

Gender, faith, identity and cultural hybridity are both central themes and the driving forces of Guler Ates' practice. The lone veiled woman is the primary motif of her work, a figure whose identity is consistently obscured. By denying the viewer authoritative gaze over the figure, ambiguity creates a liminal space in which ideas and concepts retain fluidity, allowing the viewer to have a more holistic experience of the image.

While the veiled female figure is a recurring theme, it is the setting that informs her practice. Each series is site-specific and selected not simply for aesthetic qualities, but also historical and political significance. Thus, by responding to her surroundings, and the various ways her figure interacts with the setting, her work explores the nuanced ways in which locale and context affect our interpretation of images. This aspect works in tandem with the concept of performativity, exploring how supposedly fixed concepts, such as gender, ethnicity or nationality, are in no way static, but rather merely roles that we perform. In her use of the veil, Ates interrogates what it means for a woman to be covered.

Art Historical references in Ates' works are therefore both reverential and subversive. By acknowledging Orientalism, a genre created by and for European male artists that is often considered mere aesthetic indulgences of erotic desire rather than accurate or cognisant depictions of the Middle East, Ates asks us to reconsider these tropes. Thus, by working in regards to this tradition, the female body is reclaimed, thereby commanding respect and allowing autonomy of the figure. In doing so, Ates is able to reclaim not simply the female body, but also Orientalist imagery, resulting in highly charged images that are seductive yet defiant.

By Josephine Rout, freelance curator, London, 2013