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The art of protest

The Gezi Park resistance inspires art exhibitions around Istanbul

BY VICTORIA KHROUNDINA | JULY 22, 2013



The Cornucopia Blog has been following the Gezi resistance from a cultural perspective, and we have shown examples of how the movement has added meaning and beauty to some of the art, music and writing being created in the city. Elsewhere on this blog I have posted information about which cultural events were affected by the protests and the perspectives of various cultural institutions in relation to this. However, the resistance has also inspired exhibitions dealing directly with the protests. Last week I visited two such events showing artists' representations of some of the many powerful images that will undoubtedly be etched into Turkey's collective consciousness for years to come.

Galatea Art's *Free Gezi/Özgür Gezi* exhibition opened on July 2 and has been extended until July 26, showing works by 28 of Istanbul's most renowned photographers. The *Aesthetics of Resistance/ Direnişin Estetiği* at Gallery Park Art in Kadıköy is in a different mood, with pieces by amateur and some more well-known artists using a variety of media. Originally scheduled for one month from July 5, this exhibition, too, has been extended, until August 31.

What struck me at the *Free Gezi* exhibition was the sheer intimacy of many of the photographs. Perhaps, having witnessed the protests myself and been involved in a few of the processions and forums, that sense of intimacy came from inside me. Whatever it was, the photos stirred up all the emotions I'd felt in the midst of the action. Some of the pictures are beautiful to look at (despite the subject matter), some are humorous and others distressing, but all capture the atmosphere of the resistance which started in Istanbul on May 31, pretty soon spread to many corners of the country and still doesn't seem to be letting go.

Timurtaş Onan, one of Istanbul's best-known photographers, continues his love affair with the city in these interesting times with his arresting image (above) of a man standing inside the Atatürk Cultural Center, arms spread, holding a Turkish flag and looking at the thousands gathered in Taksim Square in front of him. Of course nationalism, love for one's country and standing up for what you believe in are all themes that spring to mind, but that solitary figure of a man – an almost mythical representation of Atatürk – on the other side of the protesters also reminds us that every individual counts. As does every tree.

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