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GRANT SCHEME FOR COMMON CULTURAL HERITAGE: PRESERVATION AND DIALOGUE BETWEEN TURKEY AND THE EU–II (CCH-II)
MULTIDISCIPLINARY PLATFORMS FOR CULTURAL COLLABORATION (CO-LAB) PROJECT

MENTORS FROM TURKEY

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As I strolled, facing – to name but a few – rattling tea cups placed on trays hanging from the ceiling, images coming and going on a wall-sized illustration under changing light and colours, the composition woven out of personal clothes turned into threads across the Istanbul Design Biennial's designer residency programme *Camekân*'s open studios; I remembered the very first meeting we had had with the participants in Barın Han a month earlier. I remembered thinking: will these eight designers, each with their different sets of tools and areas of research and interest coming together in Istanbul, come through the process of producing personal works on a common ground, and if so, how will they do it?

As the participants, all initially strangers to Istanbul, were immersed in the city and its urban vernacular landscape through a programme, skillfully designed by the Istanbul Design Biennial, that included walks and talks, the keyword – *adaptation* – became more and more pronounced by the day. The liberal and very hands-on dialogues that connect the inhabitants of the city with their surroundings immediately seeped into the studio allocated inside Barın Han as found materials, objects, bits and parts started to accumulate along with trials, mock-ups, sketches and discussions. As the participants became a temporary community transforming the once empty space into a habitable studio, they not only performed a "conceptual" coming together on a common ground, but also experimented and practiced it on a day-to-day basis as they worked on-site, side-by-side.

As an ongoing practice, "making" also permeates Barın Han's legacy. One senses it from the very first moment when entering the bookbinding and marbling workshop and Emin Barın's studio. I walk across this intriguing piece of architecture, with its unexpected volumes and surprising connections reminiscent of the winding streets and pathways that the participants followed to and from Barın Han almost everyday. I see bread crumbs transformed into a texture covering the floor. I walk through a room, immersed in

an interactive animation consisting of rotating cubes on a perfect grid, then go out and have a glass of tea at the entrance of the building which has been transformed into the “Emin Çayevi” (Emin’s tea house).

Perched on a stool made of bent galvanised steel sheets, I think of the same common ground we had discussed at the beginning of the month. The process itself is what has generated this common ground: through such actions as adapting the initial proposals to the situations, negotiating with each other, with the day-to-day and eventually with a city that was new to all, adapting and responding to the city’s attitude, to the way it places materials in a web of interrelations, in a very short time, the participants embodied this attitude within their practice. The İKSV team was very competent and helpful during the production process which resulted in a wonderful exhibition, an exciting narrative that ties eight heterogeneous proposals together through people and materials.

I feel privileged to have had the chance to meet and work with the participants, the other mentors and the Barın Han and İKSV teams, and to have been a part of this programme, connecting different people and their creative practices, and providing them with an opportunity to present what they are so good at doing.

CANDAŞ ŞİŞMAN

For eight artists and designers with very different cultural backgrounds to come together in hot spots across Istanbul, form a collective, encounter local artists/designers/craftspersons, discover time-space-people and experience local textures, smells, materials, points of view, sounds and culture in a hybrid manner is extremely valuable. I guess that such a method materialises the journey or playground that every artist and designer dreams of. This experience has been a thrill for participants and mentors alike, because of how involved everyone was throughout the process. I am convinced that the significance of the project will appear in broad daylight through its lasting effects on the long run rather than merely the immediate outcomes it allowed for the production of, that it will open up new horizons in every participant's creative journey.

MERİÇ KARA

Our visit of the Barın Han, located in the district of Çemberlitaş, before *Camekân* started, gave us the opportunity to discover the area's specificities, the many spaces that the han contains and the unique web of relations that bind them. I was very impressed by the amount of freedom to intervene which this space grants artists, with the traces of past exhibitions that it keeps, with the way in which the works formed a whole with the venue itself and with the very existence of such a space, as open to artists as it is, somewhere in the city. Being able to experience the Han culture so vividly, the traces of history carried by the ustentils kept in the press room, to hear the memories of the venue's owner, Mr. Emin Barın, to view his work and benefit from his experience was truly inspirational. As for the empty space on the top floor allocated as a studio for the duration of the programme, it was only waiting, full of possibilities, for the participants to claim it.

As they started occupying and shaping it, those eight emerging designers, all initially strangers to Istanbul, selected to take part in *Camekân*, progressively turned this empty area into a collaboration and exhibition space. From the very first days of the programme on, the place began to fill with traces left by the tours of the city, discussions and

observations, bits of work attempts and mental progress. Throughout the programme, we witnessed as exhibition fragments and eye-opening experiments took shape. The fact that the mentees were initially strangers to Istanbul actually constituted an advantage, as they were able to detect and remind us of those characteristics and assets which, amid the hustle and bustle of the city, we do not distinguish any more because we became so accustomed to it.

During our regular meetings between mentors and mentees, whether these happened online or physically, we found ample opportunity to thoroughly discuss the projects as they unfolded. The chosen topics were all challenging and intriguing. For the most part, the participants remained faithful to these topics, which they had already chosen prior to their arrival in Istanbul. But throughout the four weeks of the programme, they carried their initial ideas much further. By each choosing differents spaces within Barın Han to exhibit their work, they shaped a curatorial itinerary that allowed the spectators to discover the Han in depth, even starting at the very entrance, on the sidewalk. The resonance with the venue that the works managed to capture was quite breathtaking in that sense.

Throughout the duration of the programme, we witnessed as eight mentees who were absolute strangers at first set out to work and produce together, putting their energy, approaches, cultures and eventually the relationships they built in the balance, and transformed an initially empty place into a living curatorial unit. Witnessing this metamorphosis of a barren space into a friendly, buzzing, living and working setup, especially during the last week of the production phase, was absolutely thrilling. The production support granted by İKSV was instrumental in allowing the final exhibition its high level of professionalism. Eventually, all the works were equally compelling in terms of content, implementation and installation. Having had the chance to take part in such a meaningful and multicultural programme, allowing for my encounter with Barın Han, the Istanbul Design Biennial's team, the other mentors and the mentees, has been an incredibly inspiring experience, an unforgettable moment.