



# Unearthing care: Ecologies of collaboration

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## Introduction

True to its nomadic tradition, the 11th Xarkis Festival will move to old town Nicosia and will be held from September 13-15th, 2024. It will include an Artist Multi-residency Programme supported by Culture Moves Europe from August 25th-September 12th. For 22 days a group of selected artists are invited to work with our team and the local community, to prepare works that will contribute to the program of the three-day festival. The results of these works will be realised in the course of the Xarkis Festival.

This year's international program will include gatherings, experiential workshops, exhibitions, participatory installations, interventions, live performances and concerts, interactive games and more, welcoming children and adults of all ages.

Residents are invited to respond to these ideas through a site-specific project developed in our host community. This programme places emphasis on the human, natural and cultural heritage found in the host community. In this context, each guest is invited to respond to a challenge that explores the theme of the festival.

Xarkis is highly connected and shaped by the environment and communities it is based in

each year. Artists in Residence and local community members co-create and focus on issues of interest to them, seeking ways that allow them to manage their representation.

## **2024 EDITION**

For this year's open call, we are interested in applications that explore the following questions and sub-themes around the theme of **Unearthing care: Ecologies of collaboration**.

Moving from the individual to the collective, and at the junction of practices, we suggest a proposal rooted in care as an antidote to carelessness in the cypriot context. The curatorial concept proposes an exploration of the relationship between care, collaboration and the locale, and asks what the possibilities are. What do we tend to care about or not? Who do we tend to extend care to? Who decides what is and isn't part of the locale?

In **Nicosia**, the Festival seeks to embed values of care tied to a feminist lens, to share and acquire knowledge on collaborative and participatory practices, explore and debunk aspects of the locale and "cypriotness", intangible cultural heritage and craft practices, as well as rituals and vernacular practices through contemporary art forms. The selected artists are invited to collaborate with members of the local communities, as well as test and experiment with feminist approaches to care in the aforementioned themes.

Nicosia is a mesh of practices, lifestyles, customs, rituals and traditions, and therein lies its strength.

Xarkis has gained 10 years of experience roaming rural communities of Cyprus (Arsos, Lofou, Koilani, Kalavastos, Deryneia, Polystipos, Lympia, Agros and Kornos).

We have been operating geographically so far mostly in regions that are considered peripheral.

Although old Nicosia has now become popular, most of the cultural actions that take place in Cyprus, are introspective and exchanges between dominant communities. Even though we have many communities living next to and among us (from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Armenians, Turkish Cypriots, Maronites, Latinos, Arabs, etc.), we often do not know enough about their daily lives or cultures, because we don't have enough contact and there is fragmentation, gentrification, and in some cases, marginalization.

**In what ways can socially engaged arts and design practices, guided by a collaborative and feminist lens of care, take shape in the cultural mosaic of Nicosia?**

**How do collaborative practices affect the cultural mosaic of Nicosia?**

*Sub themes: Ecologies, community practices, more-than-human collaborations, intergenerational practices, cross-species collaborations, DIY and DIT practices, ad hoc practices, feminist critique of knowledge production, rituals of everyday life, communal identities, micro communities, movement and body in care spaces, corporeal practices, meta-products of heritage, alternative technologies of creation, urban collaborations, everyday acts of care, practices of inclusion, rejuvenation of lost or endangered practices, gift economies, intercommunal practices, intercommunal rituals, loss of heritage and globalization, cultural heritage industry, gender dynamics, deconstruction/demystification of cypriotness, the multifaceted texture of cypriotness, multiculturalism of Nicosia, creating through sharing.*

## WHO CAN APPLY

Practitioners, individuals and teams are encouraged to apply. Those working from single disciplinary backgrounds, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary with backgrounds ranging from humanities, arts and other fields, working in the following directions are encouraged to apply:

- Visual arts (socially engaged art, digital arts, painting, drawing, mixed media, sculpture, installation, scenography, craft-making etc)
- Design (social design, service design, design activism, co-design, graphic/communication design, product/industrial design, architecture, sustainable design, innovation design, motion design, interactive design, animation, communication design)
- Music (performance, composition, sound art, sound installation)
- Performing arts (performance art, theatre, dance etc)
- Writing practises (academic, creative, unstructured, journalistic)

Creative practitioners from any of the above disciplines are encouraged to participate in proposals and marry practices with other sectors, encouraging new alliances. Our approach involves the application of our organisation's matchmaking mechanism, which nurtures collaborations between creative practitioners, educators and citizens from diverse educational, disciplinary, professional, generational and ethnic backgrounds.

Please note that a limited number of residencies are available. Priority will be given to applicants with experience in community-oriented, socially engaged and ecologically conscious practices. Proposed initiatives that will be prepared and shared during the Residency days with outcomes during the Festival, can take the form of:

- Workshops
- Hands-on activities
- Educational initiatives
- Music/sound performance
- Interactive sound installation
- Installation
- Campaign
- Interventions/Open space format
- Performance art
- Visual art
- Experiential dance performance
- Video art
- Film
- Exhibition
- A (digital) zine

**Apart from the final project that will take place, as part of the implementation of proposed initiatives, participants will be invited to accompany projects with short talks and/or lectures with Q&A sessions addressed towards diverse publics.**

## **APPLICATION FORMAT**

We ask for interested participants to apply via our online portal and write in English:

- The title of your proposed participation
- Name & surname or group name if applying as a group
- Email address and contact number
- Title of your proposed project
- A brief biography (150 words max)
- Please provide a synopsis of the project.  
Explain the topic you want to address, and its relevance to the theme of this year's call. Which members of the local community are involved in or affected by the topic and how? (150 to 300 words)
- An explanation of your proposed method/approach.  
Please explain in what ways you propose to disseminate the work before, during and after the Festival? A proposal on how you will engage and collaborate with communities during the residency and the Festival, and how you intend to use the Festival days as a way to realise the project. (150 to 300 words)
- If you are an interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary practitioner, please specify which disciplines come together through your work.
- Links to your website and / portfolio
- 30-word synopsis and 30-word bio for promotion and dissemination on social media in a style that is suitable for a general audience, with no jargon (up to 60 words)
- A profile picture and an image for social media in landscape, colour, high res with no graphics (max 1Mb)
- Describe what type of technical support you will need, in terms of tools, equipment etc (max 150 words). Please note that as we are a DIT Festival, we have a limited availability of technical equipment.
- 3-4 related examples from your work/work in progress (in JPEG, and/audio formats wherever applicable) with captions (max 1 Mb)

Please include an application title as follows:

**Your Full Name\_Surname\_Discipline\_Type of activities**

**E.g. Marion\_Sky\_Music\_Workshop or Joe\_Bouvoir\_Design\_Installation etc**

## **KEY DATES**

- Application deadline: 10 June 2024
- Program Start and Admission: September 1, 2024
- Program End Date: September 12, 2024
- Xarkis Festival: September 13-15, 2024
- Shortlisted individuals may be invited to participate in an interview as part of the selection process.

- Invited residents will also be invited to participate in group meetings and share their work in progress with coordinators and the Xarkis team throughout the Programme.

All artists are invited to take part in a residency programme of workshops and peer-to-peer support alongside mentorship sessions with selected co-curators, residency coordinators and other experts, as well as collaborative sessions by artists, curators and coordinators.

Participants will have the opportunity to travel to Nicosia and tour its urban landscape under the guidance of a member of Xarkis team at the start of the residency.

## **WHAT WE OFFER**

- 550 euros for your participation and for production costs/materials
- Travel costs
- Support during group and peer-to-peer and mentorship support meetings
- Audio-visual recording
- Communication and dissemination via social media and in person
- Accommodation in shared space
- Sustenance from our kitchen

## **Xarkis Inclusion Policy**

As Xarkis, we invite artists from diverse backgrounds, regardless of gender, sexual orientation and age, to apply. We particularly encourage applications from people who are not equally represented in the public debate, such as femininities, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities and people from different ethnic and educational backgrounds.

## **Our Approach**

By adopting a form of 'decolonisation' and caring, we don't just wish to connect communities, but aim to be with people who are experts of their own lives and take the time to listen to their own experiences and ideas. The process is based on interpreting key aspects of their heritage, including those that are often left untold, and sharing unknown narratives worth telling, in public and private spaces.

Recognizing the constraints and competing interests between actors involved in contemporary culture and heritage management, but also the tensions between institutional and independent sectors, which often limit conversations and disempower those who have something to say, we wish to contribute to the creation of appropriate conditions, to talk about taboo subjects and diffuse complicated discussions.

Internationally, there has been a rise in socially engaged practices and artistic collective action as a form of radicality. All the more we witness the commons permeating prestigious art platforms, encouraging a move out of our comfort zones and a response against excessive forms of individualism. From Documenta 15 to Venice Biennale and the Turner Prize, the contemporary art world is facing a turning point; away from spotlighting individual artists to giving space to collaborative practices as emerging symbols of anti-capitalist, alternative artistic paradigms.

Reflecting on these shifts, we recognise that collaboration has always been key to our practice. In this view, the thematic framework assembled here, reflects an active continuation in our politics of working collectively, as well as acknowledging these changing times and

emerging transitions within a global art world. As such, we propose a shift from the static and an embrace of the moving, the fluid, the dynamic, the ephemeral and the temporal itself.

We view this proposal as an act of activism, as we aim to create points of connection and care, whereby we will bring artists together with curators so as to produce a *discourse*. In this instance, we will utilise Xarkis Festival as an *activator*; as a testing ground and space for new understandings to emerge.

### **Thoughts and References**

#### **On care, collaboration and cypriotness**

Our curatorial proposal looks into the work of multiple thinkers, including Donna Haraway, Lynn Margulis, Maria Puig de La Bellacasa, and Iliana Fokianaki, to dive into the nuances that the term 'care', 'collaboration' and 'cypriotness' encompass.

Reading Donna Haraway, we think of the notion of ethical relationality (Todd 2015); A notion that explores how, despite our varied circumstances and place-based knowledge systems, our futures (as humans and more-than-humans) are interdependent and we must act accordingly. We are all universally connected through our need for care. Care is integral to our survival, as it is our stimulus to endure our precarious worlds. However, in reality, care is not distributed evenly, inclusively or always visibly, as it is often rooted in the domestic. This proposal is about turning the inside out; a call to action, a collaborative, creative and political manoeuvre to consider and re-consider how we can co-exist care-fully. A playful yet urgent critical interrogation of our present, and its impact on our everyday life and our future worlds. Surviving through the absence of care is not an option for us as we need to act urgently in the now.

Maria Puig de La Bellacasa theorizes care further as an essential affective state, an ethical obligation and hands-on labour that is rooted in feminist social sciences and political theory. Even though care has been and remains a vital aspect of transformative feminist politics and alternative forms of organizing, 'caring' is also commonplace in everyday moralizations, often used as a buzzword in mainstream contexts (e.g. in the corporate world, to prove how much companies care about a certain target group or cause).

*'Nothing Comes Without Its World': thinking with care (Bellacasa, 2012).*

Iliana Fokianaki is one of many curators who has written about the roots of care, deconstructing its heritage and the relationship to the notion of *curare*, the Latin word that means both *to cure* and *to care*, acknowledging the historical connections between care and healing. In her article, *A Bureau for Self-Care: Interdependence versus Individualism*, Fokianaki (2021) speaks of the need for self-care to abandon the individualist approach of self-improvement and cure ourselves of neoliberal approaches to self-care. In this way, care and self-care can become a political act, a universally acknowledged human right that must be protected. In the words of Fokianaki, "self-care must aim to transform people into active and engaged citizens" (2021).

We look both towards the emerging and deep roots that can be found in many corners of domestic, private and public spheres in Cyprus and the diaspora. Who tends and cares towards the creation of local identities, and when does this idea become careless?

In view of these reflections, we propose approaches underpinned by empathy and care, that de-intellectualise contemporary art in ways that tend to the life in front of us.

In the context of Cyprus, this paradigm shift towards collaborative artistic practice could perhaps be described as being in its infancy steps, and has had less exposure thus far. This call offers a proposal on how collaborative practices can offer alternative ways of viewing and understanding what local culture is today. Here we find the proposal instrumental in cultivating a culture of empathy and care with what appears to be foreign on first reading, yet is commonly rooted in the ways we collectively understand and operate in the world.

The urgency to address the current context or conditions of the island stems from the rapidly shifting realities that run in parallel, stretching over multiple directions; from the crisis of sociopolitical identities to cultural appropriation advocated in fields of artistic expression, to excessive modes of 'development' and the ways that land is owned, transferred and inhabited, to gentrification and the reality of demographic diversification.

Firstly, we wish to adopt a plethora of diverse examples of cultural practices that are the result of joined efforts. It is not adequate, or enough, to simply make inequalities visible, work needs to be done to change institutions and arts and cultural gatekeepers. Secondly, by acknowledging the labour so far of intersectional feminist, indigenous, queer and minority communities who have been long demanding the redistribution of care. An act that should not be considered radical by any means.

As Fokianaki (2020) urges "we have to seize the possibilities enabled by the legacies of countless forms of collective care: healers, care workers, parents, social workers, educators, and cultural workers". We must be guided by those who have successfully forged counter-power structures against efforts to undermine collective care as a way of being. Taking lessons from existing collectives is necessary for the contemporary art institution to change its current shape. In revising the way we understand and experience cultural practices, we can democratize spaces, adapt horizontal structures, and collectively conceive, share, formulate and deliver programs. This calls for "a reevaluation of the compensation and value of all workers, rotating tasks and leadership roles, sourcing material and workers locally" (Fokianaki, 2020).

Who do we extend care to?

While discussing care, it is important that we also acknowledge the care work performed locally. In Cyprus, much like in other contexts, care work is predominantly performed by people living in precarious conditions, existing on the periphery of 'mainstream' society, surviving with little or no access to benefits or receiving care themselves. This includes but is not exclusive to care workers for an increasingly aging population, domestic and rural workers, hospital staff and delivery drivers for example. In truth, Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) are vulnerable and marginalised throughout the world. The reasons behind this are due to the fact that they are primarily women migrants, who take on essential yet unappreciated work (cleaning, cooking and caring for children and the elderly) and are often hidden from the public's eye (Hadjigeorgiou, 2021). Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that care work is gendered, racialized, and typically delegated to the precarious classes. The communities that do not enjoy white Western privilege or wealth are those who provide the majority of care for those who do have access to these, while receiving disproportionately little care themselves (Fokianaki, 2021). While these challenges exist everywhere, the difficulties faced by FDW in Cyprus are particularly severe. There is still a lot of work to be done in Cyprus in regulating the legal framework that safeguards the working and living conditions of FDW (Hadjigeorgiou, 2021).

So who cares for the carers?

In recent years we are witnessing a global revisiting and critiquing of whose stories and experiences are platformed within cultural institutions, programmes and festivals. Take the

23rd Sydney Biennale for example, whereby the Artistic Director invited STARTTS (NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors) to the curatorial programme. The STARTTS community collaborated with artists to visibly share their experiences and cultures on their own terms.

Similarly, through this open call, we see an opportunity to collaborate with communities and collective groups in Cyprus at the forefront of care work. Guided by these communities, the collaboration and outcome could manifest in a number of ways; visual artworks, and presence in live performances and dialogue.

In this sphere, communal and collaborative practices as well as resources that stem from collective action, guide us towards a changing model, where acts of the commons constitute a radical act that pave the way towards alternative chains of exchanges.

**Rituals, practices and values associated with care, such as attentiveness, empathy, stoicism, patience, and responsibility, from the ground upwards, connect the inwards and outwards, the rural and the urban, Cyprus and the diaspora, the local and the global, the central and peripheral.**

### **About**

#### **Xarkis Festival & Xarkis Multi-residency**

Founded in 2013, Xarkis Festival began as a social experiment to test ideas of resilience, self-sufficiency, DIY and DIT practices, and cultural heritage, so as to create a communal identity in the midst of the global economic crisis, which climaxed in Cyprus in 2013. Eleven years later, in a post-pandemic era, within which we are still experiencing various crises, we reconsider the relevance of such principles.

Today Xarkis is a multidisciplinary team, with professionals coming from different artistic backgrounds that adopts a contemporary, interdisciplinary and socially engaged approach.

Since 2016 the Xarkis Multi-residency Program has been established as an interconnected programme to the Festival. The Residency focuses on socially engaged practices and encourages artists from different backgrounds to temporarily inhabit a local context and respond to a theme, while working with communities and creating works that draw inspiration from the stimuli they find in the community/ies that we temporarily inhabit.

Here, various art practices are democratized and open to the public. Therefore, one of our main goals is to co-create contemporary art with communities, regardless of whether their members have previous experience in such processes. We know from experience that the accessibility of art and the willingness to communicate with the local community helps to deconstruct hierarchical power structures and strengthen social inclusion through the exchange of good practices and the creation of peer-to-peer support networks and mutually beneficial exchanges between artists and communities. In the context of the residency, different community groups engage in cross-cultural dialogue through different art forms.

So by learning about the way of life of local communities and minorities and adopting anthropological and collaborative research methods during our initiatives, we believe we can move towards a more inclusive world, placing environmental and social well-being at the centre.



## **The Team**

The curatorial team will work in a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary way, encompassing examples of practices from various fields of research and artistic expression, in order to inclusively pursue the locale in many forms, and therefore work on a diverse collection of examples that avoid potential biases of the curatorial team. By doing so, we will include artists that explore the theme addressed in unconventional ways and through non-linear artistic formats, expanding across physical and digital platforms, institutional and self-initiated practices, tangible and intangible examples, and native and international identities.

We will work in a decentralised manner in collaboration with local and internationally acclaimed curators, local and international artists and collectives that share a relationship with Cyprus.

Christina Skarpari: Creative Director  
and Visual art/design coordinator and curator

Yorgos Stenos: Music/sound coordinator and curator

Annie Khouiri: Performance/movement coordinator and curator

Haris Droussiotis: Production Coordinator