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Khaled Jarrar: Whole in the Wall an incredibly moving exploration of life in Palestine, at Ayyam Gallery

The reality of living in Palestine, in a state of statelessness, as depicted by Khaled Jarrar in Ayyam Gallery, could not seem any further removed from this white cube space in Mayfair – a fact that only heightens the effect of Jarrar's work.

Ashitha Nagesh 22nd July 2013



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Ramallah-based artist Khaled Jarrar's work is an exploration of the liminality and statelessness of Palestine, with the barrier (also known as the "Apartheid Wall") – a 700 kilometre division constructed by the State of Israel that separates the West Bank from Israel – running like a spine throughout his oeuvre. In Ayyam Gallery, a relatively new Mayfair branch of the Damascus-based gallery, Jarrar has built a replica of the wall in the centre of the gallery.

Ayyam Gallery

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It is built in such a way as to severely obstruct access to the exhibition, with visitors forced to clamber ungracefully through a small hole that is the shape of Palestine in order to see his other works. I myself managed to stumble awkwardly through, with the help of a gentleman on the opposite side who held my bag for me, without getting stuck in Palestine's long, narrow shape, or falling over. This being the opening evening, once I had made it through – ungracefully, but unharmed – I was greeted by a glass of champagne. This was a gesture, often taken for granted at such events, that disturbed me in this context – for it became apparent just how much of a disconnect there is between the actual works and the space of their exhibition. Even the act of climbing through the separation wall itself is, at present, mere ideological fiction, and what is highlighted by this act of attempted gallery apartheid is the luxury with which we are able to recreate such an imposing monument to evil as no more than an absurd and, most crucially, *temporary* inconvenience.

It seems Jarrar is certainly conscious of this disconnect. His photographic series *Whole in the Wall* (2013), with which the exhibition is eponymous, presents different viewpoints through tiny holes in the wall that make the one at the entrance, only shortly beforehand having seemed dauntingly small, look huge. This series was created in homage to a recently deceased elderly woman that Jarrar recalls having met. The catalogue explains, "Khaled Jarrar met an elderly woman at the wall on one of her many trips to visit her daughter. Though they were separated by the concrete structure, a small hole enabled them to see each other from a distance. Like so many other villages whose lands were divided when the wall was erected, this woman and her daughter were cut from each other and forced to live on either side. The wall completely surrounded her daughter's home, leaving her as a Palestinian living in Israel with limited ability to travel and no way to relocate her home." An accompanying video captures one of these moments – a completely un-melodramatic meeting between mother and daughter, in which they cannot see each other if one of them is not standing at a distance. In a way, in this very particular context, the bathos of the situation increases the tragedy – for it is tragic that such an unnatural method of a mother and daughter meeting should ever feel so quotidian.

A film of Jarrar chipping tirelessly away at the separation wall, *Concrete* (2012), provides a backdrop to his sculptures of sports objects – both in the gallery space, and in the making of the

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sculptures themselves, as they are made from reconstituted concrete from these chippings of the wall. This is an attempt to remember the destruction caused by the wall's erection – in this case, the demolition of a football pitch for Palestinian children. Sports equipment, equally, evokes a sense of unity that is the antithesis of what the wall represents; as Jarrar has stated, "The wall is a source of separation that I hope will fall eventually, but the ball unites people". It is also amazing to see how Jarrar is able to make such beautiful works from an object of hate and partition; but, perhaps it is key that these works are born out of the wall's partial destruction.

Needless to say, this is a moving and incredibly thought-provoking exhibition. The reality of living in Palestine, in a state of statelessness, as depicted by Khaled Jarrar could not seem any further removed from this white cube space in Mayfair – a fact that only heightens the effect of Jarrar's work. The discord between such disparate perceptions of "normal" life is incredibly unsettling, just as such an exhibition should be.

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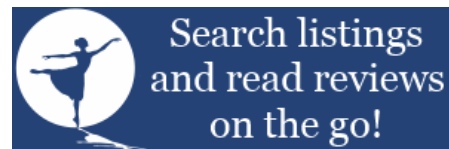
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