

Figure 1

*Darzanà: Two Arsenals, One Vessel*, 15th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, Pavilion of Turkey, Sale d'Armi, Arsenale, 28 May-27 November 2016, Venice / "Harbor", Istanbul Modern, 28 January-20 July 2017, Istanbul / Curators: Feride Çiçekoğlu, Mehmet V. Kütükçüoğlu and Ertuğ Uçar / Organized by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts

1. Under the titles of "lightness", "quickness", "exactitude", "visibility", "multiplicity" and "consistency", Calvino prepared these "memos" as a series of the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University in the fall of 1985. Sadly, he died before delivering them and before writing the sixth one.

2. For a variety of reviews of the *Darzanà* project, see the files published in *Istanbul Art News* (Haziran 2016) 32; *Yapı* (Ağustos 2016) 417; and *Mimarlık* (Kasım-Aralık 2016) 392. For a comprehensive chronological list of the news, reviews and discussions of the project, see also 15. *Venedik Mimarlık Bienali Yorumları Zaman Çizelgesi* (2016) [<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1kftntRy50MNgzxZNO3Pk6zaQq26dleuJua-AQ0BNrel/edit#gid=0>] Access Date (06.06.2017)

3. The coordinating editor of the book is Feride Çiçekoğlu and the visual editor is Gökçen Kılıç.

## EXHIBITION REVIEW: NOTES ON THE LIGHTNESS OF BAŞTARDA

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### 1.

In his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Italo Calvino shares with his readers his profoundly inspiring insights into "certain values, qualities, or peculiarities of literature that are very close to [his] heart" (1988, 1) (1). "Lightness" is his first memo which for him "goes with precision and determination, not with vagueness and the haphazard" (1988, 16), and therefore which indicates "a value rather than a defect" (1988, 3). Basically, it is characterized by an attempt at reaching a "weightless gravity" (1988, 19) or at "escaping the force of gravity" (1988, 22). This "levitation" reveals itself not only in language which "hovers above things like a cloud" or like "a veil of minute particles of humours and sensations" (1988, 15), but also in images and objects "floating in space" (1988, 23) or "suspended in the air" (1988, 26), as in the case of "a flying boat" (1988, 27).

To visitors of the 15th International Architecture Exhibition, *La Biennale di Venezia*, Calvino's memo on literary lightness seems to be materialized in *Baştarıda*, exhibited as part of the project "*Darzanà: Two Arsenals, One Vessel*" in

the Pavilion of Turkey located in the *Sale d'Armi*, in the *Arsenale* (2). As a vessel 30 meters in length, 4.5 meters in width, 2.5 meters in height and 4 tones in weight, it is a meticulous assemblage of more than 500 single pieces of colourful wooden molds, measurement units, signboards, and boat remains, all found in today's deserted Golden Horn Arsenal in Istanbul. What is remarkable in this assemblage is that most of the pieces are suspended one by one through steel wires from the wooden trusses of the *Sale* (Figure 1).

Marked by such lightness, *Baştarıda* intrigues visitors by evoking some images and models of fanciful, whimsical or dysfunctional machines in histories of art and technology. Even more excitingly, it can remind them of the etymology of the word "machine", signifying the machinery of the theater of antiquity as an "artifice of technical art" and/or an "artistic creation" (Raunig, 2010, 37). In this sense, *Baştarıda* can be viewed as a machine of a theatrical spectacle exhibited not only in the *Sale* but also in the book of the project "*Darzanà*" (3). In the *Sale*, the two entries on opposite sides, one left

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Figure 2

4. The book design is by Bülent Erkmén.
5. ERKAL, N. (2016) Reporting from *Darzanâ: Seven Episodes of the Golden Horn Arsenal, Darzanâ: İki tersane Bir Vasıta / Two Arsenals One Vessel*, Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, Istanbul; 5-38.
6. COSTANTINI, V. (2016) Comparing and Restoring: The Ottoman-Venetian Maritime Traditions and the Collective Memory of Mediterranean People, *Darzanâ: İki tersane Bir Vasıta / Two Arsenals One Vessel*, Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, Istanbul; 39-44.
7. The photographs are by Cemal Emden.
8. The photographs are by Cemal Emden and the notes are by Feride Çiçekoğlu.

open with an eye-catching partial sight of *Baştarda*, and the other closed by a black and heavy stage curtain, arouse visitors' curiosity and invite them inside. Similarly, while staging *Baştarda* in the Arsenal of Istanbul, the book welcomes its audience through three overlapping scenes. (4) The first is in the form of a booklet with two articles: one is an invaluable and a comprehensive historical analysis of the Arsenal within the context of a common maritime architecture, technology and language shared with the *Arsenale* of Venice, in particular, and across the Mediterranean, in general (5); and the other is a brief but perceptive overview of the comparative sociopolitical histories of the Arsenal and the *Arsenale* (6). The second scene is a folded leaflet showing *Baştarda* as assembled in an abandoned shipshed of the Arsenal in colored photographs (7). And the last one corresponding to the main body of the book is a rich visual documentation of derelict spaces and discarded objects in today's Arsenal in black and white photographs on which narrational notes and some additional material, such as small archival images and sketches of *Baştarda*, are attached (8).

As such, both the *Sale* and the book appear as contemporary versions of *Teatrum Mechanorum* or *Theater of*

*Machines*, an early modern genre of illustrated literature on various mostly fantastical machines. Similar to the display of those machines within theatrical settings in that literature, the exhibition of *Baştarda* combines the three planes of background, middle ground and foreground (Knoespel, 1992, 107-108). While in the *Sale* the background is formed by a view of the *Arsenale* of Venice through a filtered window, in the book or, more precisely, in the booklet and the documentation, it is presented both verbally and visually by juxtaposing the past of the Golden Horn Arsenal with its present. Against these backgrounds, the middle ground and foreground, corresponding to the overall view of a machine and the cutaway views of its certain parts in close-up in that literature, respectively, are blended together in the exhibition of *Baştarda* both in the *Sale* and in the book or, more precisely, in the leaflet. This visual blending highlights the compositeness of *Baştarda* built by numerous suspended pieces while blurring the distinction between its exterior and interior views both as a whole and in detail. So it is through such theatrical visuality that *Baştarda* performs as a fantastical machine floating in space (Figure 2).

## 2.

In his first memo, Calvino also reflects upon his own writing practice in relation to “the images of lightness” that he uses in his works (1988, 7). Some stimulating examples of this use can be seen in his widely acclaimed *Invisible Cities* (Calvino, 1983a), and particularly in a group of cities lying at “the heart of the book” and forming its “most luminous areas” (Calvino, 1983b, 42). “Octavia” is one of them which “instead of rising up, is hung below” (1983a, 61). More characteristically, it is a city where “rope-ladders, hammocks, houses made like sacks, cloth-hangers, terraces like gondolas, skins of water, gas jets, spits, baskets on strings, dumb-waiters, showers, trapezes and rings for children’s games, cable-cars, chandeliers, pots with trailing plants” are all suspended through “a net” (1983a, 61).

To visitors of the *Sale D’Armi*, the lightness of “Octavia” as recounted by Marco Polo, the explorer of all the “invisible cities” in the novel, can look suggestively similar to that of *Baştarda*. What can be even more inspiring is to see how Marco Polo tells his stories about these cities “by drawing objects from his baggage” and by showing them to Kublai Khan (Calvino, 1983a, 32) or, in other words, how he communicates with the Khan by means of a language of objects. Accordingly, considering that *Baştarda* is first and foremost an object composed of hundreds of objects in different forms, dimensions, textures and colors, it can be suggested that using a similar language, *Baştarda* is a

carrier of its own story between Istanbul and Venice (Figure 3).

This is the story that visitors can watch in the *Sale d’Armi* where the exhibition of *Baştarda* is accompanied with a continuous loop of photographs and video shots shown on five adjacent screens consecutively and complementarily. While black and white images document the assemblage process of *Baştarda* in an abandoned shipshed in the Golden Horn Arsenal, a single colored photograph which appears at the end and covers all the screens presents *Baştarda* after it was assembled there and before it was disassembled to be shipped to Venice and reassembled in the *Sale*. Rather than simply providing visitors with background information, the show helps them visualize this process as the story of *Baştarda* travelling between two shipsheds, two arsenals, and two cities reflecting each other across the Mediterranean like the story told by Marco Polo about the two cities with one name, “Valdrada”, mirroring each other on a lake (Calvino, 1983a, 43-44).

## 3.

After its travel to Venice, *Baştarda* is back again in Istanbul. Today it tells a new version of its story in a shipshed constructed in the harbor of the city and outside Istanbul Modern as part of the exhibition “HARBOR” (9). Through a large opening, once visitors step into this simple metal structure enveloped by opaque panels, they can see *Baştarda* in daylight depending on the season

9. The exhibition curators are Çelenk Bafra and Levent Çalikoğlu.

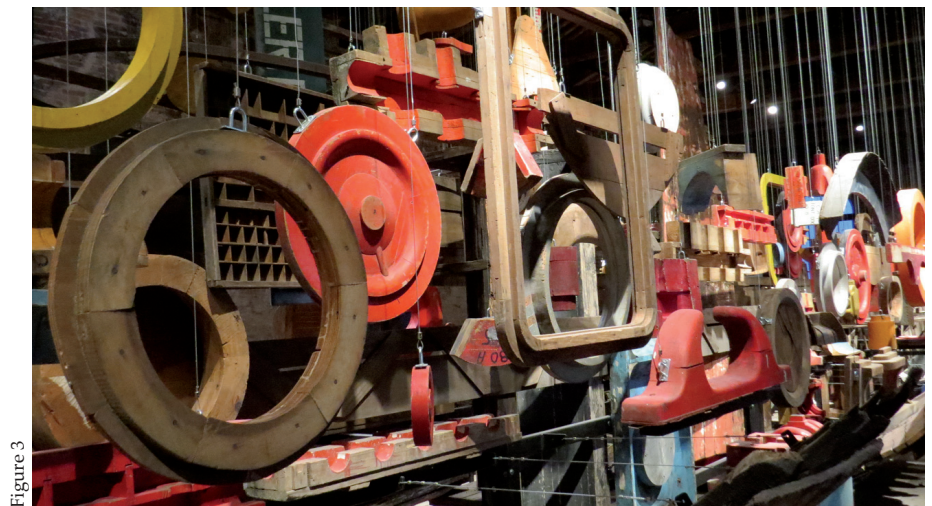


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

and the hour (Figures 4 and 5). This is a remarkably different perception from the one in the dark *Sale d'Armi* where *Baştarda* is illuminated theatrically by artificial lighting. Another ever-changing outdoor condition here is the weather which affects visitors' experience of the lightness of *Baştarda* not only visually

but also aurally. Now they can see and hear *Baştarda* whose suspended pieces swing by the wind, touch each other, and make soft and distinct sounds while reminding them of what Marco Polo tells Kublai Khan: "it is not the voice that commands the story: it is the ear" (Calvino, 1983a, 106).

Participating actively in this visual and aural performance of *Baştarıda*, here visitors can also think of Calvino's use of the myth of Perseus as an allegory of his own writing practice in his memo on lightness: "Whenever humanity seems condemned to heaviness", Calvino says, "I think I should fly like Perseus into a different space" (1988, 7). But then he adds: "I don't mean escaping into dreams or into the irrational. I mean that I have to change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification" (1988, 7). Through this allegory, what visitors can perceive is that the lightness of *Baştarıda* is neither a refusal of the controversy arising from the recent urban transformation project of the Golden Horn Arsenal in Istanbul, nor an escape from its weight, but a possibility of dealing with this reality from a novel and challenging point of view. This is what remains after *Baştarıda* tells its story: "a void not filled with words" but left to visitors' imagination, as in the case of "the space" that remains around "every event or piece of news" after Marco Polo recounts his stories of the "invisible cities" (Calvino, 1983a, 32).

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