

New Exhibition at the Ottoman Bank Museum: Sedad Hakki Eldem (1908-1988) I Early Years

(April 30 through August 30, 2008)

Sedad Hakki Eldem is without doubt the most talked-about name in 20th century Turkish architecture. No other figure has been as influential both as an educator and as a master architect. At the same time, his conspicuous individualism probably made him the most controversial of any architect in this country. From the 1930s until his death in 1988, he aroused envy, admiration and occasional antagonism from every rising generation of architects. Although throughout his life the force of his presence on the architectural scene in Turkey was tremendous, in some ways he remained removed from the realities of the country and an outsider in his profession. In architecture, he would always be the most foreign Turk, or the most Turkish foreigner.



As 2008 marks the centenary of the birth and the 20th anniversary of the death of this complex and controversial figure, the Ottoman Bank Museum honors him with two exhibitions and their accompanying publications. The first exhibition, "Sedad Hakki Eldem (1908-1988) I Early Years" opens on April 30, 2008, and focuses only on the first 24 years of the famous architect's life. The second exhibition, "Sedad Hakki Eldem (1908-1988) II Mature Years" addresses the totality of his architectural works during the period where he assumed his leading role in contemporary Turkish architecture. Through a remarkable abundance of personal materials both visual and written, the first show offers a chronicle of Sedad Hakki Eldem's childhood and youth and focuses on his formative years as a young architect before he started his academic career at the Academy of Fine Arts. These early years can also be seen as a phase of cross-cultural or supracultural travel between Turkey, Switzerland, France and Germany, a true adventure during which, he absorbed three languages, quickly becoming fluent in German and French in addition to Turkish. Within this context, resorting to a rich variety of visual materials, the exhibition traces the evolution of the boy, the aspiring adolescent architect, the architecture student and finally the budding architect embarked on a voyage of discovery throughout Europe, which lasted several years. It chronicles the construction of an identity and personality across countries, languages and cultures. At the same time, it highlights the transformation of a young man of an elitist late Ottoman background and reluctant to pin himself down to a single national identity, into an early Republican intellectual and a key exponent of the nationalist discourse in architecture.

The exhibition "Sedad Hakki Eldem I: Early Years" and its accompanying book are the collaborative effort of three academics: Edhem Eldem, Bulent Tanju and Ugur Tanyeli. Bulent Erkmen designed both the exhibition and its accompanying book.