

Mariakirken



Khaled Barakeh: *Design of Necessity*

June 4 - Sep. 30 2022, opening June 4 2022, 3-8 pm, Mariakirken, Istedgade 20, Copenhagen V.

3 pm Opening on Maria Kirkeplads featuring work of twelve Syrian activists and asylum seekers living in Denmark, alongside eleven photographers who witnessed the siege in Syria. Co-curated by Guevara Namer.

4 pm Readings by three Syrian women, assisted by Anne-Marie McManus, who heads the European Research Council Grant SYRASP on contemporary Syrian narratives of imprisonment and disappearance.

5 pm Funeral On The Moon – a concert by Syrian musician and composer Milad Khawam

6 pm Food by De Etniske Rødstrømper, a socio-economic enterprise run by staff and women volunteers in job training, internships, and activation with roots in the Middle Eastern countries.

Design of Necessity by the Syrian artist Khaled Barakeh honors the resilience Syrians manifested to survive sieges carried out by the Assad regime, which, aided by its ally, Russia, used starvation as a weapon of war.

For no crime beyond political dissent, besieged communities in Syria were deprived of basic necessities like food, cooking fuel, and medical supplies; trapped and even forced to live underground to avoid shelling. These tactics aimed to wear down citizens mentally and physically, forcing them into surrender. The sieges were a major war crime in a protracted conflict that the regime initiated to put down 2011's popular, peaceful movement for dignity and justice. As of 2022, no independent mechanism has been put in place to investigate the sieges or support their victims' pursuit of justice.

Today, images of wartime deprivation and suffering are once again prominent in the European media, rightfully outraged by Russia's invasion and destruction of Ukrainian cities. Yet in this moment when Europe embraces Ukrainian refugees, Syrian refugees are threatened with forcible return to the regime that, with Russia's help, sought to kill and starve them into submission.

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Starvation, a slow violence that tortured the bodies and souls of the besieged, has taken an inestimable but almost invisible toll on Syrian communities. Today, as the conflict has stagnated and dropped out of world attention, Syrians are still not safe from the pervasive threat of starvation. In 2021, the World Food Programme sounded the alarm that hunger in Syria had reached “critical levels”. As many as 12.4 million Syrians – nearly 60 percent of the nation’s population – are food insecure. These numbers are increasing rapidly, as humanitarian assistance alone cannot resolve the regime’s lack of action or concern for its citizens, or the structural and economic damage caused by a decade of war.

Design of Necessity

Khaled Barakeh is the next artist to bring his activist practice to the *Maria Project* at Mariakirken. His exhibition highlights human resilience in wartime. In *Design of Necessity*, art is an open platform for sharing memory, practicing solidarity, and reenacting resilience in the name of justice for Syrians, and for all people suffering under siege and starvation. Using a socially engaged art practice as methodology, Barakeh’s *Design of Necessity* is inviting the creative engagement of Syrian siege survivors and Syrians living in deportation and asylum centers in Denmark. As a result, *Design of Necessity* recollects universal themes through stories and experiences that are uniquely and intimately Syrian. The exhibition takes artistic inspiration from these stories, exploring Syrians’ determination to stay alive as a collective act that forged networks of solidarity and compassion. *Design of Necessity* offers a space to explore new possibilities for common understanding and solidarity among the victims of war crimes, past and present.

The sculptural works in *Design of Necessity* depict the creative, everyday practices that Syrians developed with ordinary objects under siege, living in cellars, shelters, and barren hiding places. To heat up food and boil water, Syrians fixed shards of broken glass to the inside of satellite dishes to harness and concentrate the rays of the sun. Confined underground, they learned to grow mushrooms, which became a crucial source of nutrition and were able to flourish even under harsh conditions.

Design of Necessity exhibits satellite dishes installed on Maria Kirkeplads, containers of mushrooms growing in the church space, and a series of documentary materials displayed until the end of September. Syrian asylum seekers and refugees – who endure the constant threat of being sent back by the Danish state – are invited to produce the cooker-satellite dishes. The dishes will in turn become artworks, portraits of human survival, and their fractured reflections want to provoke spectators to consider the fragmentation of Syrian identities and communities over the past decade. In Danish cities, satellite dishes are often stigmatized objects associated with immigrants and so called ghetto areas. Khaled Barakeh’s exhibition transforms them into a sincere search of connection and a wish to create icons of Syrians for their resilience – both in war and in new foreign homes.

Much like the branching roots of mushrooms, the exhibition establishes networks, links between the art and its context, connecting Syrians in the diaspora and the Syrian community with host communities. Through performative events the participants and the public will come together to cook mushrooms in the satellite dishes and share stories of siege, starvation, and the ways Syria remains unsafe for those who fled the regime’s violence and survival will be explored. Through storytelling and the sharing of food, these meetings will hopefully strengthen the ties between Syrian war refugees and the Danish communities. During the exhibition, Mariakirken serves as a viewing and screening space, conversation room, and forum for practitioners working with conditions and opportunities for victims of war crimes and starvation in besieged areas.

The exhibition programme will be announced continuously on the project’s website (mariaprojektet.dk) and Facebook-site (@mariaprojektet) and will among others take part in Art Week 2022.

About the artist

Khaled Barakeh is a conceptual artist and cultural activist living and working in Berlin, Germany. He graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus in 2005 and received his MFA from Funen Art Academy in Odense, Denmark, in 2010. In 2013, he completed a Meisterschuler study at the Städelschule Art Academy in Frankfurt, Germany.

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Barakeh approaches creative practice as a tool for societal transformation against long-standing structures of injustice. Although he employs a range of artistic strategies, his work often manipulates immediately recognizable and found objects and pre-existing imagery. In recent years, his projects have addressed the media's portrayal of victims of war; the division of once-cohesive communities through political strife; and the dynamics of integration for refugees. Barakeh sees art as an opportunity for these experiences to be understood and felt by a broader audience - not just by the individuals who live through them.

Barakeh has exhibited at The Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, Shanghai Biennale, Salt Istanbul, The Frankfurter Kunstverein, Landesgalerie Niederösterreich museum Krems, The Busan Biennale, Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien Berlin, and many other international venues and institutions. Take a further look at www.khaledbarakeh.com

About the Maria Project

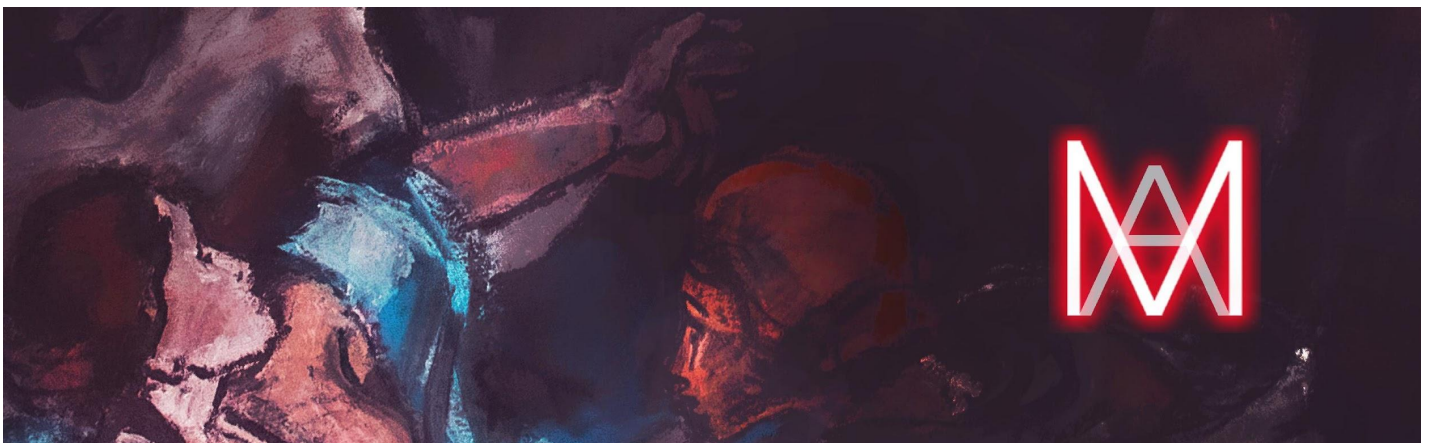
The Maria Project is an art project based in Mariakirken in Vesterbro, Copenhagen, that seeks new socio-ethical models of conversation, interaction and community through investigations into the space and practice of the church and visual arts. The Maria Project is driven by the idea that art can be a forum for methodological exchange and development, and the practices of the project are different attempts to develop a social-ethical approach and methodology that can set new agendas for how both the church, the arts and the public listen, speak, act and think socio-ethically. Socio-ethical work in this context can be understood as the church's advocacy for vulnerable populations in public discourse and efforts to address pressing social problems of vulnerable groups, either on its own or in collaboration with public and private actors.

The Maria Project is curated by Matthias Hvass Borello and developed in collaboration with Lise Christina Rasmussen, pastor of Mariakirken. The project is generously supported by the Danish Arts Foundation, the Bikuben Foundation, the Augustinus Foundation, the Engineer Captain Aage Nielsen Family Fund, the Diocese of Copenhagen (Social Ethics Committee), the Innovative Diaconal Fund, the City of Copenhagen and the Vesterbro Local Committee, among others, and will run until autumn 2023. The participating artists are: J&K, Stine Marie Jacobsen, Khaled Barakeh, Hanne Lise Thomsen, Kenneth Balfelt Team, Santiago Mostyn og Tamar Guimarães & Jeuno JE Kim & Ronah Sadan

Design of Necessity is realized with immeasurable assistance from FX team, DanChurchAid, PAX, Cinemateket, Beyond Coffee, and through a residency at Fabrikken for Kunst og Design.

Participants: Amer Kazkaz, Dima Sada, Fadia Allokla, Ghazal Shemi, Haya Termanini, Joudi Obaid, Lojain Ajek, Ola Ajek, Rami Mahouk, Tarek Kelani, Yasser Omar, Yousef Fares, Abed Doumany, Ameer Alahabi, Aref Tammawi, Bassam Khabieh, Bassel Altawil, Diyaa Khattab, Moayad Zaghmout, Mohammed Badra, Mohammed Abdullah / Artino, Mouhamad Abo Kasem, Rami Muhammad Alsayed, Wissam Khattab Shahleh.

See more and follow the project: <https://www.mariaprojektet.dk> / <https://www.facebook.com/mariaprojektet>



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