

Prinz Gholam



Prinz Gholam, *12. April* (2005), chromogenic print, 60 × 49 cm, courtesy P Gholam and Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris

“Throughout this depiction of the Crusaders, of the Crusades, from which the cross is so curiously absent, except on the ornaments of the indignant patriarch on the left, it is as though there is an obstinate return to the artist’s name, Eugène, fortunately born Delacroix (‘of the cross’). He discreetly sets Constantinople ablaze. In the sketch in the Musée Condé collection in Chantilly the reddish glow is much more vibrant. Look at him, this young fire raiser, who falls exhausted to the ground, still supporting himself with his right hand behind an empress’s legs while he continues to hold a torch against his heart. He is in love, he is passionate. Is he Greek or French? In any case, he is not a soldier. The agitation, the state of the ladies and of the city; will not all of these allow him to satisfy the desires he would have considered completely crazy a few days earlier? What does he still want to burn before abandoning himself to sleep? He wants to burn Istanbul, unburden the city of its new name, this Constantinople taken by the Turks, like it had been taken again by the Greeks, like it had been taken by the French. He wants to burn the city of Paris whose sky rushes over this city, to recommence the Revolution of 1830, make liberty guide the people once again. Hence, the banners, far from bearing great families’ recognizable coats of arms, are red and black flags.

“He wants to burn this painting whose subject enchants and exasperates him all at once... . Not destroy it, but perpetually set it alight, because the inner fire devouring the painting is not sufficiently expressed, and because he knows that his colors risk fading. He wants to burn himself as Sardanapalus in a moment of extraordinary luxuriousness, to denounce the world’s darkness, and light it up like a torch, or, if you would, like a beacon; Baudelaire’s verse will allow us to plant green firs on the hills that rise above Galata, and Weber’s music will there reveal countless knight-errant huntsmen: ‘Delacroix, lake of blood haunted by evil angels, / Under the shadow of a green forest of firs, / Where, under a gloomy sky, strange fanfares / Pass, like a muffled sigh of Weber ...’”

—Pierre Bal-Blanc