



PLAYGROUND

an INSTALLATION *by* TULU BAYAR
presented by THE ART GALLERY
& THE KOZMETSKY CENTER *of* EXCELLENCE *in* GLOBAL FINANCE
at ST. EDWARD'S UNIVERSITY

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BOOK DESIGN

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PLAYGROUND

Squat. Reach. Twist. Deep knee bend. Thrust. A camera in his right hand, a young man stares fixedly at the cell phone in his left. A woman pauses mid-street, wind whipping through her coat. Mindless to the world around her, she looks upwards. She shoots. In a stadium a man braces his shoulders and pulls back. Snap. Standing facing him is another photographer framing a picture. Snap. Adjacent a young photographer previews his shots for his companion; she stares not at the camera but poutingly at him signaling her disdain for his priorities. Pivot left. Shoot. Right. Shoot. Review. Pause. Turn. Shoot. Such is the rhythm of Tulu Bayar's *Playground*.

Such too is the rhythm maintained by *Playground's* viewer. One may arrive in the gallery anticipating a normative display of evenly spaced, tidily-framed photographs. If familiar with Bayar's installation work, one perhaps expects something more three-dimensional. Instead one is plunged into a performative role--bending, turning, looking up, peering down--for the viewer has entered the *Playground*. Printed in black and white and spaced sporadically on long rolls of paper, Bayar's work is loosely tacked around the room at varying heights. The very casualness of the mounting refutes both gallery formality and documentary straightforwardness. So indeed the viewer quickly finds himself crouching down, looking up, and at play.

Standing in the Beijing Olympics Stadium, better known as the Bird's Nest, in 2008, Bayar, was initially taken aback by the single sport current in this remarkable site, namely, tourist photography. Bemused and fascinated, she joined in--shooting the photographers, by times being shot in return, and only gradually recognizing her own dual engagement in work and play. So was born *Playground*, an ongoing project which has now taken Bayar to iconic sites in the U.S. and Europe including Time Square, London's Eye, the Eiffel Tower, and Checkpoint Charlie, her camera focused not on the sites (often unidentifiable in the resulting photographs) but on the tourist photographers. The results are engaging. Here is the wide-eyed gaze that says "got it"; there the focused scowl wondering where "it" went. In one image five seniors raise their cameras in harmony. In another

group attention is splintered between the pictures taken and the obvious fear that perchance another photographer is getting a shot one has missed. In one image time stands still; in another a photographer moves through the image with raised camera in right hand, sipped coffee in left, stride unbroken.

Bayar's *Playground* captivates. We see ourselves and our fellow man--the addictive cameras in hand. We watch. At times we almost think ourselves the possible subject of a raised camera--much as Bayar found herself that initial day in the Bird's Nest. We bend, stretch, and look closer.

Recurrently, Bayar has expressed a desire that her work would encourage viewers to search beyond first impressions. And, indeed, questions percolate up through the fun. Is this a humored exploration of societal behavior reminiscent of, say, William Klein? How do the ever-ready cameras (Bayar's as well as her subjects') define the iconic site? What values--intended or otherwise--are embedded in the captured moments? And what is the camera doing to lived experience? Bayar's query is not McLuhan's exploration of media effect nor Sontag's of photographic meaning, but rather addresses our own involvement therein. While Bayar's *Playground* makes obvious the omnipresence of cameras, its focus is not the cameras but the photographers--old and young, diverse in gender and nationality. Bayar's photographers are active, empowered, and engaged--often joyously--in life. The camera may be transforming how life is experienced, but, as *Playground* clearly demonstrates, that transformation is a collaboration. As we turn, kneel, and peer yet again, Bayar reminds us, moreover, that we too are among the collaborators involved.

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In the St. Edward's University Art Gallery, Playground is shown in conjunction with Bayar's 2008 video Encounter - offering alternative stimuli to questions of confrontation and gaze.

- Mary K. Brantl, Ph.D., Art Historian
St. Edward's University



photo credit: ASHLEY AMADOR











photo credit: HOLLIS HAMMONDS

TULU BAYAR AT ST. EDWARD'S UNIVERSITY

For a week in the fall of 2011, Tulu Bayar came to St. Edward's University as the guest of the St. Edward's Art Gallery and the Kozmetsky Center of Excellence in Global Finance. On October 19th she offered a Kozmetsky Center-sponsored public lecture entitled "Diversity, Ethnicity and Minority Status in China"; two nights later *Playground* opened in the St. Edward's Art Gallery. In class visits Bayar's input ranged from discussing religious migration to critiquing photographic installation proposals.

Bayar's arrival on campus also brought an ongoing collaborative effort to completion. Early in the semester she had posed a question to the St. Edward's community: "What is the value of a dollar?" Invited to consider this seemingly simple question in terms that might range from daily experience to global identity, St. Edward's students were then encouraged to respond in 7"x 7" format in the medium of their choice, and they did just that. In the weeks prior to Bayar's arrival, poems, diatribes, drawings, and sculptures found their way to drop-off points. Then, during her week at St. Edward's, Bayar worked collaboratively with an Art Exhibition Techniques class brainstorming and then fabricating the resulting installation (left image). An opening (with Bayar-judged prizes) followed.

This collaborative undertaking—like so much of Bayar's visit—spoke directly to the educational mission of the university, the active role of the arts therein, and the contributing role of the Kozmetsky Center. But, above all, "What is the Value of a Dollar?" was informed by the artist, Tulu Bayar, and the ongoing engagement with people that is at the center of her art.



TULU BAYAR

Born in Turkey, Tulu Bayar holds a B.A. from the University of Ankara as well as an MFA in Photography from the University of Cincinnati. Since 2002 she has been on the faculty of Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, where today she teaches photography and multimedia arts and is Chair of the Department of Art and Art History.

She is the recipient of various grants and honors including artist residencies at the Camac Centre d'Art, the Woodstock Center for Photography (funded through the Warhol Foundation and the New York State Council on the Arts), and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

Bayar has exhibited widely in galleries in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Kansas City and Houston in the United States. Internationally, she has shown in Ireland, France, Denmark, Germany, as well as Turkey.

Bayar's work embraces diverse media often in installation, video and/or performance format. Although she has teamed with other artists (as in her 2005 *Shelter* with Chinese painter Xiaoze Xie), her collaborators are more often her viewers (as in her 2006 performance *Addicted*) or everyday people to whom she offers a voice (as in her 2003 *Admissions*).

Recurrently, Bayar's work raises questions of cultural construction and identity—often interwoven with gender. No doubt her own Turkish-American identity informs much of Bayar's work, such as her 2011 *Invisible* exhibition at Amos Eno Gallery in New York critiquing film's role in the construction of Oriental exoticism. *Invisible*, however, much like her ongoing work on Uyghur identity, responds to Bayar's overarching engagement with gaze and encounter—a conceptual core rooted in Bayar's earliest work and at the very heart of *Playground*.

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St. Edward's University Fine Arts Gallery