

CITY GUIDE

MY

Istanbul-based artist Bureak Bingol tells Arsalan Mohammad what makes the city a constant source of inspiration – as well as sharing a few of her favourite places around town...

ISTANBUL



W

What do you find inspiring, stimulating and unique about Istanbul and how does the city directly affect your work?

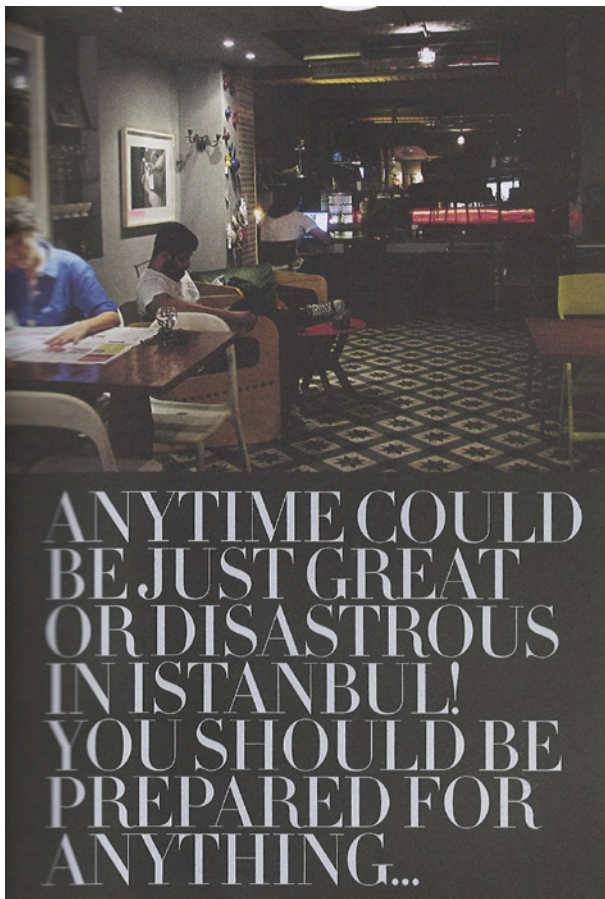
I moved to Istanbul four years ago. Since then, I try and understand it by both observing and asking people why they like it here. It may sound like a cliché but the Bosphorus is the answer by many why they like it here. The soothing effect surprises me every time I get close to it. Istanbul's an enigmatic city; it changes itself over and over for thousands of years. This change is so constant and powerful that it keeps the city in a transitional state at all times. The layers and residue that belong to different times and cultures all merge to create such a unique texture. My works always involve the cities I live. Soon after, I settled in Istanbul, I made an installation entitled 'Unforeseen Transformation' which actually was a sort of visual wish to connect the things I do, my surroundings and myself, through a specific pattern, which happened to be a floral Victorian style. This wish came true and manifested itself into the next project: 'A Carriage Affair', which was an examination of a tradition through a novel written by Recaizade Mahmut Ekrem in 1896. My focus just shifted to where am I and where I'm from, and I started researching the various ways of dealing with such traditional patterns. Both the novel and the exhibition were questioning the country's Westernisation process and the consequent identity issue.

How does Istanbul directly inspire your work?

As a person from Ankara, the capital of the modern Turkey, the history that I come across in everyday life inspires me to work on past times and different traditions in a contemporary context. My next projects involve research on local history and it is very exciting for me that it will make me discover more which ultimately makes me one step closer to define Istanbul.

(Above) A view from Tepebasi to the Golden Horn. (Below) A view from the terrace of the Grand Hotel De Londres.





ANYTIME COULD
BE JUST GREAT
OR DISASTROUS
IN ISTANBUL!
YOU SHOULD BE
PREPARED FOR
ANYTHING...

(Above, Right) On the terrace of the Grand Hotel De Londres.
(Above, Left) The Marva Cafe in Galata, Istanbul.
(right) Simit!
(Courtesy of Mine Erkmen)



There has been a dramatic increase in art events in the city over the past few years. How do you see events such as Art International, Contemporary Istanbul etc benefiting the city?

Well, it's a reality that having two ambitious art fairs in the city caused a certain amount of competition, which creates a very stimulating atmosphere in terms of the events, projects and network that forms around it. I'm not sure if this giant city has that many 'art lovers', which will feed both fairs financially in the future, but it is possible to see its impact today among art people.

Where have you seen the most exciting developments in recent times in the city – (institutions, galleries, museums etc)

The Beyoğlu area is always exciting for its institutions, galleries and museums. Karaköy is also gaining its momentum as a spot that attracts art crowds. I just hope all of them last!



Which museums and historic sites do you most like?

I think Istanbul itself is a historic site. However I like being in the historic peninsula where the Topkapı Palace, Hagia Sofia and a lot of museums are. Despite the reductive effect of heavy tourism, it is still fascinating. And I'm really looking forward to the new contemporary museums that are on the way.

Where is a great place to hang out and relax?

I live in Beyoğlu and I spend most of my time here. So there are a lot of places to go but Urban, İmді Cafe and Mavra are the places that I really feel at home. The terrace of Grand Hotel de Londres is a place that I like for the view of Golden Horn. Other than that, going to a hamam regularly is something I started to do after moving to Istanbul. I usually go to Çemberlita Hamamı, not only for a timeless experience in a place built by Architect Sinan in 1584, but also for the healing and regenerative effect of it.

Where do you like to shop? Any unusual and unique shops in Istanbul you can recommend to us?

There is no specific shop I go to but I really like little boutiques and small shops in the Galata, Cihangir and Cukurcuma areas. I think going small and local is something we should invest for a better environment both social and ecological.

Istanbul's knownod – where would you recommend to go and

Simit [bread] is a classic and might be the most consistent thing in Istanbul. A 17th century traveller, Evliya Çelebi, wrote that there are 70 bakeries in Istanbul making simit in 1630. It is circular bread with sesame seed on it. It is a food that everybody loves - even the seagulls... it's a must, to feed a seagull with simit while commuting to one continent to the other.

Do you have a favourite hidden part of town you like to visit?

This is a very old and a very big city and I especially enjoy walking on the streets that I've never walked and talking to the people there. It's incredible how different lives just live side by side.

When's the best time of year to come and visit?

I think anytime could be just great or disastrous in Istanbul! You should just be prepared for anything...

What would be your advice to the first time art-lover visiting Istanbul?

Last year many of the most exciting 'art' happened on the streets realised by the public during or after the Gezi protests. I think it enabled us to see each other and taught us the joy of doing things together. It was just amazing. There are still projects coming along, fed with the Gezi spirit. Apart from the listings of galleries and museums, I suggest them to connect with local people to discover some unlisted events taking place around the city. Kadıköy is an area on the Asian side that hosts lots of events, spaces and artist initiated projects. **MBA**
www.galerizilberman.com/zilberman/burcak-bingol