

ART BEAT

ON

THE



BOSPHORUS

WITH ITS CELEBRATED ARTISTS AND ITS CURRENT BIENNIAL, ISTANBUL IS ABUZZ WITH CREATIVITY. WE TAKE AN ART TOUR

TRISTAN RUTHERFORD



Stephanie Gallia, left, and Giulia Campaner, co-curators of an Istanbul-based online art platform

STEPHANIE GALLIA and Giulia Campaner are the epitome of hip, young, arty types in the 21st century. Both 25, they are the co-curators of a cutting-edge website *Banané* (bananemag.com) that showcases the work of young artists. Operating (of course) from the coolest – and most crumbling – quarter of the city they live in, their office is a former rococo dining room of the type that Keith Richards might use to hold a sultans 'n' harems-style bacchanalian feast.

So far, so predictable, you might say. However, this dynamic duo are not based in one of the usual creative hotbeds of London, Paris or New York – they're in Istanbul. For those in the know, this shouldn't come as a surprise. In recent years, the Turkish city has established itself as an artistic capital of world renown, with a growing community of sculptors, painters and gallery owners making names for themselves on the global stage.

"In the past five years or so, most of the big artists and designers in the city have emerged," says Gallia. "The scene has exploded."

It's true. At this moment, the city is hosting its 12th Biennial (17 September - 13 November, *bienal.iksc.org*), the biggest art event Istanbul has ever held, encompassing a kaleidoscope of gallery openings, offbeat exhibitions and off-the-wall parties.

So why now? One reason is that a large number of foreign-born Turks with German, British or US passports – whose parents emigrated from Turkey – are returning to the city and injecting new cultural life into it. Gallia and Campaner exemplify this trend.

"It seemed the perfect time to do something in Istanbul," says Gallia. "I'd lost my job as the crisis hit London and saw no point looking for a job there, as so many [creative professionals] were unemployed".

Innovative, cheap places for artists to work and exhibit have aided the upsurge, with creatives carving out a niche in the Beyoğlu district, which forms a rough triangle between the Bosphorus Straits, Taksim Square and the Galata Tower. This area of one-off vintage outlets, al fresco bars, antiquarian bookshops and crumbling bourgeois townhouses has become ground zero for the city's art scene.

Gallia and Campaner frequent its hip watering holes, like Kiki (*42 Siraselviler Caddesi, kiki.com.tr*) and Mini Müzikhol (*7 Siraselviler Caddesi, minimuzikhol.com*), with Gallia DJing at several local venues. Both indulge in the Istanbul pleasure of *rakı balık*: a raucous fish dinner while being serenaded by wandering musicians and washed down with rakı, a fiery Turkish take on French pastis. Boho Beyoğlu is full of these backstreet joints, known locally as *meyhane* (literally, wine house), with the girls recommending Asmalı Cavit (*16 Asmalımescit Sokak, tel: +90 (0)212 292 4,950*) in a buzzing alleyway.

This quirky area is a feast of galleries, with the revolving temporary exhibitions at Milk (*Şahkulu Mahallesi, Balkon Çıkmaızı, whatismilk.com*) and ▶

PHOTO © AHMET NECATI UZER

Galeri Non (27 Boğazkesen Caddesi, galerinon.com) capturing Gallia and Campaner's attention.

"Beyoğlu really became happening thanks to [what were] originally cheap rents, plus scores of amazing potential spaces to work in, from unused buildings to derelict warehouses," explains Gallia.

Gallia reels off a list of local talent, including illustrator Baysan Yüksel (bayananderson.com), who has exhibited in Amsterdam, Bristol and Berlin, and whose latest show was a sell-out success.

"The recent interest in Istanbul is the real reason they've had all this exposure," says Gallia. Beyoğlu is certainly a vision of iPad wielding, gallery hopping, culturally active tourism. In a wider picture, Istanbul leapt from the world's 20th most-visited city a few years back to its 9th in 2010, with a 20% growth in visitor numbers expected in 2011.

Amazingly, Istanbul has been cranking out an important new art space almost every year for a decade and there are now 250 in the city. The newest is SALT Galata (22 Bankalar Caddesi, saltonline.org), which –



"The Biennial crowd is very important to the galleries in Istanbul"

when it opens this November – will also be Istanbul's most striking art facility. Housed within a Euro-Oriental palazzo, one neo-classical façade looks west, the other Arabesque face looks east across the Golden Horn waterway. Inside are exhibition spaces, an interactive art archive and a rooftop restaurant.

The fact that its massive sister museum, SALT Beyoğlu (196 İstiklal Caddesi, saltonline.org), only opened last April highlights the city's confidence in its art scene. And, in common with much of Istanbul's creative industry, this six-month-old venue has attracted home-grown as well as foreign talent, including UK-born November Paynter, a global art curator who is now an associate director at SALT.

The institution's director of research and programmes, Vasif Kortun, claims that a decade ago there was "hardly anybody from outside" working in the city's art scene. "People move to Istanbul for different reasons," he says. "Some for its beauty, some for adventure, some for business. We cannot imagine that this moving will stop any time soon."

With new exhibition space Arter (211 İstiklal Caddesi, arter.org.tr) across the street and digital art museum Santral (2 Kazım Karabekir Caddesi, santralistanbul.org) a bus ride away, Istanbul's art aficionados are now spoiled for choice. And the Biennial celebrations will showcase the city's arty highlights.



PHOTOS © ZILBERMAN GALLERY (ASLI TORCU, MASALLAH), ISTOCK (ISTIKLAL CADDESI), SERKAN TAYCAN (SALT), MURAT GERMEN (ARTER).

FOUR ARTISTS TO WATCH



● **TANER CEYLAN**

German-born Ceylan honed his trade at Mimar Sinan University in the late 1980s. His hyperrealist portraits bridge the gap between photography and fine art. *Spiritual*, the portrait of a bloody-faced boxer, was the star of Sotheby's first Turkish art sale in 2009, raising over \$100,000. tanerceylan.com



● **MUHARREM ÇETİN**

Born in 1983, Çetin held his first solo exhibition at cutting-edge Istanbul art gallery Milk in July 2011. Primarily a collagist, Çetin began collecting and mounting old books, cards and drawings, before moving his collages into the digital arena. He is also a fashion designer. belkemiği.com



Clockwise from left: *Masallah* by Asli Torcu, one of the pieces for sale at Art Beat Istanbul during the city's Biennial; an example of why contemporary Turkish art is becoming so popular at an exhibit from a previous Biennial; pedestrianised Istiklal Caddesi in the arty Beyoğlu district; the SALT gallery; exhibition space Arter, which opened in 2010



● ERİNÇ SEYMEN

Seymen exhibited in a Turkish art show at London's Saatchi Gallery in April 2011, entitled *Confessions of Dangerous Minds*. His output during an eight-year collaboration with major Istanbul gallery Galerist won many plaudits, and his Rampa spring show is highly anticipated. rampaistanbul.com



● IMGE ÖZBILGE

Vienna-born Özbilge started drawing tuition at the age of 12. She packs her quirky canvases with colourful Istanbul and Ottoman imagery. At only 25, Özbilge has already designed magazine covers, painted wall-sized backdrops for Istanbul bars and storyboarded a movie. imge.net

Many thousands of visitors are expected to head to Depo, a former tobacco factory in the Karaköy docks, which will be the headquarters of this grand show of art for the second time. This once-gritty area is also now home to the Istanbul Modern (*Meclis-i Mebusan Caddesi, istanbulmodern.org*), Turkey's premier contemporary art museum.

According to the Biennial's director, Bige Örer, it promises to be a big year. "There are more than 5,000 accredited guests coming to the Biennial opening," she says, adding, "This crowd is very important to the galleries and art spaces in Istanbul." These art spaces include gallery-to-the stars Galerist (*311 Istiklal Caddesi, galerist.com.tr*), which is hosting the pop-up exhibition *That's F***** Acesome* until 22 October and, at the other end of the scale, tiny PASAJist (*62 Halep Pasaji, Istiklal Caddesi, pasajist.com*), a 27m² space with a show from local curator Secil Yaylali.

Örer describes the current Biennial as an arena "where the artists from Turkey meet an international art audience". Taking advantage of this creative stampede, work from the country's leading artists will be in public art sales such as Contemporary Istanbul (contemporaryistanbul.com) and Art Beat Istanbul (artbeatistanbul.com).

Although contemporary Turkish art has been patronised by Istanbul's big buyers – including the Eczacibaşı and Koç families – its appeal is widening. According to Turkey's *Fortune* magazine, the national market is now worth an estimated US \$200m, and London auction houses Sotheby's and Bonhams are holding regular Turkish art sales.

With so many Turkish artists in the city this autumn – and its art scene increasingly celebrated – Istanbul's latest vogue could end up becoming its biggest attraction.

easyJet flies to...

Istanbul from Basel-Mulhouse and London. See our insider guide on page 140. Book online at easyJet.com

