



Photographer Ertuğ in search of pure light -- just like architect Sinan

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He runs after the most pure and poetic traces of light for days or even months to catch the authentic and natural light of his subjects. In his photographs, the products of a delicate art, you sometimes see the patience of a calligrapher and sometimes that of a sculptor. Although he doesn't hold exhibitions often, many people know architect and photographer Ahmet Ertuğ through his books.

Gallery Ellipsis, a new contemporary photography gallery inaugurated last week in the Cukurcuma quarter of the Fatih district, currently hosts Ertuğ's latest exhibition, entitled "Saray ve Ötesi" (The Palace and Beyond). In a bid to make Turkey's much-neglected and disregarded cultural heritage more visible, Ertuğ says he has been trying to send a message abroad that his home country has an extremely rich cultural heritage. "Most people abroad think that we are not connected with these historical structures," he notes.

The structures depicted in Ertuğ's photos are actually always before people's eyes, but their beauty and glory usually go unnoticed. These places of grandeur include the Topkapı Palace, the Ayasofya Museum and the Süleymaniye Mosque. Ertuğ has also photographed the works of the great architect Mimar Sinan. Ertuğ's photos bring out the eternal dance of light that takes place in and around these awe-inspiring structures. You should brace yourself for the size of the photographs, since Ertuğ takes them with large format cameras.

Ertuğ's childhood dreams told him to become a jazz guitarist. But his destiny led him to his father's desires instead of his, taking him as far as the prestigious Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, one of the world's best. Through the projects he carried out there, he won a fellowship with a Japanese foundation. For years he worked under Sedat Hakkı Eldem to learn how to look at and see places. The things he saw and experienced in Japan changed his perception. In a sense he received an education in "how to look." He says: "Before touring the Zen gardens, they present you with the most brilliant view of them from a round window. It's as if you enter the object. That's what my vision of archi-



Ayasofya Museum



Süleymaniye Mosque

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ecture is like. I think of myself as the object and leave the viewers of the photograph face to face with that cultural heritage," Ertuğ stresses.

What makes him distinctive is his ability to leave the viewers alone with the core spirit of the structure. It is quite difficult to resist the captivating beauty of his photographs. Before photographing a place, he starts observing the light and carefully calculating what sort of angles the light will create at what hour of the day, and at

which times during the year. This way, he knows exactly where to place himself and his camera. Through this planning, the mystery and poetic side of the light reveal themselves to him. For instance, the artist takes photos of Sinan's works during the months of October and November. According to him, the most naked and purest state of light emerges during these times. When he is out on a mission to photograph a work of Sinan, he tries to see it the way Sinan had seen it.

Ertuğ says: "Sinan has the purest form of aesthetic and the art of engineering. He was perfectly aware of the secret of light, and he followed the light in İstanbul very meticulously. I'm following in the footsteps of that light. I try to see the works as they had been imagined by Sinan."

When technology fails

It isn't easy to determine the authentic light of a building. Sometimes able and sometimes unable to catch that authentic light, the artist is always searching. Ertuğ emphasizes that Byzantine structures don't let in sufficient light, obliging him to use lanterns during his photo-taking sessions inside such buildings. He completely turns off all the modern lights there, and he only uses light from lanterns, which help him to convey the depth of the artifacts inside. He complains that technology is insufficient for capturing the beauty these works, adding that he has to buy new lenses and cameras every year. Except for the inescapable modern-day cables and lamps in his photos sometimes, there is nothing else to indicate to the viewer the era in which these photographs were taken. As a matter of fact, his aim is to efface the sense of time in the photos, which is why he takes photos without people in them, stemming from his desire to take allow eternity to show itself in his pictures. He has even had the electric lamps removed from places that date back to the 16th century to leave the viewer wondering.

The artist is about to finish a book on the ancient city of Ephesus, after which he will start working on Aphrodisias. But his real passion is İstanbul. He says: "With the exception of the monumental structures, there is not much left in this city. We still get by through topography and the beauty of the silhouette. A big part of the historic peninsula is made up of very low quality structures that have come to the end of their lives. İstanbul will be European Capital of Culture in 2010, so we have to launch projects to make this city a world capital."

Those who visit Ertuğ's exhibition will from then on view İstanbul, the city of seven hills, differently on their way to Asia from Europe. Art enthusiasts have until Nov. 30 to see the magnificent records of light. Tel.: (212) 249 4892