

# A THOUSAND DOTS AND NO LINE

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*Topology : The study of certain properties that do not change as geometric figures or spaces undergo continuous deformation*

The two components of this exhibition, a series of photographs and an installation created especially for PASAJ, each reflect in their own way my recurring reflections of memory, its lack of security and incompleteness as well the mechanisms involved in its construction.

The series *Forever Is Made of Nows*, was obtained from one thousand analog pictures taken in Istanbul between 2014 and 2016, and stems from a personal ritual established in order to try and figure out this gigantic city, which seemed almost inhuman to me through the rapidity of its transformations.

To grasp the destiny of millions of human beings who cross each others' paths in a city like Istanbul is certainly an impossible feat. As much as to picture the many dots building up a line, or to apprehend the infinite moments which make up a life:

there is no solution of continuity.

Something evades us, again and again.

As I roam the city in all directions, my interest focuses on empty spaces or hybrid areas occupied by impersonal building – railway stations, construction sites, wedding venues, shopping malls. Each time with the same guiding aspiration: to capture a fleeting chance composition, something akin to a door open upon an “elsewhere”.

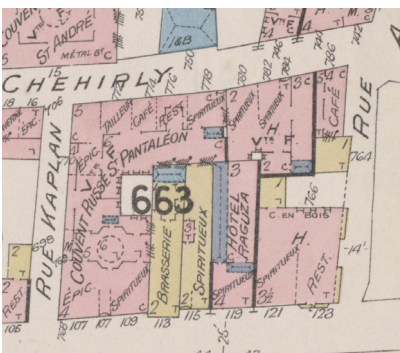
Now and then while walking in the street, everyone experiences, at the detour of a street, an intuition of this type: like a quick peek into a gap that closes immediately afterwards, whose memory troubles us as we are left unable to assess its precise nature.

The paradoxical pursuit of this photographic series is to set a subjective sensation of timelessness by installments of one fiftieth of a second. And after that, at the end of an extended selection and recombination process, by assembling them in a way likely to suggest in the mind of the spectator my idea of the city — out of a tiny series of chosen points. As an imaginary line which, by the transition to the next dimension, would connect them all.

The title of this series is inspired by a quote by Emily Dickinson, “*Forever – is composed of Nows –*”, which expresses this fragmentation of experience. Not stopping at this realization, the poetess stresses with a simple uppercase the possible grandeur and unexpected eternity of every one of these particles of life – thus allowing, for all solace, a glimpse to the remote possibility of completeness.

At the other far end of the spectrum, the installation *Topology* is the result of my disparate efforts to try and comprehend Nimet Hani, the building housing the PASAJ gallery. This restricted scope, which may seem easier to apprehend than the previous one, rapidly proved to be unexpectedly complex. The more I researched about the history of this relatively unknown han, hardly mentioned in specialized literature, the wider the scope of my research got and more numerous my questions.

Nimet Hani, which was constructed at the beginning of the 20th century, is an “Ottoman office han”. In other words a late hybrid, the product of the encounter of a distant descendent of the Turco-Persian caravanserai with the Western-designed office building (1). The presence of an abandoned oratory of Orthodox style on its top, an unusual structure that can be found on several neighbouring hans(2), is the sign of a likely Russian origin.



First row, from left to right :

Entryway & detail of a column of the Nimet Hani porch; orthodox oratory on top of the edifice; detail of the corbelled façade.

Second row, from left to right :

Details of three ancient maps showing the Nimet Hani location at the crossing of Mumhane Sokak with Akçe Sokak :

Map by Charles Goad (1906); German map [Mavi alman] (1922); map by Suat Niven (1948), complement to Goad's work.

Furthermore, the examination the porch of the porch of the building reveals that the inscription has certainly undergone modifications: the visible marks on the white stone give away an original lettering that was different <sup>(3)</sup> and longer than the actual name.



This han located at the crossroads of several *fault lines* – between East and West, between spiritual dimension & technical rationality, between Sultanate and Republic, in an ancient working class neighborhood currently undergoing accelerated gentrification – seems to condense centuries of history. Finally, erected at the entrance, its inconspicuous neoclassic porch with an altered name admirably sums in my view the work of memory and the slow passage of time. And it is not so much that I am driven by sheer historical curiosity: it doesn't matter in the end wether we know or not the original name of Nimet Hani. It's the very absence of a name that inspired this piece, as a blank surface that can be projected upon.

## NOTES

1/ The Ottoman han is the urbanized heir of the rural medieval caravanserais, fortified buildings where merchants halted, somehow similar to ancient European posthouse relays. Hans were dotted the Muslim world, in particular along the Silk Road, and have seen their use evolve with time, losing for instance their function as accommodation to instead favor production, commerce and storage. As Western influence began to spread within the Ottoman Empire, the han was transformed once again: under the reign of Sultan Ahmed III (1703-1730), this was mostly noticeable through certain decorative elements, and Western influence began to mark architectural concepts from the reign of Selim III (1789-1807). Cf. GÜLENAZ, Nursel. *Batılılaşma dönemi İstanbul'unda hanlar ve pasajlar*. I.T.O. Yayınları, 2011.

2/ A group of four hans in Karaköy, each topped with the same kind of oratory, were apparently built with Russian capital and served as a resting place for Russian pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land. These are the Russian Saint Pantaleon convent [Aya Pantaleon] & the Church of the Virgin Saint Mary [Aya Maria]. The latter was confiscated in 1924 by the young republican government to the profit of the Turkish Autocephalous Orthodox Patriarchate, which still occupies the location. These structures are themselves flanked by other religious edifices such as Saint Nicholas [Aya Nikola] and Saint Chrysostome Russian monastery.

3/ The current address – *Mumhane Caddesi, 45* – is designated as *Kilic Ali Paşa, 125* on the oldest maps; the number 125, still visible on the frontispiece, is a remnant of that period, confirming the antiquity of the porch itself. Incidentally, it is also to be noted that the ancient city walls that protected the Genoese fortress of Galata run along present-day Mumhane Caddesi, passing precisely in front of Nimet Hani's entrance.