

Frieze

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# FRIEZE

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## Must-See: Juliette Minchin Brings New Life to an Istanbul Hammam

Beneath the Turkish city, the French artist unveils responsive sculptures in wax and molten metal, works that breathe with visual pleasure and material wit

*This review is part of a series of Must-See shows, in which a writer delivers a snapshot of a current exhibition*

Wax hangs like fresh *yuba* in the subterranean Byzantine cistern of an Istanbul hammam. Shaped to suggest shrugged-off garments, it is displayed in patinated steel niches, as in works like *Niche 1* (all works 2025), or draped over limestone ledges and pedestals. Commissioned in the 16th century by the notorious Ottoman corsair Hayreddin Barbarossa and designed by court architect Sinan, the Zeyrek Çinili Hamam complex fell into disrepair before its 2023 renovation and reopening. Upstairs, the experience remains much the same as it always was: a shedding of layers, warming up on heated marble, an enthusiastic sloughing of skin, a foam massage and decompression. Downstairs, however, this purifying journey is paralleled in the almost alchemical transformations of wax, tin, and paper that make up Juliette Minchin's exhibition 'Where the River Burns'.



Juliette Minchin, 'Where the River Burns', 2025, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Zeyrek Çinili Hamam; photograph: Hadiye Cangökçe

Among the most arresting works is a series that references molybdomancy: a technique of divination – and, in Turkey, for dispelling the evil eye – involving pouring molten metal into cold water. The resulting shapes, in works like *When the River Burns 1* and *2*, at once suggest action painting and the webbed proboscis of a ribbon worm. There is considerable visual pleasure to be had in Minchin's material manipulation, which conspires with the sensitively restored cistern to beautiful effect; the wax textiles, in particular, look good enough to eat. The restorative, healing power of ancient rituals and collective care, the wellness-retreat-adjacent exhibition text seems to suggest, certainly holds true in an antechamber hung with the aforementioned niches and a series of gentle, marbled drawings from Minchin's 'Hydromancies' series.



Juliette Minchin, 'Where the River Burns', 2025, installation view.  
Courtesy: the artist and Zeyrek Çinili Hamam; photograph: Hadiye Cangökçe



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But in the cistern's coiled passages, the walls index memories, too – quite literally, in the form of carvings made by the enslaved sailors who were once housed here. There is a sense that history cannot always be neatly narrativized or contained. Metal drips from cracks in the walls and pools out from blocked-off alcoves, almost like a threat: less auspice, more portent.

*Juliette Minchin's 'Where the River Burns' is at Zeyrek Çinili Hamam, Istanbul, until 18 January 2026*