

For Immediate Release

Richmond Art Gallery challenges the nature of myth-making in Erdem Taşdelen's *A Minaret for the General's Wife*

Exhibition presents the real and imagined histories of an architectural oddity in Lithuania

MARCH 24, 2022 (VANCOUVER, B.C.) — The **Richmond Art Gallery (RAG)** presents *A Minaret for the General's Wife* by **Erdem Taşdelen** from **April 22 to July 31, 2022**. The exhibition weaves together fact with fiction to tell the origin stories of an unusual minaret in Kėdainiai, Lithuania. The artist's reconstruction of how the structure came to be calls into question the way narratives take shape, and ultimately encourages a multiplicity of readings by the viewers. *A Minaret for the General's Wife* is guest curated by **Julia Paoli** and **Toleen Touq**, and is organized and circulated by Mercer Union and the South Asian Visual Arts Centre in Toronto, where the exhibition was first displayed in 2021.

"*A Minaret for the General's Wife* speaks to both the potential and the limits of storytelling," says RAG director **Shaun Dacey**. "We've seen in media, pop culture, and social movements that objects and images can become incredibly powerful vessels for ideologies. Erdem Taşdelen reflects on this by sharing real and imagined moments in history that link migration, displacement, and appropriation. His interest lies in how meaning is made — and re-made — when objects are taken out of their original context. This feels especially poignant now, as we see nationalistic machines of myth-making at play in our everyday lives. This exhibition is a reminder that our own biases can influence and manipulate the way we read texts, see images, and perceive objects."

The exhibition centres on a little-known architectural oddity that the artist first came across on a Turkish travel blog several years ago: a freestanding minaret in one of Lithuania's oldest cities. Despite being familiar with the Ottoman style of this minaret, Taşdelen's attention was struck by its location and the fact that it was not connected to a mosque. After learning that the minaret was built in 1880 by a Russian army general named Eduard Totleben, Taşdelen was motivated to participate in an artist residency in Vilnius in 2019, which gave him the opportunity to do further research at the capital's State Archives and the Regional Museum in Kėdainiai.

In his research, the artist came across two prominent narratives about the intention behind the minaret's construction. The first, rooted in fact, is that the structure was built as a monument in celebration of Russia's victory in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, and that it featured marble elements taken from Turkey as war booty. The second, a myth popular among locals, is that the orphaned minaret is the last remaining vestige of a mosque Totleben built as a gift to his Turkish wife of Islamic faith (who, in fact, never existed according to historical records).

The exhibition features a trove of archival photographs, miscellaneous artifacts, the audio of a call to prayer sung in Turkish, and a video shot on-site at the city park where the structure is located. These are all arranged in an installation that resembles a rehearsal space, where Taşdelen's multi-faceted historical narratives hold the potential to be transformed into theatrical productions, and visitors can imagine stories about the minaret tailored to their own curiosities. There is a tension between the authenticity of

the records, the truths that visitors uncover within their subjective experiences, and the constructed tale that each person ultimately conceives about the minaret.

“The work offers fragments of fact and fiction within the realm of performance and theatricality, with its potential unrealized,” says Taşdelen. “The exhibition gestures towards the provisional, the unfinished, the incomplete — so that the viewer can be involved in the meaning-making. *A Minaret for the General’s Wife* asks the audience to consider how the stories of the objects in their own lives are created.”

Erdem Taşdelen is a Turkish-Canadian artist who currently lives and works in Tkaronto/Toronto. His projects often draw from unique historical figures, events and texts in order to build semi-fictional narratives that explore frameworks of political entanglement through a range of media, including installation, video, sound, and printed matter. Taşdelen has been an artist-in-residence at the Delfina Foundation, London; Rupert, Vilnius; and KulturKontakt Austria, Vienna. He was awarded the Joseph S. Stauffer Prize in Visual Arts by the Canada Council for the Arts in 2016, the Charles Pachter Prize for Emerging Artists by the Hnatyshyn Foundation in 2014, and long-listed for the Sobey Art Award in 2019.

The exhibition launch and artist talk will be held on Saturday, April 23 at 2pm. Register for the free event or learn more at richmondartgallery.org/artist-talk-tasdelen.

A Minaret for the General’s Wife is commissioned and organized by Mercer Union and the South Asian Visual Arts Centre (SAVAC) in Toronto and was made possible with Support from RBC Insurance and SAHA Association, Istanbul.



Mercer Union
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About Richmond Art Gallery

Richmond Art Gallery (RAG) is a non-profit municipal art gallery established in 1980. The gallery produces an array of exhibitions and programs that connect, empower, and provoke conversation with our diverse Richmond, B.C. communities. RAG actively contributes to Richmond’s cultural communities through our commitment to supporting artists via exhibitions, educational programs, publications, and a permanent collection.

Press kit and photos

bit.ly/RAGminaret

Press contact

Ines Min
604 440 0791
ines@inesmin.com