

DESCRIPTION OF THE ART PROJECT VOICESVOID

Purpose:

1. VOICESVOID – an open space for mutual exchange

The title VOICESVOID indicates the idea of an open and extended space for mutual exchange – an exchange which can confirm or deny ideas about art forms of the past and the future, and inspire to new possibilities and ideas in art.

This is the objective of the project: to contribute to the opening and the extending of a space which can function as a neutral and experimental meeting place, reaching beyond religious, cultural and political positions. Precisely art inherits a kind of neutral space – a certain potentiality – to communicate across the boundaries of more common categories and the potentiality to transform these into another space. This transformation creates new possibilities and ideas for which there wouldn't have basis and space, were it not for this neutral space of art.

The implications of the title VOICESVOID:

Voice(s) primarily allude to the media: writing, singing and music. But *voice*, in this context, should not be understood as referring to writing and sound only, but rather more specifically as any kind of expression through a medium. The plural form of *voice* alludes to communication between the different modes of expression as well.

Void alludes to "the empty space"; the space which has been emptied. But the word "*void*" ironically also deals with emptying content into this empty space. Furthermore it is the intention to reflect the *void* as a space of dwelling; for to make space and room for encounters between different cultures and religions. This is important, especially when we think of globalization, because it is in this virtual space that possibilities can emerge.

VOICESVOID as a composite word thus alludes to the impersonal and/or common space, and to a space for mutual exchange and development.

2. The religious picture

Today it can be difficult for us fully to recognize the past's senses of religiousness. Still, modern art presents a succession of religious-theological ideas and concepts, but in artistic form. Art thus seems to insist on what we usually consider to belong to the religious sphere, from early abstract expressionism to contemporary practices. In a sense contemporary art seems to present seemingly endless series of new spaces and pictures, which often stands in some kind of relation to religious forms of earlier times and other cultures.

Through exhibitions, workshops, and a concluding seminar the project will attempt to examine the interfaces between art and religion. For to expose these interfaces, the project will dialogically confront the art of the west with another tradition, that is: the Middle East/Syrian, which also entails modern art, but whose modernism has evolved in different conditions than the Danish.

The project will, among other things, in the end focus on the differences and similarities between the 16 versions (8 Syrian and 8 Danish) of "the religious picture" and how modern art relates to "the religious".

3. Danish-Arabic dialogue

The project has been under development for a long time, but since the events provoked by the Danish newspaper JyllandsPosten's Muhammad-drawings, where the Danish-Arabic dialogue is more needed than

ever, it has in a higher degree become the intention of the project to contribute constructively to this dialogue. This contribution should, however, primarily take the visual art as its starting point and medium of dialogue. This has demanded a certain reorientation and additional preparation.

Syria is an obvious point of departure for a Danish-Arabic dialogue, as the land is a part of an area, which history goes back to a time when Islam and Christianity had still not moved apart. Syria and its surroundings is not just the cradle of Islamic civilization, but Christian civilization began here as well. Christianity and Islam have existed side by side throughout the past in this physical landscape, and have often mutually been influencing each other. Historically, Syria has a tradition of respecting and unifying different religions and cultures. We have today a lot to learn from the past and present of Syria, when it comes to give place to each other and respect differences.

Activities:

1. Exhibitions and workshops:

First part - in Damascus:

All the artists will make and bring a piece of art for the exhibition in Damascus at Khan Asad Pasha. Then there will be a cooperative workshop in five days, where artists work together and make new pieces of art. After the five days the new pieces of art will be shown at the same exhibition in Khan Asad Pasha (with a new opening). The Danish artists will also make a workshop for the students at The Faculty of Fine Art in Damascus.

Second part - in Copenhagen:

Again all the artists will make and bring a piece of art, but now made for the exhibition in Copenhagen at The Round Tower, and again there will be a workshop as the one in Damascus. Beside this, a two day seminar with art historians, theologians (with Islamic and/or Christian knowledge), philosophers and the participating artists, will take place at Islamic-Christian Study Center. Here will be speeches about background information of the theme and an evaluation of the artworks and the project. The Syrian artists will make a workshop for the students at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art in Copenhagen.

2. Seminar:

The purpose of the seminar is to draw perspectives from the exhibition, involving existential, cultural and religious aspects and in that way contribute to the Danish-Arab dialogue. The main question will be whether art can widen our horizons and thereby have a releasing and reconciling function. The seminar will draw perspectives from the theme of the exhibition; give some background information and discuss the following themes:

Mutual inspiration in religious art in Syria historically and contemporarily

The forbidden picture in Islam and Christianity.

The significance of art in Christianity in Denmark?

The relationship of modern art to religion.

Views of the picture. The picture as language of power.

How art has been used for illustrations of the ideal.

What can art contribute to the improvement of co-existence in Denmark?

Can art in the Arab world and in Europe be a common free space, where it is possible to communicate across cultural and religious background?

Practical arrangements:

1. Time scale:

Damascus 2006:

- 28. October: opening of the exhibition in Khan Asad Pasha
- 28. September – 15. October: exhibition at Khan Asad Pasha.
- 1. - 5. October: workshop at Khan Asad Pasha
- 8. October: new opening after the workshop
- 8. - 12. October: workshop at The Faculty of Fine Art.

Copenhagen 2007:

- 2. June: opening of the exhibition in The Round Tower
- 2. - 29. June: exhibition in The Round Tower
- 4. -8. June: workshop in The Round Tower
- 9. June: new opening after the workshop
- 9.-13. June: workshop at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art.
- 16.- 17. June: seminar at Islamic-Christian Study Center?

2. Participating artists:

Syrian artists:

Sara Shamma, Buthayna Ali, Mohammed Omran, Fadi Yazejy, Ramia Suleiman, Hesko Ali, Hrair Sarkissian, Tammam Azzem

Danish artists:

Nynne Livbjerg, Sophia Kalkau, Jane Maria Petersen, Martin Erik Andersen, Katja Kristensen Serber, Jesper Rasmussen, Christian Finne, N. N.

3. Participants, who have confirmed to take part at the seminar in Copenhagen:

Lissi Rasmussen, director and dr. theol
Mikkel Bøgh, rector of The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art.
Safet Bektovic, PhD, author and philosopher.
Hanne Kolind Poulsen, mag. art and Senior Research Associate.
Frederik Stjernfelt, professor at The Danish University of Education.
Karsten Fledelius, senior lecturer at Institute of Film and Media Science, University of Copenhagen.
Anne Mette Gravgard, priest and art historian.

Other persons will be invited later. The seminar is under preparation together with the Islamic-Christian Study Center and the Danish Academy of the Fine Art:

Cooperating partners and places:

In Syria:

Director Jørgen S. Nielsen
The Danish Institute in Damascus
8-9 Soug al-Souf Street
P.O. Box 1262, Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
T: 00963 11 2238038
Email: did@scs-net.org
www.damaskus.dk

Dr. Abir Arkari
Khan Asad Pasha
Damaskus
Syrian Arab Republic
M: 00963 94 239594
Email: a.arkawi@scs-net.org

Professor Nizar Sabour
The Faculty of Fine Art
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
M: 00963 41 242461
Email: sabourni@scs-net.org

In Denmark:

Director and dr. theol. Lissi Rasmussen
Islamic-Christian Study Center (IKS)
Sortedam Dosserring 5 st.tv.
DK - 2200 Copenhagen N
T: 0045 35364650
Email: lissi@teliamail.dk
www.ikstudiecenter.dk

Director Jesper Vang Hansen
The Round Tower
Koebmagergade 52A
DK - 1150 Copenhagen K
T: 0045 33730373
Email: post@rundetaarn.dk
www.rundetaarn.dk

Rector Mikkel Bogh
The Royal Academy of Fine Art
Kongens Nytorv 1
Postboks 9014
DK - 1022 Copenhagen K
0045 33744500
Email: mib@kunstakademiet.dk
www.kunstakademiet.dk

Catalog- and websidelayout:

Aase Eg Joergensen
Eg&Fjord
Ryesgade 108 A, butikken th. 2
DK - 2100 Copenhagen Ø
T: 0045 35251200
Email: eg@eg-fjord.dk

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The Danish Institute in Damascus
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