

Imploded, burned, turned to ash

Performance, duration 36 min 08 sec

By Issam Kourbaj

Multiple screenings of recorded drawing and sound performance in various locations, worldwide, throughout Refugee Week

20 - 26 June 2022



Issam Kourbaj, *Eleven years and counting*, 2022
Digital image © Issam Kourbaj

This performance by the Syrian-born and Cambridge-based artist Issam Kourbaj was created to mark one decade of the Syrian uprising. It was performed and livestreamed on 15 March 2021 – the tenth anniversary of the first day of unrest. Filmed during the second COVID-19 lockdown at The Howard Theatre at Downing College, Cambridge, it was watched live across the world. In collaboration with the composer Richard Causton and the soprano Jessica Summers, as well as Kettle's Yard, The Heong Gallery and The Fitzwilliam Museum, the original performance also coincided with the artist's display of 366 eye idols created from Aleppo soap (*Don't Wash Your Hands: Neither Light Agrees To Enter The Eyes Nor Air The Lungs*, 2020) at the Fitzwilliam Museum (2 December 2020–5 September 2021).

In March 2021, Kourbaj said:

"To mark the tenth anniversary of the Syrian uprising, which was sparked by teenage graffiti in March 2011, this drawing performance will pay homage to those young people who dared to speak their mind, the masses who protested publicly, as well as the many Syrian eyes that were, in the last ten years, burnt and brutally closed forever."

The recording of this performance will be screened in multiple locations worldwide, including cultural institutions and churches across the UK, Europe, Middle East and USA, throughout Refugee Week (20–26 June 2022). The ash produced during the original performance will also be installed in a glass vessel next to the screen at selected locations, including St James's Piccadilly, London, and Great St Mary's Church, Cambridge. The performance will also be available to watch virtually on associated websites that will be accessible to anyone unable to make it to one of the physical locations.

The idea of screening it in multiple locations and on the internet reflects the diaspora of many Syrians forced to leave their destroyed homes and erased cities, who are now scattered across the world, while the glass jar of ash casts light on war's terrible continuity (even when it is no longer mentioned in the media) and the destruction of all cities and livelihoods, which we see repeated time and again (as is now tragically happening in the Ukraine) and throughout human history.

**For further information
and images**

Please contact Helen Dickman
press@kettlesyard.cam.ac.uk

Kettle's Yard

T. +44 (0)1223 748 100
F. +44 (0)1223 324 377
kettlesyard.co.uk

Screening Locations Worldwide

Kuwait

Kuwait
Contemporary Art Platform, Shuwaikh industrial area,
Design district, Block 2, street 28

Netherlands

Amsterdam
Framer Framed, Oranje-Vrijstaatkade 71, 1093 KS

Leiden
International Institute for Asian Studies, Rapenburg 59,
2311 GJ

UAE

Dubai
Alserkal Avenue, 17th St - Al Quoz, Dubai

UK

Aldeburgh
The Aldeburgh Beach Lookout, 31 Crag Path, Aldeburgh
IP15 5BS

Birmingham
Ikon Gallery, 1 Oozells Sq, Birmingham B1 2HS

Bristol
St Mary Redcliffe Church, 12 Colston Parade, Redcliffe,
Bristol BS1 6RA

Cambridge
Great St Mary's Church, Senate House Hill, Cambridge
CB2 3PQ
Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington St, Cambridge CB2
1RB

Hastings
Hastings Museum & Art Gallery, John's Place, Bohemia
Rd, Hastings TN34 1ET

London
St James's Church, Piccadilly, 197 Piccadilly, London
W1J 9LL
V&A museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 2RL
The Mosaic Rooms, 226 Cromwell Rd, London SW5
0SW

Newcastle
The Culture Lab, Newcastle University, 49 King's Road,
Newcastle NE1 7RU

Peterborough
Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, 51 Priestgate,
Peterborough PE1 1LF

USA

Atlanta
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 435 Peachtree St. NE.
Atlanta, GA 30318

Philadelphia
Twelve Gates Arts, 106 N 2nd St, Philadelphia, PA 19106

Online Screening

alserkal.online
Art and Christianity
Atassi Foundation
Counterpoint Arts
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
Heong Gallery, Cambridge
Kettle's Yard, Cambridge
Qisetna
La Reine Blanche, Paris
Scottish Refugee Council
St Mary Redcliffe
The Markaz Review
The Refugee Week

Events

Wednesday 22 June, 7pm (BST)

Composer Richard Causton and Artist Issam Kourbaj in
Conversation with Claudia Tobin

[Creative Conversations:](#)

Royal Drawing School, London

Zoom webinar registration page:

https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_n5_AlBTrQyaF2QmYJ_fwfw

Postcards

Postcards of Issam Kourbaj's work will be on sale at The
Heong Gallery with proceeds going to support refugees.

**For further information
and images**

Please contact Helen Dickman
press@kettlesyard.cam.ac.uk

Kettle's Yard

T. +44 (0)1223 748 100
F. +44 (0)1223 324 377
kettlesyard.co.uk

About Issam Kourbaj

Issam Kourbaj was born in Syria and trained at the Institute of Fine Arts in Damascus, the Repin Institute of Fine Arts & Architecture in Leningrad (St Petersburg) and at Wimbledon School of Art (London). Since 1990, he has lived and worked in Cambridge, becoming an Artist-in-Residence, a Bye-Fellow (2007–11) and a Lector in art at Christ's College, University of Cambridge. Kourbaj's work spans many disciplines – his interests stem from his wide-ranging background in fine art, architecture and theatre design. His artwork include paintings, works on paper, sculptures, film and performance pieces, and he frequently collaborates across the creative sciences and humanities. It has been exhibited and collected widely; for example, a collection of his sketches, *Sound Palimpsest*, was acquired by the British Museum in 2008 and exhibited in their display *Iraq's Past Speaks to the Present*. Kourbaj's piece *Dark Water, Burning World*, is currently touring several museums in the UK and is in the collection of Pergamon Museum and the British Museum. It became object 101 in 'A History of The World in 100 Objects' when former Director of the British Museum Neil MacGregor was asked which object would best encapsulate our modern age. Kourbaj created new performances for the exhibition *Actions. The Image of the World can be Different* at Kettle's Yard in 2018, and has been dedicated to raising awareness and funds for projects and aid in Syria through several exhibitions, installations and performances in the UK and abroad. In 2021, he was invited to curate and create work for a large-scale art installation called *Fleeing the Dark* in response to and inspired by objects from the collection of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. Kettle's Yard and The Heong Gallery (University of Cambridge) are collaborating with the artist on a major two-venue exhibition of the artist's work in 2024. www.issamkourbaj.co.uk

About Richard Causton

Richard Causton (composer) has been described as "one of the most courageous and uncompromising artists we have". He studied at the University of York, the Royal College of Music and the Scuola Civica in Milan, studying with Franco Donatoni and his music has been heard all over the world, thanks to performers such as the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Sinfonieorchester Basel, RundfunkSinfonieorchester Saarbrücken, London Sinfonietta, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Britten Sinfonia

and the Nash Ensemble. Issam Kourbaj, *Eye idols and Arabic Graffiti, ink on paper, 2020* His music often challenges the performers to reach unusual realms of expression to achieve his intentions. Richard is currently Professor of Composition at the University of Cambridge. www.richardcauston.com

About Jessica Summers

Jessica Summers (soprano) has performed around the UK both in concerts and in opera. An alumna of the Britten-Pears Young Artists Programme (Contemporary Performance directed by the late Oliver Knussen) and New Vocal Repertory courses (directed by Jane Manning), Jessica has performed twentieth and twenty first century music in a wide range of venues and festivals including the Three Choirs Festival, Holywell Music Room, Oxford (Pierrot Lunaire), St John's Smith Square, Brighton Festival, York Late Music Festival, King's Lynn Festival, Dartington Hall, Ripon Cathedral, Science Museum (London) and the St Martin in the Fields New Music Series. She has sung in several tours for English Touring Opera, for Opera North (Education) and for the Royal Opera, Covent Garden. Jessica is an ardent supporter of refugees and those who have been displaced. She is a former orientation volunteer for the Red Cross Refugee Unit in London and continues to volunteer, fundraise and raise awareness of the current global refugee crisis. www.livingsongs.co.uk/artists/



Issam Kourbaj, *Imploded, burned, turned to ash*, 2021
Still from a performance (duration 36 min and 8 seconds) © Issam Kourbaj