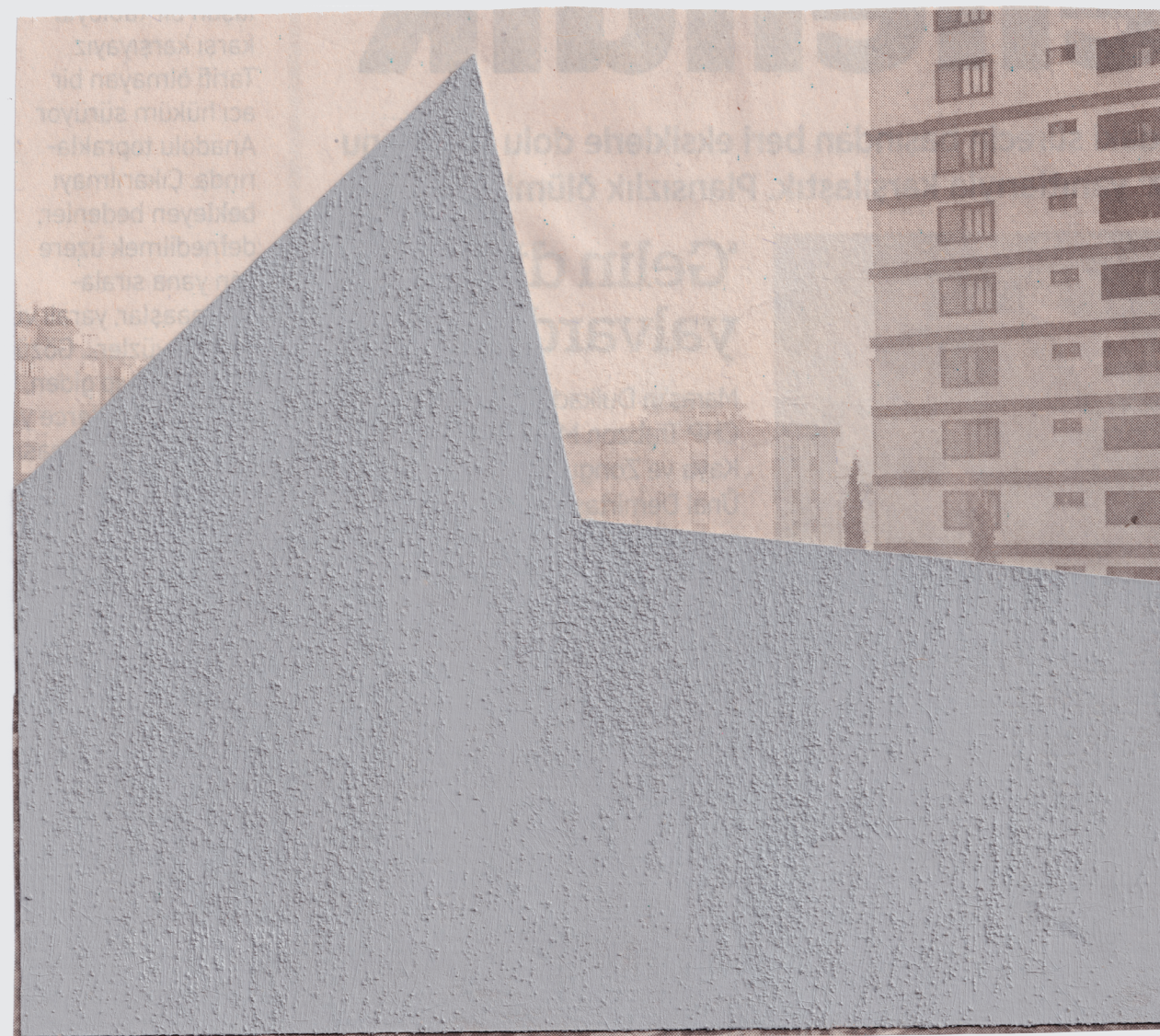
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*Ivan Grohar Gallery*

# Borga Kantürk: »In the deathcar, we are alive«\*



\* From the song *In the Deathcar*  
(Goran Bregović & Iggy Pop, *Arizona Dream* soundtrack, 1993)

15 Şubat 2023

## 24. 9. – 16. 11. 2025

Curators: Anabel Černohorski, Ezgi Ceren Kayırcı



The exhibition by Turkish artist and university lecturer Borge Kantürk weaves together the personal with broader social and political realities through drawings, photographs, video(documentation) and collages. Rooted in a distinctly documentary, diaristic and archival practice, Kantürk chronicles his daily life and the events that shape it – from the academic environment and artist residencies to natural disasters, protests and football as a site of solidarity and resistance. His works often integrate clippings from printed media alongside a wide range of art-historical, literary and cinematic references.

The earliest work in the exhibition, *Becoming a Survivor* (2005), already demonstrates Kantürk's diaristic approach and his engagement with newspapers as a source of imagery and aesthetics linked to bureaucratic environments that recur throughout his practice. Created during an artist residency in Finland, the work reflects the artist's sense of isolation caused by the language barrier and his position as a foreign newcomer. Each day, he selected one image from a local newspaper as a symbolic way of engaging with the local community he could not fully access. He recalls that, coinciding with a national holiday, Helsinki appeared almost deserted, leaving him with the uncanny impression of wandering through a post-apocalyptic city. This experience inspired the title *Becoming a Survivor*, alluding to the zombie horror film *28 Days Later* (2002). The work's diaristic quality and artist's intimate engagement with his surroundings are echoed in his later projects such as *Black Frames* (2025), a series of 25 Polaroid photographs that transform fragments of Kantürk's daily life into immediate, tangible diary entries, bordered with black frames.

The central installation of the exhibition, *Concrete Cover* (2023), occupying most of the first gallery room, also adopts this diaristic method, though on a collective rather than personal scale. Its geometric forms – painted over newspaper clippings depicting buildings – recall the abstract language of early 20th century Suprematism, a reference also present in *Black Frames* (where the stark black borders evoke Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square*). The work consists of 94 sheets of papers organised in archival folders. In the gallery, the sheets are pinned to the wall while the folders are left open to reveal their contents. At its core, the piece refers to the devastating twin earthquake that struck southern Turkey and

northern Syria in 2023, functioning as a document of collective trauma rather than private memory.

Kantürk has deliberately painted over the ruins next to standing buildings in the newspaper photographs from that time, so the visible destruction is absent. This symbolic act of covering recalls mechanisms of censorship and erasure, mirroring how the tragedy was quickly overshadowed by the Turkish general elections that same year. Yet what also disappears under the plaster-like paint is the human factor. Beyond the natural disaster itself, the high death toll was intensified by systemic failures: delayed and poorly coordinated aid efforts, harsh winter conditions in which many froze to death, and – most starkly – the collapse of newly built structures that should have met earthquake safety standards. As international reports revealed, corrupt construction practices and unenforced regulations left entire neighbourhoods vulnerable, turning what could have been a preventable tragedy into a catastrophe of historic proportions.<sup>1</sup> The same region has since faced new disasters, including widespread wildfires in 2025, underlining its ongoing environmental and social precarity.

Numerous works stem directly from Kantürk's role within the academic environment, highlighting both the systemic shortcomings of higher education and their impact on his artistic practice. For more than two decades, Kantürk has been closely tied to the Department of Painting at the Dokuz Eylül University's Faculty of Fine Arts in Izmir, first as a student and later as a lecturer. Over this time, he has witnessed how government interventions reshaped Turkish universities: elected rectors were dismissed, academics pressured to conform and student needs often sidelined, turning institutions into systems preoccupied with statistics – such as numbers of graduates or publications – rather than with people. At Dokuz Eylül, these policies culminated in the relocation of the Faculty of Fine Arts to the city's outskirts, into a former administrative building ill-suited for studio teaching. For Kantürk, this signalled not only the physical displacement of the school but also the symbolic dismantling of an environment essential for

artistic learning.

This aspect of Kantürk's practice is reflected in two works included in the exhibition. *Jury* (2018) documents the setting for oral entrance exams, now serving as an archive of a discontinued practice that once enabled direct encounters between candidates and faculty members. *After Rothko* (2020) features soap ready-mades photographed with Polaroid film, referencing Mark Rothko's abstract paintings and acting as a metaphor for art's persistence within highly sanitised and bureaucratic settings during the pandemic, when human interaction was further restricted. Together, these works trace the loss of hands-on, human-centred education and its replacement by administrative procedures – a challenge that resonates across universities worldwide, where bureaucratization is gradually overshadowing research and teaching.

*Building Libraries* (2021–) originated during the pandemic, when the closure of libraries prompted the artist to reflect on whether a book's value is found in its physical presence or the ideas it contains. The project also raises questions about the precarious state of libraries in Turkey – often underfunded and subject to political disinterest – as well as the vulnerability of collections more broadly. When Kantürk's on-site artist residency in Istanbul turned into a stay-at-home programme, he shifted his attention from institutional libraries to his own collection.

The series draws inspiration from Jorge Luis Borges's short story *The Library of Babel*, which envisions a universe of knowledge as an infinite labyrinth, and Alberto Manguel's book *The Library at Night*, a meditation on libraries and collecting. Reinterpreted by Kantürk on an intimate, personal scale, books from private or institutional collections are arranged into temporary architectural forms, such as towers and bridges, then carefully indexed and photographed. This process results in a triadic mode of representation that recalls Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965), in which the conceptual artist presented a chair, a photograph of the chair and a dictionary definition of the word “chair” to explore the relationship between object, image and language. Yet in Kantürk's case, the focus lies on the fragile existence of collections – constantly relocated, dispersed or threatened with disappearance. The act

of indexing reminds us that even if the physical books disappear, they remain present – a record of the titles preserves both the idea of the collection and its potential to be reassembled elsewhere.

Another focal point of the exhibition is a section dedicated to football drawings, a series Kantürk has been developing for more than two decades, based on real events covered by the media. These works trace the history and politics of the sport, evoking moments of solidarity, resistance and protest against labour injustice, homophobia and racial discrimination. For the artist, football is not only about the game but also about the collective energy it generates, as he puts it: “This sense of unity, this social belonging and synergy, if harnessed positively, can create an incredible powerful impact – not just in football, but in all public spheres.”

The title “*In the deathcar, we are alive*” not only alludes to life as a one-way ride to death but also evokes the entire metaphorical sphere of the phrase: living in and surviving an era of corruption, adversity, polarisation and the erosion of human rights, both in the artist's homeland and across the world. A sense of loneliness permeates many works, as if a sole survivor is chronicling a daily life clinging to hope or as if the sheer scale of the disaster and decay makes it inexplicable to share; however; this isolation is juxtaposed with, and at times answered by, a profound sense of solidarity and unity that emerges in others.

**Borge Kantürk** (1978, Izmir, Turkey) is an artist, curator and lecturer. He studied painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Dokuz Eylül University, where he also completed his M.A. and Proficiency in Art. He currently works as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Painting at the same university. Kantürk is the founder of KUTU Portable Art Gallery (2002) and co-founder of K2 Art Center (2004–2007), 6×6×6 Izmir Collective (2017) and KARANTİNA Art Space (2018). His work includes numerous solo and group exhibitions in Turkey and internationally (France, Germany, Italy, Finland and Slovenia). He lives and works in Izmir.

Anabel Černohorski,  
Ezgi Ceren Kayırcı,  
September 2025

<sup>1</sup> Jake Horton & William Armstrong: Turkey earthquake: Why did so many buildings collapse?, BBC Reality Check & BBC Monitoring, 9 February 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/64568826>