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*installation view at 'Istanbul: Passion, Joy, Fury'*  
 MAXXI Museum, Rome 2015  
 photo: Musacchio Ianniello  
 courtesy of Fondazione MAXXI



# ENGAGING ISTANBUL

6 stories of Exchange, Change & Growth

JEREMIAH DAY  
 GABRIELE GARAVAGLIA  
 NIKOLAJ BENDIX SKYUM LARSEN  
 MARIEKE WARMELINK  
 ANNA BAK  
 SOPHIA POMPÉRY

BY ANNA ZIZLSPERGER

## ENGAGING ISTANBUL

an essay on  
EXCHANGE, CHANGE & GROWTH

BY  
ANNA ZIZLSPERGER

Residencies have become recognised as an important way for artists to develop their career, a significant platform of exchange and an alternative form of education – especially for artists from countries where the arts education is not very strong. They also play a crucial role in the development of local art scenes by providing space and opportunity, as well as an international network and a safety-net, particularly to young artists who are only just starting to face the sometimes difficult realities of the art market. For artists from Western countries staying in an area within the MENASA region, such as Turkey, residencies can provide critical exposure to different socio-political contexts and new ideas, as well as a way to critically engage with the world outside of the residents' own cultures and comfort zones.

I talked to six artists who temporarily lived and worked in Istanbul to learn about their experiences in the city, their reasons for coming here and what they took with them from their stay. As discontinued non-profit projects have a history of being forgotten very quickly in a fast-paced and constantly changing city like Istanbul, I complemented their stories with the histories of some of the institutions that run or used to run artist residencies in Turkey.

Artist residencies are a relatively recent development in Turkey and initially began as agreements between Istanbul and various European cities. The Berlin Senate programme, one such residency that was founded in 1989, was the first of its kind in Istanbul and has hosted two Berlin artists every year since its inception. It wasn't until 2003 that IPR, the first larger-scale residency programme, opened in the city. As part of Platform Garanti (since re-opened as SALT), IPR ran until 2010.

Jeremiah Day came to Istanbul in 2009 as a participant of the IPR residency. One of the most significant results of his stay in the city is the collaborative work with his co-resident Can Altay

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titled *You Don't Go Slumming*. As a fractured investigation of the city, the project combined Altay's almost urbanistic approach to the ecology of the city with Day's concern for storytelling and memory. The project focuses on stuffed mussels, a street food sold everywhere in Istanbul, which is also regarded as a symbol of the city. Just as mussels filter the water and absorb traces of pollution, Altay and Day filter and absorb all kinds of other, more abstract traces through their joint art project. Newspaper clippings refer to events such as the 'Ergenekon case', an ongoing police investigation that has seen hundreds of prominent citizens, including retired army generals, put on trial and accused of planning a coup. This documentation merges with Day's and Altay's own photographs of Istanbul streets as well as the waterfront of the city. Lines between reality and documentation are blurred; the project is accompanied by a video interview with a fisherman complaining about having been misrepresented by the media, who had filmed him with secret cameras. The fragmented presentation of these mementos of Day's and Altay's shared time in Istanbul leaves their story of the city incomplete and the narrative to the viewer.

The work was first exhibited at Arcade, London and Artists Space, New York in 2009. Further exhibited at SALT Galata, Istanbul in 2014 and at the 5th Thessaloniki Biennial in 2015, the project is currently on view at the MAXXI Museum in Rome until 31 April 2016. Discussing his residency at Platform Garanti and his time in the city, Jeremiah Day states: "What is actually most significant about Istanbul for me is the conviction that art making is connected to civil society and that this conviction is not explored theoretically, but *in practice*, curatorially, institutionally, and through the individual artist's attitude as well."

After the closure of IPR, Caravansarai opened in 2010 – the first in a row of independent artist residencies in Istanbul. Located in the hardware district of Karaköy, the programme provided its founders and guests a chance to work freely and have open discussions until it was discontinued in 2014. Berlin-based Italian artist Gabriele Garavaglia came to Istanbul in 2012 through the *Global Art Programme (GAP) – Waiting for Expo 2015*, a series of exchange residencies between Italy and many other countries created in partnership with the universal Expo 2015 of Milano. Garavaglia stayed at Caravansarai for two months and opened an exhibition titled *Ruins and Fortifications* there in March 2012. His project focused on the Istanbul district of Tarlabaşı and the people forced to leave this area due to urbanisation and gentrification processes. When walking around the empty streets, he was literally confronted with 'ruins and fortifications' and translated these into artworks for the show. In 2013 Garavaglia returned to Istanbul for a workshop at Apartment Project, a space founded by Selma Asal in 1999 as one of the first artist-run spaces in the city. At the end of the workshop, there was an exhibition called *bufferzone: checkpoint*, which opened in October 2012 at the Istanbul non-profit art space DEPO. The project took a closer look at divided cities; fenced sovereign nations; demographic, cultural and social class segregations; and how we define those who reside beyond borders, often construed as 'the other'.

In 2015 Garavaglia opened a new version of the installation *Ruins and Fortifications* as part of the *GAP - Waiting for Expo 2015* group exhibition at the Fabbrica del Vapore in Milan. When asked about his time in Istanbul, Garavaglia states: "I'm very interested in the informal structure of the city. I thought that between the chaos I could find space and time to do what normally, in a European western city, you are not allowed to do. It's something powerful, similar to the sensation of freedom but it is not."

It was only shortly after the opening of Caravansarai that artists Didem Özbek and Osman Bozkurt started the residency PIRPIR in 2011, hosting artists in collaboration with the Danish and Dutch Arts Council. Their independent art space PiST///, opened in 2006, was already internationally established as a place open to artistic production, collaboration, discussion and experimentation. Sadly, the residency was discontinued in 2013, as Özbek and Bozkurt needed time to focus on the production of their own work. Still, during its 31-month period of operation, the programme hosted 26 art professionals. Another very important aspect of PIRPIR was its aim to provide free studio space to artists from Turkey. PiST/// tried to develop a support structure to provide a production budget, but this project did not succeed. Regarding the reasons for its failure, Didem Özbek states that "the main difficulty in Turkey is the lack of local funding to facilitate hosting or inviting artists from abroad to collaborate."

In 2012, Özbek and Bozkurt invited Danish artist Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen - whose video installation *Rendezvous* they had seen at Sharjah Biennial 9 in 2009 - to come to Istanbul and stay at PIRPIR for 4 months. The artist, who had never been to Turkey before, was interested by their proposal in part because the location fit in perfectly with a strand of his work that traces migratory routes from Europe back to their origins. He was granted a flat and studio in Istanbul via the the residency organised by the Danish Arts Council and PiST///.

A few weeks after his arrival, Larsen went off to shoot his film *End of Season* in the small village of Üyüklütatar, close to the river Meriç in north-western Turkey at the border to Greece. Until 2012 the river was the busiest entry point into Europe for illegal migrants. Although illegal migration is a reoccurring theme throughout the film, the work also expands upon the concept: like many other small communities, Üyüklütatar is losing its young population to big cities, where they are moving to work in factories. The film was screened in January 2014 in a small cafe in the village of Üyüklütatar, where Larsen had shot the film.

The Danish artist's residency in Istanbul opened up further international opportunities for him - At a studio visit organised by PiST/// Larsen met November Paynter, Associate Director of Research and Programmes at SALT. Paynter decided to screen a work-in-progress-edit of *End of Season* at the 59th Oberhausen Short Film Festival in Germany in 2013, and in early 2015 Larsen was invited to show the world premiere of his installation *End of Dreams*, which is part of a series of works on migration, at SALT Galata. The project is a response to the countless migrants who are drowning

as they attempt to cross the Mediterranean and Aegean seas to get to Europe. Regarding his time in Istanbul, Larsen states: "[It] seems to be a city of contrasts: Modern, traditional, religious, anarchist, rich, poor etc. It is a melting pot of cultures. It has an incredible buzz. It is welcoming, it has social and political friction, it has history, it points into the future, it is full of very local areas and at the same time it seems very international."

Maumau Artist Residency, which opened in 2012 in the now mostly gentrified and artsy neighbourhood of Cihangir in Beyoğlu, focuses on actively mixing visual and performing artists with curators, historians, and writers. Dutch artist Marieke Warmelink first came to Istanbul through maumau in 2012. As her artistic practice responds to socio-political issues conveyed in the news, the artist was interested in the historical and political climate in Turkey. During her stay she produced the performance *House of Revelation*, a 'living installation' and intervention in which performances took place throughout different floors of the residency building, in addition to a display of paintings. Each floor symbolised a layer of society and referred to how politics, media, and government are related to each other. In several rooms various people were playing a 'role'. In one of the rooms six 'politicians' were invited to partake in an elaborate feast; men were served delicious food as the crowd moved through the rooms. The conversations of the 'politicians' emphasised the conflict of traditional values opposed to the need for gradual change in the socio-political system in Turkey. Coincidentally, Warmelink presented her project a few months before the outburst of the Gezi protests, which took place in the immediate surroundings of the exhibition space.

After her residency at maumau Warmelink returned to Istanbul many times, first for Artlab at Mixer - a gallery-integrated, open-studio initiative organised by Mehmet Kahraman - and then to conduct a performance titled *Democratic Kumpir* at Sanatorium Gallery during the IPA Performance Festival. In 2013, the artist organised *Shifting Office, Local Vessel*, a residency in collaboration with Sine Ergün at maumau. Together with four other Dutch artists she created new work in response to the city. In 2015, Warmelink was invited to present a performance at the General Consulate of the Netherlands during the 14th Istanbul Biennial. Later that - year she presented *The Act of Hanging*, a performance at the opening of the exhibition *Alice* at Studio Kein, Istanbul. Being in Istanbul and taking part in the residency allowed Warmelink to "define [her] working method more clearly; making work in response to a specific location, in collaborating with [her] environment and with the means that were available." She goes on to say: "It was in Istanbul I met the right people at the right time which naturally led to many more international opportunities working in a similar way."

Anna Bak came to Istanbul in 2014 with the support of the Danish Arts Council, which currently provides three-month residencies in collaboration with the art institution SALT. Bak states that she was particularly interested in the "post-industrial melancholy and alienation often associated with the loss of harmony with nature or of 'original' culture." She feels that due to the city's exposure to the problematic effects of urbanisation and gentrification "there

is a conflict between Istanbul's need to develop and modernise and preserve and protect its cultural heritage."

During her stay Bak made collages and drawings from found magazines and postcards, as well as from photos she took of the city. They became more an examination of what she found interesting, what stood out in the urban space and seemed foreign to her. The artist had a special interest in the old wooden houses in Istanbul that were slowly crumbling in between other modern buildings. To Bak, these houses became emotional objects connected to the history of the city, making her think of Orhan Pamuk's definition of 'huzun', "a state of mind that is ultimately as life-affirming as it is negating." Bak also started to produce a larger leatherwork titled *A congruous variety of pieces or parts* during her stay. The patchwork leather carpet was inspired by Turkish traditions of leatherwork, patterns and carpet making.

"Istanbul was a fairy tale. Istanbul is a challenge." This is how Sophia Pompéry sums up her experience of the city. She first came to live in Istanbul in 2012 during a six-month artist residency financed by DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), and has been coming back ever since. She mentions that Istanbul had been promoted as a cultural hotspot in Germany particularly after becoming the cultural capital of Europe in 2010. "Istanbul is multi-faced and vibrant," she says. "Istanbul is oriental, exotic, western,

beautiful and brutal at once." Pompéry's relationship with the city goes deeper than the artist residency endeavour she embarked upon in 2012 - Her ancestors were Ottoman citizens that migrated to Hungary in the 18th century. Another point of contact was when Pompéry met René Block, the founder of TANAS, an art space in Berlin that followed and presented the ongoing developments in contemporary art from Turkey between 2008 and 2013. Block curated the inaugural exhibition *STARTER* at the art institution

ARTER in Istanbul in 2010 and invited Pompéry to participate. She describes this event as a "key experience" in her life as an artist. The show was a starting point for Pompéry's relationship with her current gallerist in Paris, and people continue to refer to this exhibition when getting in touch with her for projects or research.

With a strong interest in physics and optical phenomena, Pompéry decided to observe the city by restricting colour: as an exercise she took a series of colour photographs when, by chance, the natural light situation in Istanbul turned monochrome. When she returned to Istanbul after her residency, the artist took on a film project titled *Atölye*, investigating a Turkish-Armenian

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*„there is a clear need for more support of local, non-profit initiatives promoting exchange, change and growth“*

workshop that designed and produced plaster elements. The owners of this workshop had kept moulds of reliefs and ornaments of most of Istanbul's historical buildings for five generations, thus preserving the architectural historical memory of the town. Pompéry discovered the workshop by coincidence, peeking through a keyhole of the building in Istanbul's Tophane district.

*Atölye* is installed in a dark room, where a wandering spotlight lightens the walls and reveals countless diverse plaster elements. One has the impression of being in a plaster workshop, but when approaching the walls, the trompe-l'oeil effect of the beam of light becomes clear and reveals that it is instead a projected video of the interior of the workshop with all its moulds and casts of stucco ornaments. The video gives no information about the location of the place, as most of the fragments are in a European rococo or belle-epoque style. However, the atmospheric sound of Istanbul recorded on-site, which plays throughout the exhibition, gives the viewer an idea of the geographical context. The moment when someone starts to play Mozart's *Rondo alla Turca* on a twinkling piano in the ballet-school next door is emblematic of the ways in which Western Orientalism and the Ottoman version of the rococo style are interwoven. *Atölye* tries to answer the question of whether the atmosphere of a place can be captured in a work of art and transferred to another city.

In a way Pompéry's work can make us reflect on the intentions of artist residencies - bringing artists to a new environment or culture so that they can (ideally) be inspired by the different surroundings, produce work that responds to these foreign places, and then bring a piece of 'the other' back to where they came from to let their peers have a glimpse through the keyhole into a different world. But can this truly be called a 'cultural exchange'? What if the artists living in this world behind the keyhole don't have the same financial means to go abroad and experience the other world they would like to see?

Many Western artists have access to various support systems, and most of the residents we talked to came to Istanbul with financial support through programmes from their home countries. Unfortunately, artists from Turkey lack this support - a gap which is only partially filled by private institutions such as İKSV, who support the stay of Turkish artists at Cité des Arts in Paris, or the newly founded private organisation SAHA, which funds residencies and other international projects for artists from Turkey.

Istanbul's art scene has become extremely vibrant during the past 10 to 20 years due to its location between Europe and the Middle East, making it a significant hot-spot for very current and varied art practices. However, there is a clear need for more support of local, non-profit initiatives promoting exchange, change and growth of this promising scene in a country dealing with an inconsistent socio-political situation - a gap which can only be filled by visionary patrons with an understanding of and commitment to the scene behind the commercial art market.

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**Jeremiah Day** (b. 1974, USA) first exhibited in Istanbul at Platform Garanti (2005), where he was a resident from 2008-09 and produced the collaborative project 'You Don't Go Slumming' with Can Altay. The project, which was exhibited at Salt Galata (2014) and the Thessaloniki Biennial (2015), is currently on show at MAXXI in Rome. Day is presently working on a new performance, 'Letter To Turkey', which explores the spontaneous 'forums' that emerged in Turkey after the Gezi Park struggle through the broader context of Hannah Arendt's theoretical work on council-democracy and the artist's own experience of town-hall politics in New England.

**Gabriele Garavaglia** (b. 1981, Italy) studied Architecture in Milan and London. His artist research is based on a conceptual approach and is characterised by a series of site-specific interventions, installations and sculptures through which to explore the surrounding space as a tank of humanity. He has participated in several national and international exhibitions, including 'Bufferzone: Checkpoint', DEPO, Istanbul (2013) and 'GAP - Waiting for Expo 2015', Fabbrica del Vapore, Milan (2015). His Istanbul residencies include Global Art Programme/Caravansarai (2012) and Apartment Project (2013). Garavaglia lives and works in Berlin.

**Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen** (b. 1971, Denmark) received a BA from Chelsea College of Art and MFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London. In recent years migration and disempowerment have been main areas of his research; the project 'End of Season', produced during his residency at PIRPIR (PiST///) Istanbul, was on view at SALT Beyoğlu, Istanbul (2014) and the installation 'End of Dreams' at SALT Galata (2015). Larsen has attended residencies through the Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE (2005); Danish Art Council & PIRPIR, Istanbul (2012); and Qwatz, Italy (2014). The artist lives and works in Paris.

**Marieke Warmelink** (b. 1977, Holland) is an interdisciplinary performance artist whose works are developed in public spaces and presented at art, performance and theatre events, as well as festivals. Warmelink's exhibitions, performances and projects in Istanbul include 'House of Revelation', maumau art space (2012); 'Democratic Kumpir', Sanatorium (2013); 'Of Kings & Consuls', Consulate General of the Netherlands (2015); and 'The Act of Hanging' (2015). Warmelink lives and works in Amsterdam.

**Anna Bak** (b. 1985, Denmark) has a MFA from The Funen Arts Academy, Denmark. The artist works in different mediums, primarily installation, and is interested in stories that are based on nature-culture conflicts and socio-cultural paradoxes. Her residencies include The Danish Arts Council Artist in Residency Programme, Istanbul (2014) and the Capacete Art Institute, Rio de Janeiro (2016). The artist lives and works in Copenhagen.

**Sophia Pompéry** (b. 1984, Germany) studied fine arts at Berlin-Weissensee School of Art. The artist produces works inspired by everyday objects and physical phenomena. She was a participant at the 'Institute for Spatial Experiments', an educational research project by Olafur Eliasson, and was the laureate for the DAAD Fellowship for a residency in Istanbul in 2012. Her works have been exhibited at various international galleries and institutions, and were included in ARTER's inaugural exhibition 'Starter' in Istanbul (2010). Her solo show at ARTER titled 'The Silent Shape of Things' was on view from June-August 2012. Pompéry lives and works in Berlin.

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from top:

**RUINS AND FORTIFICATIONS**

installation view at 'Global Art Programme - Waiting for Expo 2015', Fabbrica del Vapore, Milan 2015  
courtesy of the artist

**GABRIELE GARAVAGLIA**  
courtesy of the artist

from top:

NIKOLAJ BENDIX SKYUM LARSEN  
photo: Jonas Mortensen  
courtesy of the artist

END OF SEASON, 2014  
*video*  
photo: Jonas Mortensen  
courtesy of the artist

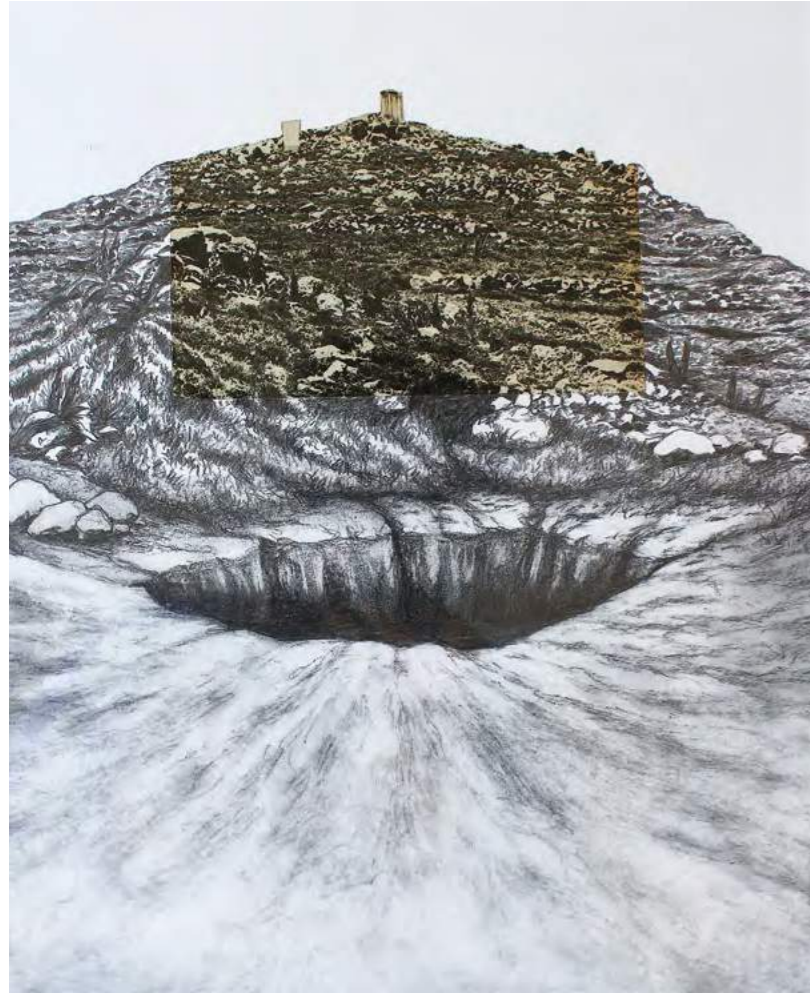


from top:

THE ACT OF HANGING  
*performance*  
*'Alice' exhibition, Studio Kein, Istanbul 2015*  
courtesy of the artist

MARIEKE WARMELINK  
OF KINGS & CONSULS  
*performance*  
*parallel event of 14th Istanbul Biennial*  
*Consulate General of the Netherlands, Istanbul 2015*  
courtesy of the artist





clockwise from top:

**UNTITLED, 2014**  
*collage on paper*  
 courtesy of the artist

**A CONGRUOUS VARIETY OF PIECES OR PARTS**  
 2014  
*patchwork leather carpet*  
 courtesy of the artist

**ANNA BAK**  
 courtesy of the artist



from top:

**THE SILENT SHAPE OF THINGS**  
*exhibition view at ARTER, Istanbul 2012*  
 courtesy of the artist & ARTER

**SOPHIA POMPÉRY**  
 ©Honeybunn Photography

