













Replica



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As a holiday destination, Turkey is multifaceted. There is a dizzyingly impressive cultural history of many civilisations, ranging from the Lydians, the Greeks and the Romans to the Seljuks, Armenians, Kurds and Ottomans, all of which, and more, left their traces (although much has been done to disregard or erase many of those traces accidently or deliberately). The country varies from the pastel moonscape of 'fairy chimneys' and tuff cones of Cappadocia in the centre of the country to the rough and rainy Pontic Mountains up against the border with Georgia, and from the sparkling Aegean Sea with its fashionable bathing resorts in the west to the strategically located Northern Karadeniz, in the news recently because of blocked grain deliveries from Ukraine.

Despite ups and downs (a global pandemic, a series of ISIS-related explosions close to tourist areas and a coup attempt in 2016), Turkey still greatly appeals to European and Russian tourists. Yet, most European holidaymakers with middling incomes opt for a far from adventurous 'all inclusive' holiday with all-you-can-eat buffets and all-you-can-drink bars, in or near Antalya. Photographer Ekin Özbiçer became fascinated by these 'all inclusives'. She was especially interested in the hotels built as replicas of buildings in European cities and the Ottoman Empire. 'I was in Antalya for three days. I stayed at the Kremlin Palace and spent a whole day in Amsterdam'.

A man lies sunbathing alone in front of the pastel-hued towers of the Kremlin. A large swimming pool is surrounded by Amsterdam's canalside houses. In the spa are the floral motifs of Iznik pottery and the restaurant is adorned with scenes from Ottoman palaces painted by oriental masters. The 'all inclusives' that Özbiçer photographed with mild irony are a curious amalgam of different cultural identities.

The all inclusives do everything they can to obscure the fact that their European and Russian guests are in Turkey. Why do people want a holiday in Turkey that creates the illusion that they're in their own country, or at least somewhere in Europe? (Turkey has been a prospective member of the EU ever since 1999. Negotiations have proceeded in, to say the least, fits and starts.) The all inclusives are also popular with middle-class people from within Turkey and with tourists from Turkic states. Why do guests from the same country or region want to believe the false impression of being somewhere in Europe or Russia? For both groups, the same things probably apply: 'exotic', a dash of adventure, familiar, cheap. To Europeans and Russians, their stay feels exotic because it's in Turkey, but safely familiar because of the European architecture. And it's a good bit cheaper than a holiday on the coast of Spain, Italy or France. To the Turks and others from the same region, their stay feels exotic because it's set against the background of Amsterdam or Moscow, yet safely familiar because of the Turkish cuisine and Turkish-speaking staff. More importantly still, it's cheaper than a stay in Europe. And easier. Tourism without the hassle of travelling. Many Europeans don't realise that Turks need visas if they want to travel to Schengen countries. Whether or not they can get a tourist visa depends mainly on their economic circumstances.

If there's anything that *Replica* (2016) by Ekin Özbiçer shows convincingly, then it's that we are creatures of habit. Although our Instagram accounts seem like a succession of the most awesome adventures, most of us do best with structure, recognition, order and regularity, with just a smidgin of adventure.

The photographs in *Replica* look like film stills. Özbiçer watched lots of films and then took screen shots to study the colours, gestures and architecture. An astonishing feeling for composition, colour and stylised

beauty makes the pictures look staged; even the leftovers of fruit on the white tablecloth of the abandoned lunch table look lovely. The cinematographic setting and the positioning of people or objects in the architectonic space contribute to that impression. The photos suggest that nothing has been left to chance, yet the opposite is true. 'I am holding the camera, eyes open, click-click-click, forgetting that I photograph'. For fashion and editorial shoots — for magazines including Vogue and Marie Claire, or for brands like Kutnia and Begüm Khan — Özbiçer does indeed stage-manage her photographs. But for her autonomous work Özbiçer sees the challenge in finding scenes from indeterminate daily life and freeze them with her camera — scenes in which she does not intervene at all, but that nevertheless seem staged. *Replica* is the result of shooting many photos, intuitively but with an exceptionally trained eye, and a careful selection process afterwards. Özbiçer retained this way of working from a job she had while she was studying for her degree in Fine Arts at Marmara University, as an assistant photographer of weddings in high-society Istanbul.

With hindsight, it's clear that the weddings of the Turkish jet set consolidated her earlier interest in Turkish social classes and hierarchy. As the only child of a left-wing, secular, middle-class family, she was educated at a French high school in Istanbul that was attended by the daughters and sons of the city's very richest. She was fascinated by the combination of intellectual and economic elites, and by the differences in class and hierarchy.

Özbiçer's series *Replica* (2019), *Auto Orientalism* (ongoing) and *Blue Flag* (2012–2013) amount to aesthetic research into the Turkish way of life and its class system. They express a curiosity about her own class, other classes, and the places where they mix or clash. In her photographs, she subtly and sensitively uses humour to lay it all bare. She never ridicules people but tries to look at other classes as she does at her own, with wonder, surprise and an aesthetic eye. 'I feel like a tourist in Turkey. I belong and I don't belong. Who are we? What is it to be Turkish, living west of Asia and east of Europe?'

— Text by Kim Knoppers

All images from the series *Replica*
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EKIN ÖZBIÇER moved to Prague to study Photography at FAMU after studying Ceramics at Marmara University's Fine Arts department, while working as a photographer's assistant. During her stay, she produced the *Slavia* series. Her *Blue Flag* series, depicting the life and aesthetics of İzmir's summer resort beaches, was featured in SALT's Summer Homes: *Claiming The Coast* exhibition. She is currently working on *Auto-Orientalism*, a series documenting her native Turkey.

KIM KNOPPERS is an art historian working as an independent curator and writer. Currently, she is working on projects in Albania, Turkey, Greece and Switzerland. She is based between Selçuk, Turkey and Amsterdam, the Netherlands. From 2011 to 2021, she was curator at Foam, photography museum, where she worked on over seventy group and solo exhibitions at the intersection of contemporary photography and other disciplines. In addition, she studied the origin of the medium in several exhibitions and essays. Kim has contributed to various magazines including Unseen Magazine and Aperture, and has written essays for many catalogues and artist books. Kim is a lecturer at the MA Photography at ECAL in Lausanne, where she initiated the course *Do Not Disturb — Curating in Progress*.