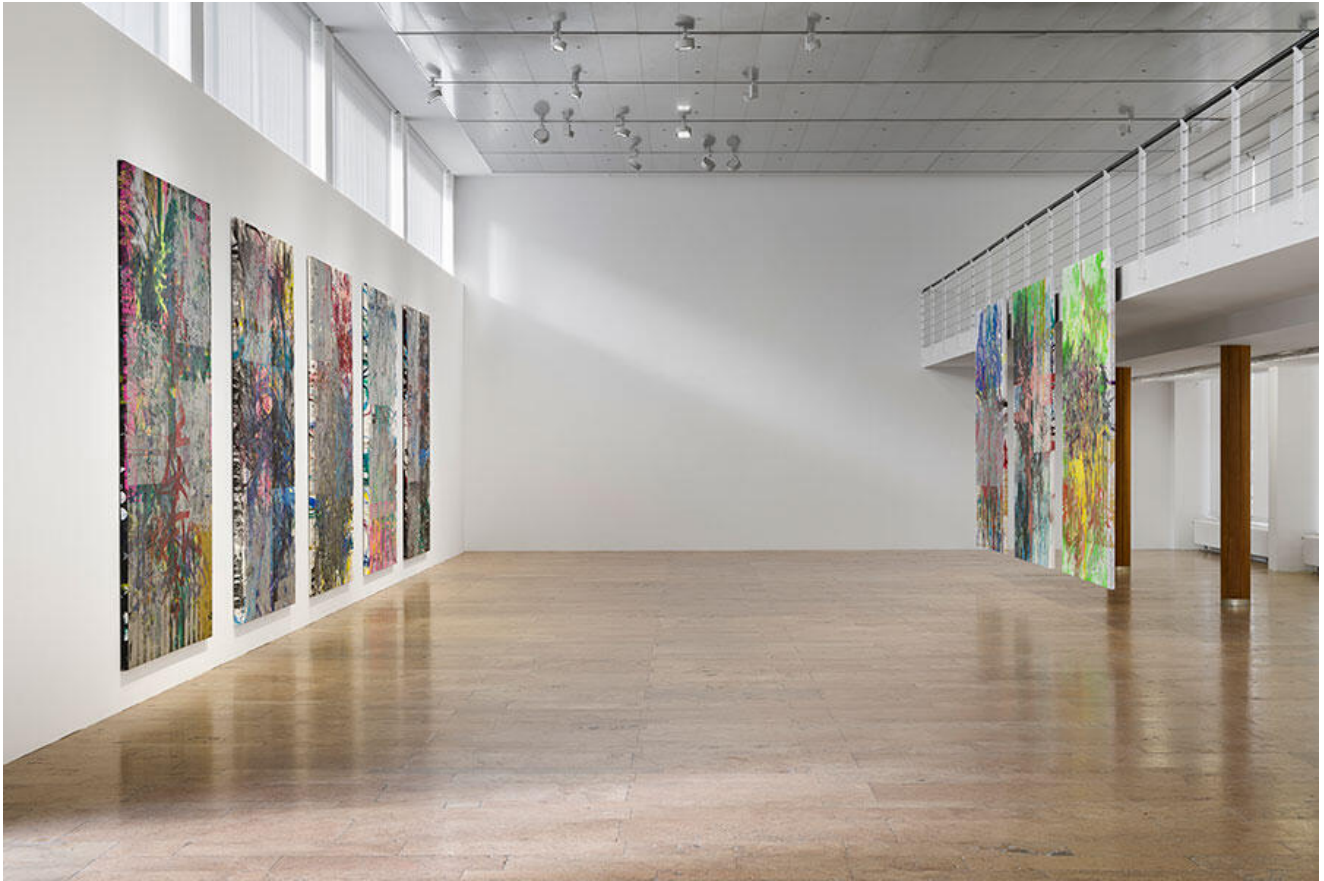


Leyla Yenirce's Frenetic Paintings of Female Fighters

[frieze.com/article/leyla-yenirce-ich-krieg-geschwindigkeit-2023-review](https://www.frieze.com/article/leyla-yenirce-ich-krieg-geschwindigkeit-2023-review)



Hanging side by side on opposite walls, eight three-metre-high paintings dominate the central room of Leyla Yenirce's solo show 'Ich krieg Geschwindigkeit' (I'm Gaining Speed). Filled with aggressive swirls and splotches of blue, red, yellow, pink and purple paint, they seem to hum with frenetic energy. Silkscreen prints of soldiers from the Women's Protection Unit (YPJ), an all-female Kurdish military group, structure every composition, at times almost unrecognizable amid multiple layers of oil paint and acrylic spray. In *Polterabend* (Bachelor Party, 2022), for instance, the outline of a soldier's body and her AK47 are barely visible through dark blue circles and traces of yellow. The blurred lines of a blueprint rendered in Barbie pink creep across the top of the painting, while other sections of the canvas are left blank.



Leyla Yenirce, 'Ich krieg Geschwindigkeit', 2023, exhibition view, Capitain Petzel, Berlin. Courtesy: the artist and Capitain Petzel, Berlin; photograph: Gunter Lepkowski

Rhythm of the Night I–IV (all 2023) – a series of smaller, square-format paintings installed on Capitain Petzel’s mezzanine floor – contrasts with the larger works, both in form and content. While the latter pieces highlight the inquisitive gaze of an individual soldier, here the artist crops the image to shift the focus onto the object the fighter’s gaze fixates on: a hand pointing at a notebook with a pen. The imminent aggression suggested by the gun-filled image is replaced by a sense of gentle curiosity and, with it, Yenirce’s approach to her paintings changes, too. In several works, the canvas is first coated with a layer of dark silver paint, giving it a more muted appearance. Across the series, acrylic spray is also used sparingly in thinner, more subtle lines.



Leyla Yenirce, 'Ich krieg Geschwindigkeit', 2023, exhibition view, Captain Petzel, Berlin. Courtesy: the artist and Captain Petzel, Berlin; photograph: Gunter Lepkowski

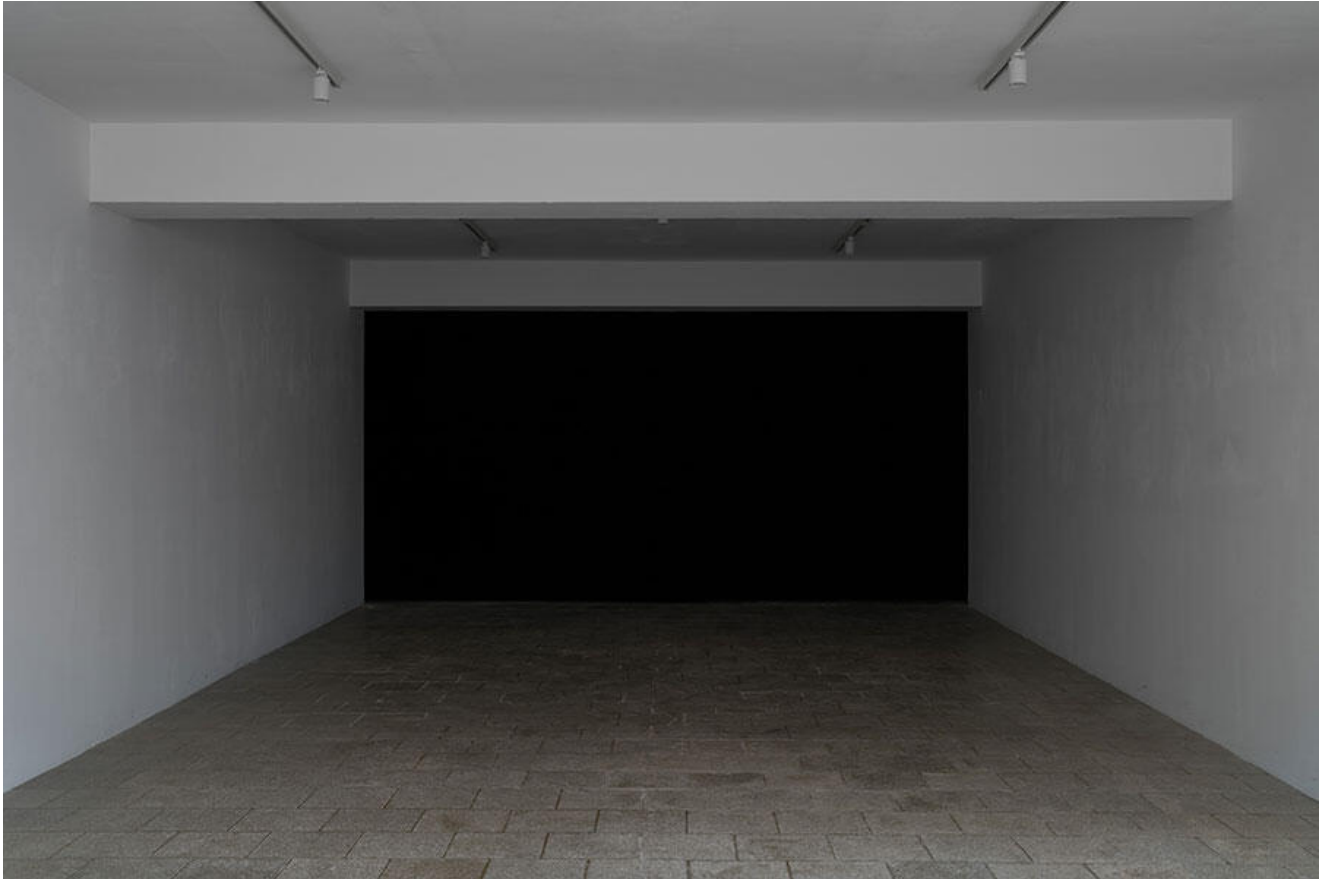
The motif connecting the two series is a crop from an AFP photograph illustrating an Al Arabiya news article about the death of a German soldier in Kurd-ISIS clashes in Qamishli, Syria, in 2015, which Yernice found on the internet. Kurdish-born, the artist is both fascinated by these images of female fighters, which play an important role in YPJ's communications strategy, and repelled by their ubiquity. Although the photograph picked here suggests an empowering environment, it is likely that, as Yenice pointed out in an accompanying artist talk, most of these young women are already dead. Repetition is thus a strategy against indifference, forcing a new look by slowing down the rhythm of how we interact with and disseminate images of war online.



Leyla Yenirce, *PlayStation 5*, 2022, oil, acrylic spray and silkscreen ink on canvas, 3 × 2 m. Courtesy: the artist and Captain Petzel, Berlin; photograph: Gunter Lepkowski

Sampling, a technique Yenirce often uses in her sound work, operates here as a tool against the vicious circle of detachment. Every time the outline of a YPJ soldier emerges, the violent context involving this image becomes more evident, but the detail of her gaze is also made visible. In a way, this visibility also humanizes the scene, for one of the consequences of indifference is precisely the lack of capacity to recognize fragility. As artist and scholar Oraib

Toukan said in an interview published by KW Institute for Contemporary Art in 2021: ‘Cruel images eclipse the life that sites of struggle seek, and their strategies for survival, which are often based on love of life.’ Repetition is certainly an effective means for subverting passivity, but can an image freed from a chain of violence ever truly become tender?



Leyla Yenirce, *Ich krieg Geschwindigkeit*, 2022/23, sound installation. Courtesy: the artist and Captain Petzel, Berlin; photograph: Gunter Lepkowski

Ich krieg Geschwindigkeit (2022/23), a 20-minute sound installation playing from behind a dark curtain in the basement, sums up this tension. As it oscillates between a delicate pace and moments of acceleration, footsteps crunch in the snow, eventually turning into laughter, gasps and shouting. Towards the end of the track, a sequence of blasts builds up and then fades into a repetition of intertwined restless synths. It's never made clear whether this is the sound of gunfire or of celebration.

Leyla Yenirce's 'Ich krieg Geschwindigkeit' is on view at Captain Petzel, Berlin, until 20 December

Main image: Leyla Yenirce, *Präludium* (detail), oil, acrylic spray and silkscreen, ink on canvas, 3 × 2 m. Courtesy: the artist and Captain Petzel, Berlin; photograph: Gunter Lepkowski