

IMAGE PHENOMENOLOGY · FINAL PROJECT

THE CLASSIFICATION LINE

TIMELESS
HERITAGE · CLASSIC

EXOTIC
ORNAMENT · REPLICA

THE OTHER SHORE

Classification, auto-orientalism and the landscape built as a
backdrop in Ekin Özbiçer's *Replica* (2016)

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A Situated Investigation of the Gaze
1,655 words

A line drawn through one sea

The template does not reach every shore it claims, and I want to start with the shore it skips.

In *Mediterranean Dream*, Marta Martina describes the moment a landscape stops speaking and starts performing: “the passage of landscape from symbolic space to performative surface.” What the image industry produces along that coast is no longer documentation but a template — “pastel tones, measured sunsets, silent, empty glimpses from which every trace of everyday life has been removed.”

Sicily, Puglia and the Amalfi coast are photographed as *timeless*. Tod’s *Italian Stories* (S/S 2025) sells “the timeless allure of Italian lifestyle”; Dolce&Gabbana Casa (2025) turns “iconic landscapes” into “dreamlike settings”; Mango’s Mediterranean Summer campaign (2022) does the same work in linen and white stone. The words that come with these images are always the same: heritage, light, restraint.

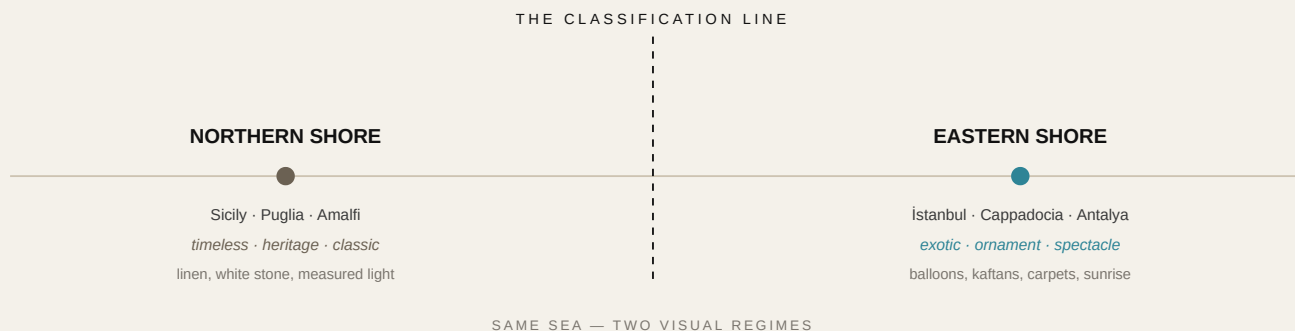
Turkey sits on the same water and is not photographed this way. The image economy around it does not offer timelessness; it offers *ornament*. The genre is legible in its own titles: “21 Most

Instagrammable Places in Istanbul,” “15 Best Instagram Spots in Cappadocia.”

This is a difference in classification, not in beauty. Rachele Borghi argues that the Western world’s “classification anxiety” has “made us believe that it is normal to consider the world as a puzzle in which each piece must be placed in one and only place,” and that when a piece does not fit, “the norm requires that the transgression be followed by a sanction” — a sanction that “often initiates a process of excluding people from places.”

Turkey does not fit cleanly: Mediterranean but not European, Muslim but not Arab, modern but narrated as ancient. The system resolves the ambiguity downward, into the Orient — a place permitted to be gorgeous and not permitted to be ordinary.

Martina asks what remains of a place once it stops being inhabited and starts to be represented. Ekin Özbiçer photographs the most literal answer available: a coast where the backdrop has actually been built.



A hotel that is not in Turkey



Fig. 1 — Ekin Özbiçer, from *Replica*, 2016. The Kremlin Palace hotel, Antalya. © Ekin Özbiçer.

Özbiçer is an Istanbul photographer who studied fine arts at Marmara University and works across editorial fashion — *Vogue*, *Marie Claire* — and autonomous projects. *Replica* (2016) photographs the all-inclusive resorts of Antalya, a number of which are constructed as copies of European and Ottoman buildings.

“I was in Antalya for three days. I stayed at the Kremlin Palace and spent a whole day in Amsterdam.”

EKIN ÖZBIÇER

It is not a joke. The Kremlin Palace is a hotel. So is Amsterdam.

Take the sunbather. A single figure, horizontal on a lounge; behind him the Kremlin’s towers rise in sugared pastel, competently proportioned and entirely



Fig. 2 — Ekin Özbiçer, from *Replica*, 2016. Amsterdam canal houses around a hotel pool, Antalya. © Ekin Özbiçer.

weightless. It is a seat of Russian state power, and the two of them have nothing to do with each other. He is not looking at it. That is the point. The Kremlin has become wallpaper. Özbiçer does not comment on this; she just leaves it in the frame.

Martina writes that in the tourist regime “the place does not respond, does not return the gaze, does not engage in dialogue.” Here the place is incapable of responding by construction. It was never a place.

The pool ringed with canal houses works in reverse. Amsterdam’s houses are narrow and deep because of how the seventeenth-century city parcelled its canal frontage. Rebuilt around a heated pool in Antalya, the proportion survives and its reason does not. This is what the template does to form everywhere it travels: it keeps the silhouette and discards the history that produced it.

What the pictures actually do



Fig. 3 — Indoor pool with Iznik-style floral panels.



Fig. 4 — Hotel restaurant hung with Orientalist paintings.



Fig. 5 — A guest photographed in front of a St Basil's replica.

One photograph shows the replica working exactly as designed. A woman stands at a railing in front of the onion domes of a St Basil's copy, arranged for the camera; beside her, a companion raises a phone. Özbiçer photographs the photograph being taken. The backdrop is doing its job, the pose is being produced, and what we are given is not the souvenir but the manufacture of the souvenir — the tourist gaze caught mid-gesture, from the side.

Three formal decisions carry the argument.

They look like film stills. Özbiçer studied screenshots from films for their colour, gesture and architecture, and the photographs inherit that: cinematographic light, figures positioned in architectural space, nothing apparently left to chance.

Nothing is directed. For fashion and editorial work she stage-manages; here she refuses to. “I am holding the camera, eyes open, click-click-click, forgetting that I photograph.”

Those two facts together are the finding. The photographs look composed because *the place is already composed*. She does not need to art-direct a location that was art-directed before she arrived. The staging is in the concrete.

The palette is the template's own. Pastel, measured, evenly lit — precisely the register Martina identifies in Mediterranean campaign imagery. The difference is that here the pastel is paint on a building rather than a grade applied afterwards. The filter has been constructed at 1:1 scale.

Who the replica is for

Some passports go to Amsterdam. Others go to Antalya's Amsterdam.

As Kim Knoppers observes, European and Russian guests get Turkey, therefore exotic; European architecture, therefore safe. And it costs less than the coast of Spain, Italy or France.

Turkish and regional guests get Amsterdam or Moscow as a backdrop, therefore exotic; Turkish food and Turkish-speaking staff, therefore safe. And it costs less than Europe — and is easier. Turkish citizens require a Schengen visa, and whether they receive one depends largely on their economic circumstances.

That was 2016. The Turkish middle class those resorts also served has thinned since, squeezed by

years of inflation; a domestic holiday now tends to be either small and local or expensive and carefully chosen. The replica's home audience is not what it was.

This is where classification stops being an aesthetic matter. Borghi's sequence — transgression, sanction, exclusion from places — usually reads as metaphor. In Antalya it is administrative.

The replica is what a border produces when it cannot be crossed: the other side, rebuilt at home, and rented by the week.



Fig. 6 — Ekin Özbiçer, from *Replica*, 2016. An abandoned lunch table. © Ekin Özbiçer.



THE SAME BUILDING SELLS BOTH GROUPS THE OPPOSITE FANTASY
 — and only one of them could have gone to the original —

Auto-orientalism

Özbiçer's ongoing companion series is called *Auto Orientalism* — her own neologism for “a commonplace psyche observed in urban, westernized Turkish middle classes while they experience the social and political changes of the past decade.”

The name does analytical work the theory has been circling. The tourist gaze is usually described as something done to a place from outside. Auto-orientalism describes what happens afterwards: the template is internalised and then performed by the place upon itself. Antalya does not need European photographers to exoticise it. It has built the exotic and the European, and rents both.

This complicates the third space. Bhabha's hybrid, as Birgit Haehnel applies it to fashion, is a space where meaning is renegotiated through critical rereading. The replica resort is unmistakably hybrid: Iznik tiles, canal houses, Ottoman murals, a Kremlin. But it negotiates nothing. Every guest receives exactly the fantasy they arrived holding. It is hybridity that forecloses rather than opens — Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's single story, built in concrete, with a buffet.

Sarah Banet-Weiser's shift from a *politics of visibility* to an *economy of visibility* explains the economics of

it: what becomes visible is governed by what is marketable. Antalya is one of the most photographed coastlines in the Mediterranean and one of the least seen.

The part that should stay uncomfortable. Özbiçer is not standing outside this, and says so:

“I feel like a tourist in Turkey. I belong and I don't belong. Who are we? What is it to be Turkish, living west of Asia and east of Europe?”

EKIN ÖZBIÇER

That is this course's method stated by a practitioner — a situated investigation of the gaze in which the investigator is inside the frame.

It also names the limit. *Replica* was published and written about by Foam, an Amsterdam institution. The critique of the replica Amsterdam is validated in the real one. The work cannot stand outside the economy it describes. Özbiçer's tone appears to know this: she uses humour without ridicule, and never mocks the guests. She photographs the architecture that was built to hold them.

Where I am standing

I have never been to one of these hotels, and I would not go. In Istanbul they are read as a tourist trap — the guests imagined as German and Russian, middle-income — and the judgement arrives quickly and comfortably.

That judgement is mine, and it is a social position before it is an aesthetic one. Özbiçer works from inside the same kind of position. Neither of us is outside the frame.

What I do have is the experience from behind a facade. In Baku, buildings along the main streets have been given Parisian fronts: cornices, tall windows, pale stone. I walked into a courtyard behind one and the whole thing collapsed. The back had been left alone — crumbling, patched, lived in. I remember saying it was like makeup. The street had been made up and the inside had not.

That is why *Replica* reads to me as buildings rather than pictures. I studied architecture before I came to Milan for fashion creative direction, and I was taught to read buildings before I was taught to read campaigns. Antalya's Amsterdam is not a bad copy — the proportions are competent, the detailing is

deliberate. What has been removed is the reason those proportions existed. An architect is trained to walk round the back. A campaign is designed so that nobody does.

And the imagery I am being trained to make is the imagery this essay has been describing: the linen, the light, the coast as backdrop. The template is not something I am looking at from outside it.

Image phenomenology shifts attention from *what we see* to *how we see*, and insists that no neutral or original gaze is recoverable. *Replica* shows why that matters in practice. When a classification becomes strong enough, it stops being a way of looking and becomes a way of building. Antalya's Amsterdam is a gaze that has been poured as concrete.

The Mediterranean does not end where the classification does. But if we keep photographing as though it did, the coast will keep being built to match.

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