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Tear down this wall: Khaled Jarrar at the Ayyam Gallery

Khaled Jarrar has made playful sculptures from fragments chipped from the eight metre high wall which runs through the West Bank. Is this trivialising or accepting the wall's existence?

By [Aisha Gani](#) ^[1] Published 23 July 2013 15:30

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Palestinian artist Khaled Jarrar with a football sculpted from pieces of the Israeli separation wall in Qalandia. Photograph: Abbas Momani/AFP/Getty Images.

The looming grey wall confronts you as soon as you step into the gallery. It is claustrophobic and you have two options: walk all the way around the length of the wall, or squeeze through the chiselled opening in the shape of historic Palestine.

Khaled Jarrar's provocative installation is a piece of the West Bank in the heart of London. Earlier this year I travelled to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and was intrigued to see how the wall, a symbol of division, would be integrated to express freedom and unity. The Jenin-born artist combines video, photography and sculpture to reflect life in the shadow of the separation wall.

We are introduced to Jarrar in a short film, as he chips away at the eight metre high wall, working quickly with a chisel, hammer and red plastic bag. As you walk along the installed barrier, you come across a heap of concrete rocks in a corner of the gallery. It is the crushed and recycled sediment of the wall that acts as a base and links all of the sculptures in the gallery.

A football, table tennis rackets and a basketball are seated on plinths. They are sculptures made of concrete. The heaviness of the items contrasts with their usual lightness. Jarrar also makes international parallels, and a concrete figure of Buddy Bear, which was first exhibited at the site of the fallen Berlin Wall, stands in the gallery's shadows.



We also encounter a short film featuring a surreal badminton match over the wall, in which a split screen shows the Israeli side of the wall painted bright, and the Palestinian side grey and dusty. The only thing unifying the uncanny scene is the blue sky and the ball going from one side to the other. It is a reflection that dark humour can be found in the most absurd situations.

Then there is the poignant film of an elderly woman who travels to the wall to talk through the gaps to her daughter, who was forced to live on the other side when the village was divided. It is heartrending to see her searching for her daughter's voice, seeking her eyes through the gaps, touching her daughter's fingers under the wall with her frail hands. "What can I tell you. It's hard," she says to the camera. You can feel the love they have for each other, but at the same time you feel helpless.

Jarrar's sculpture of a halved olive tree, with a half-concrete branch is particularly powerful. The traditional significance of the olive tree to Palestinians, as a symbol of peace, resistance, life and growth, contrasts with the dead concrete. Yet at the same time, both sides are needed to make the branch whole. The lighting in the gallery creates a sombre mood, and all is still and quiet in the shadows aside from the distant sound of chiselling.

Eleven years have passed since the first slabs were erected separating the West Bank from the rest of Israel. Referred to as the 'Apartheid Wall' or 'Security Wall' depending on which side of the fence you are on, is it right that this Wall is already being memorialised in a bourgeois gallery space, moving from active resistance to the realm of grieving, of history and acceptance of the status quo?

Jarrar is clear that his art is not an attempt to beautify the separation wall. Far from it – especially as he moulds his sculptures from its destruction and emphasises how the concrete could be used for a much better cause. But this debate has been raised before: there is a story that an old man confronted Banksy as was putting up his street art in Bethlehem, telling him to go home and not make the wall he hates beautiful.

Whether it is the old woman who communicates with her daughter through a crevice in the wall, a student who feels like she is living in an open-air prison, or a farmer separated from his olive groves by an electric fence, Khaled Jarrar’s work is fresh and at times eccentric. Although he could be bolder in exploring some themes in greater depth, Jarrar doesn’t use clichéd images and certainly helps to unpack and re-contextualise the wall. He is keeping the issue on our conscience.

Whole in the Wall is at the Ayyam Gallery London 20 June – 3 August 2013

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