

Better than a 100 Amnesty-posters

By Ingo Arend
13 September 2017

Cevdet Erek's work 'Çın' at the Turkish Pavilion doesn't show a political message, but it is a subtle image for the situation in Turkey.

A slightly rising ramp made of rough wooden boards, mounted by a metal framework. At the first sight, one doesn't really not know whether it is a finished artwork in the narrow passage on the first floor of the Sale d'Armi in the Arsenale or that it might be under construction. Or if you are walking on something provisional.

'Site specific-installation' is a nice understatement for the seemingly simple, but actually richly elaborate structure, the Turkish artist Cevdet Erek has made between the old walls with liberated bricks that host the Turkish Pavilion of the 57th Venice Biennial. This structure divides the tubular space into well-proportioned rectangles and spatial sequences that can be discovered from a bird's perspective from a crosswise commanding point at the end of the ramp. And the bright polished poles will increase the heartbeats of minimal fans.

The installation also exemplifies something subtly political. There isn't the slightest sign of any clear message here. It is only the form that speaks in Erek's work: better than 100 Amnesty posters together he gives an impressive image that reflects the Turkey's situation perfectly like a score of a match in pause.

The space in the center with the tribune on the far end is found empty as if it is about to be filled with people gathering. The rear tribune is inaccessible. The metal fence surrounds it and is closes it off with a lock: a 'guest-tribune' as a closed public space, visible but useless. Opposite there is an open tribune, where people can sit down and have an informal conversation.

Work as a construction site

The whole artwork could be a construction site or an agora, a prison or a massive arena. 'In this time of conflict and oppression, the greatest problem for me was how my endeavour could contribute to the culture of free speech in Turkey', Erek explains his dialectic of 'open' and 'closed' in his work; turned into one of the most impressive national pavilions.

The artist born in 1974 is an exceptional phenomenon. He didn't study art but architecture at the Mimar Sinan University in Istanbul. Before he even started university he played in the metal and progressive rock-band Nekropsi. He completed his education at the Center for Advanced Studies in Music at the TU Istanbul.

Later he worked as a sound engineer for the Turkish contribution at Eurovision. In 2002 the curator Fulya Erdemci asked him for a sound installation for a project in the public space. In

the nineties, Erek was still hanging out with some 'dark people' and sympathized with anarchism. 'All of a sudden I was part of the art world,' says the artist surprised even today.

The mixture of space, sound and image has since become his trademark. He created a soundscape for Orhan Pamuk's 'Museum of Innocence' in Istanbul. He turned a garage during the 2015 Istanbul Biennial into his installation 'Room of Rhythms'. And with this presentation in Venice this year he has now become part of a serie of artists like Sarkis, Hüseyin Alptekin or Ayşe Erkmen.

National representation is out of fashion

He got his idea for this new work in the ruins of the ancient city of Priene in the southwest of Turkey. In the amphitheatre at the 'Pompeii of Asia minor', the sounds of a neighbouring cricket playing suddenly appeared to him 'like a concert'. 'Çın', an onomatopoeic word, which in Turkish means something like ringing, reverberating or roaring and reminds of the sound of a large cloche, is the reason for the title of Erek's youngest work. Strange sounds are heard from the seven shiny loudspeaker boxes on the bridge. A sound as a cross between the reverberation of a loudspeaker and the swoosh of a buzz.

In between, mixed sentences can be found: 'Block your ears / face history / may the war end'. What Erek calls a formalistic 'sound-ornamented facade' can be read symbolically. The country on the Bosphorus also resembles a buzzing gossip. When it comes to political statements the silent artist remains in the background. He calls the area with the bright wooden beams and the half-timbered structure that leads to the neighbouring countries in the Sale d'Armi the 'international route'. At the opening of the exhibition he declared ambiguously that he 'wanted to leave the road between the countries open'. National representation is out. But sometimes the overthrown principle of the national pavilions in Venice still makes sense or goes even beyond that sense.

Translated from German by Inez Piso - [Original version in German](#)