

# Contemporary Art in Architectural Spaces

## (12<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial for Contemporary Art)

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### Резюме

XII Биенале за съвременно изкуство в Истанбул декларира, че се занимава с богатството от връзки между изкуство и политика и се фокусира върху творби, които са едновременно формално иновативни и с политически откровен до яростен изказ. Наблюдавайки мрежата от разнообразни пространства за експониране на съвременно изкуство, моето винаги търсещо архитектурните основания съзнание ми диктува идеята за оценка на съвместимостта. Разнообразието от места за изложение е многа широка: от реконструирани стари пристанищни сгради, през банки и галерии до действащи офиси на големи фирми. За пространственото решение и аранжиране на основните експозиции на самото XII Биенале в двете съседни на „Истанбул модерн“ халета Антрепо 3 и Антрепо 5 е поканен архитект Рюе Нишизава. Той и неговата съдружничка Казуо Седжима от SANAA, както е известно, станаха през 2010 г. носители на Прицкер награда – всички техни сгради носят усещане за пестеливо и поетично отношение към пренаситения с предметни излишества и неравностойности свят, в който живеем. Яснота, привидна простота и чисти линии характеризират и проекта за пространствено оформление за експозициите в Истанбул на архитект Нишизава.

Една друга експозиция, посветена на XVII симпозиум на електронното изкуство (*ISEA 2011 Istanbul*), е поместена в някогашен хамам – (турска баня) на ул. „Истиклал“. Забележителното на изложбата в хамама е пълната пригодност на пространството за електронните експозиции. Съответстват си по мащаб.

На Босфора в Перили къшк, или къща на духове, седалище на преуспяващия Бурсан холдинг, ангажиран с подкрепа на класическа музика и визуални изкуства, е представена колекция от съвременно изкуство на компанията. Важно е да се знае, че офисът на компанията е действащ и посетители има само в почивни дни и до късно през нощта. Общата идея на изложбата се съдържа в думите „преход, промяна и движение“, защото такива са целите в работата на самата компания. Произведенията са намерили своите подходящи места, следвайки тематичен принцип или подходяща светлина или удобство за работещите да отдъхнат с медитация пред някоя от видео-инсталациите.

Най-забележително в тази колекция е осъзнатото ѝ представяне за публика. Изпълнителният директор Ахмед Коджабиюк казва: „*Borusan contemporary* има две

мисии. Едната е да сподели своята колекция от съвременно изкуство с публиката, а другата – да повиши интереса към съвременното изкуство.....“.

Ключови думи: съвременно изкуство, биенале, архитект Нишизава, архитект Сеиджима

## **Abstract**

The 12<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial for Contemporary Art declared that it explores the rich relationship between art and politics focusing on artworks that are both formally innovative and politically outspoken. Observing the network of various spaces for exhibiting contemporary art, my always searching architectural reasons mind gave me the idea of conformity assessment. Diversity of exhibition places is very wide: from reconstructed old warehouses, through banks and galleries and to operating offices of large companies.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial spatial design and arrangement of main exhibitions in the two halls neighboring Istanbul Modern – Antrepo 3 and Antrepo 5, was made by the architect Ryue Nishizawa. He and his partner Kazuyo Sejima, SANAA, as it is known, have won 2010 Pritzker Architecture Prize - all their buildings have a sense of frugal and poetic attitude to the oversaturated with material superabundance and inequalities world we live in. Clarity, affected simplicity and clean lines characterize Nishizawa's design of the exhibition's spatial layout in Istanbul.

Another exposition, dedicated to the XVII Symposium on Electronic Art (*ISEA 2011 Istanbul*), is housed in a former hammam – (Turkish bath) in Istiklal Street. The full adaptability of enfilade hammam spaces to electronic exhibitions is remarkable. They match in scale.

At Bosphorus, in the Perili Köşk, or the Haunted Mansion, the headquarter of the successful Borusan Holding, promoting classical music and visual arts, the company's collection of contemporary artworks is displayed. It is important to know that the company's office is operating and visitors are allowed only on weekends and late at night. The exhibition centers on the idea of “transition, change and movement”, because such are Borusan's professional targets. What is most remarkable in this collection is its conscious presentation to audience. Borusan Holding managing director Ahmet Kocabiyik said: “Borusan contemporary has two main missions. One is to share its contemporary art collection with the public and the other is to increase interest in contemporary art...”

Key words: contemporary art, biennial, architect Nishizawa, architect Sejima

With recurring seriousness, scale and precision, the Biennial of Contemporary Art in Istanbul has been presented for twelfth time. To maintain tradition, a lot of funds have been attracted of also recurring and even promising future support international and mainly Turkish companies and institutions.

Not everywhere in the world, contemporary art is a minion. However, where it is cared of, there is civil awareness, constructive potential and stable economy. Therefore, Istanbul has been chosen as the “2010 European Capital of Culture”. This is evident even from the waste management system, which some of the new European capitals have not started to crave for.

Indeed, some works presented at the present biennial are created from waste. Some of them are ominous signs not simply of neglect to keep the planet clean but also of violence and slaughter of innocent people.

Here, in this article, I am not going to deal with presentation and critical analysis of the works of participating artists. I, of course, have live attitude to most of them, I share their ideas and I am aware that expectations of human emotional response is crucial to authors in the same classical way art does rely on the responsiveness of recipient. Coding of messages is done in the most direct and readable manner often with annoying repetition of information. I attribute this to authors’ ambition to reach the widest audience, even to politicians. It is for them that all these transformations of war symbols and authentic remains of destroyed dwellings with objects of human life of recent inhabitants, forced tragically and prematurely to leave the world of living, are.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial itself declared that it explores the rich relationship between art and politics focusing on artworks that are both formally innovative and politically outspoken. This time Istanbul Biennial does not follow one curatorial trend based on its tradition to associate art with relations in surrounding world in general. The curators Jens Hoffmann and Adriano Pedrosa have been preparing themselves from afar and thoroughly. A year earlier, in November 2010, they organized the conference called “Remembering Istanbul” bringing together many of the past biennial curators. The title of the Biennial is “Untitled” (12<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial), 2011. It is associated with the work of the Cuban American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996) – a participant in the 5<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial and an inspirer for many of the present participants. There are five “untitled” group exhibitions: **Abstraction, Ross** (Portrait of Ross Laycock, a partner of Gonzalez-Torres who died of AIDS as the artist five years earlier), **Passport, History** and **Death by Gun**. All exhibitions contain artworks directly inspired by politically and socially engaged works of Felix Gonzalez Torres.

The idea is to come to dialogue through a vast number of exhibits reflecting the world of the past twenty years and attaching less importance to aesthetics at the expense of focusing on political views.



Reworked howitzer shells

Transformation of rifles, 2009-2011 (Eylem Aladoğan, 1974, the Netherlands)



The organization of the biennial with four thousand accredited guests and four hundred foreign journalists from all over the world made it possible to see both the main and the supporting cultural events, taking place in different parts of Istanbul linked by small boats hurrying to and fro via the Bosphorus.

Observing the network of various spaces for exhibiting contemporary art, my always searching architectural reasons mind gave me the idea of conformity assessment. Diversity of exhibition places is very wide: from reconstructed old warehouses, through banks and galleries and to operating offices of large companies. So the city gets even and unostentatious presence of contemporary art. We only need the effort to visit the interior spaces. As large the works are, in the tradition of such exhibitions, they are still chamber.

The main exhibition is located in Beyoğlu district in two former port warehouses near to the authoritative and disposing of very rich funds Istanbul Modern Art Museum, also located in a former warehouse. The success of this conversion of a warehouse into a museum is undisputed and fueled even by the care for the weary art consumer, who can drink a cup of coffee in close proximity to an ocean liner moored in Bosphorus like “Queen Victoria” during this September. The museum has a multiplex cinema and a library with books on art and art history. The collection contains of mainly works of Turkish authors and fewer foreigners. Thematic exhibitions are usually located on the lower floor. Exclusively for international visitors of the ongoing Biennial, the museum’s exhibition showed a retrospection of Turkish modern art. Istanbul Modern is an example of a museum with a friendly attitude to works of art and to existing building structure and to visitors at

the same time. They have achieved a strict, simple and vital interior. People and works are the important there – spatial layout follows these priorities with colour, illumination and type of materials.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial spatial design and arrangement of main exhibitions in the two halls neighboring Istanbul Modern – Antrepo 3 and Antrepo 5, was made by the architect Ryue Nishizawa. He and his partner Kazuyo Sejima, SANAA, as it is known, have won 2010 Pritzker Architecture Prize for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, and for some more buildings for culture. Inviting a recognized author is not surprising but only one more convincing proof of organizers' serious attitude to maintain Biennial's high level and joining the line to promote young Japanese style. All their buildings have a sense of frugal and poetic attitude to the oversaturated with material superabundance and inequalities world we live in. Clarity, affected simplicity and clean lines characterize Nishizawa's design of the exhibition's spatial layout in Istanbul.



Architect  
Nishizawa,  
Exhibit – a grey  
cardboard model  
of exhibitions'  
spatial layout in  
the former port  
multi-storey  
warehouse  
Antrepo 3

Renata Lucas (year of birth 1971, Brazil) *Failure*,  
2003



The rational system for spatial partitioning of each floor into ten to twenty fragments of various sizes is bound by the nature of artworks. Nishizawa creates a composition of them while achieving isolation in seeing the exhibits and alluding a characteristic part of the next exponent, attracting and fostering internal “conversation” between artworks. He has a clear principle of distinction between solo and group exhibition spaces: for the first - white light partition walls and for the second – grey. There are interesting narrow passages between exhibition spaces creating the so much needed sensory break. Renata Lucas' artwork *Failure* is in the spirit of Nishizawa's approach for sharing spaces. She herself, interviewed by Adriano Pedrosa, clarified her idea to create an opportunity to transform terrain through plywood floor panels to the suggestion of institutional fragility, establishing unstable conditions for us to create and perceive.



Arch. Nishizawa, Antrepo 5, Spaces and narrow passages

© Nishizawa office

A significant space is devoted to Adrian Esparza's work *Far and Wide*. The silhouette of Istanbul, highly stylized and executed with taut coloured threads deploys on three walls. This strict geometry, very remote from the impressive architectural nature, is still among the few works of representational nature. The passage with two openings to the neighboring spaces allows the silhouette to be seen in motion.



Adrian Esparza (year of birth 1970, El Paso, USA)  
*Far and Wide* – silhouette of Istanbul, 2011

Ala Younis (year of birth 1974, Kuwait) *Tin Soldiers*,  
2010-2011

Many of anti-war artworks are located in Antrepo 3. Nishizawa's models of architectural layout are also exhibited there, which is a sign that his work is valued.

Another exposition, dedicated to the XVII Symposium on Electronic Art (*ISEA 2011 Istanbul*), is housed in a former hammam – (Turkish bath) in Istiklal Street. There are a few curators here associated with four different themes. Again, I do not dwell on the works themselves, most of which are funny to the extent of being childish and other are socially

engaged. Karen Lancel and Hermen Maat's work *Tele\_Trust* falls into the second group. The artist duo draw parallels between the cloak – cassock, burka or that of Darth Vader, and hiding our identity through communication technologies in a world that badly needs trust (...I need to see your eyes to trust you...).



An enfilade in the hammam

Karen Lancel and Hermen Maat's *Tele\_Trust*

The full adaptability of hammam space to electronic exhibitions is remarkable. They match in scale. Working with light, a fundamental element in most electronic artworks, is an essential part of the idea to create a specific, sometimes mystical atmosphere for displays. Enfilade spaces arranged in two mutually perpendicular axes create natural walk-lines and support perceptual gradation. Everything is coated with white plaster – walls, domes, arched openings with rounded angles. This is supplemented by the special and favourable experience when we perceive artworks, generated by the specifics of conduction of tectonic forces from the dome, through the walls and to the foundations.

Though extremely tiring, exhibitions in general are interesting with bringing together many and different world views. At such type of places, contemporary art traces trends, gives guidelines, adds new levels in audience knowledge. This didactic role of contemporary art somehow approximates the purpose of haute couture – roughly said, it is to watch but not for use. It is interesting that works of the avant-garde art have pragmatic value. And here comes a cautionary tale of a patron of art, at that not the only one, who opens gates to a wealth of artworks.

At Bosphorus, in the Perili Köşk, or the Haunted Mansion, the headquarter of the successful Borusan Holding, promoting classical music (they support a symphony orchestra) and visual arts, the company's collection of contemporary artworks is displayed. It is important to know that the company's office is operating and visitors are allowed only on weekends and late at night.

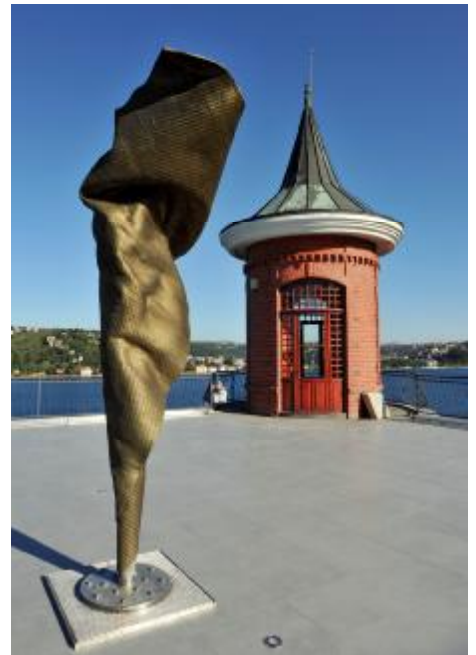
First, the building itself is interesting with its stages of development. The construction of Yusuf Ziya Paşa Pavilion started in 1910, the subsequent wars left the site uncompleted and there, through the unglazed windows, the wind made sinister noise – so it was said to be haunted by ghosts. Built from red brick and with an exquisite corner tower, it stands out against the silhouette of the European side of Bosphorus.

Currently, in the building you can experience the “Office Museum” or “Segment #1 exhibition, which features works drawn from Borusan’s apparently much larger collection of contemporary art. The exhibition centers on the idea of “transition, change and movement”, because such are Borusan’s professional targets. The artworks have found their proper places, following thematic principles or adequate light or comfort for employees to rest in meditation in front of a video installation. At the same time, there are works that are permanently and continuously connected with the interior. Peter Kogler’s work called *Untitled* (2008) is a wall painting specifically designed for the Perili Köşk’s staircase walls and lounge spaces with vertical and horizontal curved lines/pipes, creating a network and linking different levels in a single magnetic labyrinth. This is a really good example of a fusion of art and architecture, as far as the wall painting follows, emphasizes and enriches the features of interior.



Peter Kogler, *Untitled*, Borusan 2008

Andrew Rogers, Gold-leafed bronze sculpture on the Perili Köşk’s roof, 2007



On the second of the seven floors, among the office workplaces, there are sixteen different author art pieces. One of them is work of Ivan Navarro and is called *Exodo*. It represents a visual well in the deep perspective of which the repetitive words “exodo” disappear in infinity. I find this piece inspiring the work process because it generates a natural comparison with the scale of the universe. And so on, through many more works, including those in the office of the boss.





Ivan Navarro, *Exodo*, 2007

The Perili Köşk, Borusan Holding office



What is most remarkable in this collection is its conscious presentation to audience. Borusan Holding managing director Ahmet Kocabiyik said: “Borusan contemporary has two main missions. One is to share its contemporary art collection with the public and the other is to increase interest in contemporary art in Turkey.”

Insha'Allah, meaning if God Wills it, to other peoples as well!

Photos: Nishizawa office, Rositsa Nikiforova, Violeta Toncheva