

HECTOR MCDONNELL

ISTANBUL'S LIGHT



HECTOR MCDONNELL

I S T A N B U L ' S L I G H T

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SG GALLERY x WINSOR BIRCH

HECTOR McDONNELL

Hector McDonnell (b. 1947) is a Northern Irish painter, etcher and author, known for his architectural, landscape and portrait work. Born in Belfast, he grew up at the McDonnell family estate at Glenarm, County Antrim, and was educated at Eton and the University of Oxford, where he studied Modern History.

He studied painting in Munich and Vienna in 1965–66 and, in 1979, was awarded the prestigious Darmstädter Kunstpreis. A major retrospective followed at the Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt in 1981, with a second museum retrospective at the Ulster Museum, Belfast, in 2003–04. McDonnell has since established an international reputation, exhibiting extensively in Europe, the United States and the British Isles. He lives and works in Northern Ireland.

WINSOR BIRCH

Winsor Birch is a British fine-art dealership specialising in British and European painting, works on paper and sculpture from the 18th to the 20th centuries, with particular expertise in British and Irish art. Founded by Grant Ford, formerly Senior Director of Sotheby's British & Irish Art department, the company works with established and emerging artists and advises private and institutional collectors. Based in Marlborough, Wiltshire, Winsor Birch regularly presents exhibitions in London and participates in leading UK and international art fairs.

SULE GAZIOGLU

SG Gallery is an Istanbul based art gallery founded by curator and designer Şule Gazioğlu. Rooted in Istanbul's rich cultural heritage, the gallery presents a considered programme of contemporary art, photography and design, bringing together emerging and established artists whose practices engage with memory, place, materiality and lived experience.

Located in Emirgan, Istanbul, SG Gallery is distinguished by an intimate, collector-led approach that places contemporary works in dialogue with historical objects and interiors. Through exhibitions, international collaborations and art fairs, the gallery seeks to create a bridge between Istanbul and the wider international art world, presenting Turkish and international artistic perspectives to a discerning audience.

FOREWORD

When Hector McDonnell and Bill Montgomery asked whether I might help bring Hector's recent Turkish pictures to London, I said yes before either of them had finished speaking.

I should explain why. For fifteen years I looked after Irish art at Sotheby's, and those years made me. The job took me down every road in Ireland: to the great Georgian houses of the countryside, whose collections had not been seen by a specialist in a generation; to the magnificent town houses of Dublin; and, following the diaspora, to Irish collections in Canada and America. I was received with a hospitality I have met nowhere else, by people who could tell me the story of every picture on the stairs. Somewhere between the first cup of tea and the last whiskey, I fell in love with Irish painting. The sales that grew out of those journeys set world records for Irish art. But what one remembers is not the hammer prices; it is the pictures one kept meeting, and the McDonnell on the wall was the most faithful of companions. A Belfast shopfront here, a café interior there, always the same unhurried eye, always the light weighed to the ounce.

Hector is a traditionalist in one respect and a thoroughly modern painter in another, and he is the richer for both. His interiors descend in a direct line from Lavery: the same ease with a lit room, the same instinct for the figure caught between one moment and the next. His stillness is Hopper's, and it is not fanciful to say that in Hector's pictures Lavery and Hopper meet. His palette has the Paul Henry blues, that cool clarity only an Irish eye seems able to mix. But what is entirely his own is the way the paint itself tells the story. The cobbles in a McDonnell have been walked on, and the bar has heard the conversation. He does not describe a place so much as record what has happened in it, and that is why people live with his pictures rather than merely own them.

The pictures gathered here as Istanbul's Light find that eye at full stretch. Turkey has given Hector a light harder, higher and more absolute than anything in the Glens. It pours down the filigree staircase of the Rüstem Pasha Mosque, flooding the Sultan's chamber at Topkapı, and he meets it with the discipline of a lifetime. The turquoise of the Pandeli is a considered turquoise; the gulls over the fish market at Üsküdar are set down with the gravity he once gave a launderette; a snack seller's cart is honoured exactly as a sultan's pavilion is honoured. In the great yalı interior at Çengelköy, the Bosphorus comes indoors and takes possession of the room. The colour has a new heat, but the old refusal to embellish remains, and the result is, to my eye, the most joyous work of his career. The invitation came by way of Bill Montgomery, which makes it dearer. Bill and I spent more days on the Irish roads together than either of us would care to count, and much of what I know about Irish pictures I learnt in the passenger seat of his car.

Gallery 8 stands on Duke Street, St James's, a hundred yards from Christie's and in the heart of the quarter that has dealt in pictures since the age of Reynolds. I have walked these streets for the whole of my working life, past the lamps coming on in Bury Street and Ryder Street, and past the great dealerships whose back rooms have seen more fine pictures than many a museum. Hector's work already hangs in many London houses. It is time it was seen together in St James's.

Şule Gazioglu curates the exhibition, and it could not be in better hands. Şule studied philosophy at Galatasaray before training at the Sotheby's Institute in New York, and she comes from a family with three generations in the art and antiques trade. Her gallery at Emirgan, on the Bosphorus, has made Istanbul its subject since 2020. She knows the ground on which these pictures were made as no London eye could, and she has the rarer gift of letting a painting speak before she does. Hector in Turkey, seen through Istanbul and shown in London, is a happy alignment. I can think of few pleasures greater than hanging these paintings in Duke Street and opening the doors.

Grant Ford
Chairman of Winsor Birch

I S T A N B U L ' S L I G H T

Istanbul is one of those cities that provides a continuous, endless fascination for anyone who experiences it, whether for a brief visit or a lifetime of living in it.

Alongside the cultural and historical vastness, depth and liveliness it shares with metropolises such as Paris, New York and London, Istanbul possesses a magic entirely of its own. It is the only great metropolis built across two continents, carrying the magical light of the East while standing at the doorstep of the Western world.

Istanbul is often represented through its skyline, its mosques, the Bosphorus and its streets. Yet much of the city's true identity is experienced elsewhere: inside apartments and yali rooms, cafés and hotel salons, family homes, palaces, staircases, kitchens and terraces. These intimate spaces hold another Istanbul, one that is lived rather than observed, remembered rather than simply seen.

Hector McDonnell, one of the greatest living Irish painters, is a master of light and, equally, of interiors. His work is deeply rooted in his experience of the world around him and in the beauty of the life he encounters in each place. Alongside London and Ireland, he has painted extensively in New York, Paris, Italy, Portugal and Germany, always responding to his own personal visual experience of a place, to the beauty of the ordinary and the extraordinary, and to the wonderful mixture of the two.

For a very long time, it was his wish to reflect upon one of his favourite cities: Istanbul.

What makes this exhibition particularly special is the way Hector approaches the city. He presents its layers of history without giving us a history lesson. He reflects upon a city in the Orient without falling into Orientalism. Although he approaches Istanbul as a visitor and remains an external eye, he does not position himself outside the culture he encounters. Instead, he finds his place within its everyday life, looking at its people, interiors and rituals on the same human ground that he would approach any place he has known and loved. There is no sense of the exotic or the unfamiliar being held at a distance. What he sees is something shared: beauty, intimacy, character, memory and the simple poetry of everyday life.

His Istanbul is not a collection of landmarks. It is an exploration of intimacy: of rooms, light, objects, gestures, memories and the traces of lives lived within them. In this sense, Hector McDonnell explores something universal: the intimacy of a room, and the strange familiarity that certain spaces can evoke even when we have never physically entered them.

Looking at his paintings, one might think: "I have never been in this room, but I feel as though I know it." Or perhaps: "I feel as though I have already been here."

This is where Hector's Istanbul becomes something more than a portrait of a city. It becomes a kind of universal memory, filtered through his own personal relationship with the places he has encountered and the lives, histories and atmospheres he has absorbed.

I feel immensely proud to be part of this exhibition and deeply honoured to have been given the opportunity to curate it. More than anything, I am excited to invite you into Hector McDonnell's Istanbul, an Istanbul of light, memory, intimacy and endless fascination.

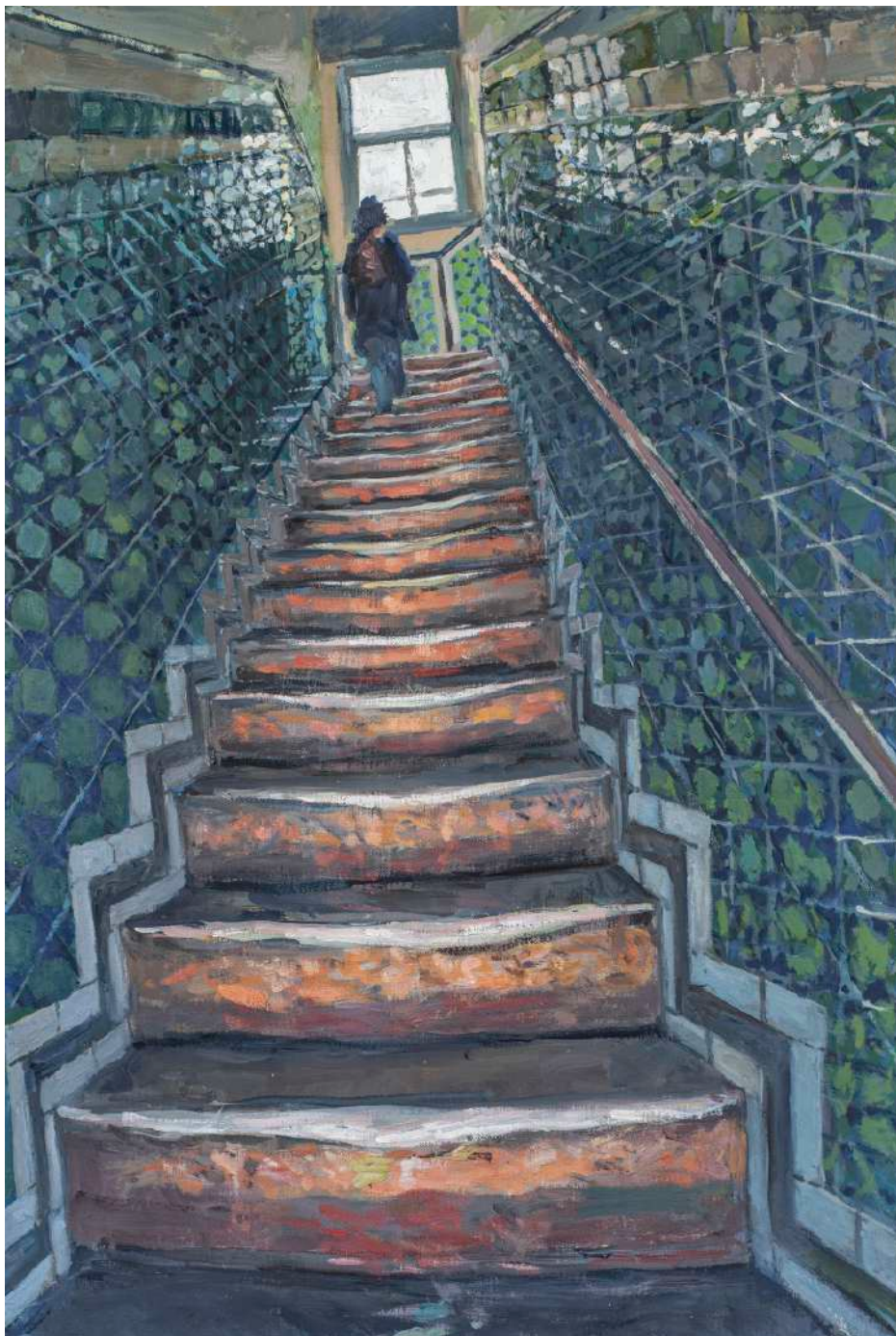
Şule Gazioğlu



Pandeli Window
Oil on Canvas
16"X 12" / 40x30cm
2026



Waiter in the Pandeli
Oil on Canvas
23.6"X 15.7" / 60x40cm
2026



Pandeli Stairway
Oil on Canvas
23.6"X 15.7" / 60x40cm
2026



Çengelköy House, View of the Upstairs Landing
Oil on Canvas
16"X 12" / 40x30cm
2026



Çengelköy House, Ottoman Porch
Oil on Panel
10"X 12" / 25x30cm
2026



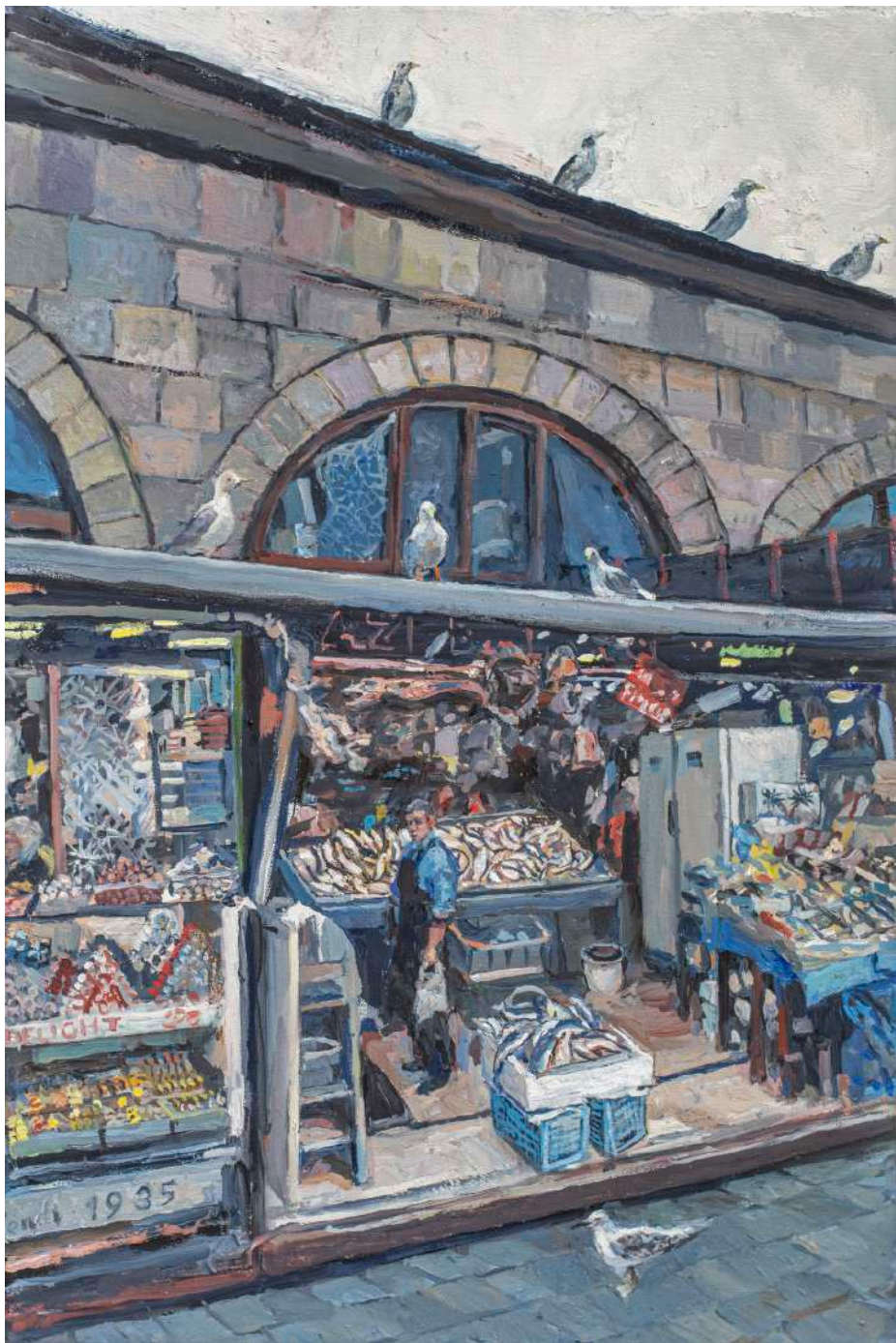
Çengelköy House Ottoman Window
Oil on Panel
12"X 10" / 30x25cm
2026



Red Hat at the Flute Makers
Oil on Panel
12"X 10" / 30x25cm
2026



Snack Seller's Cart
Oil on Panel
12"X 10" / 30x25cm
2026

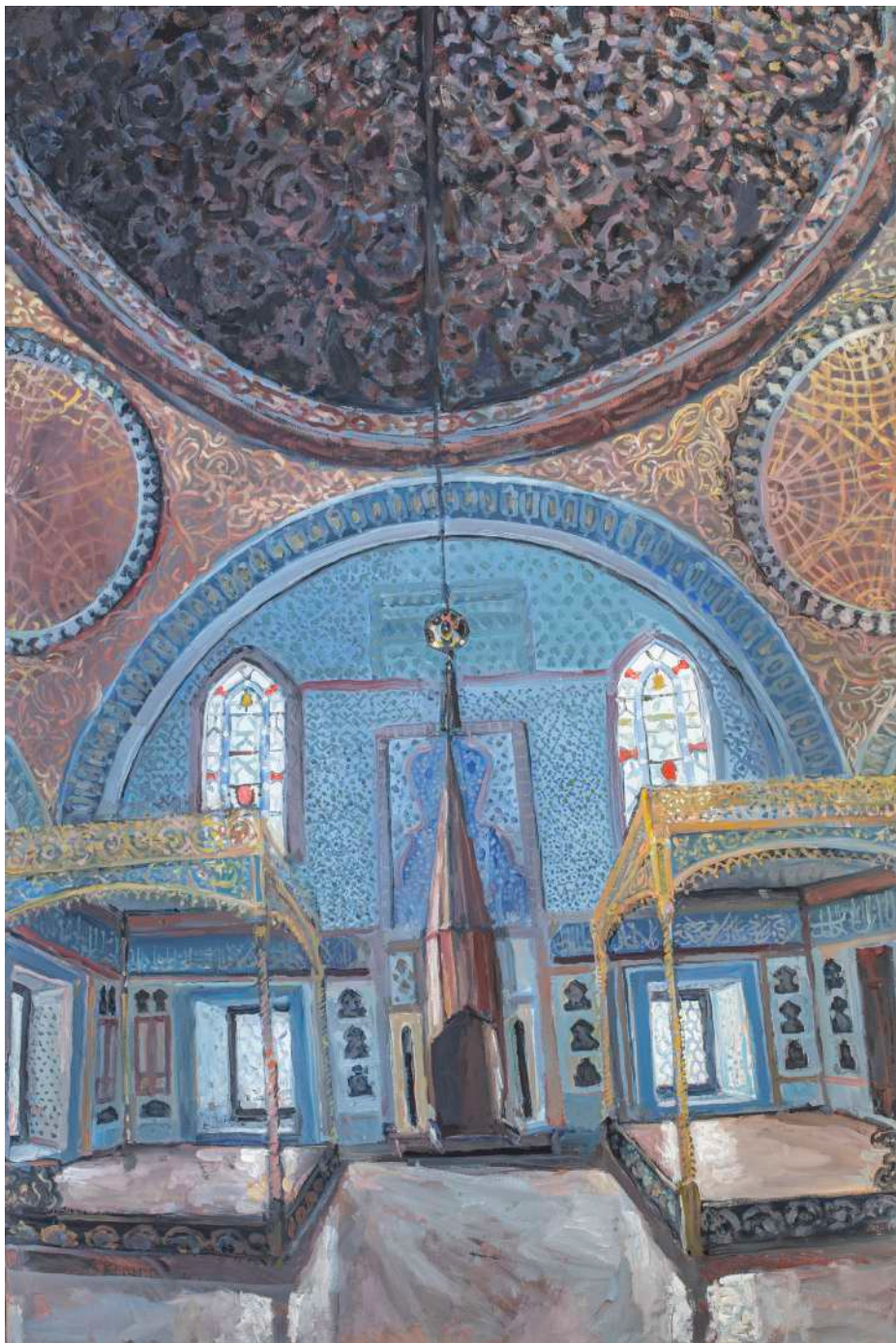


Fish Market with Seabirds
Oil on Canvas
23.6"X 15.7" / 60x40cm
2026

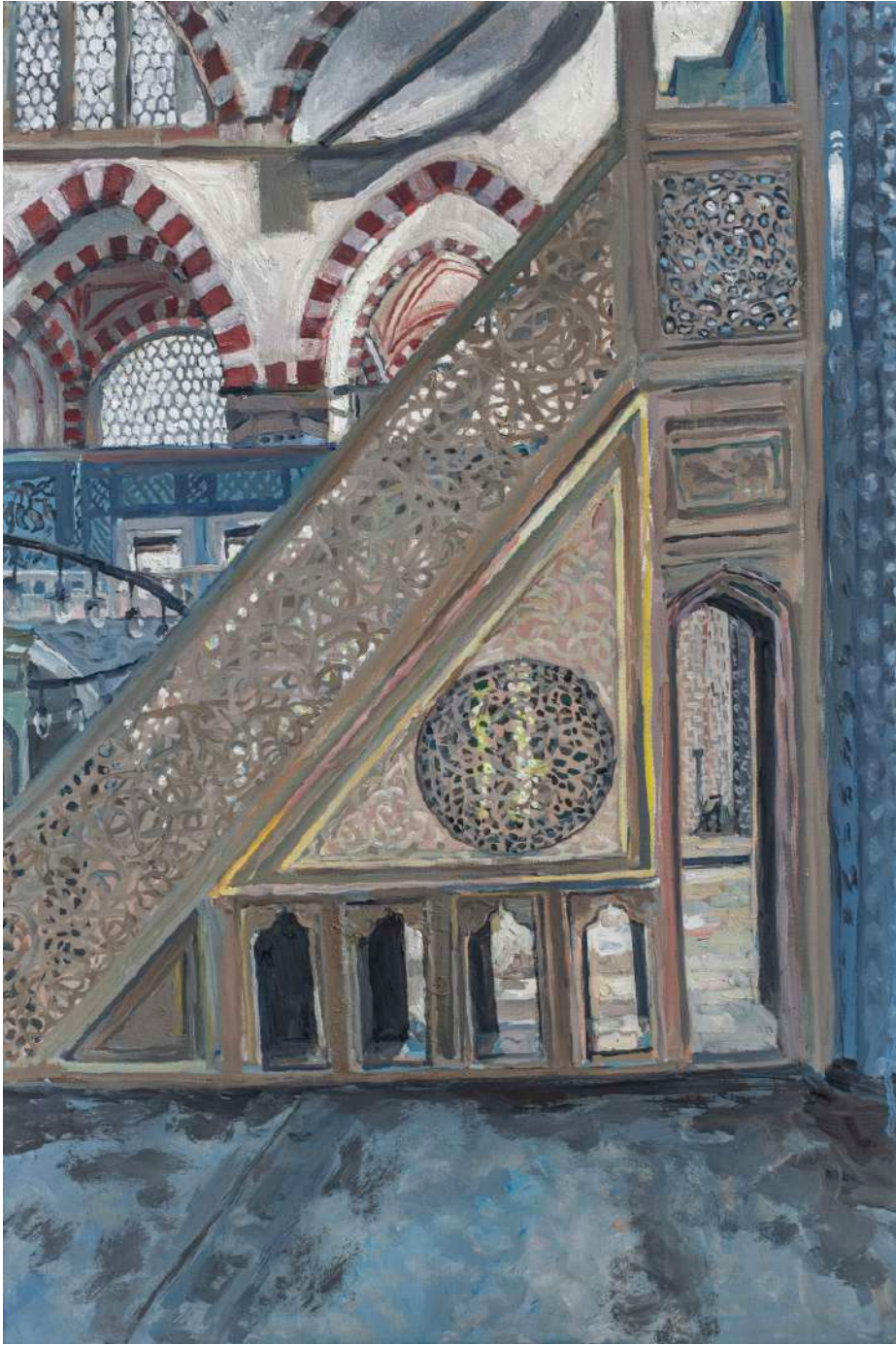




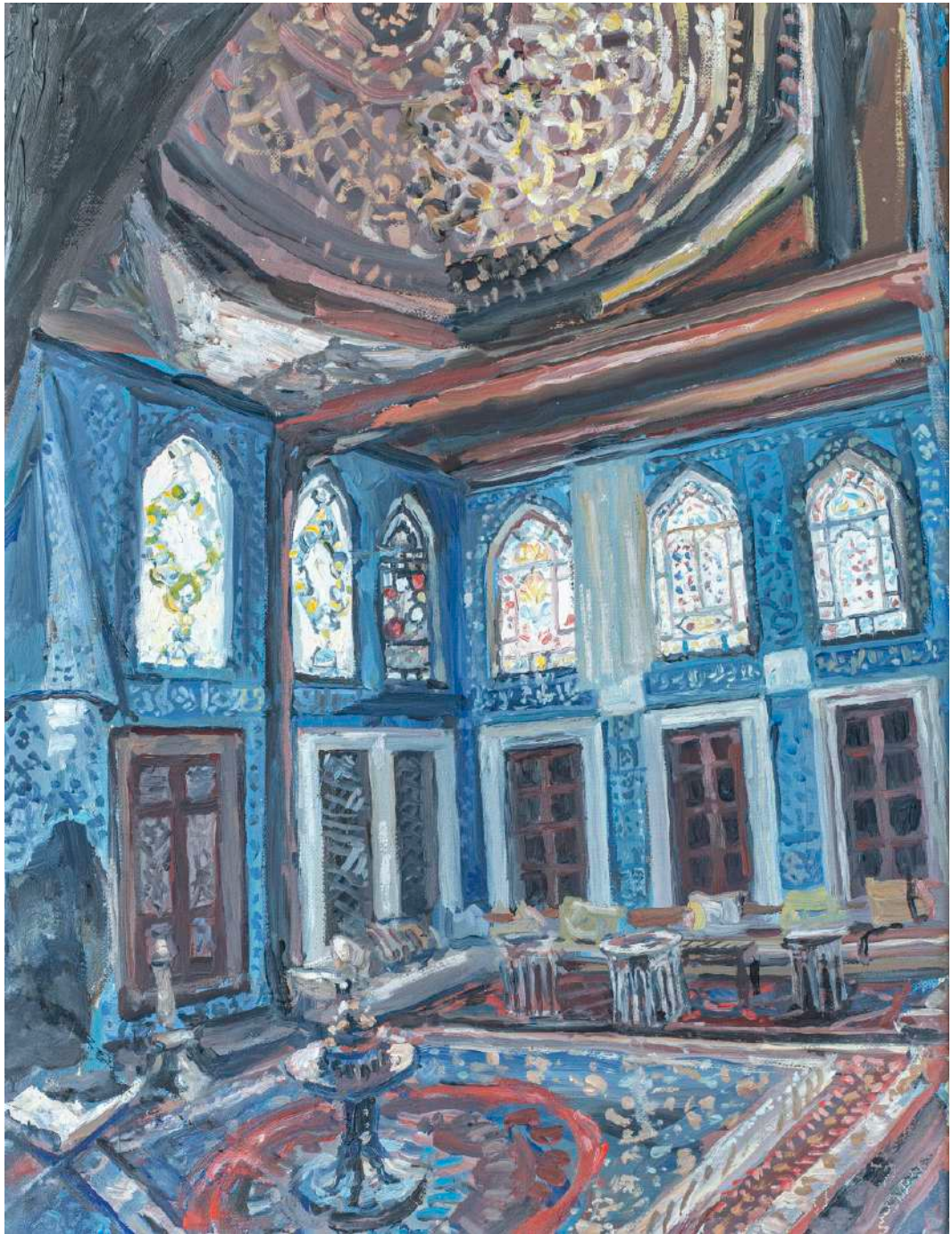
Aqueduct
Oil on Panel
12"X 10" / 30x25cm
2026



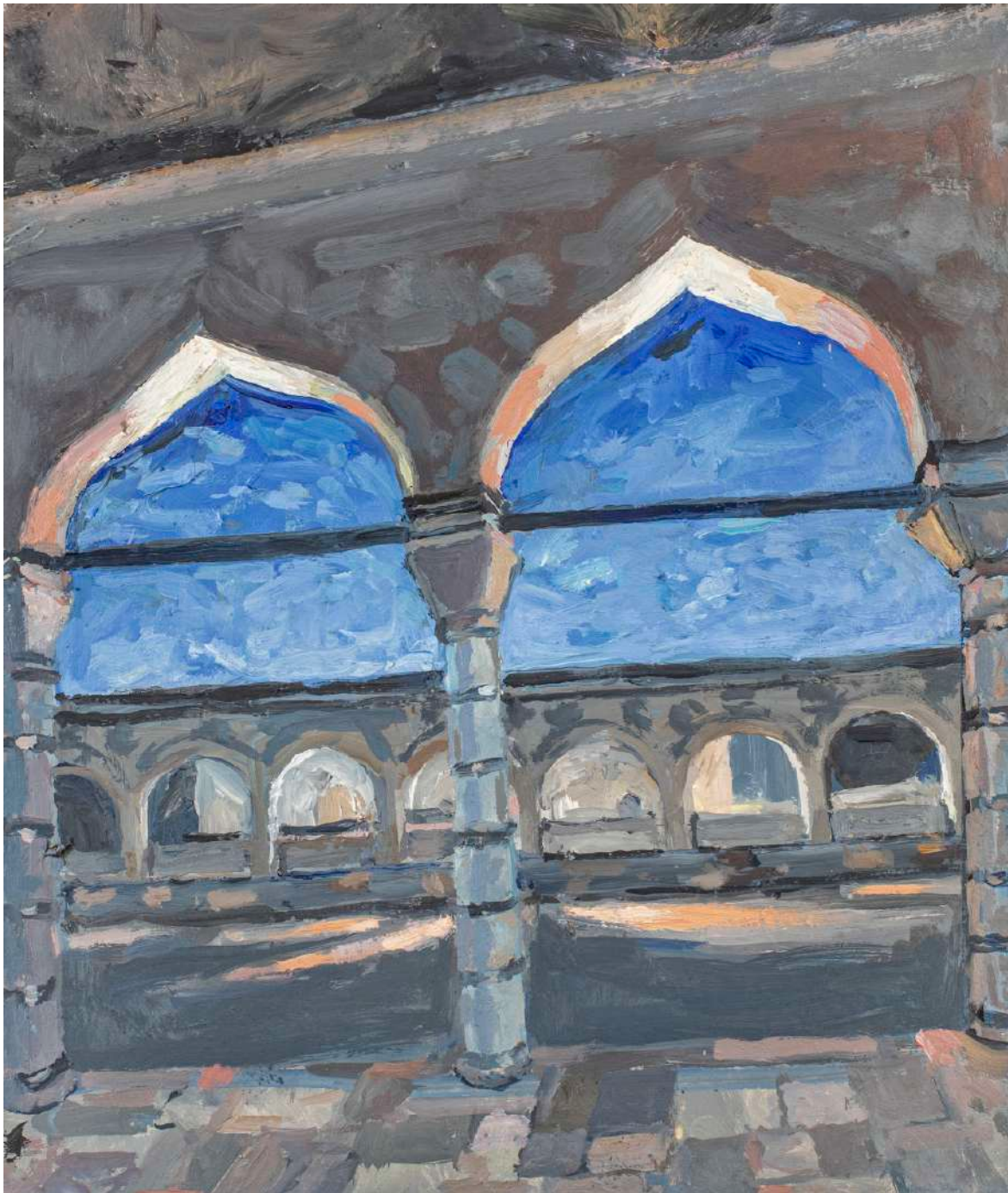
Sultan's Chamber In the Harem
Oil on Canvas
35"X 23" / 90x60cm
2026



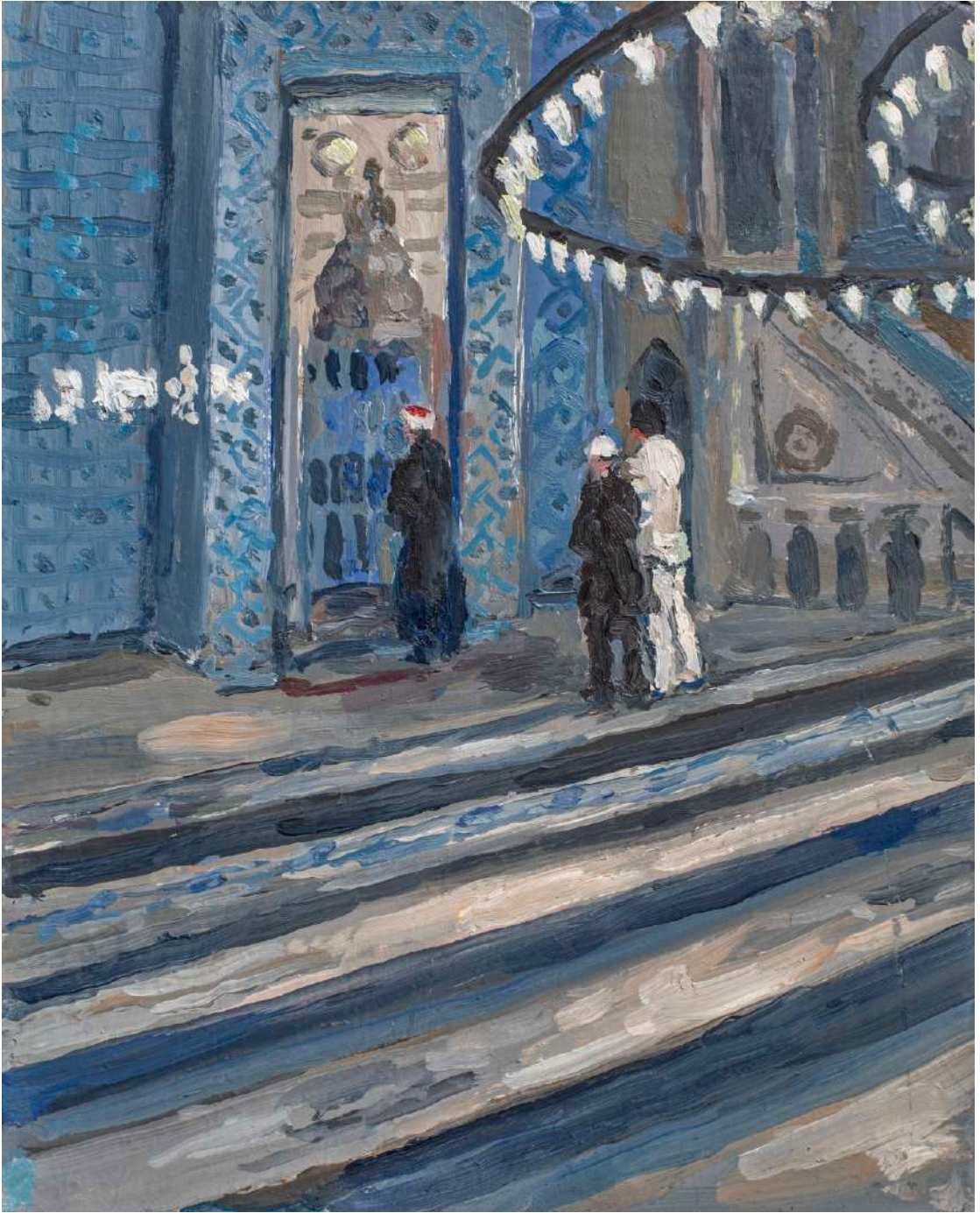
Filigree Mosque Staircase (Rüstem Paşa Mosque)
Oil on Canvas
23.6"X 15.7" / 60x40cm
2026



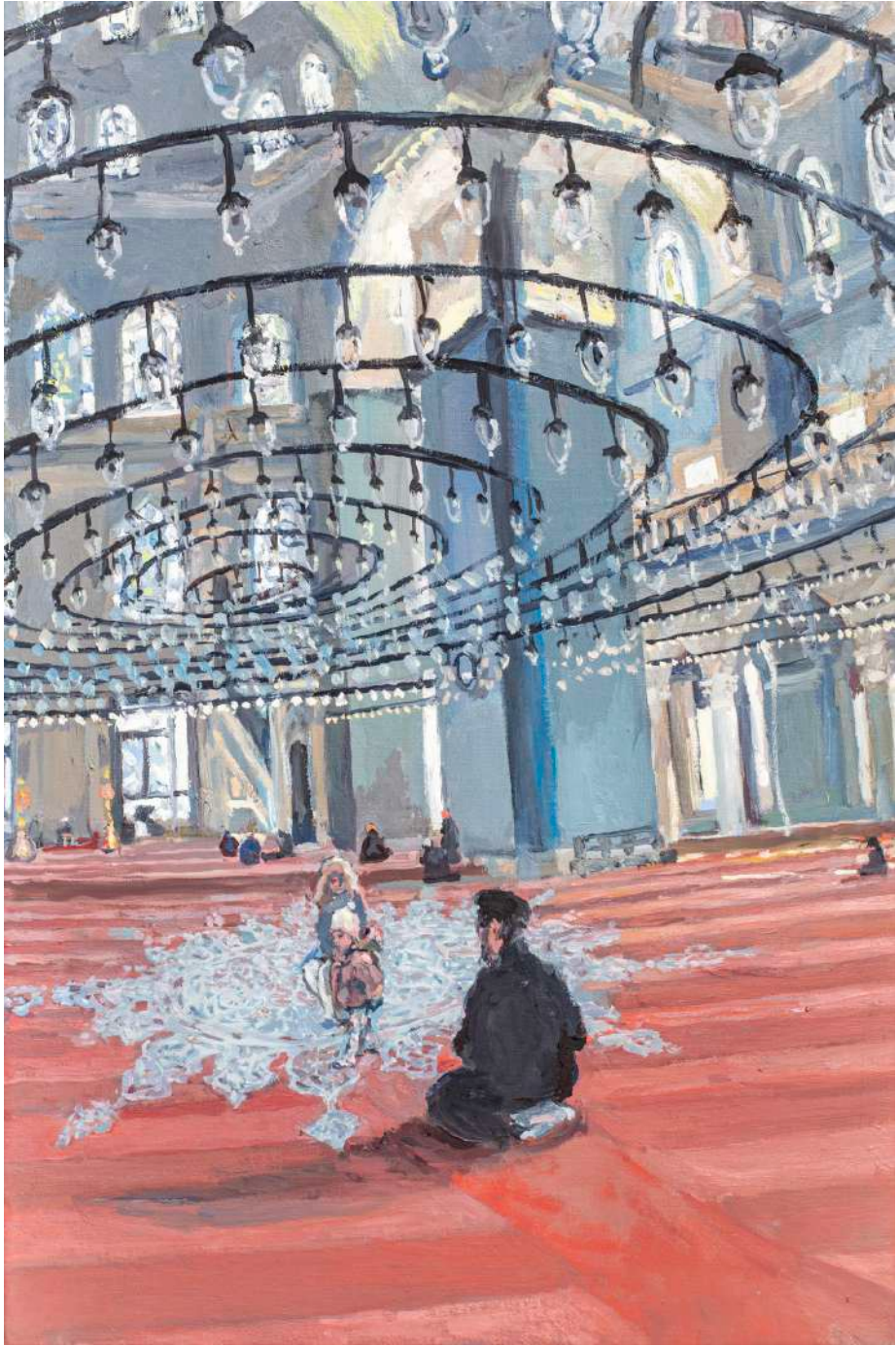
Sultana's Pavilion (Yeni Mosque)
Oil on Canvas
16"X 12" / 40x30cm
2026



Night Arcade (Rüstem Paşa Mosque)
Oil on Panel
12"X 10" / 30x25cm
2026

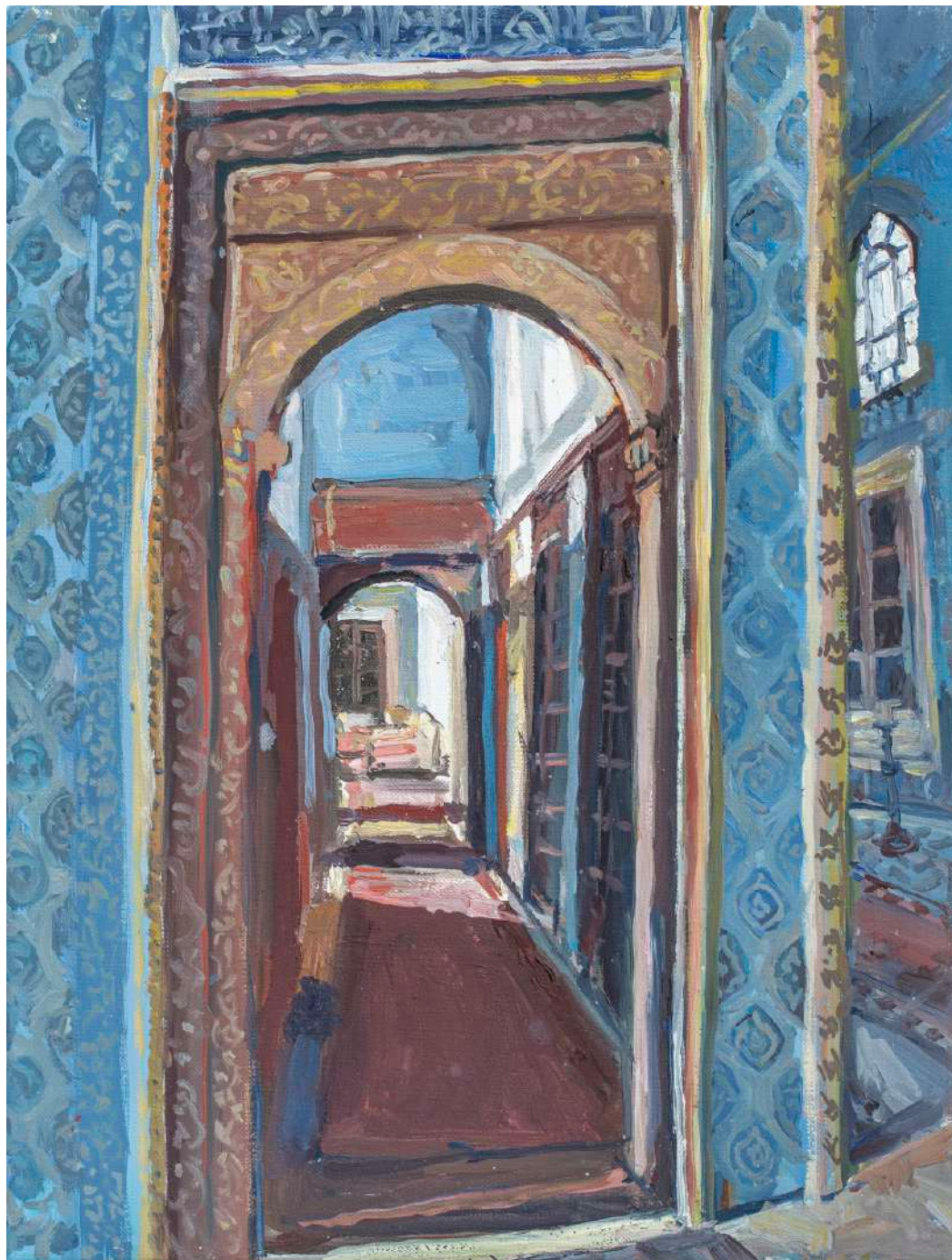


Figures at the Mihrab (Rüstem Paşa Mosque)
Oil on Panel
10"X 8" / 25x20cm
2026

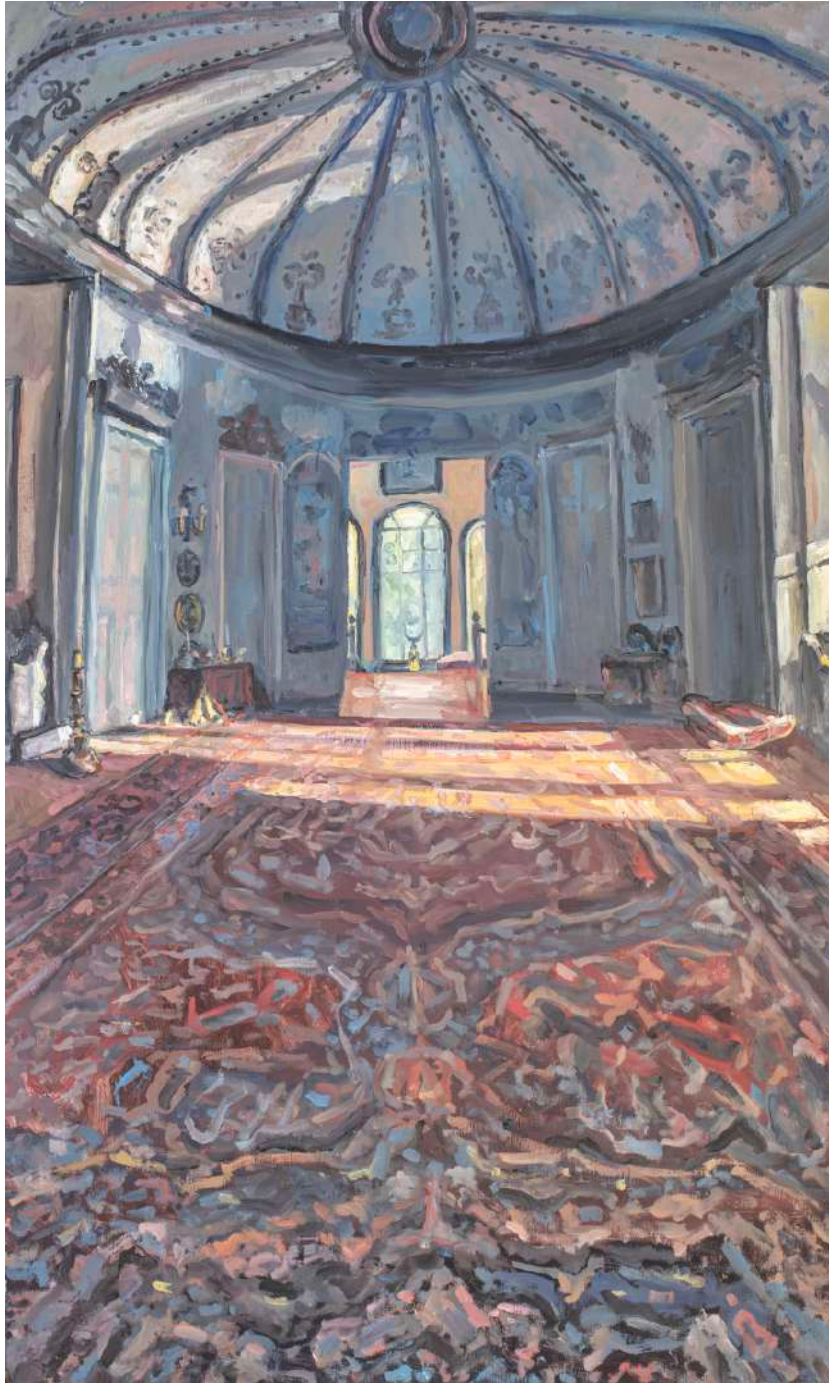


Concentric Mosque Interior (Yeni Mosque)
Oil on Canvas
23.6"X 15.7" / 60x40cm
2026

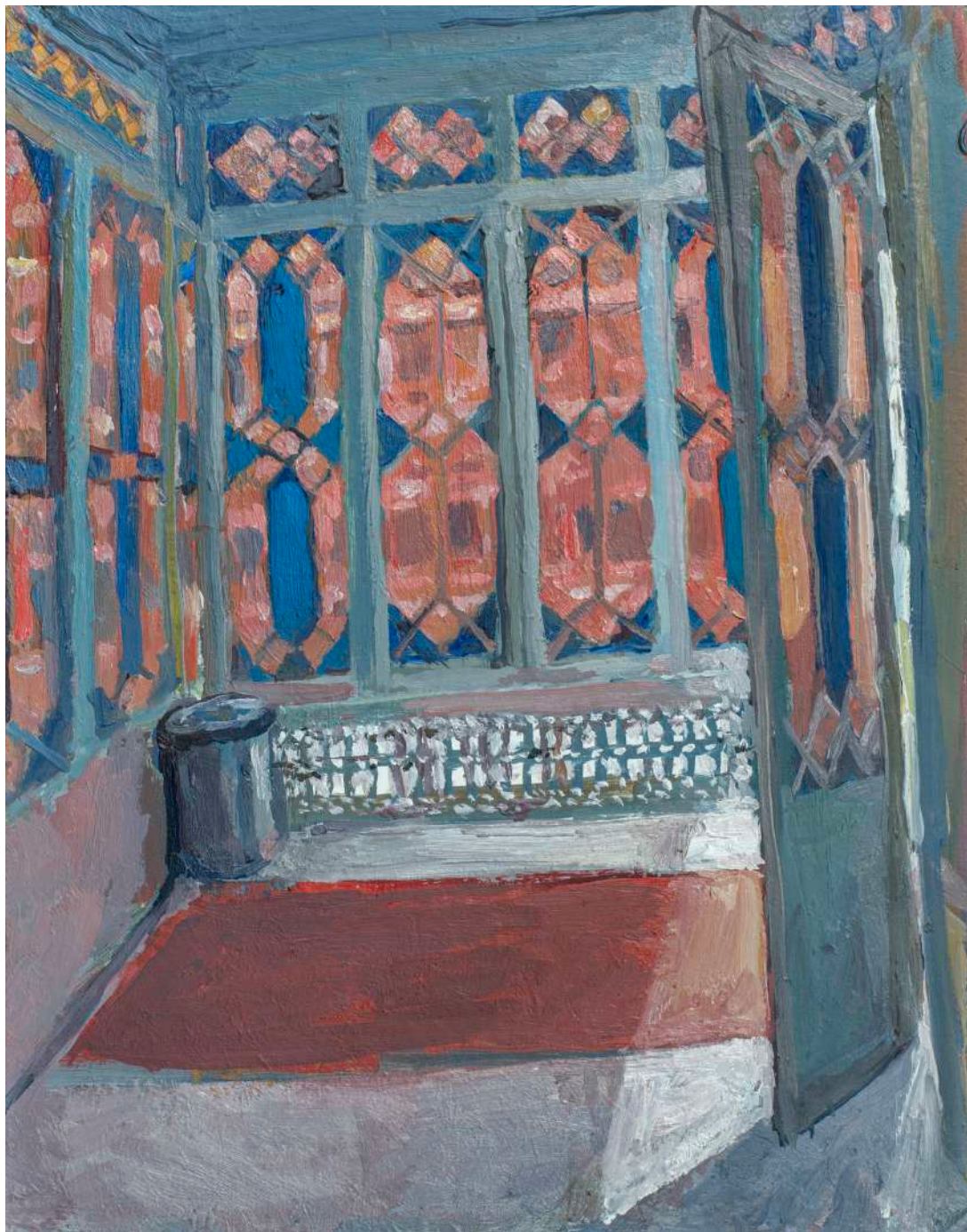




Passageway to Sultan's Pavilion
Oil on Canvas
16"X 12" / 40x30cm
2026



Salon at Sadullah Paşa Yalı
Oil on Canvas
39"X 23" / 100x60cm
2026



Red Porch
Oil on Board
10"X 8" / 25x20cm
2026



Well Chamber Istanbul
Oil on Canvas
39"X 27" / 100x70cm
2026

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