

DAAR – Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti Entity of Decolonization 04.02-02.04.23

EN

La Loge

Kluisstraat 86 - rue de l'Ermitage
B-1050 Brussels

An exhibition curated by Matteo Lucchetti

The new exhibition titled *Entity of Decolonization* by **DAAR – Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti** brings together a selection of works that activate new conversations around undiscussed heritages. The exhibition is centered around the encounter between the original Freemasons lodge of La Loge with the architectural prototypes and projects by the collective, in an attempt to reconfigure how nation-states organized societal structures through modernist and colonial blueprints in the 20th century.

With a practice developed at the intersection between architecture, art, pedagogy, and politics, DAAR has created a series of artistic research projects over the last two decades that are theoretically and practically engaged with decolonizing processes on a global scale.

With their latest project, *Ente di Decolonizzazione – Borgo Rizza*, Hilal and Petti present at La Loge the possibility of a critical reappropriation, reuse, and subversion of fascist colonial architecture. Italy's "defascistation" remains an unfinished process, and this is one of the reasons why the country still has visible architecture, monuments, plaques, and toponymy that celebrate the regime.

The installation at the center of the exhibition is an attempt to profane the rural settlement of Borgo Rizza, a village built in 1940 by the Ente di Colonizzazione del Latifondo Siciliano [ECLS, Entity of Colonization of Sicilian Latifundia]. The function of ECLS was to reclaim, modernize, and repopulate Sicily, a place that the regime considered backward, underdeveloped and "empty." Similar architectural blueprints were adopted by fascist colonial urban planning in the Italian colonies of Libya, Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia around the same time. Borgo Rizza was abandoned after the Second World War when the fascist regime and its colonial project collapsed, and the local community has used it sporadically since. In 2020 DAAR started collaborating with the local municipality to reuse this fascist architectural heritage site in a decolonial sense, starting a summer school on its premises and developing the *Entity of Decolonization – Borgo Rizza* as an ongoing project.

The *Entity of Decolonization – Borgo Rizza*, now installed in the temple of La Loge, is an assemblage of blocks that are the scaled reproduction of Borgo Rizza's main building facade which the artists have deconstructed into fifteen multipurpose modules. Its primary function is to become a gathering space for decolonial assemblies: a discursive site where the public is invited to critically reconsider the social, economic, and political legacies of the fascist and colonial heritage, while collectively imagining new common uses of the installation. A video essay accompanies the structure, showing the origins of the research and the installation's development through its different activations.

Understood as a traveling ghost that encourages acts of decolonization of modernist-colonial architecture, the work provides an opportunity to initiate a series of actions and interventions. Thus, it uses the building for other functions than those for which it was designed. The assemblies aim to create spaces of horizontal encounter and exchange, entering into direct dialogue with groups, individuals, and associations that critically address the European colonial, modernist, and fascist past in the various contexts where the work is installed. Some of the main questions asked in such a space are: how does the residue of the colonial past involuntarily penetrate the collective thinking, attitudes, and actions of exclusion and privilege? How can we collectively work on this privilege to activate its transformative potential?

It becomes urgent to ask: What kind of heritage is the fascist-colonial and modernist heritage? Who has the right to reuse it? Should this heritage be demolished, or could it be reoriented towards other ends? Against the re-emergence of nostalgic and neofascist ideologies, DAAR's work consists of discursive, educational, architectural, and political interventions that

transform the former Entity of Colonization into an *Entity of Decolonization*. These interventions have included site research, summer schools, art installations, exhibitions, and public events which bring together the local community, international universities, and cultural institutions to form new partnerships with different municipalities.

In the lobby, the *Difficult Heritage Summer School* video documents the summer school activity since 2021 in Borgo Rizza. The school exists thanks to the Decolonizing Architecture Advanced Course at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, and the MA program in Critical Urbanisms at the University of Basel in collaboration with the Municipality of Carlentini. In the first two years of the summer school, the participants developed a new vocabulary about reparation, restitution, and healing the heritage, collectively reimagining the reuse of these spaces in dialogue with the locals.

In the triangle space on the first floor, a site-specific video installation interacts with the window in the temple. The work is titled *Architectural Doubles* and rearticulates, through a slideshow on video, previous research by DAAR on the Entity of Colonization in Libya. The public is invited to sit and choose from which window to look out, the physical or the digital one. Here different geographies and approaches to architecture enter in dialogue with the Freemason's temple. Through this gaze on the past, the foundation of the research around the *Entity of Decolonization* is revealed, uncovering a series of questions about the afterlife of fascist-colonial architecture which, from 2014, became DAAR's long-term investigation.

There is repetition, replication, and duplication of the same structures built on both Italian and African soils: systematic urban schemes for new towns; Rome and Addis Ababa as twin capitals of the new empire; and piazzas, *casa del fascio*, churches, villas, leisure centers (cinemas and theaters) and monuments. Italy saw the establishment of New Towns in the Agro Pontino near Rome, in Sardinia, and in Sicily as a modern project of redemption of the land and its inhabitants. Similarly, the new agricultural settlements in Libya, together with the master plans of Asmara and Addis Ababa, were meant as tools to modernize the local population.

In addition to the previous works, there is a screening of a film based on DAAR's research about refugee camps on the second floor. As a paradigmatic representation of political failure, the camps are established to be demolished and forgotten. In tracing, documenting, revealing, and representing refugee history beyond the narrative of suffering and displacement, the *Refugee Heritage* project (2015-2021) attempts to imagine and practice *refugeeness* beyond humanitarianism. UNESCO's "Format for the nomination of properties for inscription on the World Heritage List (Annex 5)" is a monumental bureaucratic structure founded during the colonial era. Refugee Heritage seeks to deploy the potential for heritage to be mobilized as an agent of political transformation by applying to UNESCO World Heritage with a photographic dossier that captures the life and richness of the

camps. The project's goal is not UNESCO's approval but to start a needed conversation about the permanent temporariness of refugee camps.

Coming to Brussels after past iterations in Naples (Museo Madre) and Berlin (Berlin Biennale), *Ente di Decolonizzazione - Borgo Rizza* aims now to bring the Ente and its horizontal discursive platform, in dialogue with the urgent and pressing debates around the decolonization of the public domain in Belgium. The *Entity of Decolonization* connects the elements of coloniality in various European contexts that still permeate public space, language, behaviors, and images together with a new generation of citizens who are actively dismantling and repurposing today.

DAAR's work shapes critical learning environments starting from architectural structures, with interventions taking place that challenge dominant collective narratives with the aim to produce new political imagery, while also forming new civic spaces in collaboration with multiple subjects and partners.

About the artists

At the beginning of **DAAR (Decolonizing Architecture Art Research)**, **Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti** founded *Campus in Camps*, an experimental educational program hosted in Dheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem with the aim to overcome conventional educational structures by creating a space for critical and grounded knowledge production connected to greater transformation and the democratization of society. *Campus in Camps* has offshoots in other Palestinian camps and is linked in a consortium with universities around the world. DAAR (previously Decolonising Architecture Art Residency) was born in 2007 with Eyal Weizman in Beit Sahour, Palestine, with the aim to combine an architectural studio and an art residency able to gather architects, artists, activists, urbanists, film-makers, and curators to work collectively on the subjects of politics and architecture.

Their latest publication *Permanent Temporariness* (Art and Theory, Stockholm 2019) is a book, a catalog, and an archive that accounts for 15 years of research, experimentation, and creation that are marked by an inner tension and a visionary drive that rethinks itself through collective engagement. *Permanent Temporariness* was published in connection with their eponymous retrospective exhibition (New York University Abu Dhabi Art Gallery, 2018; Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, 2019).

Hilal was the head of the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Program in the West Bank at UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) from 2008 to 2014. Alessandro Petti has written on the emerging spatial order dictated by the paradigm of security and control in the *Archipelagos and Enclaves* (Bruno Mondadori, Milan 2007) and more recently Petti and Hilal co-authored with Eyal Weizman the book *Architecture after Revolution* (Sternberg, Berlin 2014), which is an invitation to rethink today's struggles for justice and equality not only from the historical perspective of revolution, but also from that of a continued struggle for decolonization.

The participation in various international exhibitions, among them the Biennale di Venezia (2003–2008–2009–2013–2015), Istanbul Biennial (2009), Home Works Beirut (2010), Bienal de São Paulo (2014), the Asian Art Biennial (2015), Marrakech Biennial (2016), and Qalandia International (2016) aimed to investigate and act upon the formation of different social, political, and spatial relations between people, state, and territory beyond the liberal notion of citizenship. The practical implications of these conceptual and artistic interventions have been tested more concretely with architectural interventions in refugee camps. In 2014, the *Shu'fat School for Girls* was inaugurated for 1,000 students, teachers, and local organizations as an expression of dignity and strength for the refugee community living in overcrowded refugee camps. Further, in 2015 these practices led to the construction of a "concrete tent" in the garden of the Al Finiq Cultural Center in Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem, a pavilion that embodies the contradiction of the permanent temporariness of Palestinian refugees.

Alessandro is a professor of Architecture and Social Justice at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm. Sandi initiated *The Living Room Project*, a series of spaces of hospitality that have the potential to subvert the role of guest and host. She is a Visiting Professor at Lund University.

About the curator

Matteo Lucchetti is a curator, art historian, and writer. He is currently curator for Contemporary Arts and Cultures at Museo delle Civiltà in Rome. He is cofounder of the project *Orchestra della Trasformazione*, a curatorial agency that promotes new artistic imaginaries for the 2030 agenda. Since 2011, he has been co-curating with Judith Wielander *Visible*, a research and biennial award for socially engaged artistic practices in a global context supported by the Pistoletto Foundation and Zegna Foundation. He was curator of exhibitions and the public program at the BAK in Utrecht from 2016–2018, and was curator of the 16th Rome Quadrennial.

A selection of curatorial projects include: *Pompei Commitment* with Otobong Nkanga and Marzia Migliora, 2022; *Climavore Italy* with Cooking Sections, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Roma, 2021; *Marzia Migliora. The Spectrum of Malthus*, MA * GA, Gallarate, 2020; *Sammy Baloji. Other Tales*, Lunds Konsthall and Kunsthall Aarhus, 2020; *Marinella Senatore: Piazza Universale. Social Stages*, Queens Museum, New York, 2017; *De Rerum Rurale*, 16th Rome Quadrennial, 2016; *Don't Embarrass the Bureau*, Lunds Konsthall, 2014; *Enacting Populism*, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, 2012. He was curator in residence at Para Site (Hong Kong), Kadist Art Foundation (Paris), and AIR (Antwerp). He is a faculty member of the Unidee Academy, Biella. He has been visiting professor at HISK, Ghent; Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam; Sint Lucas Antwerpen, Antwerp and Brera Academy of Fine Arts, Milan. His critical contributions have appeared in *Mousse Magazine*, *Manifesta Journal*, and *Art Agenda*. Lucchetti lives and works between Brussels and Rome.

WORKS

Outside

Entity of Decolonization, 2023

Brass plaque with engraved text

50 x 60 cm

Courtesy of the artists

Entrance

Difficult Heritage Summer School, 2021

Video, 12 min 55 sec

Directed by Ana Naomi de Sousa

Additional editing: Marlon Rouse Tavares

Sound: Jens Haendeler, Emilio Distretti, Denise Vega Santiago

Courtesy of the artists

Video realized in collaboration between the Decolonizing Architecture Advanced Course at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, the MA program in Critical Urbanisms at the University of Basel, and the Municipality of Carlentini.

Temple

Ente di Decolonizzazione - Borgo Rizza, 2022

Wood, plaster, plexiglass

350 x 600 x 45 cm

Video, 16 min 07 sec

Courtesy of the artists

1st floor

Architectural Doubles, 2014–2023

Video, 4 min 49 sec

Credits: DAAR – Alessandro Petti and Sandi Hilal

Photo and video archive: Vittoria Capresi, Piergiorgio Massaretti (IsIAO),

Lorenzo Pezzani

Courtesy of the artists

2nd floor

Refugee Heritage, 2015–2021

Video, 8 min 44 sec

Credits: DAAR – Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal

Photographic dossier: Luca Capuano.

Video editing: Husam Abusalem

Courtesy of the artists

PUBLIC PROGRAMME

Decolonial Assemblies

03-04.02.23

14:00-17:00

The assemblies use the installation as a discursive platform to bring the participants in contact with the urgent debates around the decolonization of the public domain in Brussels, and in relation to the global context highlighted in the project.

Organized in collaboration with CIVA, an open call was published in January inviting participants to register in the discussions of the assemblies.

Free participation upon registration

Language: English

To receive further information, please consult our website and/or write an email to entededecolonizzazione@gmail.com

Through The Eyes

Date and guest to be confirmed

Subjective guided tour of the exhibition

Free participation upon registration

Credits & Acknowledgments

Research: Sandi Hilal, Emilio Distretti, Alessandro Petti

Project coordinator: Sara Pellegrini

Public programme and exhibition curator: Matteo Lucchetti

Design assistance and executive production: Orizzontale and Zapoi

Documentation: Pietro Onofri

Video editing: Husam Abusalem

Website design: NERO editions

Online platform editor: Michele Angiletta for NERO editions

The team would like to thank Corrado Gugliotta, Salvatore La Rosa, Lole Lianza, Laura Mariano, Remo Minopoli, Nicolò Stabile and Kathryn Weir.

The project is co-commissioned and co-produced by La Loge - Brussels, Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, and Madre Museum - Naples, Comune di Albissola Marina, as well as supported by the Italian Council programme (10th Edition, 2022) to promote Italian contemporary art in the world by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity for the Italian Ministry of Culture.

The realization of *Entity of Decolonization* at La Loge was made possible thanks to the professional and dedicated work of Arthur Jules, Leonor Gomez and Zoë Brennan.

The public programme of the exhibition is co-organized with CIVA.

The opening is supported by Vedett.

The team of La Loge:

Director and curator: Wim Waelput

Curator of public programme and communication: Antoinette Jattiot

Intern: Zoë Brennan

Visual identity: Antoine Begon, Boy Vereecken

Production: Léonor Gomez, Arthur Jules

Audio & video: Ludo Engels

Photography: Lola Pertsowsky

Video documentation: Showing the Show

Translations and proofreadings: BLURBS, Joséphine Michel, Hilde Pauwels

Lab Loge coordinator: Lisa Man

Volunteers: Alice Beilig, Jonas Halkin, Marielou Laforest, Alice Nataf, Mary Szydłowska

Opening hours

From Thursday to Sunday

13:00 - 18:00

Free entrance

Visit our website for more details about our programme and events

www.la-loge.be

La Loge is a privately initiated non-profit association founded by architect Philippe Rotthier. La Loge is supported by the Flemish Government, the French Community (FWB), the Flemish Community Commission (Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie - VGC) and First Sight, La Loge's community of engaged individuals and organizations. La Loge receives additional support from the Municipality of Ixelles. La Loge is a member of 50° nord Réseau transfrontalier d'art contemporain and Brussels Museums.

La Loge

Kluisstraat 86 - rue de l'Ermitage

1050 Brussels

+32(0)2 644 42 48

info@la-loge.be

www.la-loge.be

