

## BLOG

### Book Review: Istanbul by Timurtaş Onan

March 12th, 2021 by [Hans Durrer](#)



Istanbul: A City of strange and curious moments @ Timurtaş Onan

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Marina Leybiskis @ Baxter St...

In the fall of 2006, I taught English in Istanbul, for two months. I had not prepared myself for this assignment, didn't know anything about the city or Turkish culture. To be sure, I was not free of preconceptions like that Turkey was a country dominated by bearded men and women had not much to say. Needless to say, I was in for a surprise. Well, Istanbul is not Turkey but one of these modern cosmopolitan cities where elegantly clad women work in all sorts of professions. One of my students was a professor of child psychiatry who gave lectures at universities in the US. Why you want to take classes with me?, I wondered. In order to keep up with my hyper-active colleagues from Michigan, she smiled.

In other words, I have pictures in my head when looking at Timurtaş Onan's Istanbul books. That he has another view of his native city than the visitor, isn't exactly a surprise. Neither is it astonishing that quite a few pics arouse familiar feelings in me, especially the ones showing the ferries that I often took – Istanbul is divided by the Bosphorus, also known as the Strait of Istanbul, a waterway that separates Europe and Asia.

All pictures in the two tomes are in black and white. When I first went through the pages, I thought most striking the intimacy that the portraits radiate. These pics are not of the kind that a person has been caught off guard, quite the contrary – these people must have trusted the photographer. Or so it seemed to me.



Istanbul: Against all odds © Timurtaş Onan

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15h

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Istanbul: A City of strange and curious moments © Timurtaş Onan

Although these two works carry Istanbul in its title, they appear, at least to me, less pictures of or about a city than of the people populating it. It is their humanness that make these pics special and very touching.

Both books come with an introduction. The one in “Against all odds” by Erhan Sermet was largely incomprehensible to me and makes the point: “*Istanbul: against all odds* reminds us that we can find the meaning of the city in its smallest building blocks, in the casual relationships of everyday life.” The meaning of the city? I must admit that I haven’t the foggiest idea what that could possibly be but I strongly disagree that meaning can be found in photographs. It is the other way ’round: We bestow meaning on photographs.

The introduction of *Istanbul: A city of strange and curious moments* by David Cregeen points out “the very many touches of humour, the surreal,” to which I can easily relate. It also highlights “the loving appreciation of life, of all life, human or other, birds, (a favourite theme of his) dogs and cats” that characterises these photographs that seem to reflect not only the present and to stem from some other time: “the force of life and the passage of life,” as David Cregeen writes.

David Bert Joris Dhert  
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Keliy Anderson-Staley  
Kevin Bubriski  
Kevin Faingnaert  
Lady Bunny  
Landscapes  
Laura Kontinen  
Leanne Wiggers  
Lecture

The photos of *A city of strange and curious moments* come without captions and the ones of *Against all odds* are found at the end of the book and only mention the part of Istanbul where they were taken as well as the year – and they are not needed for these pics because, as far as I'm concerned, they are invitations to look and feel. Chances are that Timurtaş Onan's, to my mind, deeply humane approach will lead your imagination to similar areas of the soul.



Istanbul: A City of strange and curious moments @ Timurtaş Onan

The more time I spend with these photographs, the more I feel like I have been transported out of time and have very much the impression that life has always been like that – people sitting together, walking around, playing cards, smoking, talking.

I know these photos were taken in Istanbul. And while many of them show familiar sights (the Bosphorus, the Galata bridge etc), most of them, taken out of context, I would not necessarily relate to Istanbul. But they were taken in Istanbul, a city of almost 16 million (according to Wikipedia), that, by the way, consists to a large part of faceless and soulless highrises. Timurtaş Onan shows us the human side of Istanbul. Masterfully.

Linda Simpson  
Lithuania  
love  
Malcolm Lightner  
Mandy Williams  
Marc Sirinsky  
Marcus Xavier Chormicle  
Marcy Palmer  
Mark Sawrie  
Mental Health  
Michelle Bogle  
Mickalene Thomas  
Nancy Baron  
Nature  
Niall McDiarmid  
Nicole Campanello  
Night  
Noah Kalina  
Norm Diamond  
Odette England  
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Rohina Hoffman  
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Sally Gall  
San Antonio  
Sandy Carson  
Sarah Hadley  
Stan Raucher  
Stephen Frailey  
Street Photography





Istanbul: Against all odds © Timurtaş Onan



Istanbul: Against all odds © Timurtaş Onan



**Istanbul: Against All Odds (2018)**

**Istanbul: A City Of Strange And Curious Moments (2021)**

**by Timurtaş Onan**

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