

## What does 'Sanctuary' mean to people?

### New Artworks Created with Local Community and Artist Issam Kourbaj Opens at Arbury Court Library

**Tuesday 23 April 2024, 4pm**  
**Arbury Court Library, Cambridge, CB4 2JQ**

A new series of artworks will be unveiled at the newly refurbished Arbury Court Library on Tuesday 23 April 2024 as part of a project entitled Sanctuary. Created in collaboration with Kettle's Yard, artist Issam Kourbaj and people from the local North Cambridge community, the artworks will welcome visitors to this much-loved community venue in North Cambridge.

Drawing inspiration from Kourbaj's work highlighting the Syrian refugee crisis, the project asked participants to think about the word 'Sanctuary' and what it means to people in their daily lives. On display will be a new catalogue of 'stories of sanctuary', told through a series of photographs showcasing diverse objects belonging to people in the library's neighbourhood. Documented by photographer My Linh Le, each photograph displays the objects cradled in the hands of each individual owner. The photos are displayed on warm and welcoming acoustic boards in the library.

The objects chosen tell many different moving stories. Some objects, including a family photograph bought to the UK from Ukraine when the war broke out, evoke memories of family and home. Others, such as a small ukulele, help to make day to day life more enjoyable.

Alongside the photographs residents attending Arbury Court Library shared stories which illustrate feelings of sanctuary or home.



*Jug, photo: My Linh Le, 2023.*

These sound recorded stories, directed by sound artist Hannah Kemp-Welch, accompany the photographs of the objects on display.

A community participant in the project says:

*"Through the Sanctuary project I've learned that the feeling of home can take different shapes. I thought before it was a wall and roof, but it's different. It can be about different stories. I always thought I would be someone just passing through Cambridge, and not leaving my mark here... But we've made the choice to stay here and the Sanctuary project has been an opportunity to leave something here."*

Councillor Alex Bulat, vice-chair of Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, and Migrant Champion at Cambridgeshire County Council says:

*"Our libraries are safe and inclusive spaces for everyone with an important role to play in creating a fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire. This was recognised in 2023, when all Cambridgeshire's public libraries, including Arbury Court Library, became Libraries of Sanctuary."*

*"I'm delighted that this new artwork celebrates how people locally, around Arbury Court Library, have given a warm welcome to sanctuary-seekers, bringing communities and cultures together through exciting, fun and thoughtful shared experiences."*

**For further information and images**

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**Kettle's Yard**

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## Notes to Editors

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## About Kettle's Yard

Kettle's Yard, part of the University of Cambridge, is a leading gallery and unique house with a remarkable collection of 20th-century art. Its founders Jim and Helen Ede believed in art's ability to transform lives, a vision upheld today through critically acclaimed exhibitions, pioneering community and learning programmes, and research of the highest quality. Our aim is to offer an inspiring and enriching experience for everyone who visits. Find out more and get involved at: [www.kettlesyard.cam.ac.uk](http://www.kettlesyard.cam.ac.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. Since 1990, he has lived and worked in Cambridge, where he has been artist-in-residence, a Bye-Fellow and a lecturer in Art, at Christ's College. Since 2011 his artwork has related to the Syrian Crisis and reflects on the suffering of his fellow Syrians and the destruction of his cultural heritage.

His work has been widely exhibited and collected, and most recently it was featured in several museums and galleries around the world: The Fitzwilliam Museum, the Museum of Classical Archaeology, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge; the British Museum and the V&A, London; Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam; Penn Museum, Philadelphia; Brooklyn Museum, New York; the 2019 Venice Biennale and the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds. *Dark Water, Burning World* is in the permanent collection of the Pergamonmuseum, Berlin, and the British Museum. For the BBC's 'A History of the World in 100 Objects,' Neil MacGregor (the former Director of the British Museum) chose *Dark Water, Burning World* as the 101st object.

## About Arbury Court Library

Arbury Court Library is a local library based in the centre of North Cambridge, supporting the immediate community. Cambridgeshire Libraries are hubs of learning, creativity, and connection. They strive to create welcoming spaces where individuals can explore, learn, and grow. As well as books, Arbury Court Library offers a wide range of services from digital resources and online databases to interactive workshops and community events.



*Picture*, photo: My Linh Le, 2023.



*Slippers*, photo: My Linh Le, 2023.

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