

From the series 'Whole In Ther Wall'
(2013) Edition of 5 (Courtesy the
artist/Ayyam Gallery)



Palestinian multi-media artist Khaled Jarrar comes to London this month with a dynamic, structural installation at the city's Ayyam Gallery. Lee Ann Biddle discusses this eclectic artist's themes and practice.

KHALED JARRAR:

THROUGH THE BARRICADES

Palestinian visual artist Khaled Jarrar has gained international acclaim for his provocative artistic projects, which highlight the plight of the Palestinians and present new forms of resistance against the Occupation.

'At the Checkpoint', a series of photographs captured by Jarrar at the Huwara and Qalandia military blockades in 2006 and 2007, were exhibited on the fences facing these same blockades and Israeli soldiers. Though inescapably political, Jarrar insists these images demonstrate a mere reflection of Palestinian daily life and the conditions at the military blockades. With its images of the young and old, 'At the Checkpoint' conveyed the lack of necessity for the torment and humiliation caused by this border process.

His 2012 project 'Live and Work in Palestine' involved the creation of a national stamp and a global performance of stamping the State of Palestine into over six hundred and fifty passports, which began at the West Bank's Qalandia checkpoint and Ramallah bus station. Composed of the Palestinian Sunbird and flowering jasmine surrounded by the words 'State of Palestine' in English and Arabic, Jarrar's stamp simultaneously highlights the statelessness of Palestine and the authority implied in a symbol, and places control over immigration and welcoming people to their lands back into the hands of Palestinians.

Regardless of media used, Khaled Jarrar presents a coherent theme throughout his oeuvre; all works revolve around the current socio-political state of Palestine and stories of life in the shadow of the wall. His new exhibition at London's Ayyam Gallery, 'Whole in the Wall', combines photography, sculpture, installation, and video to thoroughly investigate and reflect the affect of the Separation Wall in daily life.

Upon entering the gallery space, visitors are confronted with a concrete wall representing the Apartheid Wall, a 700-kilometre partition constructed by Israel that divides the West Bank from Israel. Spanning the height and length of the gallery, this claustrophobic barricade is only penetrable by climbing through a map-of-Palestine-shaped opening.

While the immediate confrontation with this wall highlights the daily experience of division and border control endured by Palestinians and sets an initial divisionary tone for the exhibition, Khaled Jarrar's 'upcycled' artworks ultimately create a sense of unity.

By recycling and re-contextualising the concrete wall, Jarrar elevates this demeaning symbol of oppression and humiliation. As the artist states, 'a source of separation can become a source of unity' and the unity created is not one of political unity but that of humanity.

*KHALED JARRAR'S
'UPCYCLED' ARTWORKS
ULTIMATELY CREATE A
SENSE OF UNITY*

'Football Shoes' (2013) (Courtesy
the artist/Ayyam Gallery)



'PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO LIVE AND SURVIVE AND THIS WALL WILL NOT STOP ANYTHING... ITS NOT JUST ABOUT PALESTINE AND ISRAEL, ITS ALSO ABOUT REALLY BASIC ISSUES - THE NEED FOR LIFE.'

Khaled Jarrar



Taking matters into his own hands... Still from the video 'Concrete' (2012) (Courtesy the artist/Ayyam Gallery)

sculptures. A tree burrowing through concrete is a testament to strength and will in the face of adversity, and the artist presents this image as a metaphor for the Palestinian people who are confronted daily with the obstacles this wall presents.

Jarrar employs olive trees for their significance to the Palestinian people, traditional symbology, and to emphasize their widespread destruction when the wall was erected. Cherished not only for their economic importance, olive trees are draught resistant and able to thrive for thousands of years under poor conditions, symbolizing the Palestinian spirit.

Half olive tree, half concrete, the sculptures reveal the impediments on growth, nature, and peace as a result of the wall. Extending the proverbial olive branch, Jarrar cleverly accentuates the role the Apartheid Wall has in hindering the hand of friendship and peace. Yet as a tree can grow from beneath concrete, the hope for unity and a free Palestine is retained in these sculptures.

Perhaps most poignant of his sculptures is the reproduction of 'Buddy Bear', the international symbol for tolerance and peace among nations first exhibited at the site of the fallen Berlin Wall in 2001. Subsequently toured around the world and representing 140 different nations, United Buddy Bear's 2007 exhibition in Jerusalem included a Palestinian bear on equal footing with all the other bears for the first time. Reproducing this with concrete from the Apartheid Wall, Jarrar emphasizes the hypocrisy of his homeland being considered a nation in Jerusalem while this wall stands and Occupation endures, and the wider irony of holding an exhibition of tolerance in an occupied city.

As a Palestinian living in the occupied West Bank, Khaled Jarrar finds liberation through art. With concepts of resistance, freedom, and peace in works revolving around the Apartheid Wall, the artist delivers a simple message by successfully conveying the stories of his fellow Palestinians. By re-appropriating its very building materials, Jarrar illustrates that the demolition of the wall can make larger strides towards peace than the concrete barrier. His artworks lead the viewer to reconsider the illegal partition and the many ways the unsightly concrete wall can be reconstituted to benefit the people, such as in the construction of schools and hospitals. As he says, 'People are trying to live and survive and this wall will not stop anything... Its not just about Palestine and Israel, its also about really basic issues - the need for life.' **IBA**

Khaled Jarrar 'Whole In The Wall' runs until August 3 at Ayyam Gallery, London. www.ayyamgallery.com

Still from the video 'Concrete' (2012) (Courtesy the artist/Ayyam Gallery)

Though Jarrar is categorically against beautifying the wall and recalls a story of an old man who confronted Banksy while he was placing his street art on the West Bank side telling him go home and not make the wall he hates beautiful, Jarrar too is creating beautiful works of art from the wall. The key, though, is that his artworks are created from its destruction; every piece he creates chips away at the wall, leaving gaping sections as a testament to his opposition.

With chisel and hammer, Khaled Jarrar tirelessly chips away at the eight-metre high Separation Wall. Acknowledging the danger involved in this act, Jarrar works quickly to collect enough fragments of concrete to become the base medium of his sculptures. Jarrar then pulverizes these wall stones into a fine sand and mixes it

into a fresh cement mixture he fills into various moulds. His sculptural moulds incorporate sports equipment, internationally symbolic characters, and nature.

Stemming from a story of a football pitch for Palestinian children destroyed by the erection of the Separation Wall, Jarrar was inspired to create a series of sporting sculptures with the concrete taken from the wall to re-employ this divisionary object in an integrative manner.

The sculptures of sports equipment, a basketball, football, volleyball, football cleats, and table tennis racket, all signify team sports. Though competitive sports involve two opposing teams, they are unified in their necessity of the other as the game does not exist

without the participation of each side. As Jarrar states, 'The wall is a source of separation that I wish will fall eventually, but the ball unites people.'

The subsequent loss of countless children's footballs over the Separation Wall's edge further inspired the artist to create 'Badminton', an experimental film in which Jarrar engages in a badminton game over the wall's edge with British artist Jeremy Hutchison, competing from the Israeli side. Each player is displayed side by side, demonstrating the vast difference in finishing of the West Bank and Israeli wall sides.

A photograph of a small tree protruding through a crevice in the Apartheid Wall is the clear inspiration for Jarrar's olive tree