



Centre: Orhan Pamuk at the Museum of Innocence. Right and below: Exhibits from the museum.

The Word, Made Flesh

BOOKS TURKISH AUTHOR ORHAN PAMUK ON HIS MOST AMBITIOUS PROJECT YET
BY MIKE MACEACHERAN

On Çukurcuma Caddesi, a street in a working class suburb of Istanbul, there is a brand-new museum called The Museum of Innocence. It's entirely based on the book of the same name by Nobel Prize-winning author Orhan Pamuk and is a dazzling feat of creative ingenuity. And also one of astonishing literary conceit: not only has Pamuk made characters jump from his fictional universe into reality but he also believed readers cared enough to want to see a work of his fiction brought to life. The real genius, of course, is that he has made it work.

"There is a misconception that I wrote a popular and successful novel, then decided to make a museum out of it," he says, reflecting on the culmination of a project that has taken him 14 years to complete. "I thought of the museum and the novel together — I even bought the building 12 years ago. I had the general plot of the story and wanted to make a museum where the objects that are described in each chapter could be exhibited in order to tell their own story."

The Museum of Innocence charts the romance between an upper-class man named Kemal, who becomes infatuated with Füsün, his twice-removed cousin from the lower-class branch of the same family. He becomes obsessed with collecting every item that she comes into

contact with throughout her life, from the butterfly earrings that help spark their affair to the 4,213 stubbed-out cigarette butts that Füsün throws away. The latter has been painstakingly recreated by Pamuk and a team of Istanbul's best modern artists as a floor-to-ceiling art installation in the museum's entrance hall.

Understandably, over the genesis of the novel's 83 chapters, Pamuk's office began to overflow with items. He recalls picking up dozens of mechanical taxi meters, buying ashtrays, film posters, and teacups and scouring the antique markets of Istanbul for all manner of bric-a-brac. "My Museum of Innocence has the quality of Charles Dickens' Old

“I thought of the museum and the novel together. I wanted to make a museum where the objects that are described in each chapter could be exhibited in order to tell their own story”



A WRITER'S LIFE

1952

Orhan Pamuk is born in Istanbul

1979

Publishes his first novel, *Karanlık ve Işık* (Darkness and Light).

1990

The White Castle is his first novel to be published in English.

2003

Pamuk's novel *My Name Is Red* wins the International Dublin Literary Award, one of the world's most lucrative literary prizes.

2005

Put on trial in Turkey after making a controversial statement regarding the Armenian Genocide and mass killing of Kurds. "Thirty thousand Kurds have been killed here, and a million Armenians," he says. "And almost nobody dares to mention that. So I do." The charges are dropped the following year.

2006

Wins the Nobel Prize in Literature, the first Nobel Prize to be awarded to a Turkish citizen.

2012

Finally completes his ambitious Museum of Innocence project.

Curiosity Shop in London but it is not a flea market and my objects are not a random, haphazard collection," he says. "They are tightly organised and very carefully designed."

Having spent the past four years of his life overseeing everything from the floor plans to the uniform of the museum's guards, Pamuk admits to having had moments when he regretted ever coming up with the idea. "There were times when I wanted to stop doing it and go back to my writing," he says. "It was just like building your

own house when the plumber never comes on time, or the painter paints with a wrong colour."

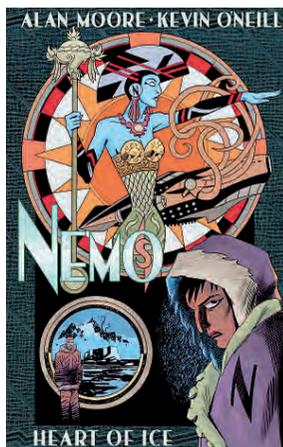
So does he think that he too has become an obsessive collector, like his character Kemal? "I'm rational," he replies. "Just to illustrate this idea — I'm not a collector by temperament. Collectors are people who collect things, not with the purpose of using these objects, but for exhausting the collection. A typical example for me will be my library. I have some 20,000 books spread across three apartments but I don't have a temperament of collecting. I buy them to read them."

Now that he has finally signed off on the museum and, more recently, its exhaustive companion reference guide — he describes the newly-released *The Innocence of Objects* as a "museum manifesto" for the 21st Century — he acknowledges that it is his most fulfilling achievement to date. "Right now, I can't believe I finished it," he adds. "And made people like it. I'm completely happy with my museum."

Despite having turned 60 this summer, Pamuk isn't slowing down just yet. For the next 12 months, it's back to his "other day job" as a world-famous novelist. He's currently working on *A Strangeness in Mind*, which tells the story of a yoghurt-selling street vendor in the 1960s who comes to Istanbul from Anatolia to find his fortune.

"I've been writing novels now for almost 38 years," says Pamuk, "and though I recognise my success, I need to keep writing. I take notes and notes and I prepare for many, many novels. I already have notebooks and dossiers for four or five novels and they all seem very important to me. There's also a sense that I still believe I have to prove something. I have to do something and it's not running around, doing something in business. It should be about pen and pencil and ink and books and reading... Of course, it's all vanity." 

OUT
THIS
MONTH



NEMO: HEART OF ICE

A new *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* graphic novel from Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill. In 1925, fifteen years after the death of Captain Nemo, his daughter launches a grand Antarctic expedition, featuring Charles Foster Kane, Jules Verne, H.P. Lovecraft on the hunt for plundered loot. Ready the *Nautilus*, she's going back to the South Pole!

Out 14 Feb

BOOKING NOW

Emirates Airline Festival of Literature returns to the InterContinental Festival City, Dubai, this month.

March 5-9

The stars shine above, the city lights sparkle below. The 71st floor holds mysteries to explore, signature creations to savor and an atmosphere to delight. The secret is out; Vault is open.

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