

PRESS RELEASE

Stateless Heritage - DAAR Decolonizing Architecture Art Research
Opening 12 October 2021



DAAR - Sandi Hilal and Alessandrazio Petti, Permanent Temporariness, New York Abu Dhabi Galery 2018. Photo: Luca Capuano.

Refugee camps are established with the intention of being demolished. As a paradigmatic representation of political failure, they are meant to have no history and no future; they are meant to be forgotten. The only history that is recognised is one of violence and humiliation. Yet the camp is also a place rich with stories, narrated through its urban fabric.' - DAAR

The Mosaic Rooms present Stateless Heritage by the artist and architectural collective DAAR – Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti. This exhibition sets out to challenge mainstream narratives of refugee experience, of humanitarian crises, victim-hood and suffering. DAAR proposes exile as a radical perspective which can take us beyond the limitations of the nation state. Stateless Heritage also interrogates the concept of heritage. By reusing, misusing and redirecting UNESCO World Heritage guidelines and criteria, Stateless Heritage resists definitions of heritage and their colonial foundations, asking instead how architecture can be mobilised as an agent of political transformation.

The exhibition consists of two projects, presented in the UK for the first time. DAAR's ongoing project Refugee Heritage, begun in 2015, and Stateless Heritage, a new installation premiering at Venice Architecture Biennale 2021. Both are part of an ongoing body of work that confronts dominant Western conceptions of heritage and presents different narratives, reorienting heritage towards non-hegemonic forms of life and collective memory.

The focus of both projects is Dheisheh refugee camp in Palestine. The camp traces its history back to 1949, around the time of the Nakba, when Palestinians were displaced by the founding of the state of Israel. Now 72 years old this is one of the oldest refugee camps, with decades of shared lived experience and collective memory. Dheisheh is at the heart of the project, however DAAR believe their approach could extend to other camps, and forms of subjugated heritage, bringing a new perspective on notions of restitution, repair and return.

The exhibition presents an installation of large freestanding light boxes of photographs of Dheisheh camp by photographer Luca Capuano. In 2010 the photographer was commissioned by UNESCO to record Italy's world heritage sites. In 2016, DAAR commissioned Capuano to photograph Dheisheh camp, taking the same care to document this living monument of 'permanent temporariness'. The spatial placement of the light boxes evokes the topography of the camp giving visitors an insight into its urban and social fabric.

In a separate space, a series of open books placed on top of plinths of varying heights will display photographs of the 44 villages from where refugees in Dheisheh originally came, also taken by Capuano. The undulating heights of the plinths form a kind of landscape, or ruin, within the gallery.

The final part of the exhibition is a space of discussion and provocation. Stateless Heritage presents a call for the official international recognition of the cultural heritage of the refugee, through proposing a refugee camp as a UNESCO world heritage site. A nomination dossier will be available for visitors to read, and a plaque claiming Dheisheh's world heritage status installed on the gallery wall. Visitors will be invited to consider if the camp should be recognised as a World Heritage Site. This space will also host a live element activated by talks and events by community members, artists, activists and thinkers.

These artworks are part of a wider movement, in which heritage is being used as a tool to challenge and resist colonialism and occupation in Palestine. They have wider pertinence too, as calls grow to recognise how heritage and conservation can expose colonial and imperial legacies. The exhibition also raises issues of migrant and refugee justice, at time when UK government is enacting its New Deal on asylum, and as the fundamental right to claim asylum is under threat internationally.

DAAR (Decolonizing Architecture Art Research) is an architectural collective that combines conceptual speculations and pragmatic spatial interventions, discourse and collective learning. The artistic research of Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti are situated between politics, architecture, art and pedagogy. In their practice art exhibitions are both sites of display and sites of action that spill

NOTES TO EDITORS

About The Mosaic Rooms

The Mosaic Rooms are situated on the corner of the Cromwell Road and Earl's Court Road in Kensington, London, a short walk from the V&A and Design Museum. Entry to the exhibitions are free.

The Mosaic Rooms are a non-profit art gallery and bookshop in London dedicated to supporting and promoting culture from the Arab world and beyond. We do this through our free contemporary art exhibitions, our multidisciplinary events (including film screenings, current affairs talks, book launches and more) artist residencies and a learning and engagement programme. We work in partnership with local, national and international organisations to disseminate our combined arts programme to the widest possible audience - in London and beyond. previous collaborations include partnerships with The British Museum, ICA, Shubbak Festival and London Design Festival amongst many others. We believe in the importance of creating a cultural space that presents new thinking and daring creativity, illuminates ideas, inspires understanding, and interrogates contemporary issues. Our vision is for a London audience with a more informed, engaged and critical understanding of Arab culture and society. We are a non-party political, non-religious organisation, and we are a project of the A. M. Qattan Foundation.

About the A. M. Qattan Foundation

The A. M. Qattan Foundation (AMQF) is an independent, not-for-profit developmental organisation working in the fields of culture and education, with a particular focus on children, teachers and young artists. Founded and registered in 1993 in the UK as a charity (no 1029450) and as a charitable company limited by guarantee (no 2171893), it has had a registered branch in Palestine as a non-profit organisation (no QR-0035-F) since 1998. The Foundation's operations are mainly in Palestine, with interventions in Lebanon through Selat: Links Through the Arts, and in the United Kingdom through The Mosaic Rooms.

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LISTINGS INFORMATION

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Open 11am - 6pm | Tuesday - Saturday | Free Entry