



# **Dream Tree**

by **Yiannis Tyrovolas**

Translation of texts: Maria Vafiadis (Arabic)  
Fariba Mohamadi (Iranian)

Athens, August 2025

# Dream Tree

Abandoned industrial plants in Greece have become temporary shelters for refugees - some on their way to Italy, others staying and working in the country. On photographing these plants, the photographs of the drawings and writings, left on the wall of the buildings by the temporary tenants, gradually caught my attention. Written between 2005 and 2018, these texts include Koran extracts, proverbs, poems, love messages, and their expectations on the travel to Italy.

The texts were translated, curated and arranged into a continuous narrative flow reflecting the culture of the Muslim refugees. This work was entirely based on practically all the texts found, with no filtration on my part. In translation, special emphasis was placed on uncovering the meaning hidden in almost unreadable scrawls across crumbling walls. In such cases, creative imagination became an essential tool for interpreters selected for their working experience with refugees.

I was deeply moved by the stamina, dignity, and optimism the refugees expressed - despite the dangers and risks of their past life and travel, including the inhuman conditions of their present residence. Inspired by my encounters meeting them in the industrial buildings, I wrote two poems grounded entirely in true events expressing my feelings and thoughts. The poems address themes of inclusion, acceptance, and integration, and reflect on how modern Western society responds to those perceived as different—the marginalized, the unfamiliar, the “other”. These issues are, I believe, among the defining challenges of our time.

This project emerged unexpectedly as a side endeavor in the context of my primary work in Industrial Archeology Photography. At that time, my engagement with the refugee issue was minimal, reflecting the general awareness of the average citizen. It is now necessary to reflect upon and reconsider the impact of this photographic experience on my perceptions, my mindset, and my emotional sensibilities. This experience has above all instilled respect, a profound respect for the “other”, useful in any meaningful process of understanding and constructive action.

In my recent photographic trips, I was fortunate to discover additional material, which I will study and curate in the same way. Tracing similarities and differences

between these projects is both challenging and rewarding. As a photographer and chemist, I know my work cannot replace deeper anthropological studies. I am open and welcome further research on this material found, which can be offered under request.

Special attention was paid to the video's music composition and the instrument choice to accompany narration. The oud, a traditional Arabic instrument referred to as the Arabic guitar, carries the voice of the refugee narration. The guitar, emblematic of Europe, accompanies my poetry. The video opens and closes with my poems, framing thus the work as an internal dialogue between Christian/European and Muslim/Asian worlds. A selection of photographs, each shown with all the texts contained, is included in this leaflet.

I wish to thank all who supported and encouraged me in this project. In particular:

- Kayra for her overall support
- Fariba and Maria for their translation services
- Maya, Vassilis and Dimitris for narrating the texts
- Vassilis Koilakos for composing and performing the music
- Iphigenia for her scientific documentation and support

My thanks are extended to the audience, honoring me with their presence and interest. Finally, my deepest thanks go to the authors of the wall texts. I hope, they will finally reach their destinations in peace fulfilling their dreams.

“thank u naw me france” N.J., July 2019

I met N.J in Patras during a photographic trip in March 2019 on his way to Europe.

**Dr. Yiannis Tyrovolas**  
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<https://tyrovolas.wixsite.com/photography>

# Join Us for “Dream Tree”

We are thrilled to present “Dream Tree,” a powerful 15-minute video showcasing poignant photographs of industrial buildings alongside the heartfelt writings on the walls left by refugees during their displacement.

I am deeply thankful to Yiannis Tyrovolas for his unwavering dedication to this meaningful project, and together, we aim to share a story that deserves to be heard. It is with immense gratitude that I collaborate with this talented artist from Greece to unveil this moving documentary, which highlights the experiences of refugees who were displaced between 2005 and 2019 in Greece.

Yiannis’s incredible work has truly struck a profound chord within me, and I am honored to share it around the globe at my pop-up art events. We want to express our heartfelt thanks to all the individuals who have supported and shared this project, helping us amplify the voices of those living in refugee camps. Our goal is to provide a platform for them to share their stories and experiences stemming from war and displacement.

The art of Yiannis has journeyed to various countries with me, spreading awareness about the refugee crisis and fostering understanding of the challenges these resilient individuals have faced.

Join us in this vital conversation and help us shine a light on the strength and courage of refugees everywhere.

**Kayra Martinez**

Director

Love Without Borders-For Refugees In Need

TEDx

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=rpRBS7tBANU&feature=youtu.be>

<http://lovewithoutborders4refugees.com/>

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Instagram: LWB4refugees

NBC

<http://nbcnews.to/2IYMAV4>

# Industrial Ruins and Eloquent Arabesques

For years, Yiannis Tyrovolas has been photographing abandoned industrial plants. His latest work is dealing with the remnants of the past mining activity on Serifos Island, searching for traces — etched in iron and stone — of the stories of ordinary miners. His images stand as the opposite of those of Lewis Hine in the early 20th century. Hine revealed (among other things) the grim realities of child labor inside vast, industrial buildings in full operation, where machinery seemed to treat humans as their subordinates, or at best merged with them. Tyrovolas captures industrial landscapes where, humans no longer toil over the machinery. The wagons, demons — symbols of an entire era, have been transformed into melancholic relics of human experience.

In a different project of his work, the same industrial sites harbor life once again in their domain. They offer shelter and protection to people in transition. People who, from key departure points such as Corfu and Patras, await the right moment to leave the country for the so called “promised land” defined entirely by their expectations. Yiannis Tyrovolas started recording traces of human presence, recent ones this time, traces of refugee and immigrants. He seeks to enlighten the latest way of use of these sites. His approach is quiet, restrained, without rhetorical flourish. The familiar unfortunately photographs, showing crowds of miserable people on boats or in camps, are replaced in this work giving emphasis to the individual. Human figures are absent in the photos, yet present in their belongings—mattresses to sleep, cooking utensils to prepare their meals, clothing. All these were left behind almost thrown down without care next to machines silent for years, on broken chairs and armchairs, on filthy walls. Yet in certain occasions they were displaced with care. In one striking image, small carpets and rugs have been laid with meticulous precision in a bare, unfriendly industrial room creating a sense of family warmth. An abandoned room with no doors and windows, still offering the very primitive prerequisites in life: A roof for shelter. This warm and cozy atmosphere may explain the discreet and mindful photographer’s entrance into the room. Yet Yiannis Tyrovolas does not impose limits on himself at this stage. He is not restrained to a precise and sensitive documentation of the human’s traces highlighting a stratigraphy of industrial archaeology. He proceeds further crossing the threshold of a photographer-recorder to the anthropologist of vision. Encountering the large number of sketches and texts covering the walls, he refused to remain a passive observer. He was not content treating them as

simple, beautiful but incomprehensible decorative arabesques. He wrote in one of his articles published in Mandragoras magazine: "the sketches and texts, left behind during their residence in the ghostly shells of the abandoned buildings, caused a profound impact on me. I attempted to translate them..." (Mandragoras 67, November 2022, page 99). Motivated by this impact, he sought interpreters—even the refugees themselves for additional aid — to help him translate. He undertook careful philological work to identify them, he was even tempted to curate them into categories. He was astonished by the final outcome. Beyond the expected passages from the Koran —expectations shaped, as it turns out to be, by our own oversimplified assumptions — we also find proverbial anthologies of people's wisdom and confessional outbursts of love grief, including old and contemporary Iranian poetry - even Iranian lyrical poetry of the 13th and 14th century. Through this documentation and research, Tyrovolas moves us away from the occasional easy sentimental pity for the difficult fate of "the other" toward a deeper knowledge about them. They are no longer unfortunate people in constant motion, they are individuals with a voice.

And now we come to the most critical question, as far as I am concerned! To whom are all these voices—whether desperate or hopeful—addressed? Can the Western notion of "personal expression" adequately explain these writings? Are they comparable to the graffiti found on the walls of our cities? The graffiti are, generally speaking, means of expression of young people. They are made to be seen by many eyes. However, this not the case of the arabesques photographed by Tyrovolas. These wall writings seem more like private internal monologues for the author to see (or better to hear himself) displacing his own thoughts, written in his own language. To see his own voice.

I come back to the essence of Yiannis Tyrovolas's venture. Avoiding theoretical quests and leaving behind the photographic aestheticization of the ruins, he moves to the heart of the matter. He is concerned about the foreign, the unfamiliar, "the other". Armed with genuine desire for understanding he opens himself to the culture of the "other side". He unexpectedly discovers fragments of genuine and difficult to be classified expressions, like the one below, classified conventionally under the heading 'Foreign Land':

"One of the brothers goes abroad leaving the other behind.

The earth pulls away from the sky.

I have a toothache, my teeth are chattering..."

**Kostas Ioannidis**

Art Historian

Associate Professor of Art Theory and Criticism, ASKT, Greece

# DREAM TREE

Two years ago, I discovered a source of spontaneous and inmost poetic expression from refugees who live a period of their lives in abandoned industrial spaces, thanks to the precious work of the photographer Yiannis Tyrovolas. These poetic forms engraved on the walls, include, in particular, short poetic texts and reflections by the residents of these buildings, as well as sayings and verses from the Koran or medieval Persian poetry, sometimes accompanied by drawings, and often signed and dated. They are written in Arabic, Farsi, and Somali, but some are also in English. Yiannis Tyrovolas had them translated by cultural mediators and interpreters, native speakers, working with refugees in NGOs, and the translation revealed the nature and the variety of the texts.

How can we conceive of this creation engraved on the walls of these abandoned places? These places aren't they transformed from forsaken places fallen into oblivion into places of collective memory, through poeisis? Especially since this same place, the building itself, becomes the material of writing.

In conditions where one feels invisible, absent to the others, and among anonymous traces of materiality (rubbish, clothing), the texts engraved on the walls with signature and date (the latter often in English even when the text is in the mother tongue) might generate traces of the individuals' existence, sometimes freeing them from anonymity: "I am here; I've been here; I exist."

This could be only one of the paths to explore in the study of the refugees' poetic creation in these abandoned places, where several artistic acts take place and several creators act - in resonance? in counterpoint? - and have acted at different times, sometimes forming a true palimpsest. Tyrovolas' photographic documents collected over nearly twenty years make it possible to access and study the similarities and differences of this palimpsest which, besides, puts this particular artistic and literary creation into a historical perspective.

Within this line of reflection, I am preparing a presentation at Paul Valéry University, Montpellier, France, November 2025, where I analyze this kind of creation, based on:

- **contemporary archeology** which studies the material traces of the recent past
- **theory of linguistic landscapes** which explores the links between language written in public spaces and historicized identities.
- **ethnopoetics**, focusing on the linguistic devices used in the verbal art outside the Western tradition.

The 15-minute gripping video Dream tree, is a precious representative sample of Tyrovolas' work, the photos of the abandoned buildings and the texts on the walls, but also two poems of the photographer, inspired by his encounters with refugee residents in the abandoned factories, during the photographic process, all accompanied by music. Thus, his voice is attuned to the refugees' voice, in a symbolic way. This so dense in images, thoughts and emotions documentary combines the lyric and the social, the cultural and the profoundly -not gross-political, and thus the profoundly human. And there is where we can all reach each other.

**Iphigenia Moulinou**

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# Yiannis Tyrovolas - Curriculum Vitae

**Yiannis Tyrovolas** was born in Athens, Greece.

His photographic work focuses on Industrial Archaeology, abandoned buildings, and Urban Traces (abstract artistic synthesis). Over the past decades, he has photographed more than 300 abandoned industrial plants throughout Greece, building a unique visual archive that preserves fragments of the country's cultural and industrial heritage preserving cultural memory. His work seeks to bridge past and present, connecting industrial landscapes with broader historical, social, and political contexts. Parallel to his photographic projects, he writes poetry that often complements and expands his images, and in recent years he has become increasingly active in multimedia art.

He has presented his work in solo and group exhibitions in Greece and abroad, and his photographs can be found in museums, public and private institutions. He also contributes articles to various magazines, combining images and poetry to expand the narrative of his work.

More information can be found at his website:  
<https://tyrovolas.wixsite.com/photography>



Balancing fear and shame.  
I write  
to be redeemed...

from the poem Fear - Shame  
by Yiannis Tyrovolas



Fate is the death of dreams.



For years my heart sought the cup of Jamshid  
yet what I was seeking was always in my hand.  
He was searching the road for what lay in his  
soul.

Improve yourself, to be beloved by people.  
In order to improve myself in my current situation,  
I need bread...

The first two poetry lines are from Ghazal No1  
by Hafez - Iranian poet of the 13th century.

Since I have immigrated to the foreign land,  
I've lost the joy in life.  
Fahim, 28/4/2009





Please do not use this place as a hotel, but as a guesthouse due to limited space.

You are the water.

I see the flowers dying around me.

All creatures fast when you're not here.

I look forward to break my fast....

If I could make a wish,

I would like to spend the rest of my life with you.

I'm trying to improve myself.

I meet obstacles on my way.

I touch your hand.

It brings me close to you.

I promise to you my love, my heart...

Don't regret the love of your beloved one.

Live with memories.



I am wondering, if there is honesty in this life.

I love you, you love me. No one can keep us apart.

Truth fades and no options remain, when the money runs dry, you must find a way to earn it back. Ayoub

Italy, Oh God!

God, may all brothers go to Italy! 5/5/2012

A generous man is in a position to travel. The pessimist doesn't have the stamina. He is completely useless.

Ibrahim, the dedicated trafficker. Haled Wednesday 5/4/2012

Shit!



Foreign land

One of the brothers goes abroad leaving the other behind.

The earth pulls away from the sky.

I have a toothache, my teeth are chattering.

I cannot wait to get the tooth removed.

I didn't want to go abroad. You sent me.

I'm in exile.

May God put you in the same position.

Although I'm too far from you, stay close to me.

Don't forget me.

Courage!



To reach your destination, you must first  
set sail on the boats of impossibility.  
Abu Al Kassem

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