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HOME

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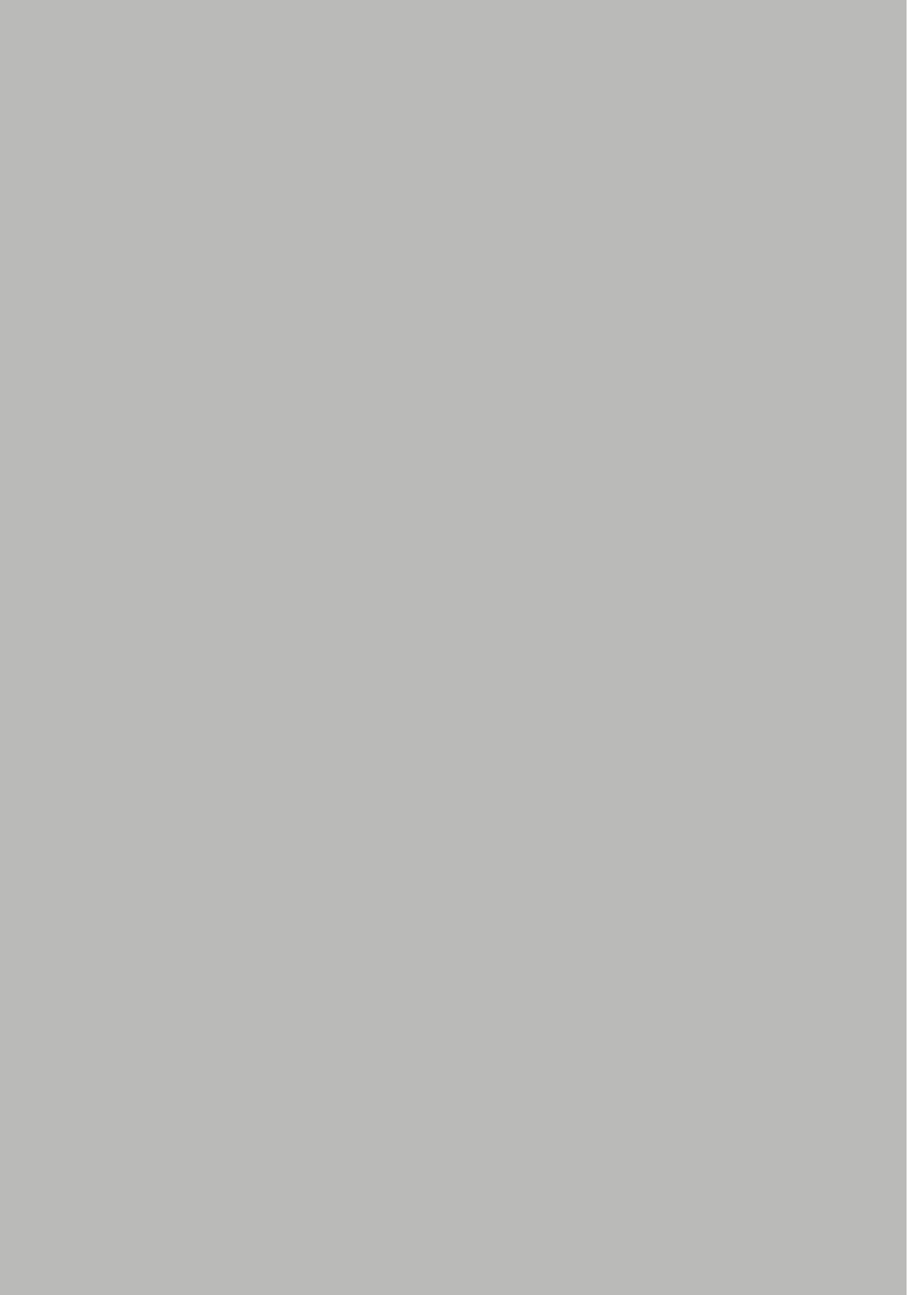
PHOTO SERIES

Marjan Teeuwen:
Destroyed House Gaza

VIDEO BLOGS

Ezz Al Zanoon & Rawan Mahady

15 JUL-
3 SEPT
2017



CURATOR

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INTRODUCTIE

home

HOUSE, ETC 1. the house or flat/apartment that you live in, especially with your family 2. a house or flat/apartment, etc. when you think of it as a property that can be bought and sold TOWN/COUNTRY 3. the town, district, country, etc. that you come from, or where you are living and that you feel you belong to FAMILY 4. used to refer to a family living together, and the way it behaves (*Oxford Dictionary, 8th Edition*)

What does it mean to be forced to flee your home and become internally displaced? What is the meaning of the word 'home' in the context of war, diaspora, exclusion, and displacement? These questions are central to the exhibition *HOME*, curated by Meta Knol.

Nearly half a million people call Gaza their home; and not always by their own choosing. The local population is rarely ever allowed to travel in or out, unemployment is high and access to electricity and clean drinking water is limited. The rubble of destroyed houses as well as the attempts at reconstructing former homes are a daily reality. For people in Gaza, (re)construction is a slow and a politically arduous process. Building supplies must go through border checks which are controlled by the Israeli government. This means it can take years before houses are finally repaired or rebuilt.

The exhibition *HOME* shows fifteen photographs of *Destroyed House Gaza*, an installation by Marjan Teeuwen, which was built from the remains of a bombed house in Gaza. The photos refer to the physical conception of a house: bricks, walls, a floor and a roof. These remains used to be a family home filled with memories. Teeuwen took on this large-scale project by collaborating with engineers and builders from the Palestinian community. They were moved by the artist's perseverance to create something new from the rubble. Together with them, Teeuwen realised an artwork as well as a meeting space; which made it possible to form a temporary community.

An important addition to the exhibition are the video blogs made by the Palestinian photographer Ezz Al Zanoon and the journalist Rawan Mahady, which shows how local residents and other Palestinians react to the project and the situation in Gaza. Mahady also coordinates the Skype meetings connecting Gaza and Amsterdam. These will happen every Sunday afternoon during the exhibition, in collaboration with, amongst others, startup hub 'Gaza Sky Geeks'. Framer Framed's exhibition space will become a space to enter into conversations with invited locals from Gaza.

The exhibition, curated by Meta Knol, relates to the politics of everyday life. How do we connect extreme news reports to everyday acts and 'life as usual' under unusual circumstances? It reflects on the role of family and friendship and how people in Gaza deal with longing and loss. It is about old residents in newly constructed houses and new residents in old houses. It also deals with the home as a mental space, which you take with you, regardless of your own physical location, and which stays with you.

In the run-up to the exhibition, the curator, artist and organisation engaged in a number of conversations, dealing with the questions that arise from autonomous art in a highly politicised environment. How can assumptions about the universality of art be assessed when they are posited from a privileged position into a situation of repression? Whose voices do these works represent? How do the meanings of the artwork change when it travels from the context of Gaza's public space to the Netherlands, into the highly specific setting of the white cube? What ethical considerations and social responsibilities are implicated when initiating an art project in a war situation? And how can we allow voices from Gaza itself to narrate their own stories during the exhibition? These questions and others will be put on the agenda by curator Meta Knol and Framer Framed in a public programme that features debates and conversations around the exhibition.

Destroyed House Gaza

BY META KNOL

On December 20th 2016, *Destroyed House* was officially opened with invited guests, tea and Bedouin music. For three months, artist Marjan Teeuwen worked on constructing the artwork, which was realised in a house in Rafah/ Khan Younis. This family home, a home to three families, was bombed during the 2014 Gaza war. The force of the explosion knocked down all the walls. One of the inhabitants was killed. There was still a hole in the ceiling where the bomb came through, right next to the air fan, and there was scattered debris all around from the house's inventory, which had been completely destroyed. Teeuwen decided to rebuild the house entirely with the help of Palestinian employees - as an artwork.

The Gaza strip is a part of the Palestinian territories. Nearly two million Palestinians are isolated on a strip of land 360 square kilometres in size (smaller than the Dutch Island Texel). To the west of their territory is the Mediterranean Sea, in the south their territory borders Egypt and the land on the northeast side has been sealed off by Israel since 1996. Subsequent wars and bombing campaigns such as

the operations Summer Rains (2006), Cast Lead (2008), Pillar Cloud (2012) and Protective Edge (2014) meant that the area was devastated several times over. The daily struggle to survive in an almost hopeless situation means most of the inhabitants of Gaza do not have the time, attention or resources to process trauma. Local visitors experienced *Destroyed House Gaza* as a space for reflection, a memorial of sorts, where they could temporarily gain some peace of mind. Since the house-turned-artwork did not feature any formal characteristics which would make it resemble an official monument and there were no ceremonial commemoration rituals, visitors could walk through the space freely and experience it in their own way, connecting it to their own lives. *Destroyed House Gaza* was open to local residents until February 15, 2017 and it stirred up strong emotions. Afterwards the artwork was dismantled and the house was refurbished in order to once again serve as a family home. Eventually, all that remained of the installation were Teeuwen's photographs and a short film. These are now on display here.



Destroyed House Gaza 17, 2017, 40 x 68,5 cm, inkjet print on dibond/ framed



Destroyed House Gaza 5, 2017, 125 x 129,6 cm, inkjet print on dibond/ framed

DIZZYING SPACE

Destroyed House Gaza was located at the Salah al Deen Road, a main road towards the border crossing with Egypt which mostly featured battered cars speeding past and the occasional calm patter of horse's hooves. Those who walked in through the open door would find themselves in a dizzying space that encompassed all of the floors and the entire surface of the building. Marjan Teeuwen and her assistants Mohammed Dagga and Achmed Al Astal had rebuilt the collapsed exterior walls by stacking pieces of debris. In doing so they gradually renewed the house's skin by using its own abrasions. A mysterious light filtered in through the cracks and crevices of the rubble and flitted across the room, a mesmerizing experience which was compounded by the soft rays of sunlight that shone down through the fractures in the ceiling.

Teeuwen and the local Palestinian employees demolished several of the interior walls which left a ragged concrete skeleton. This allowed them to create an open space with a central line of sight from which all adjacent rooms could be seen and entered. On looking around, you could see floors vertically or diagonally sloping downwards and construction elements that had been arranged into one big composition of congealed abstract geometric shapes. In the centre of the space two jagged architectural columns had been piled up along the length of the building all the way to the ceiling, one black and one white column. These colours belonged to this place; the white symbolised the house when it was inhabited while the black signified the devastating blazing fire which followed the bomb

explosion. Even the floor had been partially removed by Teeuwen and her assistants, allowing the space to be permeated by Gaza's mustard-yellow desert sand. Thus, a destroyed family home was transformed into a monumental sculptural-architectural installation through a unique artistic intervention. Despite the raw and rough character of the pieces of debris used in the installation, the result was aesthetic, delicate and poetic.

BROKEN AND HEALED

For almost ten years now, Marjan Teeuwen has been creating large-scale architectural installations in houses destined for demolition. The first *Destroyed House* was in 's-Hertogenbosch (2008) and she made similar installations in Russia (*Destroyed House Krasnoyarsk*, 2009), in Amsterdam (*Destroyed House Piet Mondriaanstraat*, 2010/2011 and *Destroyed House In The North*, 2014), in Rotterdam (*Destroyed House Bloemhof*, 2012) and in Leiden (*Destroyed House Leiden*, 2015). Nonetheless, in no other context her work was so intricately connected to the local social and political reality as it was in Gaza. Here, houses belonging to Palestinians would be destroyed over and over in consecutive bombings, only to be rebuilt again and again in communal efforts. Teeuwen travelled to Gaza because her entire life she had been fascinated by people's resilience and their ability to rebuild their environment, even in the most devastating circumstances. *Destroyed House Gaza* captures this resilience by showing a house which is broken and healed at the same time. This polarity between chaos and order, falling and rising, destruction and



Destroyed House Gaza 3, 2017, 125 x 225 cm, inkjet print on dibond/ framed



reconstruction, deeply anchored in our human activity, runs through all of Marjan Teeuwen's work. It defines her artistic practice. She believes mankind cannot conquer this polarity.

HOME

Teeuwen chooses private houses as the site of her installations, which gives them a special meaning. After all, houses are the most intimate spatial reflections of ourselves; they both enclose and reveal our identity. But what does it mean to be home? Is it a warm place that makes you feel safe? Or is it an emotionally charged memory? What does it mean to have to flee from your home and become uprooted? And what meaning does the idea of 'home' have in the context of war, violence and diaspora?

Unlike in the Dutch language, where *home* and *at home* are two different words, the English word *home* conveys a wide range of meanings - from the practicality of a residential building to a place where families come together with all their values, habits and eccentricities, to a place that symbolises specific cultural roots and histories. It could be private house but it could also be a village, a city or a country: homeland. It is exactly these deeper layers of meaning that both Israelis and Palestinians turn to when they defend their own territory. The writing by the famous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (Palestine 1948 - United States 2008), for instance, is imbued with a profound desire to turn the melancholy memories of his childhood home into an imaginary poetic landscape for the Palestinian people. From 1970 onwards Darwish

spent his life in exile as political refugee. In an interview with Newsweek International (March 20, 2000), he said: "Poems can't establish a state. But they can establish a metaphorical homeland in the minds of people. I think my poems have built some houses in this landscape."

PLACE OF SHELTER, PLACE OF MEMORY

And so the house can be charged with meaning. Art historian Wilma Sütö argued in an essay about Marjan Teeuwen's work that she explores the unconscious, emotional meaning of architecture in her *Destroyed Houses* series: "Rather than a cornerstone or personal refuge, the dwelling as she presents it is a treacherous area, comparable to the human mind: rich in hiding places, views and insights, but also in dark nooks and abysses." In an essay written in response to a visit to *Destroyed House Gaza*, the literary theorist Ernst van Alphen classifies Teeuwen's approach - her way of stacking debris - as an ordering activity of memory: "She visualises (...) the work of memory and the rooting of the people who lived there, which are embodied by the house." Van Alphen describes the conflict between Israel and Palestine as a "a war on memory", in which both people lay claim to the land of their ancestors. The home plays an important symbolic role there because it embodies the roots of human beings: 'their uprooting is the destruction of the house'. Van Alphen concludes that Marjan Teeuwen has succeeded in turning the trauma of the destroyed home into a 'place of memory' that makes commemoration possible.



Destroyed House Gaza 1, 2017, 155 x 225 cm, inkjet print on dibond/framed



Destroyed House Gaza 7, 2017, 68,7 x 75 cm, inkjet print on dibond/ framed

ART AND POLITICS

Destroyed House Gaza is intended and created as an independent work of art, but it raises many poignant questions about the politically sensitive situation in the Gaza Strip. What is the meaning of artistic autonomy in relation to political and humanitarian engagement? Teeuwen is highly aware of the context she worked in, but she is also convinced that art can provide a different perspective - without judgment, without solutions: "Art offers a free space that is connected to reality." Her thinking was inspired by the writer and essayist Maarten Doorman. In his book *De navel van Daphne* (Prometheus, 2015), he wrote: "The essence of art is precisely its ambiguity, ambivalence, the autonomous position, the power of imagination, the open-ended process of interpretation, free from social conventions and economic and political motives. (...) Art stands apart from the world and sometimes embraces it so ardently that they coincide - to phrase it romantically, art is absolute in its isolation and totalising in its embrace. Both. Simultaneously."

This exhibition features all photographic works from *Destroyed House Gaza*, as well as the film of the same name. To underscore the local significance of the project, the gifted Palestinian photojournalist and filmmaker Ezz Al Zanoon and talented journalist Rawan Mahady were invited to provide weekly video blogs from Gaza. The theme of HOME is central in these videos, both in relation to the situation in Gaza and to Marjan Teeuwen's project. Skype sessions between Gaza and Amsterdam, organised by Mahady, will also take place. This allows visitors of the Framer

Framed exhibition space in Amsterdam to enter into a conversation with inhabitants of Gaza - who come together for this occasion in the startup hub *Gaza Sky Geeks* every Sunday afternoon. It will be possible, for instance, to ask eyewitnesses and those involved in the Gaza project how the project was embedded locally, and what kind of impact it had. But the question of what role art should or should not fulfil in this context is also considered. To what extent is it possible to make art in and on a war zone from the perspective of an outsider? Where do you draw the line between 'independent' and 'socially engaged' art? What ethical considerations and responsibilities are relevant to the creation of art projects in conditions of war? Curator Meta Knol and Framer Framed will address these and other questions in a public programme with debates and conversations around the exhibition.

Marjan Teeuwen formulated an answer of her own. She travelled to Gaza and created a work of art that local people experienced as a space for contemplation; a place of remembrance that both summons memories and provides solace. The men, women and children who entered into the installation recognised the act of creating a new order from the debris of their own lives. The beauty in these accumulated piles of rubble invited them to look for deeper layers of meaning, which were often connected to traumatic experiences. Because the truth is that the complexity of destruction and reconstruction is part of the daily reality for people who live in war zones. Unintentionally, *Destroyed House Gaza* became a monument for all these people, wherever they may be, whose houses have been destroyed as a result of war.



Destroyed House Gaza 11, 2017, 75 x 95,3 cm, inkjet print on dibond/ framed

Mahmoud Darwish — HOME

I belong there. I have memories. I was born as everyone is born.

I have a mother, a house with many windows, brothers, friends and a prison cell

with a chilly window! I have a wave snatched by seagulls, a panorama of my own.

I have a satured meadow. In the deep horizon of my word, I have a moon,

a bird's sustenance, and an immortal olive tree.

I have lived on the land long before swords turned man into prey.

I belong there. When heaven mourns for her mother, I return heaven to her mother.

And I cry so that a returning cloud might carry my tears.

To break the rules, I have learned all the words needed for a trial by blood.

I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a single word: Home.

Translation Munir Akash and Carolyn Forché. Source: collection of verses 'Fewer Roses' (1986), published in Mahmoud Darwish, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise. Selected Poems* (2003)

DESTROYED HOUSE GAZA

Destroyed House Gaza (NL: Verwoest Huis Gaza) was conceptualised and directed by Marjan Teeuwen. With thanks to the Palestinian Red Half Moon (PRCS) in Khan Younis, led by Jedadh Abu Hatab, who supported the project.

Teeuwen worked alongside engineers Mohammed Al Astal and Rywyda Abu Daa, with assistance by Mohammed Dagga and Achmed Al Astal, as well as steel- and concrete workers. Photographic support was provided by Ezz Al Zanoon and Abed Zagout. In the Netherlands she received support by Koen Tornij (Photoshop). Maomar Abu Tabeekh and Ezz Al Zanoon made the videorecordings of *Destroyed House Gaza*. The editing of the film was done by Rob van de Ven and Marjan Teeuwen.

Destroyed House Gaza was financially supported by the Mondrian Fund.

MARJAN TEEUWEN

Marjan Teeuwen creates large-scale architectonic installations inside buildings: 'a building as sculpture'. The installations are temporary, but the artist captures them through the medium of photography, resulting in permanent photographic works. So far, Teeuwen has realised six installations: *Destroyed House* (2008), *Destroyed House Krasnoyarsk* (2009), *Destroyed House Piet Mondriaanstraat* (2010/2011), *Destroyed House Bloemhof* (2012), *Destroyed House on North* (2014), *Destroyed House Leiden* (2015), and *Destroyed House Gaza* (2016-2017).

EZZ AL ZANOON

Ezz Al Zanoon (1992, Gaza) is an independent photo journalist and filmmaker whose work regularly appears in the Middle East Eye, The Electronic Intifada, and Al Jazeera English, among others. His work is mostly concerned with topics such as human rights and social justice.

RAWAN MAHADY

Rawan Mahady (1993, Gaza) works as a PR Outreach Coordinator at the Social Development Forum (SDF) in Gaza, and as a News Reporter for Saudi 2 TV. Previously she worked as an advocate for women's rights, a facilitator of Outreach workshops on Gender-Based violence, and as an interpreter & translators for NGO's. Mahady studied English Language and Literature at the Al-Azhar University and in July 2017, she will start an MA in Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Northern Iowa.

META KNOL

Meta Knol (1969) is art historian, director of Museum De Lakenhal and co-founder/ex-board member of Framer Framed. She made this exhibition independently.

In August 2017, a monography on the work of Marjan Teeuwen will be published by Valiz in Amsterdam. The book features texts by Ernst van Alphen, Maarten Doorman, Hans den Hartog Jager, Meta Knol and Wilma Sùto.

CURATOR

Meta Knol

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Meta Knol / Framer Framed

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