

THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

When this project began two and a half years ago, an impossible goal was set: to contain the Biennial in one space. The spaces used around the city for the first two Biennials were to be no more a necessity but a luxury. The city had no proper exhibition facilities for major exhibitions, and the need for a singular space had long been overdue. Istanbul many desolate monumental buildings, and they remain immune to the touristified fabric of the sites in the historical peninsula.

The search for space was finalized at what was then a desolate building, the Feshane. It is now is a brand new museum, a mutual child of the result of rigorous, unselfconscious efforts of a number of people and institutions.

The Biennial is a guest house, it operates as a both a sanctuary, a space of solitude and a site of pilgrimage. It does not in itself constitute a material body of work. It is rather a space to temporarily witness. To be a witness is to have memory, and the building itself became a site of memory.

Istanbul has been a host to passing cultures throughout her story. It is a passage, a gateway in that it almost becomes a non-site, splitting apart and holding distant presences together. This is signified by the peculiar presence of a singular edifice, the only rescued building of an early industrial agglomeration on the shores of the once glorious Golden Horn, from a face-lift. it stood solitary against the holy shrine of Eyâp across the street, it stood solitary on a water strip against ancient Jewish, Greek, Turkish settlements.

The Biennial is also a gateway for Difference housed in a town which once was and is now again. It is a consensus for Difference as athopia; as the affirmation and tolerance for coexistence.

Under the globally omnipresent airways is a resistance on the arrival; an arrival for the mobility of the past into the future. The modernist, progressive amnesia is troubled by the forces of restoration and re-dis-covery. Identity as stasis is challenged by the critique of identity and identity as production.

As I sit and write these at home, the children go wild in the courtyard, The humming of Massive Attack in the background blends into the hissing sounds of soft-porn on TV next door. I smoke a Muratti and sip Jack Daniels. In Istanbul, in a century old building, whose first residents had names I could not pronounce, whose present tenants come from geographies thousands of miles apart, I stop to wonder about the sad beauty of it all. Uttering words which I thought I would never remember, I retreat into a past future tense, devoid of a unitary sense of nation or history, emptied out of the institutional mega-discourses of my youth, emptied out of intolerance for what is and what is not me. A parable of Diogenes passed on by Thomas McEvelley rings strong in my ears, 'When they asked him how he would like to be buried, Diogenes replied, 'Upside down, because soon, down will be up.'

Now that the down and up are in constant process of revolution, we face a world on a tight rope, of a new dark age, with no modern light at the end of the tunnel, in age when culture is no more the property of a nation or a geography.