



**PARERGON**

**Babak Golkar**

# BABAK GOLKAR | THE LOGIC OF PARERGA

Erdem Taşdelen



Untitled (Blue Mosque), 2011, acrylic sheets and wood, 145 x 190 x 11.5 cm [detail]

Over the past century, there seems to have been a growing consensus on the idea that what defines a work of art as art is the context in which it appears. It no longer seems adequate to ask what conditions have to be met for a work of art to be defined as such; there is no checklist or clear criteria to aid in defining art works. The conditions that situate art as art are contingent on the contexts in which the work exists, as well as the parameters set by an artist's larger body of work. The question "But is it art?" is not only a cliché but also a conversation killer; what is of importance is not whether a work is or isn't art, but rather what it does, given that it is already presented as art *in this context*. Contemporary art discourses tend to accept that the status of a work of art as art is a pre-given condition, and operating on this assumption they analyze how the work functions. Such analyses do not attempt to provide prescriptive frameworks, but rather try to understand the specific ideas and relations represented in and produced through the work. Considering this model, it doesn't seem surprising that more and more artists have been turning to the question of context as the main preoccupation of their artistic activities. We encounter works that recontextualize objects, social relations, subject positions, economic values and cultural materials, and this recontextualization often gives birth to unlikely combinations that may evoke contemplation on the audience's part.

Untitled (Azadi Tower), 2011, acrylic sheets and wood, 137 x 147.5 x 12.5 cm [detail]



It seems appropriate, then, to seek to understand the physical and cultural contexts which allow the work to be perceived as work, instead of looking for pre-established essential artistic qualities in it. Derrida's approach to thinking about art in *The Truth in Painting* is along such lines, where he draws from Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in thinking about what frames a work. This question is employed by Derrida at first in a literal sense, where he talks about physical frames, and then turns into a metaphorical and epistemological inquiry by extension. He says that when looking at a framed painting, the frame is part of the wall (the exterior), whereas when looking at the wall, the frame is part of the painting (the interior). The function of the frame, then, is to separate the interior from the exterior. But what is the frame itself? It seems to provide a liminal space that cannot be pinned down as of the work or outside of the work, so it must have a logic of its own. This is what Derrida calls the *parergon*: "Neither work (*ergon*) nor outside the work (*hors d'oeuvre*), neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it gives rise to the work." The function of the *parergon*, then, is to create a framework that contextualizes (and recontextualizes) the framing, and constitute a bridge between that which is framed and the surrounding environment.

This investigation of the frame (both as a literal picture frame and a metaphorical concept that denotes context) forms the core of Vancouver-based artist Babak Golkar's series of deformed frames entitled *Parergon*. Much of Golkar's work draws attention to physical and cultural contexts that are utilized in making meaning, and this is more strikingly evident in this series where frames are enlarged to dramatic proportions, becoming part of the architecture in which they are viewed. Golkar's frames can literally be seen as broken *parerga*, no longer framing enclosed entities but opening up to the rest of the gallery space. There seems to be a push and pull between the frames and their surroundings, where the gallery frames the frames by hosting them in the first place, but the frames also frame parts of the gallery, resulting in a tension that makes it hard to pinpoint what the framing device is. I see this question extending to a chicken and egg conundrum in terms of our understanding of art today: Are galleries and museums there to provide platforms for viewing art, or are art works present in museums and galleries to contextualize and legitimize them as platforms? This question seems especially pertinent if we consider that many galleries have styles or identities of their own, where if they add an artist to their roster, that artist's work is framed by the reputation of the gallery.



Untitled (Azadi Tower), 2011, acrylic sheets and wood, 137 x 147.5 x 12.5 cm

But of course, this kind of institutional critique is not the only framing device to be used to contemplate and complicate *Parergon*. There is also a subtle reference to a specific type of architecture in the work, which remains subtle until the moment it is noticed, and then becomes rather overt. Since these frames are not closed, the viewer is able to view their cross sections and recognize that they are extrusions of architectural silhouettes, such as the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. These buildings are clearly not neutral references, and thus the physicality of the frames begins to function as a metaphorical allusion to religion and architecture.

There is a complexity that arises through linking these architectural structures (whose religious contexts have shifted) to the picture frame, since the frame is largely a legacy of Western art history and therefore Christianity. Although enclosing borders were used in the art of Ancient Egyptians, it was in Europe that picture frames became a widely accepted norm in painting<sup>2</sup>. It is also interesting to note that before the advent of the movable picture frame, paintings were built into altarpieces with unmovable frames that referenced the exteriors of churches<sup>3</sup>. This indicates that in its inception, the picture frame was seen as part of religious architecture, and its function was to establish a visual relationship between a painting and its surroundings.

What could it mean, then, to frame the frame in a cross-cultural context of religion? It is important to remember here that Golkar's choices of architectural reference often involve buildings that have been recontextualized through different ideologies, which serves as a reminder that architecture itself is a means to frame the built environment. This is echoed in the writing of Elizabeth Grosz, where, following Deleuze & Guattari, she argues that "[t]he emergence of the 'frame' is the condition of all the arts and is the particular contribution of architecture to the taming of the virtual, the territorialization of the uncontrollable forces of the earth". Architecture is therefore never quite neutral, it reflects the social conditions in which structures are built and it forces subjects to navigate in specific ways, both spatially and ideologically. If we perceive architecture as a framing device, buildings will be understood to function as *parerga* that bridge spatial perception with cultural notions.



Untitled (Taj Mahal), 2011, acrylic sheets and wood, 178 x 112 x 15.5 cm

Untitled (Taj Mahal), 2011, acrylic sheets and wood, 178 x 112 x 15.5 cm, [detail]



Untitled (The Great Mosque of Samarah), 2011, acrylic sheets and wood, 285 x 137 x 10cm, [detail]

Within this framework, many political readings of Babak Golkar's frames immediately seem possible. If the picture frame itself is accepted as an essentially Western device, the implication might be the domination of Western culture over the East. Or, conversely, as the frame is being used in an Islamic context (in the transformation of the Hagia Sophia from a church to a mosque, to cite one example), we could say that Western entities are being appropriated by the East as a means of agency. But these hasty interpretations take the binary opposition between the West and East as a priori, hindering other more complex possibilities. They disregard postmodern subjectivity or what post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha would call *hybridization*, where cultures that were previously considered to be distinct and unitary may merge, resulting in the emergence of new cultural forms.

It seems more productive to keep the fluid nature of these framing devices in mind while thinking about Golkar's work, and to realize that the same devices can be used in framing different ideologies. This approach can also help us understand the metaphorical dimension of Golkar's broken frames; although still recognizable as frames, they are unable to encapsulate and exhaust all of the possible elements that will constitute the entity being framed. As such, they will necessarily contain a multiplicity of cultural contexts blending into one another, making it impossible to fit them into stereotypical categories. Perhaps, then, the function of *parerga* will be to draw attention to the act of framing itself, rather than what is being framed.

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**Erdem Taşdelen** is a Vancouver-based artist practicing in a range of media. After finishing a joint degree in Visual Arts and Communication Design in Istanbul, Turkey, Erdem obtained his graduate degree in Visual Arts from Emily Carr University in Vancouver in 2010, where he continues to teach. He has exhibited his work in a number of exhibitions including at the Kasa Galeri and Hayaka Arti in Istanbul, and the Charles H. Scott Gallery and 221A Artist Run Centre in Vancouver.

<sup>2</sup>Diane Day, "A Survey of Frame History, Part 1: Panel Painting" in Picture Framing Magazine, August 1998, 82-84.

<sup>3</sup>Tracy Gill, "Frames of Reference" in Picture Framing Magazine, May 2000, 85.

<sup>4</sup>Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 11.

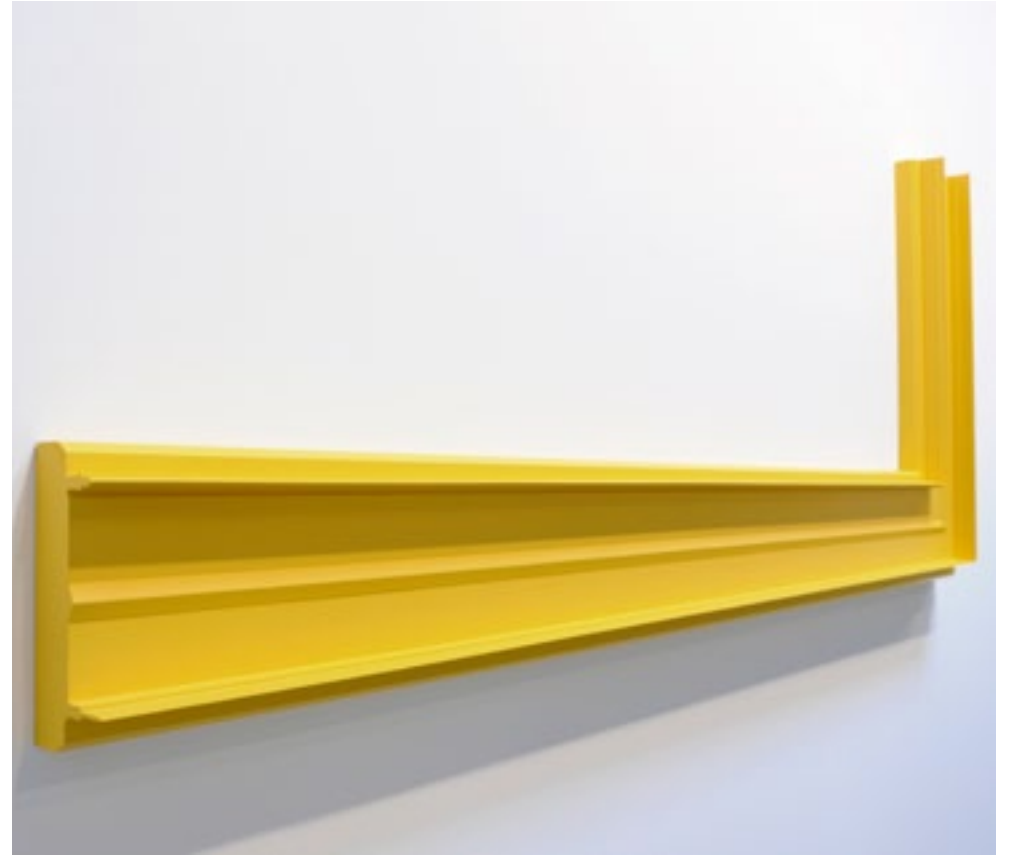
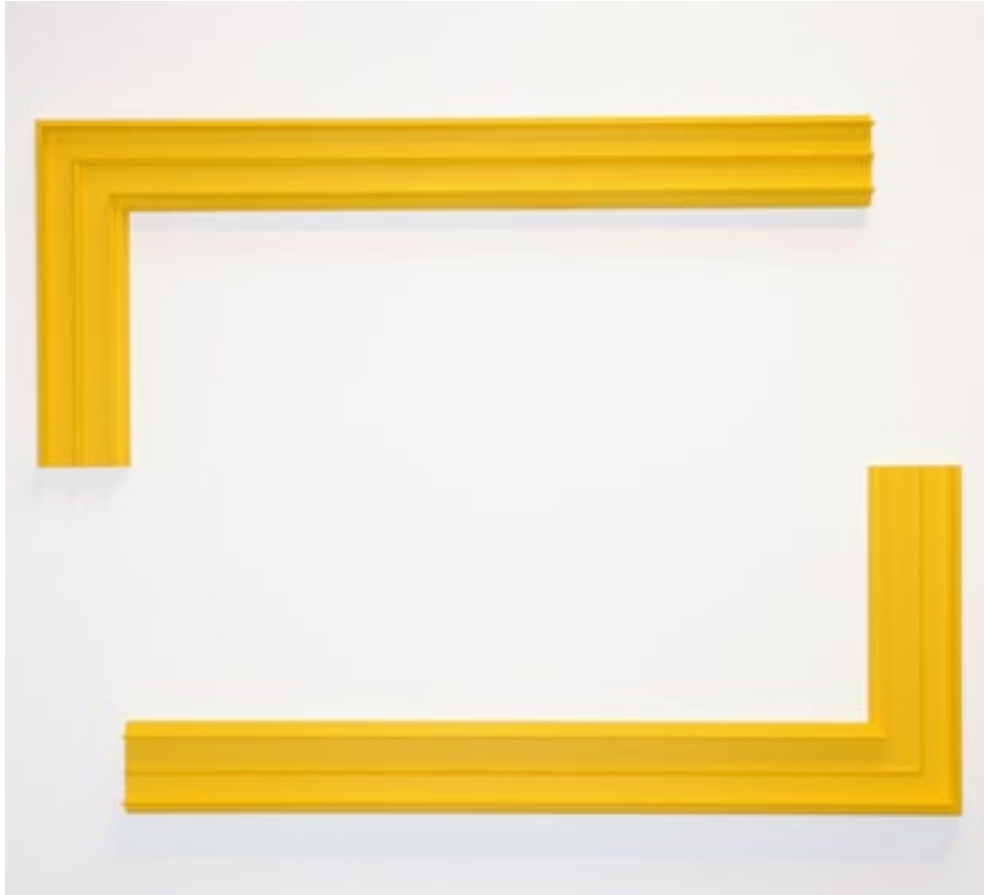


*Untitled (Blue Mosque)*, 2011, acrylic sheets and wood, 145 x 190 x 11.5 cm  
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*Untitled (Green Mosque)*, 2011, acrylic sheets and wood, 60 x 200 x 15 cm

*Untitled (Green Mosque)*, 2011, acrylic sheets and wood, 60 x 200 x 15 cm, [detail]



*Untitled (Umayyad Mosque)*, 2011, acrylic sheets and wood, 203 x 162 x 7.5 cm  
*Untitled (Umayyad Mosque)*, 2011, acrylic sheets and wood, 203 x 162 x 7.5 cm, [detail]

## BABAK GOLKAR

### EDUCATION

- 2005 Masters of Fine Arts, University of British Columbia  
2003 Bachelors of Fine Arts, Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design  
1999 Graphic Design, Shoreline College, Seattle, WA

### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 *Ground for Standing and Understanding*, Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver, Canada  
*Norouz Special Project*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, U.K.  
*To be titled*, Blanket Gallery, Vancouver, Canada  
*To be titled*, Hilger Contemporary, Vienna, Austria  
*To be titled*, West Vancouver Museum, West Vancouver, Canada  
2011 *To be titled*, Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver, BC  
*To be titled*, Sanatorium, Istanbul, Turkey  
*Parergon*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE  
*Parergon*, C.S.A. Space, Vancouver, Canada  
*Black Cube: Moving Toward the Abstract Light*, Sanatorium, Istanbul, Turkey  
2007 *Then, Now and Then*, Republic Gallery, Vancouver, BC  
2005 *Dear Joseph: Happy 84th Birthday*, Lobby Gallery, Vancouver, BC  
2003 *The Philosophy and Science of Mutation*, Centre A Gallery, Vancouver, BC  
*Throne*, XENO gallery, Vancouver, BC

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2011 *Roaming Images: Crossroads of Greek and Arab Culture* Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Greece.  
*Jameel Prize Exhibitions*. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, U.K. (Tours include Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris. Contemporary Art Museum Houston, U.S.A.)  
*Expositions*. Blanket Gallery, Vancouver, Canada.  
*Tension*. Hezy Cohen Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel.  
2010 *Time After Time*, Southern Exposure, Los Angeles  
*The Promise of Loss, A Contemporary Index of Iran*, Arario Gallery, New York City  
2009 *The Promise of Loss, A Contemporary Index of Iran*, Galerie Hilger BrotKunsthalle, Vienna, Austria  
*BrotKunsthalle*, Vienna, Austria  
*Infinite Egress*, Surrey Art Gallery, Surrey, BC  
*Nuit Blanche*, Toronto, ON  
*Folter in der Kultur – Kultur der Folter*, Artneuland Project, Berlin, Germany  
2008 *My Favorite Pastime*, WL-Project, Hong Kong  
*Prequel*, Gallery Atsui, Vancouver, BC  
*Moodyville*, Presentation House Gallery, North Vancouver, BC  
*Orientalism and Ephemera*, Centre A Gallery, Vancouver, BC / Kenderdine Art Gallery, University of Saskatchewan, SK  
*Interior of Design*, Republic Gallery, Vancouver, BC  
2007 *Emergency Biennale*, Centre A Gallery, Vancouver / Istanbul / San Francisco  
*I Love What You Do*, Drake Hotel, Toronto, ON  
2006 *Prologue I*, Republic Gallery, Vancouver, BC  
*The Wrong Gallery Edition #125*, Lobby Gallery, Vancouver, BC  
*World Urban Forum*, Vancouver, BC

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Hurriyet. Istanbul, *'Black Cube' moves, freedom vanishes*. by Hatice Utkan, Istanbul.  
Haber Turk. *Siyah küpün içinde ne var? (What's Inside the Black Cube?)* by Pınıl Güleşçi, Arkonmaz, Istanbul.  
2010 Daily Serving. Interview conducted by Sasha M. Lee  
Voice of America. Interview conducted by Behnam Nateghi.  
2009 Hurtig, Annette, *An Extended Dérive in a Terrain Passional*, Capilano Review, Essay

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