

Video Walkthrough | Erdem Taşdelen: *A Minaret for the General's Wife*

Erdem Taşdelen gives a virtual tour of his ongoing solo exhibition, *A Minaret for the General's Wife*, speaking to the histories, myths and speculations that drew him to the Kėdainiai Minaret and how exhibition-making within the pandemic environment pushed the artist to creatively rethink ideas of presence without live bodies.

Watch the video walkthrough on Mercer Union's website:

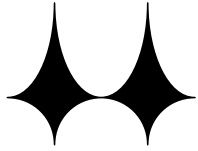
<https://www.mercerunion.org/exhibitions/tasdelen-a-minaret-for-the-generals-wife>

Erdem Taşdelen: I went through so many versions to try to arrive at something that looks like a movie poster and then I made this and a friend of mine said: "Oh yeah this looks like it won a Palme d'Or".

I am Erdem Taşdelen, and we are currently inside my exhibition, *A Minaret for the General's Wife* at Mercer Union. *A Minaret for the General's Wife* is a new body of work that revolves around the story of the Kėdainiai Minaret, which is an architectural folly in a small town in Lithuania. I was really surprised the first time I came across images of this architectural folly, because I'd never seen a freestanding minaret before. So I wanted to travel there and see it for myself, and find out why this odd-looking thing ended up in such an unlikely place. I recorded a lot of sound on-site, so some of the sound ended up in the exhibition. This is a Lithuanian song from the 1930s, which is referenced in one of the texts. The Kėdainiai Minaret was built in 1880 by a Russian Army General to celebrate his victory in the Russian-Turkish war of 1877. And during my time in Lithuania, I was able to find historical information about the construction of this minaret. But I also learned that there's a local myth about how this Russian general had a Turkish lover, and how he built this minaret as a romantic gesture for her. This is all made up, and I don't know how this myth began, but I was kind of fascinated by how the cultural significance of something shifts when it's taken out of its original context, and how new stories are fabricated to attribute new meanings to it.

Writing is at the core of my practice, so most of my projects begin with some form of writing and eventually evolve into an installation or a multimedia series of works. And that's how this project began as well. I started by writing about this minaret from different perspectives, including that of this imaginary Turkish wife. So the project really became an exercise in thinking about: what if, instead of trying to be historically accurate, I kind of populate the story of this minaret with different characters, different perspectives—some of whom are real, some made up by me—so that the minaret actually serves as a metaphor in the end for how we're all collectively entangled in making sense of things in the public realm.

The exhibition is made up of images and objects that may look as though they are theatrical props to be used in the creation or staging of a story, but what ties everything together in the end is a booklet of 12 texts that reference the minaret in some way. So there's something quite



forensic in the exhibition, where all of these elements refer to each other in subtle ways, or they might suggest that they're pieces of a larger whole.

The pandemic has pushed me to reconsider how these works will be engaged with in the space, and it's introduced a new set of conditions that I really tried to incorporate into the experience of the exhibition. I wanted to create a kind of a provisional environment that feels like it's suspended while it was in use. So there's this ghostly sense of bodies having been in the space before you, as the viewer, arrived at the scene, and maybe, hopefully, a sense of togetherness even though you're not sharing the space with other bodies in real time. And so, the exhibition kind of frames itself as a future-oriented event, where all of these different elements that are in the show might get reconfigured by actors who finally stage this thing called *A Minaret for the General's Wife*, whatever it ends up being.