

Decolonizing Architecture / Art Residency Common Assembly

Decolonizing Architecture/Art Residency (DAAR) is an art and architecture collective founded by Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal and Eyal Weizman, based in Beit Sahour, outside Bethlehem, in the West Bank. They propose new uses for oppressive Israeli architecture. The word 'decolonization' implies the dismantling of the existing dominant structure – financial, military and legal – conceived for the benefit of a single group. As well as working within the professional parameters of architecture and planning, they set up “arenas of speculation” for their projects, drawing on many cultural and political perspectives through individuals and organisations.

For more information

If you have any questions or want to find out more about the exhibition, please ask our friendly Gallery Assistants. They're here to help!



Logo by Klaus Weber

The Lawless Line

In 1993 secret talks between Israeli and Palestinian representatives were held in Oslo. Three types of territories were defined within the West Bank. Area A was to be under Palestinian control, Area B under Israeli military control and Palestinian civilian control, and Area C under full Israeli control. This temporary geography became permanently splintered when the Oslo process collapsed. A fourth type of territory appeared too. Existing between the others, it represented the width of the line separating them. The line is less than a millimetre thick when drawn on a map at a scale of 1:20,000. Scaled up in real life, its width is more than 5 metres.

Our project investigates the route of this line, following it along the edges of villages and towns, across fields, olive and fruit orchards, roads, gardens, children's nurseries, fences, terraces, homes, public buildings, a football stadium, a mosque and finally a large recently built castle.



The landscape of the Red Castle and the Line. © DAAR

Oush Grab (the Crow's Nest) – former military base – Return to Nature

In May 2006, the Israeli army evacuated a military camp strategically located on the summit of the highest hill at the southern entrance to the Palestinian city of Beit Sahour (where DAAR are based). Established by the British it became an Israeli base in 1967, during which time most of the houses surrounding it were destroyed by tank shells and gunfire from inside the base, and floodlights trapped the area in an 'endless day'.

During the Oslo era the local administration took control of the camp as a public site, drawing up a masterplan for it to include a neighbourhood with a hospital and public park. Since that time the summit and the buildings have become a focus for numerous confrontations between settlers, the Israeli military and Palestinian organizations. During the visit to Israel by US President George Bush in 2008, Israeli settlers tried to use the buildings as the nucleus of a new settlement, hoping for new concessions.

DAAR's proposal renders the buildings uninhabitable by perforating the walls. More than 500 million migrating birds pass through Oush Grab. The perforated walls would become the perfect nesting environment for migrating flocks of storks, pelicans and birds of prey that flow through the valleys and mountains, disregarding international boundaries.



Evolution of the Container. © DAAR

The Colony of P'sagot

Located on a hill, the colony visually dominates the entire Palestinian area. Before occupation it was an open space for recreation. In 1967 plans began to make it a tourist resort. These were interrupted in 1981 by the Israeli occupation, when construction of settler homes started.

Israeli settlers on occupied Palestinian lands usually have a single-family house on a small plot of land. Can a single family home become the nucleus of new types of public institutions? How can they be converted into unified clusters of communal space, including halls, classrooms and offices.

One of our lasting problems was “how to inhabit the home of one’s enemy”? People of many cultures have lived in Palestine through the decades. Rather than being the “first” or “original” occupier, one is always a “subsequent”. Inhabiting the land implies a relationship with one’s present-day enemies, or an imagined or real ancient civilization. This turns living in old cities, archeological sites, battlegrounds, and destroyed villages into culturally complex acts of cohabitation.

This proposal involves changing the direction of the front door. Instead of facing the inner areas of the settlement, they would face the Palestinian cities around them. In the process of ‘Unroofing’ these single, private dwellings are

altered by removing the roofs and building a new floor, with a series of interconnecting spaces. The new buildings are more social spaces, with communal areas. Another key alteration is through ‘Ungrounding’ – a process which challenges the existing ideas of private and public space by dismantling existing barriers like pavements, private gardens etc and replacing them with a new surface layer – collectivising the land and creating the ground from which a new life will emerge.

Editor's note: an estimated 340,000 Israelis live in 120 settlements in Area C of the West Bank, authorised by the Israelis. There are 102 unauthorised Israeli settlements. 94% of non-Jewish building applications are not granted. A further estimated 250,000 Israeli settlers live in East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.



Model for Unroofing. © DAAR



Film stills from *Cleaning the Parliament* (2011) © DAAR.
(Video Operator and Editor Cressida Kocienski, Delfina Foundation Palestine with Ghassan Bannoura)

Common Assembly

The Palestinian Legislative Council building – known as the Palestinian Parliament – is simultaneously a construction site and a ruin. Its collapse was not caused by the military violence that saturates our region, but by the failure of a form of politics now challenged throughout the Middle East.

The building is one of several Palestinian Parliaments scattered within historical Palestine and in the diaspora. There are other “fragments” of Parliaments in Cairo, Amman, Beirut, Algiers, Tunis, Ramallah and Gaza.

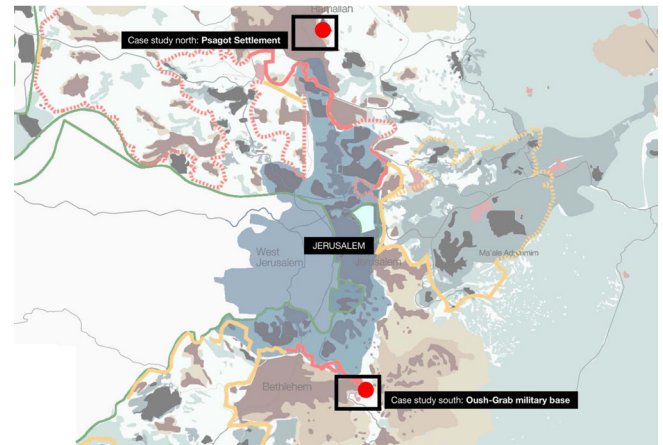
Construction began in 1996, during the euphoria produced by the Oslo Process. Its location is the product of political manoeuvring. Some prominent members of the Palestinian leadership wanted to push the building as close as possible to the renowned Al Aqsa mosque, symbol of Palestinian struggles. This would have been a stepping stone towards the ultimate establishment of East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State. The Israeli leadership, military and settlers were simultaneously pushing the Parliament outside their unilaterally declared border of Jerusalem. Consequently, the Parliament wound up in Abu Dis, a peripheral Jerusalem neighbourhood. In 2003, after the collapse of the Oslo Process, the eruption of the Second

Intifada or Palestinian uprising, and the construction of the Israeli's so-called "Peace Wall" just a few metres from the building, construction on the Parliament was halted. The building was left empty - a massive relic and a testimony to the failure of political negotiations.

Our project began with the discovery that – mistakenly or intentionally – the building was not built beside the border between Israeli and Palestinian territory, but rather, that the border runs right through the building.

It became clear that the building occupies three different spaces. Part of it is within Israeli territory, part within Palestinian controlled territory, and a small strip, no larger than the line's thickness, exists in a limbo that is potentially outside legal territories. Within the legal and political void that is the space occupied by the dividing line, we seek to re-imagine the building as an assembly that is able to represent all Palestinians - those living in Israel, under its occupation, and in exile.

Exhibitions Notes written by DAAR from www.decolonizing.ps/



P'sagot, Jerusalem and Oush-Grab. © DAAR