NOTES FOR A CANNON
SITE SPECIFIC SOUND PIECE FOR THE ROYAL HOSPITAL
KILMAINHAM CLOCK TOWER

Commissioned by IMMA – Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, for the exhibition Europa at IMMA, 2016 – 2017
Photo: Denis Mortell

A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the “time of the now” which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.”

— Walter Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History

A set of maps of Palestine from 1947 to the present is by now widely known. It depicts the gradual loss of Palestinian land, appropriated by Israel in 1948, 1967, and since. It is also a map of a land fragmented and parcelled out into isolated enclaves, disjoined from one another by the apartheid wall, by Israel’s illegal settlements, and by the Israeli-only roads that connect them. The last map in the series, of Palestine in the present, is the map of a land-locked archipelago, a shattered mosaic of disconnected spaces. Spatial fragmentation, as a recent UN report concluded, is the fundamental condition of Palestinian life, whether under an occupation that imposes roadblocks, checkpoints, closures and detours, or under a siege that has turned all Gaza into an open air prison, or in the dispersal among scattered refugee camps and the nations of the world that has been the fate of refugees, denied their right of return to homes all over historic Palestine.

EMILY JACIR’s work has long inhabited and reflected this space and time of fragmentation. More, hers is a work committed to the redemption of the fragments and relics of violently broken histories. For some time, she has worked extensively in the mode of assemblage, piecing together into constellations of memory and correspondences the overlooked objects and damaged archives that, by virtue of their very fragmentation, are all the more charged with the burden of bearing historical memory and future hope. It may be the gathering of books looted by Israeli forces from Palestinian libraries and stored in their archives as “abandoned property”. Their pages still bear the marks and traces of lives lived and disappeared (ex libris, 2012-14). Or it may be the painstaking reconstitution and preservation of abandoned footage of a refugee camp in Lebanon, witness to so much persistence and destruction (Tal al Zaatar, 2014); or snatches of a daily walk on the road from Ramallah to Birzeit University, filmed clandestinely during an extended Israeli closure, that relay the temporal rhythms and spatial constriction of occupied life (Crossing Surda, 2002). In such cases, documentation is resistance and the grain of the works, their patina of wear and restraint, soil and incompletion, becomes, almost miraculously, the resurrection of disregarded things into luminous signs of undaunted living on.

Jacir’s recent work continues this trajectory. La mia Roma (omaggio ai sampietrini) (2016), a tribute to the city that has long been Jacir’s spiritual home in the midst of her peregrinations, likewise consists of everyday objects, the cobble stones trodden daily by pedestrians in Rome’s streets that are the epitome of the overlooked, forgotten thing. In La mia Roma, these stones, collected on her daily walks through the city, are literally lifted, cast and then each inscribed with a number before being returned to their places, such that the unremarkable itself becomes
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the bearer of memory and the redemption of lost things. Forming a kind of diary of her walks, they also recall, and bring into configuration, the traces of the craft of the pavers who carved and set them and the history of class struggles in Italy, during which they have often furnished the projectiles for riots and protests. In La mia Roma, they are literally and figuratively resurrected: the Italian name for these commonplace objects—sampietrini—brings to mind St. Peter and the sacred resonances of stone and rock in the Christian imagination.

It’s not surprising that at the heart of Jacir’s profoundly moving Via Crucis (2016), is a “translation” of the traditional stations of Christ’s passion into the way-stations of Palestinian exile and displacement: in place of the nails, spent M-16 shells gathered on the West Bank; in place of the cloth with which Veronica wiped Christ’s face, a faded ghostly photo of a Palestinian family; in place of the tomb, and its sealing slab, a reddish slayeb stone, native to the village of Bayt Jalla, near Bethlehem, that is now sealed off by an Israeli settlement on stolen land. These quotidian objects generate resonances between Christ’s passion in ancient Palestine and the Palestinians’ contemporary via dolorosa. But they also resonate beyond, marking the correspondence between the fate of Palestinian refugees and that of others fleeing the violence inflicted on them by imperial wars in West Asia and Africa, arriving on the Italian island of Lampedusa, or—as like the piece of blue Venetian glass (Jacir’s station number IV) condensing the whole history of the Mediterranean as a sea that divides and connects even as it quietly bears the record of the glass-blowing techniques the Venetians learnt from the Palestinian city of Hebron.

Jacir’s site-specific installation at IMMA, “Notes for a Cannon” (2016), which she has described as throwing open her sketchbook, constellates histories of Palestine and Ireland in a magnetic field of correspondence and convergence. The work constitutes, not a didactic process of instruction defining the convergences and comparisons between two discrete spaces, but an ongoing, and ultimately collective “sketch-work” that keeps enabling the discovery of past and present interconnections between two sites that are geographically remote but bound together by historical, actual and analogical links. Both the land and the culture of Ireland and Palestine are marked by imperialism and settler colonialism and by an enduring resistance to them. But Jacir does not force them into correspondence: rather the whole assemblage of this work, which includes a sound installation issuing from the bell tower of the old Kilmainham military hospital as well as the visual materials arrayed along the wall and floor of its corridor, remains open to continual reading and recomposition. The visual array has multiple foci: at one moment, a particular cluster of materials seems to circulate around a core image, a handbill from the H-Block/Armagh protests of the early 1980s, for example, while at another moment the vortex of the assembly will seem to be the Ottoman clock tower on the old Jerusalem gate, destroyed by British military authorities in 1922 in order to restore the historical “look” of the old city. The fate of Irish republican prisoners resonates with that of contemporary Palestinian political prisoners hunger striking in Israeli jails, who have taken Bobby Sands as an inspiration; the demolition of the clock tower, whose four faces told the time according to different but coeval systems of reckoning, speaks across space and time to the imposition of Greenwich mean time in Ireland in September 1916. The effect, however, is not the comforting assurance of recognition, but that of startling estrangement: the connections that emerge, always shifting and recomposing, are unexpected and unsettling, taking place in the wrong space, even as the call of the muezzin from a Dublin clock-tower resounds as a question rather than an affirmation, or as the angle of approach to the work along the corridor, from right to left, creates a subtle disturbance of Western reading patterns. The work refuses closure. The fragmentary and episodic connections Jacir traces between such widely separated locations may look like the debris of mutual historical damage, but they are charged with the openness to the future that the imagination and forging of life in common inspires.
NOTES FOR A CANNON
Multimedia installation at IMMA which includes drawings, videos, texts and photos created by the artist as well as, archival material and objects including photographs from the papers of John D. Whiting; Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division; newspaper clippings from the Irish Independent (courtesy the National Library of Ireland); newspaper clippings from Falastin Newspaper (courtesy Institute of Palestine Studies, Beirut); a document from Başkent Osmanlı Arivi (The Ottoman State Archives, Istanbul); a 1982 poster issued by the Republican Movement (courtesy the Linen Hall Library); 19th century bell once installed in a church in Armagh, Northern Ireland (manufactured by T. Mears Whitechapel Foundry, London); 19th century Ottoman Bilodes/Zenith pocket watch: K. Serkisoff & Co., Constantinople.
An ode to walking, to labour and the “sampietrini” of Rome. Made of solid volcanic rock and each one individually hand cut, sampietrini are the stones which Rome has been paved with for centuries. This work comes from Jacir’s walks throughout the city of Rome where she collects the sampietrini, takes them to her studio, documents them, and then puts them back where she found them. The resulting work is a record not only of the selciatori (pavers) labor in hand-cutting each individual stone but also a diary of Jacir’s walks. Since the 1960s, the sampietrini have also been used during Italian protests as they are easy to collect, and so they have become part of the history of class struggle in Italy.
VIA CRUCIS
PERMANENT INSTALLATION AT
THE CHURCH OF SAN RAFFAELE,
MILAN. COMMISSIONED BY
ARTACHE, MILAN

Inspired by the history, collection and display of relics from Palestine throughout churches in Italy, in particular Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, Jacir has created a contemporary Mediterranean Via Crucis in which she portrays both the Nakba and the contemporary refugee crisis through the narrative frame of the traditional Via Crucis.


After finding an Arabic copy of the 1940 telephone directory of British Mandate Palestine, she has been painstakingly translating each page into English and turning them into drawings.

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GAZA (continued)

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* Private Branch Exchange
Engagement and dialogue between distinguished individuals who represent a wide set of perspectives, approaches to work, and disciplines has long been the hallmark of The Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center resident experience. For decades, the Center has hosted a unique residency program for artists, scholars, scientists, composers, and writers to live in residence, produce new work, and benefit from rich cross-disciplinary exchange.

From 2009-2015, to increase the capacity for outreach to accomplished artists around the world, The Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center established the Creative Arts Fellows program. The program brought more than twenty acclaimed artists from across the globe to Bellagio, nominated by an advisory panel of leading international curators, for extended residencies to develop projects inspired by or related to social or global issues.

Having ended the Creative Arts Program, The Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center remains committed to bringing in renowned international artists, and now works with regional and international arts outreach partners to attract top artists to the program. For more information about the Bellagio Center, please visit [http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/bellagio-center](http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/bellagio-center).


Emily Jacir, one of the Arab world’s leading contemporary artists, has built a complex and compelling oeuvre that explores transformation, questions of translation, resistance and silenced historical narratives. Her work investigates personal and collective movement and its implications on the physical and social experience of trans-Mediterranean space and time in particular between Italy and Palestine. Jacir is the recipient of several awards, including a Golden Lion at the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007); a Prince Claus Award (2007); the Hugo Boss Prize (2008); the Herb Alpert Award (2011); and the Rome Prize (2015).