

THE GREATER ISTANBUL MUNICIPALITY  
NEJAT ECZACIBAŞI  
ART MUSEUM  
Project

Istanbul's historical Feshane building is reincarnated as Turkey's first private art museum. Although the completion of the building will extend till April, one section is already available for exhibits. The third International Istanbul Biennale will inaugurate the new Eczacıbaşı Museum.

The Dr. Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı Foundation asked Gae Aulenti, the creator of the Musee d'Orsay in Paris to take charge of the project. Ms. Aulenti, whose countless achievements throughout the world was lastly recognized by the Japanese Emperor with the Emperor's Award for Architecture, accepted the invitation after visiting Istanbul and inspecting the site in April 1991.

All the technical facilities of the museum are ready for the opening of the Biennale which takes place in the West wing. The work on the rest of the building will continue till April and the official opening will be celebrated then. The museum will cover an area of 4.000 sq. meters and will have many facilities which will be available for public use. The Eczacıbaşı Museum will host two international exhibits each year and will also have a permanent collection of Turkish and international works.



Forgotten for over half a century among the industrial plants along the Golden Horn, the FESHANE has reemerged from obscurity in 1986. The decision to clean the once glorious coast from all industrial plants, almost inadvertently, resurrected the FESHANE, whose main workshop was the only building allowed to stand by the sea in Eyüp, as a major center of attraction.

This time, though, the importance attributed to the building came from its historical value and the possibilities it offered for artistic creativity and not from its industrial significance. Since 1986, many art exhibits, fashion shows, concerts, light shows and even big parties have been organised in the decrepit building. The contrast between a gigantic 19th century structure and the vibrance of modern and post-modern art/living proved to be an irresistible source of attraction for many artists in Turkey and abroad. It is mostly for this particular challenge that Gae Aulenti accepted to take charge of the museum project.

The FESHANE stands as the symbol of two important movements from 19th century Ottoman Empire. First, along with some other grandiose projects, it was part of the Ottoman response to the challenge of industrial revolution in Europe. The bureaucracy of the time attempted to initiate an industrialization policy that would enable the ailing empire to protect its markets against the onslaught of cheap industrial goods from Europe. Second, the factory was built to produce the Fez (hence its name, meaning "the Fez making place") which was the symbol of the Ottoman dressing reforms of early 19th century, much as the hat was the symbol of the Atatürk reforms a century later.

The factory was built in 1835 but took its final form in 1868 after a fire destroyed everything but the steamer. In 1877, following a catastrophic defeat in the hands of the Russians, its management was transferred to the military. The young Turkish Republic after first civilianizing the company, turned it into the flagship of Sümerbank, the main state owned industrial/commercial/banking conglomerate which was one of the symbols of the 'étatization' policies of the 1930's.

The Dr. Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı Foundation, in collaboration with the Municipality of Istanbul, has undertaken a project to convert this historical building into Turkey's first private art museum. In a number of ways, the locale, its location and the undertaker are an inspiring match. The site is in the Defterdar neighbourhood of Eyüp, the only village along the Golden Horn that had a predominantly Muslim population in Ottoman times.

As outlined earlier, the FESHANE itself was the symbol of the Ottoman aspirations to modernize along Western lines. The Eczacıbaşı family is one of the first and most established industrial families of modern Turkey and, for long, the most important patron of all arts and artistic festivals in the country.

Hence, the museum will be a center where the combination of universal/western trends and Turkish modernisation will find their expression in a historical building situated in a neighbourhood where each corner bears the ornaments of local culture.