



Oil, spray paint, screen printing: In Yenirce's paintings, colors and content are layered densely on top of each other.

GRAPHIT, 2025, 90 X 195 CM

# At the attack

Highly political and deeply emotional: As an artist and musician, Leyla Yenirce channels her anger into a dark, audiovisual storm of voices. Sharp ammunition for the battle of images.

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From expressive painting  
and screen printing  
emerge images full  
of blazing intensity

No fear of scale:  
Yenirce enjoys working on a  
grand scale.  
RHYTHM OF THE NIGHT I-IV, 2023,  
JE 200 X 230 CM, CAPITAIN PETZEL,  
BERLIN, 2023



As a child of the working class, Yenirce's art career was anything but predetermined

**Y**ou don't talk to Leyla Yenirce—you are drawn in by her. The 34-year-old radiates concentrated energy, which fills the room with the clarity and focus of a martial artist. We meet in her studio in Berlin-Wedding, which has just been cleared out except for a couch, a computer screen, and a mixing console. Of the five-meter-long canvases that were hanging here just moments ago, only a few splashes of paint remain on the walls—they were recently transported to Yenirce's hometown of Oldenburg, where the State Museum is presenting an exhibition with her work.

'Homecoming,' the artist calls it. 'I have a special connection to the city where I grew up. As a child of a working-class migrant family, pursuing art was hardly an obvious path. If my parents had stayed in Kurdistan, I might already have several children—or I might have been kidnapped or killed. The security I have in Germany is something I don't take for granted.'

This brings us right into Yenirce's thematic world. Her work cannot be separated from her biography, even though the artist values maintaining a healthy distance between the two. Yet the violence—especially that inflicted on the women and girls in her homeland, which she



Life-size propellers, hair blowing as a symbol of freedom: Yenirce also works with installations.

SO MUCH ENERGY, 2022, KUNSTHAUS HAMBURG

deliberately calls Kurdistan rather than Turkey—this violence, beginning with the 2014 genocide of the Yazidis and continuing under the new Syrian government through systematic murders, rapes, and abductions, forms the underlying tone of her sound works, videos, and paintings. They emerge from a growing archive of voices, sounds, and images collected from the internet, supplemented with her own family photos and voice messages. Yenirce samples these into visual and sonic compositions, always grounded in an immediate, deeply personal emotional world.

The same anger and power that can be felt on her canvases—with wildly colorful brushstrokes and serially arranged screen prints, based on images of women in the war-torn region of northeastern Syria, armed with machine guns or microphones—also permeates her pounding electronic music, giving her work an instant, visceral impact.

Yenirce was three years old when her Kurdish-Yazidi family flees from southeastern Turkey to Germany in 1995. Her parents are farmers

—after moving to Oldenburg, her father becomes a truck driver and her mother a cleaning worker. With their three children, they first move, as Yenirce recounts, 'into a high-rise apartment. Many children of very different backgrounds lived there. We formed a community on the football and playgrounds. Our apartment was small, but I remember that time as very happy.

That she speaks no Turkish besides German, only Kurdish, was just as natural as the financial support she gave her family: alongside finishing high school, she worked at a supermarket checkout, cleaned, and tutored.

Yenirce's parents were influenced by Abdullah Öcalan: the leader of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), who promoted education for girls, positions of power for women, and a socialist community—though considered a terrorist organization in Turkey and the U.S.—set the standards in their homeland. Yenirce valued going to university. In Hamburg, she began studying cultural studies, but during a year abroad in the

U.S., she felt the urge to make art herself. She started with sound. Back in Hamburg, Yenirce taught herself electronic music via YouTube, worked with synthesizers, hardware, and software, and had her first performances in the Hamburg underground scene. At the same time, she began her art studies at the University of Fine Arts, focusing on film

Then comes August 2014. 'The brutality of the events overwhelmed me. It was an unprecedented shock,' she says, noticing herself how her voice changes. 'It wasn't just the attack that was barbaric, but when it became clear what had happened to the women. None of us were prepared for that. To abuse young women and girls is more than just invading a country, dropping bombs, and accepting the death of people.'

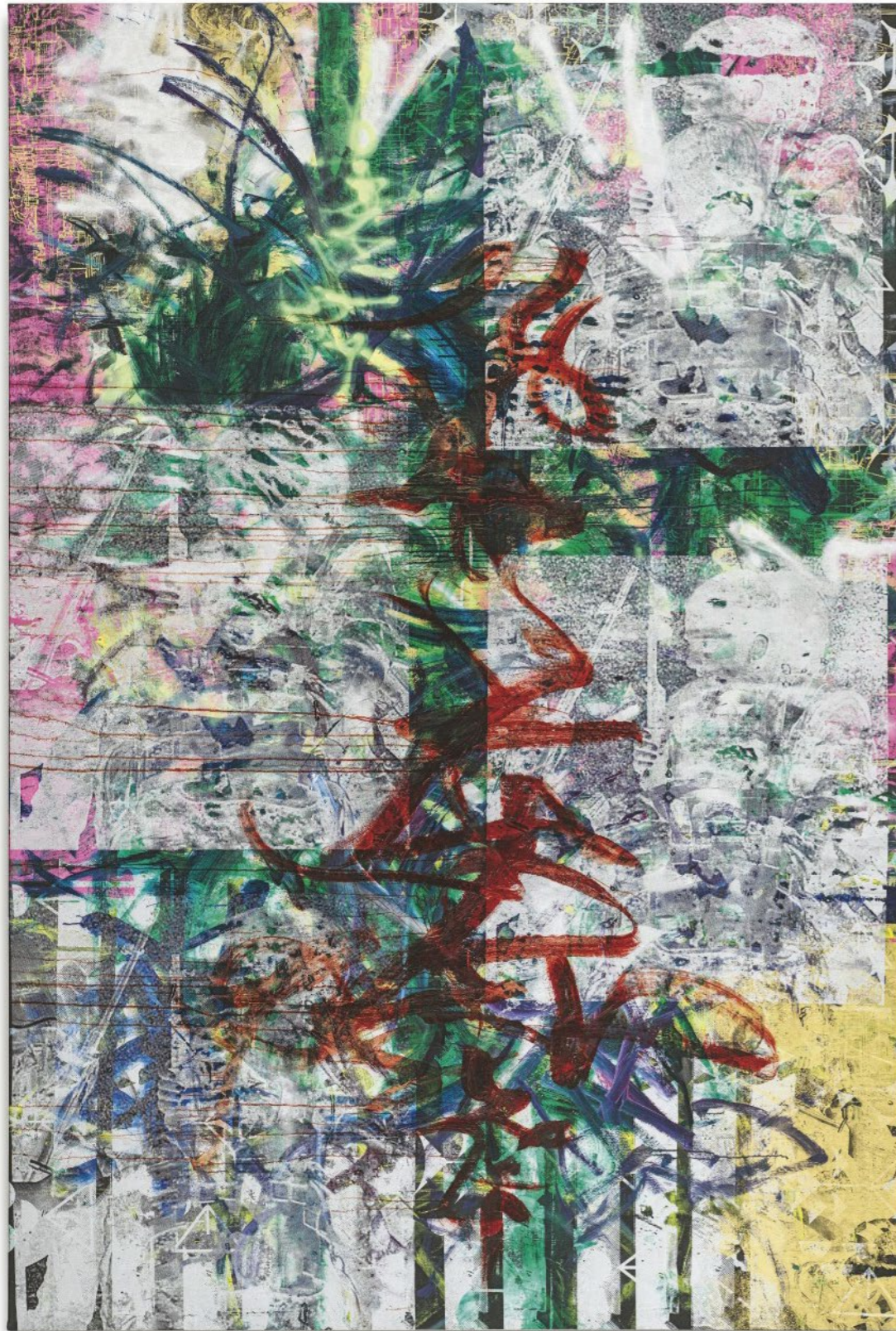
The current attacks by Islamist militias on Rojava, the Kurdish region, she sees as a retraumatization. 'The same thing is happening again. Women who were just living normal lives are being sold in the bazaar. This is sexualized violence—it's about destroying and demoralizing an entire people.'



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Writer Natalia Ginzburg alongside  
activists and fighters: important  
reference points for Yenirce's art.

28.01.2026, 2025, 480 x 200 cm

A growing archive of  
voices and sounds forms  
the foundation of her art



Her canvases also use the principle of sampling, often incorporating images from the internet



▲ Dense soundscape: Under the name Rosaceae, Yenicice performs as a musician.

A PIECE OF THE STORM, ELBPILHARMONIE, 2024

◀ Gestural painting as a counterbalance to the digital stream of images.

PRÄLUDIUM, 2022, 300 x 200 cm

How could it be that Kurdish women, who had fought alongside the Americans against ISIS, were now abandoned by Trump, while ISIS terrorists freed from prison announced on social media their anticipation of capturing Kurdish women? Yenicice shakes her head in disbelief. 'That our federal government courted the Islamist al-Julani as a state guest, while his troops are murdering not only Kurds but also Alawites and Druze—essentially all the country's minorities—that leaves me speechless.'

Yenicice's artistic response to 2014 begins with the dark electro sound of noise music, through which she virtually enters another state. She feels liberated and relieved. 'This transgressive feeling of disappearing into the sound and dissolving in earthly existence overwhelmed me. I was one with the music.'

This is followed by sound collages using sampled voices of affected women, which Yenicice gathers from the internet and condenses poetically. Her sound work gains recognition in Hamburg's underground scene around the fa-

mous 'Golden Pudel Club,' and Yenicice releases several albums in quick succession.

Then her work shifts more toward the visual. She begins working with online footage—for example, of Kurdish female fighters, whose photos were taken with the knowledge that after their deaths they would circulate on social media and become immortalized as martyrs. Yenicice transforms this into a fast-paced video collage

In a meditative way, the installation *Nacht. Schlaf. Die Sterne* gets under the skin. Yenicice references the Jewish painter Anita Rée, who fled to Sylt from the Nazis and took her own life. Her video shows hair blowing in the wind, while wind from life-size propellers whirls around, and screams and female voices are heard: they belong to the fallen fighter Anna Campbell—a Briton who joined the Kurdish Women's Defense Unit (YPJ) and fought in Rojava against Turkey's repression and ISIS terror—and to the Iraqi-Yazidi human rights activist Lamiya Ahi Bashar, who survived the genocide. Shortly before loose hair became a symbol of revolt for Iranian women, Yenicice metaphorically unties Rée's braid as a sign of freedom and powerlessness at the same time.

At this point, it must be emphasized that Yenicice clearly distinguishes her work from what many artists today like to list as a label on their CVs. 'Artists are not automatically activists. I address issues, but I do not risk my life. I work from a distance. That is precisely the condition under which art can emerge. At the same time, the ambivalence remains: I live here with privileges, and mentally I am there. I have to endure that.'

For her, art is also a way of taking responsibility—especially at a time when narratives on social media are constantly being twisted. 'The terrorists released from prison now portray Kurds in online videos as a threat to the new "democracy" in their so-called liberated country, while al-Julani speaks of his "Kurdish brothers," even though he has them killed,' she says firmly. 'These are tricks, disguises—we live in an era of propaganda that Goebbels could only have dreamed of!'



▲  
Surveillance and resistance:  
Yenirce depicts her protagonist in  
a duel with a drone

SPLITTER, 2023, single-channel  
video installation

With this mindset, Yenirce begins painting at the art academy. She joins the class of Jutta Koether, with whom, as she says, she ‘played tennis’—the back-and-forth was that intense. The professor continually challenges her, as if Yenirce weren’t already working far beyond any comfort zone.

From this process emerge paintings that feel like a form of sampling from Joan Mitchell’s abstract-expressionist gestures, Robert Rauschenberg’s collages, and Andy Warhol’s serial screen prints. Yenirce is fully aware of these references: she admires the athletic power in Mitchell’s paintings, a strength the artist herself trained in her youth as a figure skater. Warhol and Rauschenberg were among the first to bring deadly car accidents and the murder of Vietnamese civilians into art—events that, through mass media, entered American living rooms—thus reflecting the voyeurism of consumer society. This is precisely where Yenirce picks up the thread.

Her first paintings depict Kurdish female fighters on a break, with binoculars and machine guns, overlaid with construction drawings of Tornado fighter jets. Yenirce attacks these images with oil paint and acrylic spray, as if physically marking a resistance against the flood of digital images and their supposed truths. ‘The death of these

women gives me vitality, strength to continue. Now more than ever!’

Yenirce is also a kickboxer, which she calls a ‘life-long measure.’ ‘I need muscles for my painting; it’s physical work!’ Another source of energy is her two morning hours spent reading novels. Her favorite writer is the anti-fascist intellectual Natalia Ginzburg, who also appears in the series for Oldenburg.

## EXHIBITIONS

‘Werdegang’ runs Landesmuseum Kunst & Kultur Oldenburg from April 18 to August 23, 2026.

Leyla Yenirce is also part of the exhibition \*Carrying\* at the Museum Brandhorst in Munich, from May 14 to November 8, 2026.

Under the title *Frauenchor*, Yenirce gathers photos of women who have shaped her historically and personally. Alongside Ginzburg is her namesake Leyla Zana, the first Kurdish member of the Turkish parliament who then spent ten years in prison; the Jewish artist Charlotte Salomon, murdered in Auschwitz; and Yenirce’s former German teacher, who supported her. These women have an incredible presence: it’s about resonance, Yenirce says, once again linking back to music.

During an artist residency in Paris last year, she created a dark, atmospheric sound piece that captures precisely this resonance. Yenirce composed it while looking at *Sacré-Cœur* and thinking of her home village, which the Turkish government had flooded to build a dam. She visited the village twice after fleeing, once before and once after its disappearance. In a sense, her family lost their homeland twice. How does one endure the thought when not just a village, but an entire people, is at risk of being annihilated?

‘Keep going!’ Yenirce says firmly. ‘If European politicians confronted anti-democratic actions with the same self-assurance that I bring as an artist when the power goes out during a performance—that’s what I would find admirable!’