

## Images

**01.** Jordi Bernadó. The Mies van der Rohe Pavilion. Second Reconstruction. 13/05/2014 – 21/04/ 2014. © Mies van der Rohe Foundation.

**02.** Xavier Veilhan. Architectones Barcelona Pavilion. 26/06/2014 – 31/08/ 2014. © Mies van der Rohe Foundation.

**03.** SANAA. Intervention in the Pavilion. 26/11/2011 – 18/01/ 2012. ©. © Mies van der Rohe Foundation.

**04.** Enric Miralles y Benedetta Tagliabue. Exhibition: Scottish Parliament Project. © Mies van der Rohe Foundation.

**05.** Muntadas. On Translation: Paper BP/MVDR. 05/04/2009 – 05/05/ 2009. © Mies van der Rohe Foundation.

**06.** Andrés Jaque. PHANTOM. Mies as Rendered Society. 13/12/2012 – 17/01/ 2013. © Mies van der Rohe Foundation.

**07.** Ai Weiwei. With Milk \_\_\_ find something everybody can use. 09/12/2009 – 30/12/ 2009. © Mies van der Rohe Foundation.

**08.** Edwin van der Heide. Spectral Diffractions. 11/06/2014 – 14/06/ 2014. © Mies van der Rohe Foundation.

**09.** Anna & Eugeni Bach. Mies Missing Materiality. 8-11-2017 < 28-11-2017. ©Adrià-Goula.

## 13

# The museum of innocence: the construction of a story

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*The Museum of Innocence* is a novel and a museum created by Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk that tells the story of two young lovers in Istanbul through the objects of everyday life. *The Museum of Innocence* project is a collection of objects arranged in the form of a novel and displayed in a museum, calling attention to the importance of the narrative both in the building of the collection and in endowing the museum with spatial form.

It is a tale of passion, told through the objects that trigger the characters' memories in different places in the city. For this reason, it is also the story of a time and a city. In particular, it is a reflection on the importance of our houses, of the people who live in them, their objects and their stories, and how they can be turned into museums.



- "You know that I've been taking away things from this house, Aunt Nesibe," I said, with the ease of a patient who can at last smile about an illness he was cured of long ago. "Now I'd like to buy the house itself, the entire building."

- (...)

- Kemal, my son, I can't leave this house and all its memories...

- We will turn the house into a place where we can display our memories, Aunt Nesibe"<sup>1</sup>.

(fig. 01) Kemal Basmaci, the protagonist of the novel *The Museum of Innocence*, is a young businessman from a wealthy family. His distant cousin Füsün Keskin, on the other hand, is a girl from a humble family, the daughter of a retired teacher and seamstress. At the beginning of the story, one afternoon in 1975, Kemal encounters his cousin, now a very attractive young woman, and falls completely in love with her.

*The Museum of Innocence* (2008), a work by the acclaimed Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk, winner of the 2006 Nobel Prize for Literature, narrates the obsessive relationship between these two young people from Istanbul, painting in the process a portrait of the social and cultural landscape of a period in time through the objects of everyday life. *The Museum of Innocence* is the story of a life and a passion, narrated through the objects that trigger the characters' memories in different places in the city. For this reason, it is also the story of a time and a place.

## A LOVE STORY

Kemal Basmacı and Füsün Keskin begin their prohibited love affair by meeting regularly in secret, in a small apartment owned by Kemal's aunt. The family uses *Merhamet Apartment* to store old furniture, antiques, clothes and other dusty domestic

objects that fill the space, a collection full of memories of a common childhood and past, whose unique atmosphere from the very first pages becomes the backdrop of their romance. However, the relationship abruptly ends after the celebration of Kemal's engagement to his official fiancée, and Füsün disappears. From this moment, Kemal knows that Füsün is not coming back and he begins a desperate search for his cousin and anything that reminds him of her. The next twenty-four chapters describe in detail how Kemal wanders through the city, along the streets and through the squares he used to visit with Füsün, gazing into the shop windows of stores where they used to stop or buying her favorite rolls from the bakery, with the hope of finding her. In his obsession, Kemal often visits *Merhamet Apartment* to remember the moments of joy spent with Füsün, finding comfort in the objects gathered there and the memories they evoke "when taking each of the objects in my hand, and in that I found solace"<sup>2</sup>.

For a short period of time, Kemal tries to forget about his cousin and reclaim his life. To do this, he decides to stop visiting the apartment and "caressing the things that reminded me of her", in addition to "remov[ing] from my mental map a number of streets and places"<sup>3</sup>. In doing so, he creates a map of red, orange and yellow streets depending on the intensity of the memory they evoke, thereby avoiding passing by them (fig. 02). Still, in spite of his efforts, Kemal is unable to overcome his obsession. So, 339 days after last seeing her, Kemal obtains the new address where Füsün lives with her parents, Tarik Bey and Aunt Nesibe, and goes to see her. When he arrives to Çukurcuma house, he discovers with utter frustration that his cousin has married someone else. At that moment he realizes that if he wants to see Füsün, he will have to claim to be a distant relative and friend of the family.

For exactly seven years and ten months, Kemal visits the Keskins' house regularly to see Füsün while simultaneously gratifying his obsessive passion for collecting all the objects that she has touched. Kemal's zeal for collecting began in *Merhamet Apartment* when he discovered the intangible qualities of objects and their relationship to the memories and sensations they awaken. As Walter Benjamin says, "holding them in his hands, [the collector] seems to be seeing through them his distant past as though he was inspired"<sup>4</sup>. The collector becomes obsessed with the idea of collecting the objects that belong to the beloved in order to preserve the memories of moments spent with her. At first, Kemal begins by taking Füsün's lipstick from the bathroom, a bobby pin that fell from her hair, a pen. Yet, little by little, on each of his visits he takes other things which he meticulously stores in *Merhamet Apartment*: a salt shaker, a little spoon, some cards, a little porcelain dog, a box of matches, a perfume bottle, going so far to accumulate even 4,213 cigarette butts that Füsün had smoked (fig. 03).

At the end of the novel, Füsün dies in a tragic accident. In the midst of his grief, Kemal realizes while observing his collection that "if he could tell [his] story, it would alleviate his suffering"<sup>5</sup>. He understands "that he had to compile in a single place everything connected to Füsün, both what he had accumulated over the course of nine years without knowing it at first and what was in her bedroom and everything the house contained but he didn't know where it could be"<sup>6</sup>. This determination leads him to travel all over the world visiting 5,723 "little museums" and museum houses "where objects of the past are embedded as if they were his soul"<sup>7</sup>, and where he finds inspiration for his own project.

He therefore decides to buy the family home from his aunt and turn it into a museum to display his collection of objects,

because Füsün's possessions and life deserved to be exhibited "with the same brilliance, depth and power"<sup>8</sup> as any other piece of national history. A house filled with memories is transformed into a "sentimental museum" showing "case by case and box by box [how] he observed Füsün over dinner for eight years and the attention he paid to everything about her –her hand, her arm, her smile, how she twirled her hair, how she put out her cigarette, her frown, her kerchiefs, her bobby pins, her shoes, the little spoon she held in her hand"–, in such way that "when looking at the pieces, whoever walked through the museum will feel respect [...] and will mix their own memories with our love"<sup>9</sup>.

## COLLECTION AS NARRATIVE

"I wanted to collect and exhibit the 'real' objects of a fictional story in a museum and to write a novel based on these objects"<sup>10</sup>.

*The Museum of Innocence* is really a story about a collection. It is primarily a collection of objects –a necklace, a pair of yellow shoes, a Jenny Colon bag, the bobby pins, the cigarette butts, the coffee spoon– from daily life, personal objects with great emotional weight. Yet it is more than that. It is also a collection of the places where the story unfolds –*Merhamet Apartment*, the Keskins' house, anzelize Boutique, Inci Patisserie– that paints a subjective picture of the city, cataloging it and making it one's own. All this is intertwined with the narrative events, the story behind them, which gives meaning to the whole. This, in turn, demonstrates the ability to focus on peripheral details and make them essential, resting the gaze inspirationally on "everything that we have become accustomed to not seeing"<sup>11</sup>. As in the works of Georges Perec, it is a way of describing the ordinary in an extraordinary way.

At first, Orhan Pamuk conceived of the novel as a catalog, "a sort of encyclopedic dictionary in which not only objects and places but also concepts would be the subject headings"<sup>12</sup>. His original idea was to write "a novel in the form of detailed notes about every object exhibited in a museum", as if to "present each object to a museum visitor, and describe the memories that this object evoked in my protagonist". However, later "a love story burst into it"<sup>13</sup>, and this forced him to rearrange everything.

The secret of the novel's success lies in the emotional connection to the things that are collected. In other words, "we can only envisage a novel through the juxtaposition of objects that awaken within us an emotional and poetic response"<sup>14</sup>. "A relationship with objects that doesn't emphasize their functional, utilitarian value but that studies them and loves them as the stage of one's destiny. [...] Each remembered and thought thing, everything one is cognizant of, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of their properties"<sup>15</sup>. For this reason, when the protagonist of the novel discovers the power of objects to unleash memories and feelings, this becomes his driving force. The author was convinced that by focusing on objects and telling a story through them, his characters would be much more realistic. As a result, from the start, it was essential that these objects were real, that they actually existed.

Here is where we find the most important and interesting quality of the *Museum of Innocence*: the collection of objects is real. Indeed, it is on display in an actual museum in Istanbul that opened its doors in 2012. In fact, we could say that the project of the *Museum of Innocence* emerges essentially from the collection. The project is the collection. Later, the novel weaves a fictional tale around it, and the museum ultimately exhibits it. Orhan Pamuk envisaged from the start a project in which collecting and displaying actual objects formed part of a fictional story. For this, the first thing he did was to begin gathering small objects that, later, would have to form part of his story. The idea was to create a universe of objects that would fill both the museum and the novel (fig. 04). Since the mid-1990s, Pamuk had been collecting the things that the Keskin family would use, imagining at the same time how at some point they would end up in a museum.

"Sometimes I'd spot a teacup I wanted in an acquaintance's house or inside the old cupboards where my mother kept the pots and pans she no longer used, her porcelain, her sugar bowls, and her trinkets for display, and one day I'd take it without telling anyone that it was destined for the museum"<sup>16</sup>.

Many of the things he wanted for his novel were possessions linked to his life and his family, objects that had left an imprint and that could be integrated into the story: his father's old ties for Kemal's father or his mother's knitting needles for Aunt Nesibe. But, mainly, he spent many years scouring flea markets and antique shops in Istanbul and other cities searching for objects that moved him emotionally and could be used in the novel.

"I'd place an object before me and it would tell a part of my story"<sup>17</sup>. In this way, as he gradually accumulated objects for his museum, the story continued to evolve in his mind.

Pamuk did not see himself as a traditional collector. His aim was not to compile series but rather his "enthusiasm was that of a designer, one who transforms each piece into an element of a novel or a museum"<sup>18</sup>. Thus, the drawings in which Pamuk sketched what the display cases would look like in the museum, filled with notes about the objects that go in each one, their position and lighting, are vitally important (fig. 05). They are drawing plans for a collection. His own work is, in reality, a demonstration of how a genuine collector is similar to a curator, a planner whose creation is precisely the narrative that endows a series of apparently banal and ordinary objects with value and becomes a collection. In the same way as, as Pamuk says, "when selecting a series of things by instinct, turning them into a story and imagining how they could fit into the lives of the characters, we've already begun to write the novel"<sup>19</sup>, the collection was created.

The narrative is spun like a fine thread around all the pieces of the collection, establishing infinite relationships between them. It is truly intriguing "the way in which objects removed from the kitchens, bedrooms, and dinner tables where they had once been utilized would come together to form a new texture, an unintentionally striking web of relationships"<sup>20</sup>. The protagonist of the novel, like its author, is fully aware of this reality. Kemal transfers to the Çukurcuma museum-house all the possessions that he has been accumulating over the years and unites "those objects with the others, with the ones he had found on [his] travels, the ones from the Keskins' house, the ones he had discovered in junk-strewn dwellings or thanks to acquaintances that were mixed into [his] story"<sup>21</sup>. It then dawns on him that, despite being uprooted from their origins and separated from the lives of which they formed a part, like migratory birds that silently spread throughout the world, all of these objects were communicating with each other and were going to end up together in a single place. And they do so with an added value: by arranging them carefully and passionately, by reimagining them as pieces from an actual story, in the display cases of a museum they acquire a meaning which they previously did not possess. The objects departed from one house as ordinary things and returned to a museum transformed into a precious collection.

#### NARRATIVE AND SPACE

"The house was part of my collection –its biggest, most expensive, and most visible piece"<sup>22</sup>. The house is, finally, the centerpiece of the collection (fig. 06). It had to play a fundamental role both in the fictional tale and in real life. Orhan Pamuk devoted years

to long strolls through the various neighborhoods of Istanbul until one day he found it. Even before starting to write the novel, finding the right piece that he would use as the setting of the Keskin household and would later turn into a museum was a pivotal decision. Deciding where it was located also meant determining where the museum would be.

In the summer of 1999, Pamuk finally bought an old house in the neighborhood of Çukurcuma. It was a small two-story building, elegant but decadent, on a 590 square-foot plot of land with a courtyard. What attracted him most was its position on a corner with a wall and balconies facing two streets, its winding stairway and "even its smallness"<sup>23</sup>. When he saw it, he was sure that "Füsun had certainly lived here"<sup>24</sup>. In it he imagined the Keskins' life in detail: on the first floor, the living room, the kitchen and the room where Aunt Nesibe knitted and read the newspaper *Tarik Bey*. On the second floor were her parents' room, the room Füsun shared with her husband and the bathroom. Pamuk vividly imagined the stories of the actual objects that would inhabit the house during the novel and that later would actually be displayed there.

For several years, due to political pressures, Pamuk had to set aside the museum project, until, in 2008, after completing the novel, he was able to recover it. Still, it had always been clear to him how to transform Çukurcuma house into a museum and invest it with the personality it needed to transmit, instructions that he has his protagonist put into practice.

The main idea revolved around preserving the shell of the building and adapting the interior to its new use. A new longitudinal stairway was added, as well as a central opening that spanned the entire house and would enable viewing the collection from any point of the exhibition (fig. 07). Kemal Bey, inspired by houses in which people live with their collections and which, when their occupants die, become museums, moves with his collection to live in the Keskins' attic while it is being turned into a museum. "I was now, by the presence of my bed, my room, my very self, trying to turn a museum back into a house. What could be more beautiful than to spend one's night surrounded by objects connecting one to his deepest sentimental attachments and memories!"<sup>25</sup>. From his attic post, Kemal wants to look down and see all the objects he has collected, to experience each one of the pieces in the depth of the space and "feel their stories flickering inside him"<sup>26</sup>. In some way, as in the inspiring story of Ali Vâsib Efendi<sup>27</sup>, Kemal himself, while protagonist and creator of the collection, becomes another element of the exhibition.

The Museum of Innocence can be regarded as a spiral space closely tied to a story. It can be seen as a spiral drawn on the floor of the actual museum at the foot of the hollow space that crosses the building. Pamuk realizes that the line that connects moments –Time, in Aristotle's philosophy–, cannot be a straight line but rather a spiral. As a result, the visitor, when looking down in the Museum of Innocence and seeing all the objects in the collection floating in space, understands that just as the line that connects moments is Time, the line that unites objects gives rise to a story. And for the author this is "the greatest happiness a museum can bring: to see Time turning into Space"<sup>28</sup>.

It is for this reason that the museum is organized like a story. The objects are exhibited in ordered display cases that follow the chapters of the book: each chapter is a glass case. As a result, one can visit the museum as in the novel, recreating the fiction. The display cases are separate wooden boxes, each containing the objects that belong to a specific chapter. They are exquisitely arranged, with a small, delicate set design in each one cared for down to its last detail. Every object is gracefully weighed and measured. Some are the focal point while others form part of the scene but all exist in a methodical state of static equilibrium. The experience of walking through the museum and viewing the display cases is like seeing three-dimensional paintings, still lifes from the 21st century combined with the collage, diorama and mini-theaters of the 19th century. One inevitably recalls the toys room at the Museu Frederic Marès<sup>29</sup> in Barcelona, with its series of mini-theaters in wooden boxes that suddenly light up and give life to a marvelous collection of scenes. One also cannot help but discover in these glass cases Pamuk's fascination with the shop windows of stores in Istanbul where the composition of the items on display is flawless (figs. 08, 09 and 10).

The lighting system also plays an extremely important role, since it is light that makes the object come to life: “each object has to be softly lit from inside the glass cases in a way that adequately reflects the attention I paid to them”<sup>30</sup>, Kemal says. The resulting whole is a kind of Chamber of Wonders where the visitor beholds all the objects at once, more or less lit in a dark atmosphere and appearing to float in the trebled space created by the central opening. The visitor moves through a space of floating objects that envelop him. Looking at the objects spurs his imagination in such a way that he is able to “read the never written” that is, “perceive the intimate and secret relationship of things, the correspondences and analogies”<sup>31</sup>. In other words, he discovers the common thread that runs through all the pieces of the collection. “This new way of relating images shows instead of explaining, and for this reason [...] it is inexhaustible and will have as many readers as visitors”<sup>32</sup>.

The museum that Pamuk proposes deliberately seeks to distinguish itself from the large art centers found in many cities. His goal is to tell a personal story through the characters and their objects that depicts the daily reality of life in Istanbul in the 1970s. It is, in other words, an intimate museum on a human scale. Rather than constructing stories of national history the museum focuses on individual stories, since the true challenge lies in telling the story of a country with the same quality as that of the people who live in it. While the history and meaning of the objects in the museum are personal, they are also shared, insofar as they are common everyday objects with which anyone can identify. For this reason, the Museum of Innocence tells one story –that of Kemal and Füsün– but tells many other stories as well, those of the city of Istanbul and all the visitors who feel identified with it.

The Museum of Innocence is also a domestic museum. Though a museum, it is located in a house and filled with utterly ordinary things. In other words, it is a domestic space where the objects of ordinary stories are on display in their context, and as a result the objects themselves already tell a story and become an “exhibition”. This invites us to reflect on our own houses as well, particularly on the importance of the people who inhabit them, their objects and their stories –and how our own homes could in reality be museums.

“We need to imagine a new type of more humble, modest museum that focuses on the stories of individual human beings, does not uproot objects from the environments to which they belong, and is able to turn the neighborhoods and streets it is in, and the homes and shops nearby, into integral components of its exhibitions. We will all gain a deeper understanding of humanity when modern curators turn their gaze away from the rich “high” culture of the past –like those first novelists who tired of writing sagas about the lives of kings– and observe instead the lives we lead and the homes we live in, especially outside the Western world. The future of museums is inside our own homes”<sup>33</sup>.

(Translated by Kevin Krell)

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## Notes

- 01.** PAMUK, O., *El Museo de la Inocencia*, Debolsillo, Barcelona, 2017, p. 604.
- 02.** Ibid. p. 196.
- 03.** Ibid. p. 206.
- 04.** BENJAMIN, W., *Desembalo mi biblioteca. El arte de coleccionar*, Centellas, Palma, 2015.
- 05.** PAMUK, O., *El Museo de la Inocencia*, cit., p. 596.
- 06.** Ibid. p. 599.
- 07.** Ibid. p. 607.
- 08.** PAMUK, O., "A modest manifesto for museums", in *The innocence of objects*, Abrams, New York, 2012, pp. 54-57.
- 09.** PAMUK, O., *El Museo de la Inocencia*, cit., p. 633.
- 10.** PAMUK, O., *The innocence of objects*, Abrams, New York, 2012, p. 15.
- 11.** DIDI-HUBERMAN, G., *Atlas : ¿cómo llevar el mundo a cuestras?*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2010, p. 274.
- 12.** PAMUK, O., *The innocence of objects*, cit., p. 15.
- 13.** PAMUK, O., "Una mirada a mis fuentes de inspiración", *El País*, 23 mar 2015, [en línea].
- 14.** Ibid.
- 15.** BENJAMIN, W., *Desembalo mi biblioteca. El arte de coleccionar*, cit., p.
- 16.** PAMUK, O., *The innocence of objects*, cit., p. 21.
- 17.** PAMUK, O., "Una mirada a mis fuentes de inspiración", cit.
- 18.** Ibid.
- 19.** Ibid.
- 20.** PAMUK, O., *The innocence of objects*, cit., p. 52.
- 21.** PAMUK, O., *El Museo de la Inocencia*, cit., p. 617.
- 22.** PAMUK, O., *The innocence of objects*, cit., p. 33.
- 23.** Ibid. p. 30.
- 24.** Ibid. p. 31.
- 25.** PAMUK, O., *El Museo de la Inocencia*, cit., p. 618.
- 26.** Ibid. p. 620.
- 27.** Prince Ali Vâsib Efendi, a descendant of the Ottoman dynasty, returned to Turkey after being in exile for fifty years in search of a job that would allow him to stay. Orhan Pamuk met him in 1982, at a family reunion. There it was suggested that he could find work as a docent at a museum in Ihlamur Palace, where he had lived as a child. He could explain his own life by guiding visitors through the rooms where he had spent his childhood, surrounded by his own things.
- 28.** PAMUK, O., *The innocence of objects*, cit., p. 253.
- 29.** The Sentimental Museum in the Museu Frederic Marés in Barcelona is a direct inspiration for the Museum of Innocence. Orhan Pamuk visited it several times, ultimately stating that it was the place where he best understood how his own museum had to be.
- 30.** PAMUK, O., *El Museo de la Inocencia*, cit., p. 633.
- 31.** DIDI-HUBERMAN, G., op. cit., p. 15.
- 32.** Ibid. p. 15
- 33.** PAMUK, O., "Los objetos viajan por rutas misteriosas", *El País*, 17 nov 2012, [en línea].

## Images

- 01.** (Front page) Interior of the Museum of Innocence.
- 02.** Box n. 31: The Streets That Reminded Me of Her
- 03.** Box n. 68: 4.213 Cigarette Stubs (detail)
- 04.** Box n. 58: Tombala
- 05.** Project sketches for boxes n. 25 and 73.
- 06.** Exterior of the Museum of Innocence.
- 07.** The Keskins' house floor plan (left) and the Museum of Innocence floor plan (right).
- 08.** Box n. 25: The Agony of Waiting
- 09.** Box n. 38: The End-of-Summer Party
- 10.** Box n. 14: Istanbul's Streets, Bridges, Hills and Squares.