

Esther Schipper

Cemile Sahin

ROAD RUNNER

February 1 – March 5, 2025

Esther Schipper, Berlin



Cemile Sahin, **The Sharpest Blade**, 2025, Fine Art inkjet print mounted on aluminum. Image © the artist

Esther Schipper is pleased to announce Cemile Sahin's **ROAD RUNNER**, which presents all new works. This is Sahin's second project at the gallery after a presentation in the Niche space in 2021, the year she joined the program.

ROAD RUNNER transforms the exhibition space into a vivid environment that employs the colorful, staggering visual language of pop culture and video games to address contemporary political topics, among them the use of drones by corporations, authoritarian regimes, and the military. On view will be a film, presented in collaboration with CIRCA, sixteen unique aluminum panels, and six custom-made punching bags. Reflecting on a world of loudly competing stimuli, the new works are presented within an eye-catching exhibition design, with multi-colored text passages and a yellow carpet.

Sahin's work speaks about family and loss, as well as about the technologies facilitating digital disembodiment and political oppression. She not only comments on these defining technologies, such as drones and AI, but uses them as tools in her cutting-edge artistic process.

The film, also entitled **ROAD RUNNER**, employs a fast mix of genres: cinematic storytelling alternates with drone footage, faux commercials, animations and video games. **ROAD RUNNER** imagines a dystopian future in which killer drones have seized control and established a brutal order. It tells the story of Bêrîtan, who struggles to free her sister from digital captivity in a parallel Virtual Reality. Inspired by the ubiquity of games such as GTA (Grand Theft Auto) or Counter Strike, **ROAD RUNNER** is a mash-up of narrative strategies from film, TV, video games and social media platforms. Its hybrid aesthetics draw on the quick, direct communication of TikTok videos as well as on the tough, militaristic do-or-die storytelling of gaming culture.

The film's narrative fictionalizes a major theme in Sahin's work: drones as concrete instruments of surveillance and military intervention. With it, she continues to explore the connection between video games, military training, authoritarian regimes, and arms trade, and takes drones as a larger symbol of the entanglement of entertainment, corporate and authoritarian powers. Thus, drones and the impact of weapons are important

recurring themes explored for example in her work **Gewehr im Schrank** (Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden, 2023), and **Drone Valley** (Biennale in Lyon, 2022).

A group of sixteen large-scale wall-mounted aluminum panels feature bright, flashy motifs created using AI. Each panel is unique. The works were created by Sahin with a machine-learning image tool: first training it on her own work, Sahin used verbal prompts to generate specific pictures, and then fine-tune them, in effect employing AI as a tool for realizing images she had imagined. Printed on pearly-white photographic paper and mounted on aluminum, the panels combine the images with short texts that introduce a deliberately ambiguous subtext: the phrases can be read as ironic, profound or sometimes simply meme-like and nonsensical.

The images have an exaggerated cuteness, the kind of aesthetic deemed most successful by algorithms (and behaviorists): balloon letters, pretty flowers, cute (or scary) dogs, fancy cars, stylish women, lustrous fingernails, but also guns and knives. With their brilliant color and brash subject matter, the panels put into playful form serious topics: what are we to make, say, of glossy bullets floating on a lipstick-red background or a golden knife held by a hand with long pink nails? The visual pleasure masks a certain horror, not least at its near-irresistible seductiveness. Yet there is no cynicism or judgement in Sahin's works: This is how it is, the artist seems to suggest, fun and tragedy coexist.

A number of hanging punching bags are printed with motifs related to the film **ROAD RUNNER**. In the film, Bêrîtan trains with a boxing community that helps her gain the strength to rescue her sister. The bags function as an extension of the film's narrative into the exhibition space, the virtual spilling over into the real.

Cemile Sahin's new film **ROAD RUNNER** is presented in collaboration with CIRCA and funded by #CIRCAECONOMY, a circular model supporting the free public programme and the annual CIRCA PRIZE, of which Cemile Sahin was a recipient in 2023. Since launching in October 2020, CIRCA has re-distributed over £1,000,000 of #CIRCAECONOMY funds in public art commissions, cash grants, scholarships, and charitable donations, supporting the creative ecosystem and empowering artists globally.

Cemile Sahin was born in Wiesbaden, Germany, in 1990. She studied Fine Arts at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London and at the Universität der Künste in Berlin. The artist lives and works in Berlin. Sahin's debut novel **TAXI** was published in 2019, followed by her book **ALLE HUNDE STERBEN** in 2020 (translated into English in 2024). For **TAXI** Sahin was awarded the Alfred Döblin-Medaille. In 2024 Sahin's third novel, **Kommando Ajax**, was published by Aufbau Verlag.

The artist's exhibitions and projects include: **Sieh Dir die Menschen an!**, Kunstsammlung Chemnitz, Chemnitz (2024) and Kunstmuseum Stuttgart (2023); **Gewehr im Schrank – Rifle in the closet**, Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden (2023); **A Song of Tigris and Euphrates**, Kunsthalle Osnabrück (2022); **Manifesto of Fragility**, Lyon Biennial, Lyon (2022); **Identität nicht nachgewiesen**, Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn (2022); **Laboratory of Contested Space / Art & Truthtelling**, Akademie der Künste, Berlin (2020); **ars viva 2020**, Kunstverein, Hamburg (2020) and Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig (2019).

Her works are included in the collections of Kunstmuseum Stuttgart; Kunsthau Zürich; Julia Stoschek Collection, Berlin/Düsseldorf; Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin; Servais Family Collection, Brussels; and Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (The Federal Collection of Contemporary Art, Germany).

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