

Hussein Chalayan: Proje4I Istanbul Museum of Contemporary Art.

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At the start of Hussein Chalayan's video installation *place to passage*, 2003, a small, futuristic vehicle zips down the ramp of a deserted London underground parking garage, hovering just above the pavement. The vehicle's sole occupant is a thin, lithe woman wearing a white unitard and skullcap. Traveling from London to Istanbul at hyperspeed, she eats, meditates, and rests, the pod providing her with nourishment and waste disposal. En route she passes through a bleak wintry landscape and an equally dismal urban environment dominated by billboards. At the end of her trip she whisks exhilaratingly along the Bosphorus as Istanbul's mosques and modern buildings rise on both banks.

A Turkish Cypriot by birth, now one of Britain's most celebrated and innovative fashion designers, Chalayan also has a presence in the art world. The journey from London to Istanbul reverses Chalayan's own itinerary, carrying the traveler from the artist's present home back to his ethnic origin. The ovoid pod is a self-contained, womblike environment occasionally glowing red from within; it fills with water at one point, suggesting gestation and imminent birth or perhaps rebirth. The piece thus recalls Matthew Barney's *Cremaster 4*, 1994, in which a motorcycle race serves as a metaphor for a biological process. But whereas Barney's imagery is profoundly idiosyncratic and steeped in arcana, Chalayan's aesthetic is accessible yet cool. The speed at which the trip unfolds and the video game-like quality of the deserted digital landscapes through which the pod travels make the journey feel compressed and impersonal, even though the traveler's memories, shown on-screen, are of her experiences as a happy mother surrounded by her children. Her face also appears on the billboards she passes, making it clear that she is exploring her own identity as well as the external world.

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The installation was projected on five screens surrounding the viewer. In some sections the action passed from screen to screen, creating a sense of motion and speed. At most other points one saw the same action from multiple perspectives. *Place to passage* thus evokes the velocity and intensity of our information-saturated global environment while paradoxically using spare imagery focused on a single figure against shifting landscapes.

In Istanbul, *place to passage* was accompanied by an extensive selection of videos of Chalayan's fashion shows from the last several years, which come across more as performance art pieces incorporating theatrical sets and live music than as conventional catwalk displays. The traveler in the video installation strongly resembles Chalayan's fashion models: Her blank facial expression mirrors the affectlessness of the runway. Chalayan's autumn 2000 collection "After Words" addressed some of the same themes as *place to passage*. Like the pod, it constituted a self-contained world in which the same objects could be configured as furniture, clothing, or luggage. That some of the objects could be transformed into suitcases alluded to the immigrant's permanent state of transience also suggested by the return voyage from London to Istanbul in the video installation. Chalayan's aesthetic is fundamentally a design aesthetic. He demonstrates convincingly that design can serve as the point of intersection for a host of disciplines: art, film, video installation, multimedia, fashion, and performance. Chalayan brings it all together in an accessible and compelling package that is cool and slick but speaks eloquently to the profound human need for a sense of belonging and identity.

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