

An aerial photograph of a city grid, likely Aleppo, showing a road leading towards the city. The grid is composed of dark, irregular lines representing streets and buildings. A prominent road runs diagonally from the bottom left towards the center. The overall color palette is muted, with shades of grey, brown, and beige.

The Road to Aleppo

INGER-JOHANNE BRAUTASET



INGER-JOHANNE BRAUTASET

Time VII, 2009  
120 x 120 cm



Time I, 2011  
150 cm x 114 cm







Time II, III, IV, 2011  
150 cm x 114 cm







Time V, 2011  
150 cm x 114 cm

# Forord

## Preface

SIRI SKJOLD LEXAU

“Jeg er en by”, synger Anne Grete Preus. Hun tenker nok mer på byen som metafor for menneskets indre, men på den annen side har den menneskelige organisme i årtusener blitt brukt som ideal, i overført betydning, for en velfungerende by. Sirkulasjon, hode, kropp, armer og bein har vært begreper benyttet for å illustrere struktur og forbindelser - som i betegnelsen “kommunikasjonsåre”. Bygde strukturer, gater og plasser, avløpsanlegg og vannforsyning setter avtrykk på jordoverflaten, enten det er eksisterende byer i full målestokk, eller sporene etter bebyggelse i form av ruiner eller fundament. Slike sirkulasjonsnettverk finnes både inne i kroppen og i systemer som menneskene har bygd, og de danner logiske og differensierte mønstre.

Inger-Johanne Brautaset har i en årrekke studert strukturene som er overlevert oss fra tidligere sivilisasjoner, og interessen for oldtidsbyer som Ugarit, Ur og Doura Europos har ført henne på flere reiser i Midtøsten. Ved å undersøke arkeologenes nedtegnelser av gatemønstre og spor etter bygninger trer også de estetiske kvalitetene i byenes organismer frem. De siste fem årene er det spesielt eldre byplaner i det nåværende Syria som har vært gjenstand for Brautaset's undersøkelser og bearbeiding. Ett eksempel er Ras Shamra, den sentrale delen av havnebyen Ugarit nær Latakia som ble avdekket av franske arkeologer i 1950-årene. En tegning av den urbane strukturen var stilt ut på Nasjonalmuseet i Damaskus. Byen lå strategisk til på handelsrutene mellom Egypt, Lilleasia og Mesopotamia,

«I am a city», sings singer-songwriter Anne Grete Preus. She is probably thinking here of the city as a metaphor for our inner lives; on the other hand, the human organism has been used for centuries as a model, figuratively speaking, for a well-functioning city. Circulation, head, body, arms and legs are terms which have been employed to illustrate structures and connections – as in the characterization “arterial roads”. Buildings, streets and squares, drainage systems and water supplies all make their mark upon the surface of the earth, whether they are part of full scale existing cities, or found in the vestiges of buildings in the form of ruins or foundations. Such networks of circulation are found both in bodies and in man-made systems, and they create logical and diversified patterns.

For a number of years Inger-Johanne Brautaset has studied constructions which have come down to us from former civilizations, and her interest for the ancient cities of Ugarit, Ur and Doura Europos has taken her on several journeys throughout the Middle East. By studying annotations made by archeologists of street patterns and the outlines of buildings, the aesthetic qualities of the organism of the cities become apparent. For the past five years, ancient plans for cities located in present day Syria have in particular been the focus for Brautaset's explorations and work. An example is Ras Shamra, the central district of the city port of Ugarit near Latakia which was excavated by French archeologists in the 1950s. A plan of the urban structure was displayed at the National Museum

og tegningene viser en høyt utviklet by med palasser, plassanlegg og logiske gatesystemer. Bildeserien *Time I-V* fra 2011 bygger på de formale og estetiske kvalitetene i denne byplanen. Vi ser hvordan kunstneren fremhever og visker ut, henter frem i dagen og skyver i bakgrunnen ulike deler av byen, slik også vinden og sanden i ørkenen både bevarer og dekker til minnet om høyt utviklede samfunn fra fortiden. Både mosaikker fra romertiden og arkitektoniske ornamenter fra ulike epoker konserveres av den flyktige ørkensanden. Kort tid etter at minnesmerker er gravd ut, dekkes de igjen til av naturens erosjon.

Også Citadellet i Aleppo har satt visuelle spor i Brautaset's bilder, eksempelvis i arbeidet *Hommage à Alep*. I mange år har hun vært fascinert av Aleppo og dens historie, og gjennom lokale kontakter i byen har hun nå fått vite at store deler av byens bygninger og strukturer er ødelagt i borgerkrigen som i 2014 har rast i tre år - med ufattelige menneskelige og kulturelle tap som konsekvens. Det er uklart hva som er igjen av syriske kulturinstitusjoner og deres samlinger, av fantastiske og intrikate gatestrukturer, byggverk og de bortgjemte oasene av noen byhus man ikke kan se fra utsiden. Brautaset's bilder er derfor også minnebilder over en sivilisasjon som er i ferd med å ødelegge såvel sine fortidsminner som vitnesbyrdene om nåtidens samfunn.

I serien *Memories* som består av 30 små collager på 20 x 20 cm settes eldre og nyere fotografier inn i en religiøs og etnisk mangfoldighet. Nåtiden vil også etter hvert viskes

in Damascus. The city held a strategic position on the trade routes between Egypt, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, and plans show a highly developed city with palaces, public squares and logical street systems. The picture series *Time I-V* from 2011 is based on the formal and aesthetic qualities of this city plan. We observe how the artist emphasises and erases, brings to our attention and consigns to the background different parts of the city, just as the wind and sand of the desert both preserve and conceal the memory of highly developed societies of the past. Both mosaics from Roman times and architectural ornamentation from different epochs are conserved by the shifting desert sands. No sooner are the monuments excavated, than they are buried again by the erosion of nature.

The citadel in Aleppo has also left its mark in Brautaset's pictures, for example, in *Hommage à Alep*. For many years, she has been fascinated by its history. Now, through local contacts in the city she has learned that large parts of the city's buildings and infrastructure have been destroyed in the civil war, which, in 2014, has raged for three years with incomprehensible human and cultural loss as a consequence. It is not clear how many of Syria's cultural institutions and their collections have survived, or of fantastic and intricate street ways, architecture and the hidden oases of some of the town houses not discernable from the outside. Brautaset's pictures are therefore also images of remembrance for a civilization that is in the process of destroying not only its monuments of the past



ut, som et gammelt, falmet fotografi. Ofte legger Brautaset inn et gitter mellom betrakteren og fortiden, gitre skapt av selvlaget papir som hun graver åpninger i. Inger-Johanne Brautaset arbeider lag på lag med det som har vært og det som er, men som kan forsvinne. Hun studerer *sporene* etter det komplekse menneskelivet gjennom århundrene, som ligger mer eller mindre åpne for tolkning. På en liknende måte som sand og vind dekker til fysiske minner, dekker hun også delvis over motivene i bunnen av sine bilder. Noe lar hun ligge skjult, noe viser hun frem. Slik er også hukommelsen og virkeligheten. De overlevende etter krigen i Syria har en tung bær å bære inn i fremtiden. Minner om ødelagte fysiske strukturer, avrevne sosiale og kulturelle forbindelser, smerte og adskillelse vil følge dem. De vil ha en hel by av traumer, men også av skjønnhet og glede inni seg. Noe vil stå klart, andre minner vil viskes ut. I sine verk arbeider også Brautaset dypest sett med dimensjonen *tid* og alt den innebærer av menneskelig skaperverk, minner og forvitring.

but also those that bear witness to the society of the present.

In the series *Memories* which is made up of 30 small collages measuring 20 x 20 cm older and newer photographs are set into a religious and ethnic multiplicity. After a while, the present will also be erased, just like an old faded photograph. Quite often, Brautaset places a lattice between the viewer and the past, the grid is made by scratching openings through paper she has hand crafted herself. Brautaset works layer upon layer with that which has been, and that which is, but which can also disappear. She studies *the traces* left by the complexity of human life through the centuries, which are laying there, more or less open for interpretation. Similar to the way in which sand and wind conceal physical monuments, she also partly covers images at the deepest level of her pictures. Some things she hides, some she shows. Memory and reality are the same. Those who survive the war in Syria have a heavy burden to carry into the future. Memories of destroyed buildings, social and cultural relations torn apart, pain and separation will accompany them. They will carry inside them an entire city filled with trauma, but also beauty and joy. Some things will stand out, other memories will fade. Fundamentally, Brautaset's work is also about the dimension of *time* and all that it entails for human creation, memories and disintegration.





Grid I - X, 2014  
76 x 76 cm



Grid VI, 2014  
76 x 76 cm







Grid II, III, IV, 2014  
76 x 76 cm





Grid VII, VIII, 2014  
76 x 76 cm



















Archive II, 2012  
125 x 240 cm













Arcive VI, 2013  
80 x 80 cm

# Dead cities

MORTEN STRØKSNES

It wasn't that hard to find. I first took a bus from Aleppo to a nearby town. From there I started walking, but a local farmer in a Toyota pick-up soon stopped and offered me a lift. After a few kilometres he stopped and pointed the way through a village and some meadows.

– Qualaat Samaan, he said solemnly. The fortress of Simon.

Ten minutes later I entered the 5<sup>th</sup> century city, where no one had lived for 1200 years. It was a warm early spring morning, birds singing, everything looking fresh and green after the winter rain. Apart from the birds and some red squirrels, I had the whole place to myself.

The largest church – walls still standing, roof collapsed – is supposed to be the oldest surviving Byzantine church. It was built more than 1500 years ago. After St. Simonon died in 459 AD, four basilicas and a monastery was built around his column. He spent his last 37 years on top of the column, praying, fasting and trying to ensure the salvation of his soul. He started a trend all over the Levant, of stylites (from Greek, a person who dwells on top of pillars). All I could do was study the sandstone facades, washed free of details by a millennium and a half of wind, rain and snow, feast on Palmyra-dates and roasted almonds from my bag, and smoke a few cigarettes in the grass. Then I headed on to the next target of the day: an abandoned Hittite city further west, twice as old as Qualaat Samaan.

Both of these cities, and many others in the same

area, are now rebel-controlled. Like so many other historic wonders of Syria, they are subject to random or targeted destruction.

I was a young man with nothing but time in a very old country, and felt very happy about this. Sure, I enjoyed the weight and presence of dead civilizations. But the hospitable and deeply cultured people I always bumped into made it perfect. Arabs, Armenians, Kurds, Iranians, Bedouins, Alawites, Druze, Jews, Lebanese, and third generation Palestinian refugees. Totally different people lived side by side, as they “always” had, in a country where “a thousand years ago” is considered quite recent. Where people live in what would normally be considered important archaeological sites. But you've got to live, and the fact that people also lived there 3-4000 years ago, is no reason to stop.

The history of Syria is a palimpsest, a reservoir of culture from the mists of time. You can dig as deep as you like. Eventually you'll end up at the cradle of culture, when we stopped being hunter-gatherers, became sedentary, and gradually created societies with the social structures needed to sustain sophisticated cultures: written language, art, money and all the now so familiar skills and technologies.

We sit on top of all of this.

I visited Roman outposts in the desert, crumbling Arab

medieval towns, handsome crusader castles, brilliant Ottoman mosques of blue mosaic, thousand-year-old baths that were still open for use.... Cities such as Ugarit, by the Mediterranean Sea, or Dura Europos on the Euphrates, are five thousand years old. The latter place I found the remains of temples dedicated to lost gods; Zeus, Bal, Atargatis, Adonis, Assanatkona - as well as a synagogue and a Christian chapel. I also spent some time in the Syrian desert town of Palmyra. I was corrected when I spoke about it as a Roman town. It was not Roman! It was *old!*

It might look like a Roman city in need of some refurbishment and repair, I was told. But that's just because the Romans conquered it, and ruined what had already been there for thousand of years.

In Damascus - once known as "Earth's bride", "Star of the wind" and of course "Pearl of the Orient" - I got lost in the labyrinthine old town. On this walk I coincidentally found the place where - some claim with a straight face - the skull of John the Baptist is buried. And, even more dubiously, they will point out the veranda Paul allegedly used to flee Damascus, after his conversion, on the road to this city. The building looked distinctly Ottoman, like so many others in this part of town. It is not possible to study what's underneath the old town, when bombs are making big holes where buildings used to stand.

When barrel bombs or grenades hit famous urban places, we can read notes about it in the papers. Thousands

of others will become dust and blow into the desert without ever being mentioned. The modern cities of Syria are now becoming dead cities; not exactly conforming to the idea of continuous progress.

I had problems keeping track of the Christian sects (not to mention the Islamic ones) I encountered in Syria: Greek Orthodox, Syrian-Orthodox (Syriac), Greek Catholics, Russian Catholics, Roman Catholics, and Chaldean, Uniate, Assyrian and Armenian Christians. There were even some Protestants. But I had the feeling they where a bit condescended to. They hadn't really earned the right to call themselves proper Christians, belonging to a new religion or sect, without history. «What are you protestants really protesting against?» one drunken monk once asked me in the monastery of Mar Elias.

Those dead cities around Aleppo, left by themselves for time immemorial, are now controlled by rebels. Some of the extreme Islamic fighters and iconoclasts, see purpose in destroying idols, or any sign of false gods being worshipped, even if these religions were invented way back into pre-Islamic times. Gunfire, mortars and bombs have ruined many structures, including many World Heritage sites, and places that should be on that list. Only the most famous and urban sites are reported. The list is like a tourist guide of Syria. The medieval wooden water-wheels of Ham no longer sing their famous, moaning song, as they've done for centuries. Whole neighbourhoods of



that city have been flattened, like in Homs. One tower of the famous crusader castle Crac des Chevaliers, stunningly intact until recently, took a direct hit from a mortar. The Islamic citadel overlooking Palmyra is damaged by heavy gunfire, and the Roman ruins has once more become a battleground. The old city of Damascus has been hit on numerous occasions. In Aleppo, the labyrinth-like souq Al-Medina, the world's largest historic market still in use, and the most disorientating place I've ever been lost in, was destroyed by fire after shelling. The Great Mosque of Aleppo has been badly damaged by rocket-propelled grenades, just like the famous citadel in the centre of the city, where a 4500-year old temple to the Storm God Hadad was discovered a few years ago. The monastery of Saint James the Mutilated in Quara, Mar Elias monastery and many others, have been hit and damaged, but to what extent is in many cases unclear. The places listed above are only places I've seen myself. A complete list would take pages. In the violent chaos of today's Syria, people are trying to stay alive. Making records of damaged or destroyed old buildings, or dead cities, is not a priority when your home is being bombed and your friends and family shot. They are watching, as their modern cities are transformed, in record speed, into dead cities, just like all those remains of ancient civilizations scattered all over Syria.

Since the war began over a hundred thousand people has

been killed. More than three million Syrians have fled the country, and many more are displaced internally. The world hasn't seen an equally daunting refugee disaster since the genocide in Rwanda.

In Syria and Iraq I became acquainted with a sect that worshipped the devil. They are called Yazidis, and their religion is an old Kurdish version of Zoroastrianism; the ancient religion of three Iranian empires, and possibly the religion that brought the ideas of heaven and hell to Judaism, and so Christianity and Islam. They are extremely secretive (no outsider is ever reported to have read their holy book) and pay tribute to the Peacock Angel, which is another name for Satan.

Yazidis doesn't worship Satan because he's evil. They think he's acting on God's behalf. The Peacock Angel brought evil to the world, but relented and put out the flames of hell with his tears. God took him back into favour, and reinstated the Peacock Angel as the chief angel on earth.

But for the Earth to become a safe place, God must call the Peacock Angel back to heaven. Bad news. It isn't going to happen.

Hommage à Alep I, 2014  
100 X 100 cm



Hommage à Damas I, 2014  
100 X 100 cm





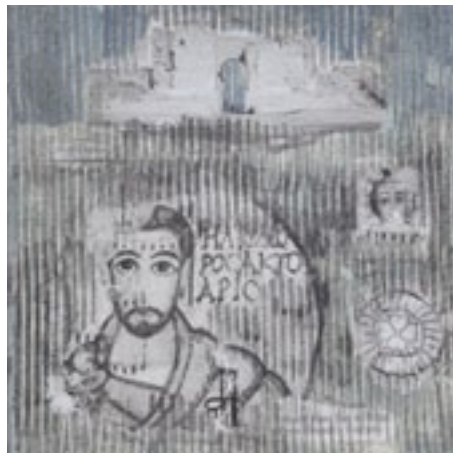
Memory VII, 2014  
20 x 20 cm



Memory III, 2014  
Memory II, 2014  
Memory VI, 2014  
Memory IX, 2014

20 x 20 cm





Memory XVI, 2014  
Memory XIII, 2014  
Memory XXII, 2014  
Memory XIX, 2014

20 x 20 cm



Memory XXI, 2014  
Memory XXIII, 2014  
Memory XXIV, 2014  
Memory XXX, 2014

20 x 20 cm







Inger-Johanne Brautaset i sitt atelier på USF, Verftet, Bergen.  
Inger-Johanne Brautaset in her studio at USF, Verftet, Bergen.

Alle bildene er i håndlaget papir av Daphne fiber, pigment, akrylmaling, pva, på papir eller lerret, blandet teknikk.  
All images are in handmade paper of Daphne fibre, pigment, acrylic paint, pva, on paper or canvas, mixed technique.



## CV

Inger-Johanne A. Brautaset

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**Education**

1987-1988 West Norway Academy of Fine Art, Bergen, Norway  
 1970-1971 College of Art and Design, Bergen, Norway  
 1964-1968 National College of Art and Design, Oslo, Norway

**Solo exhibitions** (selected)

2015 Visningsrommet USF, The Culture Hall, Bergen, Norway  
 2011, 1981 Norsk Skogmuseum, Elverum, Norway  
 Elverum Kunstgalleri, Norway  
 2009, 2002 Gallery s-e, Bergen, Norway  
 2009 Trondheim Museum of Art, Trondheim, Norway  
 Ørsta Society of Art, Kunsthuset, Ørsta, Norway  
 2006, 2001, 1984 Galleri Vikørdegaarden, Hamar, Norway  
 2004 Luna Convento, Amalfi, Italy  
 2003 Gallery Brevik, Tromsø, Norway  
 M.K. Ciurlionis National Museum of Fine Art, Kaunas, Lithuania  
 1999 Sogn og Fjordane Artists' Centre, Førde, Norway  
 1998, 87 Visningsrommet USF, The Culture Hall, Bergen, Norway  
 1997 Society of Art, Haugesund, Norway  
 1993 Møre and Romsdal Artists' Centre, Molde, Norway  
 1991 Kunstnerforbundet, Oslo, Norway  
 1987 Galleri Langegaarden, Bergen, Norway  
 1981 Oslo Society of Art, Oslo, Norway  
 Tromsø Society of Art, Tromsø, Norway

**Collective and group exhibitions** (selected)

2014 «Bergenskunstnere», Gallery s-e, Bergen  
 2007 "M-E 2007 II", Aklan Museum, Kalibo, Aklan Province, Philippines  
 2002 The 4th International Women's Art Festival, Aleppo, Syria  
 2000-2001 NORRUT; ASI Art Museum, Reykjavik, Iceland; Bryggen Museum, Bergen, Norway; Museum of Art and Design, Helsinki, Finland; The Nordic Embassies, Berlin, Germany and The National Museum of Fine Art, Kaunas, Lithuania  
 2000 Museum de Santa Maria Della Scala, Siena, Italy  
 1999-2000 "Edible paper", Leopold-Hoesch Museum, Düren, Germany and The City Museum, Deggendorf, Germany  
 1998 Holland Paper Biennial, Rijswijk, The Netherlands  
 1997 "TXX", Museum of Decorative Arts, Bergen, Norway  
 Oslo Town Hall Gallery, Oslo, Norway.  
 1996 "Stretch", Galleri F 15, Moss, Norway.  
 The Arsenal, Museum of Decorative Arts, Vilnius, Lithuania; Museum of Decorative Arts, Riga, Latvia;  
 The County Museum, Pernu, Estonia  
 Norwegian Contemporary Art, Dolny Kubin, Slovakia  
 "Sea Born Papers", Clausens Pakhus, Nysted, Denmark



- 1995 "Encounters", The National Museum of Fine Arts, Amman, Jordan
- 1994 "Paper Path", Rundetårn, Copenhagen, Denmark, travelling exhibition in DK  
 "Golden Autumn", Museum of Decorative Art and Folk Art, Moscow, Russia  
 "Paper Manifestation", Museum Aemstelle, Amsteelven, The Netherlands.  
 "Nordic Art", Frederikshavn Art Museum, Denmark
- 1993 "Célébration Papier", Montreal, Canada (selected).
- 1991-93 "KVADRAT", Christiansand Society of Art, Kristiansand; Hå gamle prestegard, Jæren and the The National Museum of Decorative Arts, Trondheim, Norway
- 1992 The IVth International Biennial of Paper Art, Leopold-Hoesch Museum, Düren, Germany  
 "Kryss/Crossing Borders", Bergen, Norway  
 "New Norwegian Tapestry", The National Museum of Decorative Arts, Trondheim, Norway
- 1991 «Crossing Borders», Norwegian/Russian Art, Gallery F 15, Moss, Norway
- 1990 «Nordform 90», Malmö, Sweden
- 1984 «The Michoacan International Exhibition of Miniature Textiles, Morelia, Mexico  
 «Hexagon», travelling exhibition: Nohaga Slott, Alingsås, Sweden, The Nordic House, Reykjavik, Iceland and The Museum of Decorative Arts, Bergen, Norway
- 1988, 85 The International Triennial of Tapestry, Lodz, Poland
- 1977, 79, 80, 88, 93 The State Autumn Salons at Kunsternes Hus, Oslo, Norway
- 1979, 82, 85, 88, 92 The Nordic Textile Triennial; travelling exhibition in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands

#### Commissions (selected)

- 2003 Øvstunheimen Nursing Home, Bergen, Norway
- 2001 Tredal School, Sunndalsøra, Norway
- 1989 Sunndal Town Hall, Sunndalsøra, Norway
- 1988 Tysvær Town Hall, Ryfylke, Norway
- 1987 Rauma Town Hall, Åndalsnes, Norway
- 1985 Karmøy Town Hall, Norway
- 1983 Norwegian Broadcasting Cooperation (NRK), Elverum, Norway

#### Public Collections

- Trondheim Museum of Art, Trondheim, Norway
- Norwegian Art Council, Norway
- The National Gallery of Fine Art, Kaunas, Lithuania
- Sunndal Culture Hall, Sunndalsøra, Norway
- The Royal Palace, Amman, Jordan
- Hamar County Council, Hamar, Norway
- The Russian Museum of Decorative Art and Folk Art, Moscow, Russia

#### Publications

- 2009 "Norsk Kunsthistorie, Bilde og skulptur frå vikingtida til idag" (Norwegian Art History) written by Gunnar Danbolt, Det Norske Samlaget, s. 379-80. ISBN 978-825217435-9
- 2009 "Portfolio Collection Inger-Johanne Brautaset", Telos Art Publishing, Brighton, England, ISBN 1-902015-99-6
- 2004 "Art Textiles of the World, Scandinavia" vol. 1, edited by Matthew Koumis, Telos Art Publishing, England, ISBN 1-902015-01-0
- 1999 "Paper", edited by Gabrielle Falkner, Watson-Guptill Publications New York, USA, ISBN 978-082300304-4
- 1998 "Fire and Paper", edited by Pat Torley and Peter Gentenaar, Gentenaar & Torley Publishing, Rijswijk, The Netherlands, ISBN 978-908041831-8
- 1998 "Ariadnes tråd" (Ariadne's thread) by Jorunn Haakestad PhD, Norwegian Academic Press, Kristiansand, Norway, ISBN 82-7634-167-5
- 1992 "Ny norsk billedvev" (New Norwegian Tapestry) by Randi Nygaard Lium MA, by C. Huitfeldt Forlag, Oslo, Norway, ISBN 82-5252-156-8

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