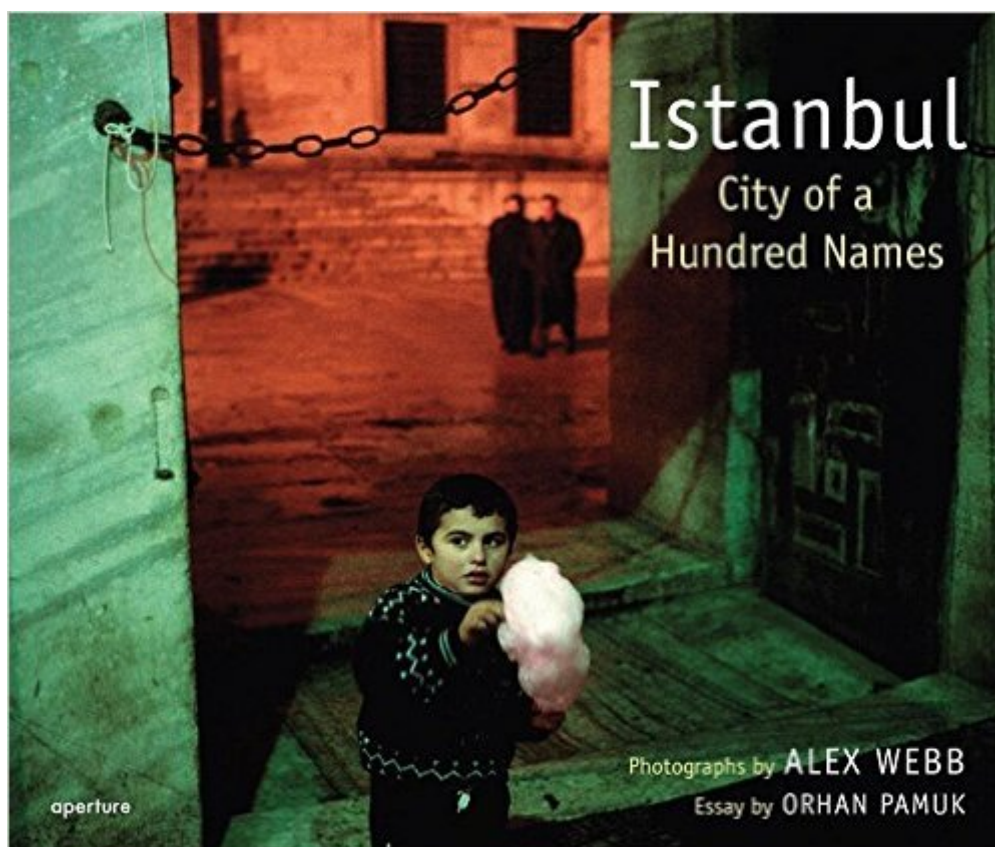


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Alex Webb: Istanbul: City Of A Hundred Names



Synopsis

In "Istanbul: City of a Hundred Names," Magnum photographer Alex Webb displays his particular ability to distill gesture, color and contrasting cultural tensions into a single, beguiling frame. He presents a vision of Istanbul as an urban cultural center, rich with the incandescence of its past--a city of minarets and pigeons rising to the heavens during the early-morning call to Muslim prayers--yet also a city riddled with ATM machines and clothed in designer jeans. Webb began photographing Istanbul in 1998, and became instantly enthralled: by the people, the layers of culture and history, the richness of street life. But what particularly drew him in was a sense of Istanbul as a border city, lying between Europe and Asia. "For 30-some years as a photographer, I have been intrigued by borders, places where cultures come together, sometimes easily, sometimes roughly." The resulting body of work, some of Webb's strongest to date, conveys the frisson of a culture in transition, yet firmly rooted in a complex history. With essay by the Nobel Prize winning novelist, Orhan Pamuk.

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Customer Reviews

With "Istanbul" Alex Webb seems to be hitting an apex in his style. It is amazing. All of his photos are complex juxtapositions of humans in their environment. His color is too saturated for my taste (detail is obliterated in his shadows), but I see what he is doing, and it works toward that end. But do I see what he is doing? I've never been to Istanbul, but I certainly don't feel like I've been there through this book. (The essay by Orhan Pamuk has zero to do with the images. Add a generic

essay about Istanbul by the city's most famous author and it will help sell a book of photos that is, well, maybe more about the photographer than the city ...) Is there a single happy face in this book? I've only seen grim, suspicious looks. Is that Istanbul, or is that Webb? Webb's strength is as a visual puzzle master. A technique that he has perfected here is his use of capturing images in mirrors and reflections. It is all confusion and dislocation, done supremely well -- as photo-surrealism. But "warmth" is not an adjective to be used in any way to describe his images, other than their saturated reds. (Even those offer heat rather than comfort.) I see this book as a fantastic tool for discussion of composition. It isn't a book to get to know Istanbul or humanity -- but maybe a great way to get to know Alex Webb.

Alex Webb has done a great job for sure. As an amateur photographer living in Istanbul for all my life, I enjoyed the photos so much that I gave myself permission to see maximum 3 photos per day. Here's why; I found lots of familiar sights with different tastes. So different that I see almost everyday of my life. I think Mr. Webb's success in this book is based on his experience on his photography skills, his full understanding of a nation, its values (such as the flag's importance for us, Atatürk-the founder of our republic), religion (the scarf and people), history, architecture, sociology and culture. The photos are being shot in a wide range of time during Mr. Webb's visits to Turkey. On the other hand, to be honest Mr. Pamuk (2007 literature Nobel prize winner) essays are unlucky to be in this book just because the photos tell everything that no words are necessary to fill in the blanks. As I mentioned in my review that the book has so familiar daily sights from my life that, I've found a woman I knew in one of his photos, shot at 2001 while she was waiting a bus in the bus stop. She was really surprised to be in this book as she didn't feel anyone shooting even though she remembers the day so clear that day. Mr. Webb found the real light of Istanbul and that day it was 07:00 in the morning. We decided together that we'll ask for a signed copy from Mr. Webb by a letter or email. Thank you Mr. Webb for these magnificent shots and for pushing me to go out and shoot again in the city I belong.

I visited Istanbul in 1988, almost 20 years ago. It was a visit that left me in awe of the uniqueness, beauty and complexity of this historic and important city. It is a great pleasure to have revisited Istanbul, this time not actually, but through exceptional photographs of Alex Webb. The photographs are not only evocative of the real life of the streets, but are depictions of people going about the daily lives with very little awareness of their being photographed. Alex Webb's level of skill in composition and timing is of the highest order. His ability to work unnoticed is incredible. The

photographs are followed by a most thought provoking essay by Nobel Laureate and Istanbul resident Orhan Pamuk. I found the text so interesting that I have ordered his book on Istanbul as well. Be aware that Alex Webb's photos have remarkable visual richness, with multiple layers of foreground and background. They possess great vibrancy of colour, honestly caught human expression and a busy city's sense of action and movement. I would recommend spending some time on each photo to draw out the vast offering of information and emotion within each one. Well worth the purchase; particularly if you have visited Istanbul, or long to go there.

I looked at it many times. Webb has a style of his own and repeats himself throughout the book. In one single photograph, you can't see it all, but overall it works, and absolutely remarkable. He touches areas of the City that a lot of photographers shun. Mysterious, sad and beautiful at the same time -- very much like "huzun" which Orhan Pamuk's delicate article elaborates, giving us a deeper understanding, wider perspective. The real, machine like city underneath the glamour and all. I felt Webb encourages photographers documenting all, and so raw. He cuts off his portraits -- you can't see all, mystifying, and it truly works.

I've tried, I've really tried, but I just can't bring myself to like this book. I get what he's trying to do here, but it doesn't stir any emotion in me. My friend, who studied under Minor White and lives in Istanbul, also said that it does not show anything unique about Istanbul, but that he makes it look like any other city. I'm a photographer and Istanbul is one of my favorite destinations to shoot street photography. Perhaps my idea of Istanbul is much too different. What I would really like to see is an updated version of Ara Guler's book titled Istanbul. He's also a Magnum photographer, and he did a very good job probably about 30 years or more ago. Also the Orhan Pamuk essay was just taken from Orhan's book Istanbul. Nothing new there.

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