

30 September 2011

SSM hosts Sophie Calle with “For the Last and First Time”

*The exhibition in which the sense of sight plays the leading role
takes viewers on a startling journey...*

Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum (SSM) hosts **Sophie Calle**, the renowned French artist named by *Newsweek* as one of today’s ten most important contemporary artists, in the exhibition “For the Last and First Time”, running concurrently with the Istanbul Biennial. Sophie Calle, in this special project realized in cooperation with SSM, has focused her lens in this instance on our country, on a group selected from the millions of inhabitants of Istanbul. In this exhibition sponsored by the technology of Sony and Teknosa, the artist examines from her unique perspective both the last “visions” of people who are visually handicapped and the “inhabitants of Istanbul who have never seen the sea”, a topic that has attracted the interest of many in the worlds of academia and art.

SSM visitors to “For the Last and First Time”, on view between 17 September and 31 December 2011, will embark on a startling, emotion-filled journey. In these later works, Sophie Calle invites lovers of art to ponder the different dimensions of the faculty of sight, whose existence is so rarely contemplated and often taken for granted.

In **The Last Image**, the first section of the exhibition, Sophie Calle questions 13 individuals who are blind from birth or who later lost the faculty of sight about the last image they recall seeing, relating their responses and photographing both the narrators and the narrated events. Realized with the support of the Altı Nokta Association for the Blind and their Istanbul branch, along with the Altı Nokta Foundation for the Blind, and exhibited in conjunction with the Istanbul 2010 European Cultural Capital activities, the exhibition that was subsequently donated to the Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts consisted of a section devoted to five persons. Today with the contribution of the university, the project in its entirety is presented to viewers, with the narrative of all 13 individuals. In the process of creating the project, Sophie Calle was inspired by the myth of the founding of Istanbul, and united “blindness” and “Istanbul” in this context. According to the legend, the city was founded in the seventh century BCE as a Greek colony. The first location the colonists saw after passing through the Straits of the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmara was today’s Kadıköy, which became the

ancient city of Chalcedon. Because of their choice of this area for the establishment of the colony in spite of the far more fertile land on the opposite shore, Chalcedon became known as the “city of the blind”. The tale of the colonists became the point of departure for Sophie Calle as she began this project. In “The Last Image”, Sophie Calle views the city through the eyes of individuals who have lost the sense of sight.

In the second section of the exhibit, **Voir la Mer**, Sophie Calle portrays individuals who live in Istanbul, but who are encountering the sea for the first time. Shot by **Caroline Champetier**, renowned cinematographer and winner of the prestigious César award that is considered the French Oscar, ten videos contain close-up views of these stunning encounters. A separate salon in the same section plays videos taken of a group of children during the first moment when they see the sea. The persons chosen to participate in this project were selected with the help of the Esenler Municipality, which took in a great many migrants from Eastern and Central Anatolia. Leaving their roots behind in their search for a new future, they migrated to Istanbul and perched marginally at its edge, unacquainted with the city, living there without seeing the sea surrounding it; it is this group, alien to the city, that triggered Sophie Calle’s artistic impulse and brought the project to life.

In the third section, two quotations from a project by Sophie Calle extending back to 1986 give meaning to the exhibition and bid the viewer farewell. Two sentences, “*The most beautiful thing I ever saw is the sea, the sea going out so far you lose sight of it*”, and, “*In 1986, I met people who were born blind. I asked them what their image of beauty was. That was the first answer: a blind man telling me about the sea*”, accompany a framed photograph of the sea taken by the artist.

Sophie Calle

Born in 1953, throughout her long career French artist Sophie Calle has attempted to pinpoint the human body, its behavior, its pain and sorrow, joy and rhapsody, sometimes through simple observation, sometimes through investigation. Almost like a third eye, she has brought her impressions to the art world by means of videos, photographs and the literary and philosophical works she has authored. With her depictions of human weakness and her absorption with topics of identity and intimacy, Calle is considered one of the greatest living contemporary artists of our day.

Caroline Champetier

The cinematographer was born in 1954 in Paris, and has worked with many renowned directors, among whom are Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Doillon, Benoît Jacquot, Philippe Garrel, Xavier Beauvois, Amos Gitaï and Nobuhiro Suwa. Currently the president of the AFC (Association Française des directeurs de la Photographie Cinématographique), the artist has received numerous awards for her work, including the prestigious César, considered the French Oscar.