



Vahap Avşar at P! and Protocinema: That Strange Man is Not Your Friend

by [Paddy Johnson](#) on ~~December 9, 2015~~



Vahap Avşar: Lost Shadows, [AND Museum]

In the late 1970's undercover government agencies in Turkey most commonly used white Renault 12 cars. These were not fine times. The country had already endured two military coups, one in 1960 and another in 1971 and was leading up to another one. After the coup of 1980, oppression became the norm. That white Renault car pictured above, then, has a bit more history than might be immediately apparent, though it is obviously weird for a car to be stationed in the middle of the road in the middle of no where.

The image was taken during the late 1970's in Turkey for the AND Postcard Company and [is now one of 12 postcards on view at P!](#) thanks to a collaborative presentation of the work between the gallery and Protocinema (through December 13th.) The images were selected from the company's vast archive by artist Vahap Avşar for the show, "Lost Shadows, [AND Museum]", some of which reveal clues to this history, others of which function as simple postcards. Each image has its own mount and stack of cards and visitors can take home any of the images. (The reproduction rights are for sale.)

Even without knowing this history, the seemingly generic images unsettle the viewer. There's a shot of a resort, a coastline vista and a parade. In the resort image two men who look more like government agents than they do tourists sit on a bench watching the grounds. To the left of the coastline vista I noticed a soldier sitting on a bench—apparently the view was near a military outpost. And the parade is actually a huge military march.

Other shots are perfectly benign. One image shows two young bathers in a public stream—with no nefarious government presence visible. But after noticing some of the other darker images, even these innocuous ones take

on a more somber tone. In fact, I found the show bled into my own mental space—perhaps an indication of how much news of government spying, terrorists threats and shootings now permeate the media. When I left the gallery I ended up checking my bag several times due to various phone related phobias. Did I accidentally phone someone? Wait, is my phone in my bag? Did someone take my phone? I don't usually worry about any of those things when I leave a near empty gallery—or anywhere else for that matter—but somehow the show left me feeling a little vulnerable.

I can't say that was a pleasant, but I'm glad I experienced it for a moment. I felt just a little more aware, too, which offered some small amount of cold comfort.



Install shot of Vahap Avşar's show Lost Shadows, [AND Museum]



Detail from Vahap Avşar's show Lost Shadows, [AND Museum]

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