



August - 2025

## Midas Touch

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### Mission

*The general vision of the festival is to question a dystopian reality of excluding "the other" in the form of the migrant, the poor, the opposite sex, the animal, the environment, the unknown.*

*The Title, Mahalla, refers to the word with its roots in Arabic mähallä, used in many languages and countries meaning neighborhood or location.*

*In this context, the word Mahalla is a metaphor for a space of diversity and inclusion in the field of arts and culture.*

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**Mahalla Festival - Sept 13 - Sept 28, 2025**

**Open Daily, 1:00 pm - 7:00 pm**

Under the title **Midas Touch** this year's Mahalla Festival is calling for a confrontation with the dystopian reality of a growth-based global economy that ignores the threats of climate change, increasing international armed conflicts and forced migration.

Parallel to the **18th Istanbul Art Biennial**, the Istanbul-based association **Diyalog** is organizing the festival program in the categories of fine arts, performance, film, video, music and poetry.

**Artistic Direction:** Sabine and Thomas Büsch.  
**Emerging Curator:** Mathilde Melek An

**Conceptual Frame:** Sabine Büsch

### Mythological Etymology

The term **Midas Touch** originates from the ancient Greek myth of King Midas. According to it, Midas was awarded by the god Dionysus for hosting his godfather in his famous paradise like garden with natural food, singing and poetry. However, Midas diminished the beauty and abilities around him, when he wished for everything, he touched to turn into gold. Soon he realized that this gift was a curse. Upon discovering that his touch turned food, drink, and even his daughter into gold, he regretted his wish and cursed it.



There are several different versions of the story. In one Dionysus takes the gift back, in one Midas dies from starvation.

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## Vision

*Over the past eight years, the Mahalla Festival has been focused on building up innovative artistic narrative styles around political content. The primary areas of interest include globalization, climate change, the transformation of urban spaces, migration, and communities.*

*The festival has become increasingly international connected and is looking for experienced artists, emerging artists, and newcomers to contribute and exchange*

*Mahalla invites for reflections on the individuals' choices and possibilities to develop a personal artistic approach to the dilemma of "Midas Touch".*



## Contemporary Adaption

**Midas Touch** is also the title of a book, co-authored by Donald Trump and Robert Kiyosaki and published in 2011. Trump and Kiyosaki intersperse financial lessons with personal anecdotes from their careers and contrary to Trumps current policy praise immigration as one of the motors of American economy and spirit.

This praise itself, however, has an exploitative flavor, as it focuses exclusively on the material and economic impact of migration. Assessments of this kind are susceptible to manipulation in times of recession and easily degenerated into the demonization of migrants today. It led to the "Pay and Play-Politics" of the current US government legitimating Neo-Colonial strategies in international power politics.

The right-wing movements in Europe and the US are waging a war against "migrant invasion," prompting a defensive response from governments and media to global disputes and conflicts. The reasons for forced migration, such as armed conflicts or climate change, are neither contextualized, nor are the origins of xenophobia analyzed.

The Midas Touch in this sense, in fact, is the incarnation of ignorance towards basic global threats. Climate change is a threat to the planet, and it is accompanied by global capitalism and armed conflicts that are accelerating it and trigger forced migration.

## Re-Narrating Midas Touch

Midas Dilemma is the curse of greed based on pure materialism. The starving rich is an oxymoron providing an inner truth. An oxymoron is a figure of speech that combines contradictory words with opposing like "old news," "deafening silence," or "organized chaos." Oxymorons may seem illogical at first, but in context they can be used as a rhetoric to point on the multiple contradictions in a post truth era.

While Midas was in the possession of a paradise garden, he poisoned it with his wish of a material wealth providing no nutrition. Neither food, nor stories or melodies.

Mahalla calls for transforming and converting Midas Touch metaphorically. A call to materialize ideas, dreams, memories into artistic expression as a nutrition for the unbroken spirit of resilience. Its value might be melting toxic motions of greed, dominance, exclusion and exploitation or exploring and dismantling these motions and dynamics.

The primary focus is on a reflection of global power structures, the alteration of gender roles, an awareness of a world in need of environmental protection as a priority, the enhancement of resilience, and the development of collaborative artistic endeavors. New narratives will emerge by connected practices of artists from different regions and backgrounds.

## Location



*Main Venue:*

**Büyük Valide Han**  
Çakmakçılar Ykş.  
No.33Fatih/Eminönü

*Second Venue:*



*Events:*

**Postane**  
Bereketzade,  
Camekan Sokak No.9  
Beyoğlu/Galata

## Communities



**Büyük Valide Han**  
Traditional  
Copper/Silverwork



## Artistic practice

Mahalla **Midas Touch** is dedicated to give a voice to the vulnerable, excluded, unseen and to revert vulnerability into strength. Questioning narratives appears through individual, collaborative and corresponding artistic works in a historical Set up in Istanbul inviting for site specific interventions.

Social and geographical boundaries, gender roles, and the exploiting of nature create dystopian environments that call for rethinking. Reflecting diverse narrative styles or inventing fresh tales is one of the primary objectives. The artists are free to use any artistic form or style. Innovative interpretations of the leitmotif are appreciated.

## Main Venue

**Büyük Valide Han (Founded 1651)**

The **Büyük Valide Han** is the largest historic Han (caravanserai) in Istanbul. This Han is in the central historic market district that extends from the Grand Bazaar to the Eminönü neighborhood on the shore of the Golden Horn.



A “Han” is a traditional space for trade in Turkey and date back to the times of the Silkroad. Traders and Handworkers would inhabit a Han and would host travelling traders and craftsmen. Today these historical spaces are threatened by gentrification and urban transformation. Still, you find the unique mixture of high-quality handwork and history in **Büyük Valide Han**.

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## Discourse

*In the Anthropocene all species are threatened with loss of a hearth, home, nest, forest, burrow, water, wilderness, plot of ground, a place where living things can settle and flourish—that essential thing the human species once used in order to define itself as ‘human’ and ‘civilized’. The ‘poor babe’ of the twenty-first century will need more than the kindness of others. Not only are the members of all species threatened with the loss of a home or habitat, but the earth also herself is at risk. (Barbara Creed)*

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## Collaborative Practice

*In December 2022 the Taliban officially banned the writing, publishing and reading of poetry from public life. After that, I decided that it should become the mission of poets around the world to write poetry in support of the people and poets of Afghanistan. (Somaia Ramish)*



Court Yard Büyük Valide Han

## Selected Artistic Positions Initiating Discourses

Austrian artist and curator **Katharina Swoboda** has taken part in the Mahalla Festival several times. She currently refers in her research to Barbara Creed, an Australian feminist theorist, who defines the migrant as part of a universal culture of stray. Stray as an entity of freedom to make choices and to induce an act of rebellion against set borders, real territorial borders, and borders in the mind.

In **Midas Touch** she invites to collaborate in “**Glittering the sky**”, a photographic performance as an act of collective creation of fantasy firmaments.



Short Film, *A Letter To The World*, by Uranus Musamen

Afghan poet **Uranus Musamen** presents, “**A Letter To The World**”, narrating the ongoing struggle of women in Afghanistan for freedom.

French Turkish curator/artist **Mathilde Melek An** works on a project focused on exploring liminality as a core theme. She defines liminal spaces as transitional or/and transformative environments that exist between defined states, inviting exploration of the emotional and physical transitions that shape our understanding of self and community.

As artist-curator she invites two artists, **Tbel Abuseridze**, from Tbilisi and **Ieva Kotryna** from Kaunas, to join a collaborative artistic intervention in Istanbul at the **Büyük Valide Han** during the **Mahalla Festival** in the frame of the **MagiC Carpets Platform**, a cultural mobility program supported partly by the European Union.

Istanbul-based **PILOT Galeri** joins the Mahalla Festival to explore the ‘golden paradox’ through the works of two remarkable artists: **Gözde “Mimiko” Türkkan** and **Emir Erkaya**.

Istanbul-based American artist **Nora Byrne** has presented several striking interactive works at the Mahalla Festival in recent years. For the festival, she invites participants to contribute to textile works through **direct human touch**, transforming collaborative gestures into tangible expressions on fabric.

Afghan Dutch poet **Somaia Ramish** is weaving magic murmurs against the silencing together with colleagues around the world.

Afghan photographer **Lida Hamid** unveils the unknown world of poor students in Afghanistan studying in the ruins of fallen apart spaces. **Naser Sahebzada** narrates the “**invisible me**” as staged photography from Kabul.

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## Supported by

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In cooperation with the  
MagiC Carpets Platform a  
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American Afghan graphic artist **Fatima Wojohat** works with colleagues in Kabul around drawings from ground zero for women, unveiling the rebellious resilience of the young generation of female artists confronted with gender apartheid and exclusion.

## Preliminary Artist List

- Tbel Abuseridze, GE
- Şevket Akıncı, TR
- Mathilde Melek An, FR/TR
- Thomas Büsch, DE, TR
- Nora Byrne, US, TR
- Emir Erkaya, TR
- İlhami Tunç Gencer, TR
- Romuald Jandolo, FR
- Talin Gülen Schenk, TR
- Lida Hamid, AF
- Ieva Kotryna Ski, LT, FR
- Uranus Musamen, AF, TR
- Naser Sahebzada, AF
- Katharina Swoboda, AT
- Gözde “Mimiko” Türkkkan, TR
- Fatima Wojohat, US/AF

And others

## Special Events

12/09/2025 - postane - 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm

**Journalism in Exile - Panel**, “Greening News Deserts. The innovative strength of exile media. Fighting for Freedom of Expression and Recognition.”

With **Fariba Nawa** (Chief editor On Spec-documentary Podcast), **Uranus Musamen** (Volant Media, Kite Runner), **Fatima Wojohat** (Artlords, USA), **Lida Hamid** (Photographer, Kabul). Moderator: **Jennifer Hattam**, freelance journalist and chair of Foreign Media Association Turkey and publisher of Istanbul etc. a newsletter covering the city’s art scene and urban trends.

Step into a journey of storytelling that transforms reality into unforgettable experiences. Discover humor as resistance against authoritarianism, explore photography as a clever tool to outsmart censorship, and uncover fresh perspectives that inspire, provoke, and connect.

13/09/2025 - Büyük Valide Han - 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm:

### Opening Ceremony Midas-Touch

Participation of 16 artists from Turkey, Afghanistan, Austria, France, Germany, Georgia, Lithuania and the US.

Performance by **Gözde “Mimiko” Türkkkan**, 6:30 pm  
Interactive workshop, “**Glittering the Sky**”, by **Katharina Swoboda**

Cocktail

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## Contact

Diyalog Derneği

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26/09/2025 - postane - 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm:

Screening/Talk: *“Fight like a girl/Pelea Como una chica”*

Short Film, 19:04, (2025) about **Gözde Mimiko Türkkkan**’s Installation & performance in collaboration with **Namibia Flores Rodriguez** produced for **15 Bienal de la Habana** at Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Centre, 2024

Talk with artist **Gözde Mimiko Türkkkan**, **Bihter Sabanoğlu** (writer, art critic) and **Nil Delahaye**, (Co-founder of BoMoVu, the Network for Sports and Body Movement for Vulnerable Groups, Researcher).

Refreshments

26/09/2025 - postane - 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm:

**Weaving Magical Whispers Against Silence**

Poetry of Resilience

With **Somaia Ramish**, **Lina Rozbih Haidari**, **Uranus Musamen**, and others

*“Load Poems Like a Gun”* is the striking title of **Somaia Ramish**’s poem that gained powerful momentum after the fall of Afghanistan and the return of Taliban rule. In 2023, it became the cornerstone of **BaamDaad**, the House of Poetry in Exile. Joining us from the Netherlands, Ramish reconnects with her Afghan poet friends. The evening opens with a short documentary about Ramish’s relocation to the Netherlands and her emergence as a poet in exile, using her voice and activism to campaign for freedom in Afghanistan.

Renowned Afghan American journalist **Lina Rozbih Haidari** is equally celebrated for her poetry and fiction writing. **Uranus Musamen**, a journalist and poet living in exile in Turkey, is a vital part of Istanbul’s feminist poetry circles.

Come and listen to these powerful voices and discover why literature has always held such a profound place in Afghan culture.

**Film Screening**

Join us for the **premiere of a stunning new film**, recently honored at the **Locarno Film Festival**. Expect surprises and an unforgettable cinematic experience!

Cocktail

Istanbul, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025 - Updates to Follow