

Exile

Stephanie Paine, 2013

Every few weeks for a period of nine-months I would make the one-hour boat trip through the base of the Bosphorus Strait to the Princes Islands *Adalar*. Over the course of those months, I witnessed many changes: The sea changed according to the seasons, which also dictated the amount of people on board. Deep navy waters meant that the ferry would be relatively empty, while bright turquoise caused such a crowd that I usually found myself sitting on the stairs or leaning against a wall. The sky changed, too, and often. Since the winds shift quickly in this region, cumulus clouds were rare to come-by, so many of these pinhole images are characterized by an empty sky or are marked with the sun's rays. Overcast days translated onto film as dark purple and blue hues, while sunny days, depending on the time of year, allowed for more green and cyan.

Unpopulated scenes, untouched by human presence wasn't something that I needed to search for, as the Islands have enough spaces to explore without meeting another face for some time. People here were diverse. Holding copious amounts of maps and pamphlets, tourists were the easiest to identify, especially on those turquoise days. Leading into the cooler months, this subsided, leaving only the locals, a few white-collar workers, and young couples seeking a sanctuary from the city. Several monasteries scatter the Islands, and I often shared the watery journey with a nun.

This series of images was created with a pinhole camera that I built for landscape photography and so chose a wide-angle focal length with a 6x9 frame. I visited the four accessible islands several times and walked the circumference of each, which took about an hour (with the exception of *Büyükada Big Island*). From one half of the Islands, Istanbul's skyline is

visible, but the camera was only subtly able to record these details. One of my aims with this series was to experiment with the way that I could portray the Islands. Certainly, an island is an island in effect, so I aimed my camera outwards, upwards, and downwards. The resulting set of photographs includes open skies, expansive shorelines, rocks, cloudy water, and trees.

I use the word exile for various reasons, but its primary purpose is to reference the historical use of the Islands as places of exile during the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. Other, less aged exiles there include the detention of political prisoners in the 20th century, and that of the street dogs, which were lead to a depressing fate when the city governor banished them to one of the Islands in the 1910s. This possession of the land is what first sparked my interest. My second aim, then, was to take on the role of the exiled, pacing and circling the shorelines ever-looking outwards. Most of the trips I made were solo, so the feeling of such an experience was easily attained. To convey that feeling in a photograph may not be as easy, but the soft focus and painterly quality that these images have support a dream- or memory-like sensation, rather than a sharp depiction which would appeal much more to our logical, literal minds.

Other reasons are of a more personal nature, as this is one of the first, larger photographic series I pursued while living abroad. It was, in one aspect, a method to discover what I could do in my new home. I don't intend to undermine those (and those artists) who are truly living in a state of exile with the use of the word. Mine is a voluntary journey, of course, but the choice of exile can lend itself to isolation similar to those of the mandatory kind. For instance, one may encounter the double exile of both land and language. Although I studied the language prior to moving, I was rarely in situations where I knew just how to use it. I was forced to realize the uselessness of it during my first few months. A cold slap from the Universe. But I like to think of this double exile as a means for certain dualities of the experience to expose themselves: existing here, yet thinking there; being the self and the other at the same time; and feeling a native to one country, but living like the natives of another. A childhood friend, who coincidentally moved abroad the same year as I, disclosed that sometimes he was afraid to lose who he was at home. Yet, these dualities, these oppositions, eventually tear away at the barrier between the inner being and the outer world, and once they become too heavy to hold back, the need for assimilation arises. Otherwise, most certainly, exile will divulge itself within, as friend and poet, Alex Banks expresses in *The Observer*¹.

*In this tan room cluttered with art deco mirrors
The accompanying voice, dancing like a feather, says "I heard you're very lonely."
This room is an endless labyrinth of rooms
turning over on themselves with no explanation
like a meat grinder of writhing bodies,
A chandelier in God's sensorium.*

*My dreams are reality; painting the theatre bizarre
Mere moments separated by suspended animation
Two tiny abruptions ruling my perception.
Every bundle of absorbed organisms looking through their own viewfinder,
one no more true than the other.*

*Walking through walls like wading pools
I often wonder what I look like to other people
Behind every I resides the seat of sensation
stampeding in blind fear,
Trampling and suffocating the observer.*

*I look in the mirror and I only see darkness, an eternal abyss of black depth
There's something there beyond the other side.*