

Screaming Feathers: Making a statement with pillows

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Berlin-based performance artist Nezaket Ekici

Nezaket Ekici was surprised to discover that pillows in India are made of cotton, as opposed to Germany, where they are stuffed with chicken feathers. Pillows are one of the essential elements in Ekici's performance, *Screaming Feathers*.

Born in Turkey, the artist has garnered a dedicated following for her performances, which involve testing her own physical limits, and work that revolves around social norms and politics. She performs the acts through the medium of audience interaction.

Change of venue

Ekici's performance space is a city gallery, which will be transformed into a laboratory. She will be dressed in a black knee-length dress, adorning hand gloves and a mouth protector, along with a glistening knife, and will be surrounded by piles of pillows. She will shred the pillows one by one, until the feathers spill out and cover the floor.

When asked about the inspiration behind her act, the artist reminds us of the 2006 bird flu epidemic in Asia, which resulted in many deaths. "The feathers act as the medium of transfer for the virus of bird flu. The pillow element struck me because we sleep with pillows stuffed with feathers, and that denotes sleeping with the virus every day. Bird flu is making news again. A month ago, in Europe, many chickens died of it, so the problem hasn't been resolved yet," she says.



The opening act of *Screaming Feathers* followed by shredding of the pillows



A still from Ekici's performance titled *Blind* (2007)

Many interpretations

While addressing the virus is one aspect of the performance, Ekici believes that it can be interpreted in many other ways too. As she tears the pillows apart, the audience will be subjected to a soundtrack of screaming hens. The artist tends to tear up pillows till the entire floor is covered with feathers, which resembles a layer of snow. She associates this imagery with the German fairy tale of Frau Holle or Mother Hulda. It follows the story of a young girl who visits Mother Hulda, and she instructs her to "make her bed well and shake it diligently till the feathers fly." The 30-minute act leaves her visibly tired. "Performance for me is a lot of effort. It needs excessive energy to concentrate and emote. If you perform with all your heart and soul, people will see your passion and authenticity with all their attention," she says.

Leaving a mark

Ekici believes that her performance will make an impression on the audience, but since she's in India for the first time, she's unsure about what they'll think of it. "I am quite unaware and doubtful about the kind of public I will encounter, and their mentality. Though I have been to seven other countries in Asia, I am curious about the reception I will get here," she says.

(You can watch her perform *The Screaming Feathers* on Feb 6, Percept Art Gallery, Lower Parel, 7 pm onwards)