

PAMUK'S MUSEUM: CLOSURE FOR HIS MAGNIFICENT NOVEL

After I read my second-favorite novel by **Orhan** Pamuk, "Snow" (surpassed in my mind by his masterpiece, "The Black Book"), I had always carried the hope -- which I never mentioned to him in our encounters -- that he would one day open a museum on Kars -- the city -- in Kars.

He had obviously had the idea of a museum for a long time. As I strolled the narrow, weary streets of the Çukurcuma district in Istanbul on Friday evening, I felt that he had filled a huge blank in the City of All Cities by opening his meticulously planned Museum of Innocence -- situated, modestly but visibly, in a corner near a cul-de-sac.

It completes his latest project in a way, the novel of the same name. Almost 600 pages long, "The Museum of Innocence" has been informing the world ever since 2008 of the story of Kemal and Füsün. It can now be found in 60 languages. Hidden in the profound, obsessive love story is the life of Istanbul's lost dreams, melancholia and hopes, from the 1950s through 2000.

Somehow, Pamuk was unable to publish the novel and launch the museum simultaneously. But, at the end of the process, I met a very happy author on Friday evening, satisfied that even those who had not read the text would now be able to see "lives that have been lived."

The interior is overwhelming, to say the least. Spread across three floors, it is divided into 83 vitrines -- "showcases" -- just as the book is. They are filled with objects related to the book -- keys, lamps, watches, postcards, restaurant receipts, glasses of raki, tiny portraits, ID cards and Pamuk's handwritten sketches of the initial pages of the novel. To me, the most impressive part is at the entrance: In a huge showcase covering the wall, there are thousands of cigarette butts, the ones picked up by Kemal. Under almost each and every one of them, visitors can read -- again -- Pamuk's comments in his own handwriting.

The museum is not only a must-see for everybody, but it also opens the door to a brand-new concept for artists, or anyone interested in preserving individual stories in history. It helps us all to cherish our choices -- however ordinary they may seem at times -- as filled with profound meanings, as they awaken others to our realities.

Pamuk's recently published article in the Guardian, "Modest Manifesto," therefore, must be read carefully and taken as a strong source of inspiration. Here are some excerpts:

"In my childhood, there were very few museums in Istanbul. Most of them were simply preserved historical monuments or -- quite rare outside the western world -- they were places with an air of the government office about them."

"Museums should explore and uncover the universe and humanity of the new and modern man emerging especially from increasingly wealthy non-western nations. The aim of big, state-sponsored museums, on the other hand, is to represent the state. This is neither a good nor an innocent objective."

"These institutions [museums], now national symbols, have presented the story of a nation -- in other words, history -- as much more important than the stories of individuals. This is unfortunate: The stories of individuals are much better suited to displaying the depths of our humanity."

"We are sick and tired of museums that try to construct historical narratives of a society, community, team, nation, state, people, company or species. We all know that the ordinary, everyday stories of individuals are richer, more humane and much more joyful than the stories of colossal cultures."

"Demonstrating the wealth of Chinese, Indian, Mexican, Iranian or Turkish history and culture is not an issue ... The real challenge is to use museums to tell, with the same brilliance, depth and power, the stories of the individual human beings living in these countries."

"It is imperative that museums become smaller, more individualistic and cheaper. This is the only way that they will ever tell stories on a human scale. Big museums with their wide doors call upon us to forget our humanity and embrace the state and its human masses."

"If objects are not uprooted from their environs and their streets, but are situated with care and ingenuity in their own natural homes, they will already portray their own stories."

My space is limited, so those who are interested in the entire manifesto, translated by Elkin Oklap, should visit the Guardian website: www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2012/apr/20/orhan-pamuk-make-museums-much-smaller?newsfeed=true