

## Between Izmir and Berlin

*Shoshannah Jeanne Brombacher*

*Oil on canvas, two panels of 100 X 100 cm, Berlin 2021*

This work was created for the office of Odag & Odag in Berlin. It is an ode to two cities, Izmir, the city the Odag family originates from and Berlin, where they live now.



Izmir (or Smyrna, from the Greek word for myrrh, *σμύρνα*) is an ancient city at the West coast of Turkey, the cradle of civilization and a cultural melting pot during several millennia. In and around Izmir, ancient Greek pillars are juxtaposed to pearls of Byzantine and Ottoman culture and a modern city with steel and concrete office-buildings, high-rises, hospitals, publishing houses, four universities, and an airport. The old town center has narrow winding streets, domed mosques with straight white minarets pointing toward the sky, and alleys lined with coffee houses with colorful woven pillows on wooden benches, and little shops selling carpets, colored glass lamps, glazed earthenware, copper, and sweet Turkish pastry. Izmir has a large port and an extended coastline with silvery, mauve-colored mountains in the distance. The city is surrounded by picturesque villages on hill slopes with white-washed houses, olive groves, fig trees, and cypress trees.

Berlin, the capital of Germany, is a few millennia less old than Izmir, but it has a long and interesting history as well. The artist, who is originally from Amsterdam, moved to this city a few weeks after the Wall opened up in 1989, taught here at the Free University, went abroad after a couple of years. Now she is back in Berlin, to stay. A lot has changed here between 1989 and now. In the nineties, she enjoyed fish lunches in the fish restaurant with the colored glass windows near Alexanderplatz and bought little yellow Reclam books with East marks from the mandatory valuta-exchange at the border-station at Friedrichstrasse. “East” and “West” were two different worlds, then. After visits to the East with its beautiful but neglected and often gloomy streets, she returned to her little apartment near Schloss Charlottenburg and strolled in the park with the waterlily pond. But now the city has no borders anymore and the “East” neighborhoods have been fixed up and painted in bright colors, like butter yellow and salmon pink, and look very attractive. The old smell of coal from the ubiquitous tiled stoves has become faint and isn’t always noticeable anymore—a smell the artist always associated with Berlin. She actually likes it and finds it kind of comforting. The city looks lively, even during the pandemic. It still has a broad specter of culture to offer, although most theaters, museums, and cafes are closed and bookshops are open with restrictions. The artist lives in the same part of Berlin as the Odag and Odag office, Neukölln. She loves the cosmopolitan diversity, different shops and food.

The painting consists of two panels of 100 X 100 cm. Due to the corona lockdown, closed stores, and disrupted production and delivery, the artist wasn’t able to obtain a large canvas of 100 X 200 cm online when she started with this project.

The two panels fit together and show an amalgam of Berlin and Izmir seen through the eyes of a traveling artist who looks at every new or old place with fresh eyes of wonder. She loves poetry and often weaves poetic elements into her paintings. Scattered all over the canvas, there are violinists and other musicians. Classical music is intrinsically connected to her art. She seldom paints without listening to music, preferably medieval music or composers like Bach, Beethoven, or Satie. Painting Izmir, she listened to Turkish *kanun* music.



The canvas on the left side focuses predominantly on Izmir. The main colors are the deep red of the sky at sunrise, various shades of blue of a sparkling sea stretching out like a mirror, mauve of the mountains behind the coastline, and lush green of nature. The white crescent and the star in the red sky are an allusion to the Turkish flag.

The left side of the canvas features a mountain with a cypress grove and the hills surrounding the city of Izmir with its villages and orchards. They morph into the Iznik pattern of long-stemmed tulips that decorates porcelain dishes, tiles, and cloth. A village woman in a traditional white head-covering is baking bread in front of a wood oven, its red glow lighting up her face. The fragrance of fresh bread mingles with the good smell of flowers and orchards. In the deep vermilion sky, an allegorical figure resembling the antique marble statue of a muse floats over the sea. A jug containing memories of the city of Izmir slips from her hands, scattering her poems, thoughts, images, and songs. To the left and the right, dreams personified by angelic figures and a moon-shaped shining face holding more dreams between her hands, like a lover or a mother, hover over the sea. They are accompanied by agile fish sliding through our dreams, surfacing and disappearing at will. In the top right corner, a large multifaceted Turkish glass lamp transforms into a bunch of flowers.





The white boats on the sea and the children playing at the beach were inspired by a poem of Edip Cansever ( 1928 - 1986):

## İZMİR'İN AKŞAMLARI

Denizlerin rüzgârı denizlerin,  
Gelir vurur kızların bacaklarına.  
İzmir'in akşamları İzmir'in,  
Herkes saadetini düşünür.

Öpülmez ki denizlerin rüzgârı,  
Kolay kolay öpülmez ki.  
Bir kaçır bir de durur  
Kadınlar gibi.

Denizlerin rüzgârı denizlerin,  
İnsan unuttur yalnızlığını.  
Gemiler yelken açar uzaklarda,  
Kim sevmez bu saatlerde yolculuğu.

İzmir'in denizleri koskocaman  
Çocuklar uzatır ayaklarını denize.  
Midye keser ayaklarını kaçarlar  
Sevine sevine.

İzmir'in akşamları İzmir'in,  
Nasıl sevilmez böyle akşamlar.  
Bir yanar bir söner Karşıyaka'nın ışıkları,  
Gün olur insanı deli eder.

İzmir'in ışıkları İzmir'in,  
Barların, vitrinlerin önünde  
Gemiler gelir rüzgârla dolu,  
Gemiler gider ışıklar içinde.

## EVENINGS OF İZMİR

The wind of the seas is of the seas,  
It comes and hits the legs of the girls.  
In İzmir's evenings of İzmir,  
Everyone thinks about their happiness.

The wind of the seas is not kissed,  
It is not easily kissed.  
It runs away and stops  
Like women.

The wind of the seas is of the seas,  
Man forgets his loneliness.  
Ships sail away,  
Who does not like the journey at these times.

İzmir's seas are huge  
Children dip their feet into the sea.  
Mussels cut their feet, run away  
Rejoice, rejoice.

In İzmir's evenings of İzmir,  
How not to love such evenings.  
The lights of Karşıyaka go on and off,  
One day it drives people crazy.

Lights of İzmir in İzmir,  
In front of the bars, shop windows  
The ships come filled with the wind,  
Ships go into the lights.

The scene next to the bread oven at the bottom of the painting features a poet sitting on a chair, writing down verses, not in İzmir but in a nocturnal tree-lined street in Neukölln in Berlin. The lights of the city and the famous ball-shaped television tower on Alexanderplatz, which appears in the second canvas as well, are visible in the distance. Just like in medieval miniatures, depicting the same person, building, or scene repeatedly is common in these two canvases, just as it is common in the mind of the poet and his memories, which have no boundaries. The mind and the heart wander at night. A woman standing on an arched balcony sings songs full of melancholic longing for places she has seen and visited and at the same time, the place where she is now. In her song, the nightly street in Neukölln transforms into the old market of İzmir. She contemplates Berlin, as it is described in Oskar Loerke's poem:

## BLUE EVENING IN BERLIN

The sky begins in stone channels;  
Because all the streets are steeply  
carved into canals, full of blue sky.  
And domes resemble buoys, chimneys, piles

In the water. Black edibles are smoldering  
And are to be looked at as aquatic plants.  
The lives that accumulate completely at the bottom  
Begin gently, listened to from the heavens,

Mixed up, unraveled according to blue melodies.  
Like dregs and trinkets of a body of water  
The will and understanding of the water stirs them up

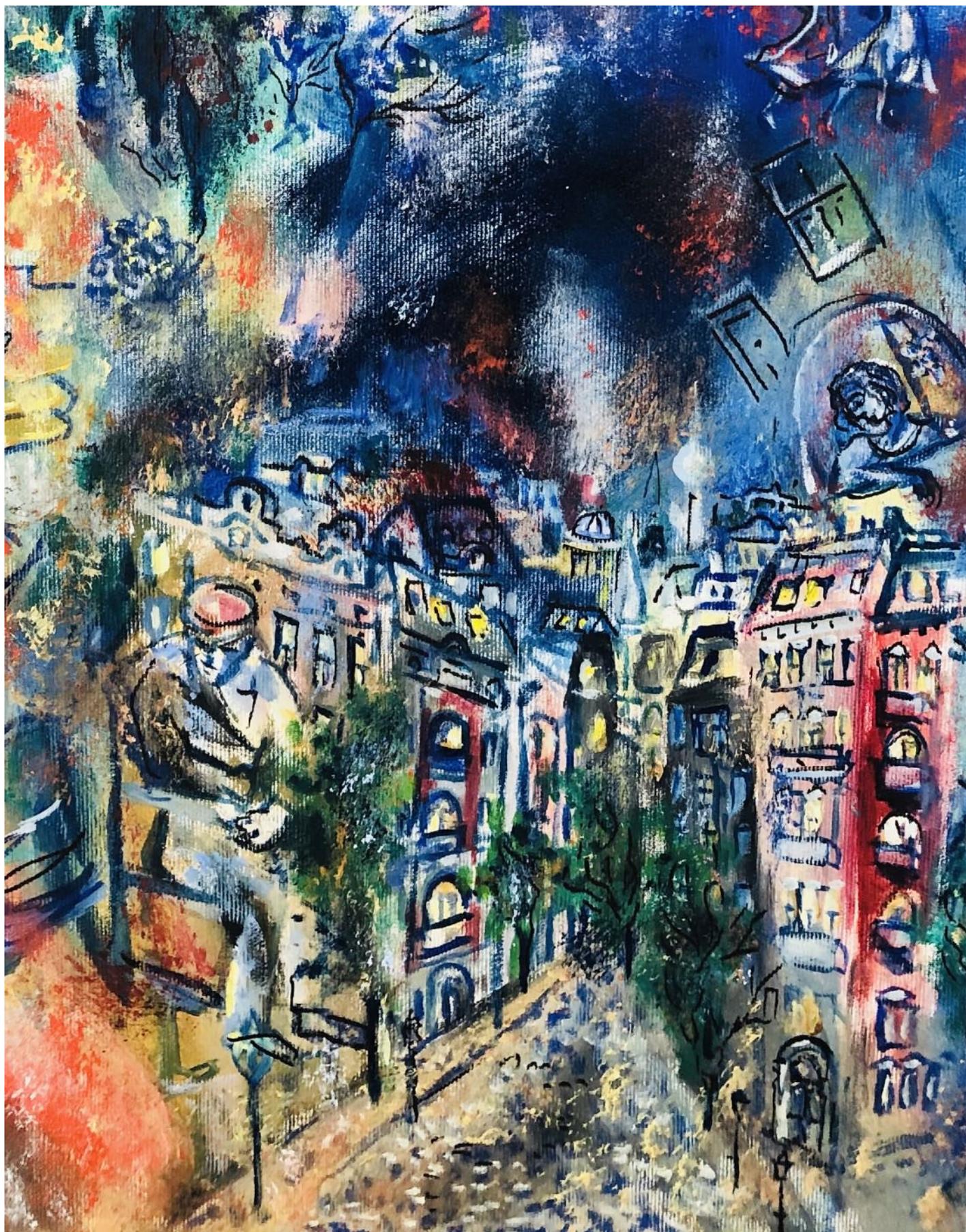
While rolling, coming, going, sliding, pulling.  
The people are like coarse, colored sand  
In the gentle game of the great hand of waves.

The market of Izmir gives way in this canvas to a beach with a lone violinist, the rose from Hüseyin Yurttaş poem behind him:

#### ROSE 1

I carry a rose to Izmir  
A yellow rose ...









To the right of the violinist grows a large pepper tree which was inspired by a beautiful poem of Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu:

### KARABİBER

İzmir’de bir ağaç gördüm  
Adı karabiberdi karabiber  
Yaprağının ucunu ısırırım  
Tadı karabiberdi karabiber.

Bir yaşıma daha girdim  
Biber dediğin tuzluğa yaraşır  
Fidesi olur fidan olur  
Bir çınar boyunda karabiber  
İnsanın başı döner

Çiçek mi, meyva mı, tohum mu nedir  
Nar tanesi gibi pırıl pırıl  
Çingen pembesinden sıcak  
Karabiber ağaçlar dolusu  
Karabiber sebil  
Karabiber salkım saçak

İzmir’de bir ağaç gördüm  
Adı karabiberdi  
Ya karabiber türküsü Allahım  
Necati Cumalı söylendi  
Soba borusu gibi bir sesi vardı  
Karabiberim, derdi karabiberim  
Candarmalar geliyor kalk gidelim

İzmir’de bir ağaç gördüm  
Adı karabiberdi  
Benim, avuç içi kadar saksılarda  
Asma kütükleri, yeşerten anam  
Bu ağacı görse sevincinden ağlardı

İzmir’de bir ağaç gördüm  
Adı karabiberdi  
Dalını, meyvasını, gölgesini  
Getirdi masamıza serdi  
Yapraklarını görse bayılırsın  
Bir yazma oyası kadar ince  
Söğüt dallarından narın  
Saçlarının arasında dolaştığını duyarsın  
İncecik biberli ellerin

### BLACK PEPPER

I saw a tree in Izmir  
The name was black pepper, black pepper  
I bit the tip of the leaf  
It was black pepper to taste.

One more age  
Pepper suits the salt shaker you said  
It will have a seedling and become a sapling  
A sycamore-sized black pepper  
People are dizzy

What is flower, fruit or seed?  
Sparkling like a pomegranate seed  
Warmer than gypsy pink  
Black pepper trees full  
Black pepper dispenser  
Black pepper cluster fringe

I saw a tree in Izmir  
Its name was black pepper  
When Necati Cumalı used to sing  
the black pepper song, my God  
It had a sound like a stovepipe  
My black pepper, my black pepper he used to say  
The beasts are coming, let's go

I saw a tree in Izmir  
Its name was black pepper  
In pots the size of my palm  
Vine stumps, mother turning green  
If he saw this tree, he would cry for joy

I saw a tree in Izmir  
Its name was black pepper  
Its branch, its fruit, its shadow  
He brought it to our table  
You would love it if you see its leaves  
Thin as handwriting lace  
Delicate from willow branches  
You hear it running through your hair  
Your thin peppery hands

## II

The second canvas, on the right side, is an ode to Berlin, the city the artist left for several years but never forgot and visited in her dreams until she returned. In the center stands the Brandenburg Gate. Instead of the classical bronze Victory figure with closed wings and a chariot with reined in horses on top of the structure, an allegorical figure symbolizing “Music” is playing the violin, wildly flapping her wings while letting her horses are jumping around in a joyful dance. To the left of the Gate are several Berlin landmarks, like the Red Town-hall, the Berliner Dom, the ruins of the Memorial Church near the Kurfürstendamm, Alexanderplatz with its ball-shaped television tower, its barrel-vaulted train station, and the Urania-Weltzeituhr. This DDR monument from 1969 is a clock symbolizing the world and featuring names of cities around the globe. It has been restored and supplemented with additional names. Some old names from the Communist era have been changed into current names, like Leningrad, which is now called St. Petersburg. *Tempora mutantur et nos in iis*, but Berlin is Berlin. The winged figure on top of the Berlin Victory Column (*Siegessäule*) stretches out her arms to “Music” while benevolently overlooking the busy city. A poem of Georg Heym comes to mind:

### BERLIN 2

The high roadside we lay on  
was white with dust. We saw in the tightness  
countless: crowds and crowds,  
and saw the cosmopolitan city looming away in the evening.  
The covered charabancs, difficult proceedings through the crowd,  
little paper flags were attached.  
The omnibuses, fully covered roofs and wagons.  
Automobiles, smoke and the sound of horns.

Toward the giant sea of stones. But we saw  
that along the lengthy street there is tree after tree,  
the leafless crowns are filigree.

The ball of the sun hangs, large, in the edge of the sky.  
And red rays shot the orbit of the evening.  
The dream of light lay on all heads.

In the bottom left corner, a lone muse melancholically ponders her different worlds, separation, and how to combine these worlds, mumbling the words of Paul Boldt’s verses:



## BERLIN EVENING

Spooky walking without existence!  
The asphalt darkens and the gas casts its  
light on it. From asphalt and light ivory is made.  
The streets prick up their ears like that. They smell of spring.

Cars, a herd of lightning, are yelling  
and looking for each other in the streets.  
Lights like flags, bright crowds:  
the city trains pull in.

And very far Berlin flashes. The east has already,  
the white wind, frost in its teeth,  
turned its gleaming maw over the street  
on which stands the night, a mute bird.



In the painting, the bird flies from the poet's dark head towards the light. Is it necessary that our memories morph and merge? Does he remind of the man in René Schickele's poem:



## SUNSET IN FRIEDRICHSTRASSE

A man stands at the corner  
with a lit up face.  
You nudge him,  
he doesn't notice.

Stares up with pale eyes  
Arms limply closed,  
Deeper enfolds his fate  
and the sky more colorful.

Does this muse combine Boldt's poem with the words of a poem of Hüseyin Yurttaş

### ÖPÜLDÜNÜZ EFENDİM



Buzul günlerinin çözüldüğü mevsimdi  
Şiirler gibi akıyordu ırmaklar  
Çekildi iğreti yollar ayaklarımızın altından  
Saat izmir sularıydı, öpüldünüz efendim

Herkes bir başınaydı, nedense biz ikimizdik  
Sokaklar yalın ışıklarla yıkanıyordu  
Özlemin kabarmış köpüğü yüreklerimizde  
Saat izmir sularıydı, öpüldünüz efendim

Söcükler nereye kaçmışlardı öyle  
Neden susmalarla doluydu o uzun yürüyüşümüz  
Şehir mi ıssızdı, biz mi kimsesizdik  
Saat izmir sularıydı, öpüldünüz efendim

Kanlı yaşantıları tanımıştık, sınanmıştı sevgimiz  
Eksik değildi yine de içimizden bulutları  
Kendi dallarımızı savurup kıran fırtınaların  
Saat izmir sularıydı, öpüldünüz efendim

Kırgındı ömürlerimiz hiçbir şeyi değiştiremediğimizden  
İçten içe yaşadığımız pişmanlıklarla  
Kaç baharın gülü solmuştu yüreklerimizde  
Saat izmir sularıydı, öpüldünüz efendim

## YOUR WERE KISSED, SIR

It was the season when the glacial days thawed  
Rivers flowed like poems  
Disgusting roads were drawn from under our feet  
The hour was the waters of Izmir, you were kissed, sir

Everyone was alone, for some reason we were the two of us  
The streets were bathed in plain light  
The swollen foam of yearning is in our hearts  
The hour was the waters of Izmir, you were kissed, sir

Where did the words run  
Why was our long walk full of silence  
Was the city desolate, were we lonely  
The hour was the waters of Izmir, you were kissed, sir

We got to know the bloody lives, our love was tested  
It was not missing although there were clouds inside us  
Of the storms that hurl and break our own branches  
The hour was the waters of Izmir, you were kissed sir

Our lives were broken because we could not change anything,  
With regrets that we lived through  
How many spring roses withered in our hearts  
The hour was the waters of Izmir, you were kissed, sir

The U and S Bahn tracks coming from the Weltuhr at Alexander, passing several stations, morph into the keyboard of a piano that leads via Schloss



Charlottenburg with its vast gardens and waterlily pond to an orchestra playing Beethoven's music, conducted by the composer himself. A wing-piano stands right in front of the Brandenburger Gate. Years ago, the artist lived near Schloss Charlottenburg and loved to walk around that pond. The water reflects the blue sky and her dreams.

A violinist is dancing on top of the pillars to the side of the Brandenburg Gate, reaching towards the sky over the sea of Izmir, the same sea that features in the other canvas. A second, red haired violinist in the upper right corner of the canvas plays a duet with the dancing musician, surrounded by a concert audience. A Turkish lamp



decorated with small pieces of colored glass swings softly back and forth under the scene.

Next to the sea stands the monumental town-clock of Izmir on a square with a few palm trees, surrounded by hosts of pigeons. To its right are the covered Kemeralti Bazaar, some old streets of Izmir, and modern buildings in the background. The ubiquitous fish in the paintings symbolize dreams, fluidity, and

agility.

In the bottom right corner the outlines of a painter in the dark are visible. The dreams of an artist become visible for the eye when they are trapped, like in amber, and catch light.

Shoshannah Jeanne Brombacher,  
Berlin, March 2021



