



The Yellow House, Boden



Boden is a former military town located in northern Sweden, 80 kilometers from the arctic circle. From being a military town, it has now become an important reception center for asylum seekers. The project is inspired by a story about a Syrian refugee couple Yasmeen and Ibrahim, who had moved to Boden from Syria two years previously, and drew on the tradition of hospitality, never accepting that they should give up their right to be hosts in their new home. They continued what was an important part of their life in Syria, opening up their living room to host both Swedes and others. The living room, when opening itself to host the stranger guest, functions as a self-representational space, that has the potential to subvert the role of guest and host and give a different socio-political meaning to the act of hospitality. The possibility of hosting had become, for them, a way to regain access to their lost personal and collective history, combining their lost life in Syria with their

new life in Sweden. By exercising their right of hosting and activating their living room, Yasmeen and Ibrahim no longer felt themselves to be statistics, passive guests in Sweden but to be owners of their own story.

Over the past two years, the Public Art Agency Sweden, Bodenbo, Havremagasinet and the Defense Museum Boden have collaborated with the architect Sandi Hilal and Yasmeen Mahmoud and Ibrahim Muhammad Haj Abdullah in the Al Madhafah / Living Room art project. With common forces, a local living room has been created, a place where conversation, cooking, and learning become art and the exchange of knowledge. Al Madhafah / The Living Room in the Yellow House at Prästholmen is a work of art, but also a living room open to those who want to host new encounters.

Al Madhafah / The Living Room in Boden is included in Art Happens:

Art Happens (2016-2018) is part of the Swedish government initiative Äga rum, where the Public Art Agency Sweden was commissioned to produce examples of public art in the million program. After a long selection process, 15 areas were selected for implementation. Read more about Art Happens at statenskonstrad.se.

Living Room, a short film about the first phase of the project directed by Ana Naomi de Sousa, was commissioned by ArkDesk, Stockholm, with the support of Public Art Agency Sweden.



Two years after first opening, the Living Room is now used every day. Yasmeen



hosts a ritual every Saturday that starts at noon where people come and spend the entire afternoon and evening cooking and eating together. Each week a different head chef is chosen, who doesn't just cook but also teaches everyone else how to cook the food they know how to cook. This has become a real reference point for all new refugees arriving in the city: no matter what, everyone knows they will be welcome. Even over Ramadan, when it's forbidden to eat before sundown, this ritual has persisted. Other things are happening too. Ibrahim recently obtained his driving license and decided to hold an informal class in the Yellow House so that people in the community could learn the theory of how to drive. Eighteen out of the twenty people who joined his class were women. At a certain point, the ABF (*Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund*, or The Workers' Education Association), a very interesting Swedish organization that has worked with refugees for many years, recognized the need within the community and started an official driving course in Boden, for both theory and practice, that is available to everyone for free. The ABF eventually ended up asking to use the Living Room for two days per week for more classes than just driving because they felt like it would be a more successful place to reach refugees. So instead of offering people services they are not interested in, the Living Room serves as a kind of laboratory for institutions that are working in Boden and with refugees to understand what will work.

Photo Elias Arvidsson

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