

4 February 2016

Dear Mister Mayor of Athens, Giorgos Kaminis

What does it mean to live in a city? When do we understand Athens? Is it the moment we set our foot outside the plane, when we cross red lights a first time or when we boil Greek coffee on the small heater in our kitchen? Athens is not different than other cities and still all what happens could only happen here. I tell you what I see, although you will have seen the same things.

A man asks if I want to marry him.
A man is making a belt from tape for another man on the street.
A man with a strange hat and anxious eyes asks me for help in the laundry shop.
A woman has a plastic bag on her head.
About thirty men in black clothes gather in my street, they say Kalispera.
After living everywhere in the world she came back to the her neighbourhood.
All kitchen sinks are made of marble.
All windows have wooden folding shutters with a specific lock.
An Iraqi man asks me if his shirt can be in the dryer with my clothes.
At this moment he is doing the job from 3 people.
Because his apartment didn't get rented anymore he is living in it himself now.
Even cars are full of graffiti.
Everyone says their mother can make the best yemista, but her mother is really the best.
First time in my life I see someone shooting heroine in public.
Greek people don't watch TV but drink coffee outside.
Greek people prefer to live outside the centre.
He explains the way to the restaurant 4 times.
His salary is almost halved.
I am feeling bad for blind people because the signs are going crazy.
I forgot that shops close around 4pm on Saturday.
I go to two museums, both are closed forever.
I start to get used to Greek coffee.
In order to survive they steal clothes and food from chains.
Many kitchens have a small brush and dustpan.
Many times men whisper something when they pass.
Most Greek toilets have a flush you need to push from bottom up.
My new neighbours leave 6 big plants in the hallway.
Older Greek man love to play with a bracelet.
On my way I see all the houses having awnings.
One of the unlucky prostitutes is always on the street.
She has three jobs otherwise she cannot survive.
She is Christian and he is Muslim.
She is working more in order to have the same living standard.
She lived in the apartment since she was a child.
She wants to make some selfies in front of the photo from the killed boy.
So many people have a camping gas fire.

So many shops are selling beads and pearls.
Some mattresses from homeless people look almost cozy.
Some toilet paper-holders are ceramic and beautiful.
The apartments on the rooftop are not empty.
The beach is surrounded by fences.
The bus is hitting 7 safety-triangles.
The bedcovers from the homeless man are from Ikea.
The hallway has the same size as the living room.
The main railway station reminds me of the one in my village.
The mosaic floor in the hallway is slightly different than the one in the kitchen.
The refugees are wearing red backpacks.
The religious objects in his apartment are from his parents.
The taxi costs only €3,5.
The homeless men next to each other look like brothers.
Their house is surrounded by orange-trees.
Their mothers are calling them everyday.
There are only stairs in the street.
They are discussing where she can smoke inside the house.
This is the smallest heating I ever saw.
Walking on the footpath when it rains is a slippery adventure.
We sit on his motorbike without helmet.
We try to figure out where the sound from the demonstration comes from.
When he wants to talk about politics he says 'come closer' and starts to whisper.
When I enter the bank I have number 219, at that moment they are at number 163.
When we go to the bar they all put on mascara, powder and red lipstick.
With my Bangladeshi neighbour from the shop I talk about the weather.
You can smell fresh graffiti-spray.

This list doesn't have a beginning or an end, just as a city it continually grows in different directions. A complete overview from the list and the city is impossible. The more we try to grasp the structure the more we loose grip on understanding what happens around us. That is exactly why Athens is waking me up and conquering my heart.

Sincerely, Elien Ronse

Visual artist

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