

Between Ebal & Gerzim

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For the past three years, the Brzeit University Museum has curated city-wide exhibitions that call upon local artists to stage visual, spatial or auditory interventions that work to juxtapose past and present in a thought-provoking manner. Each year, the focus shifts to a different Palestinian city, in order to investigate its social, cultural, and political specificity. In 2011, the city of choice was Nablus, whose history is replete with both destruction and resurrection, deference and resistance. The works were installed throughout its historic center from November 12th to November 19th and were moved to be displayed at the Birzeit University Museum on December 10th, where they will remain until March 1st, 2012.

Nablus is an ancient city, flanked by the mountains Gerzim and Ebal. It has seen the rise and fall of both foreign and domestic regimes, finding itself in its highly-contentious contemporary designation under the guise of Israel. It lies on an important intersection As an archetype for human progress, the city has historically been configured by the idea that its structure should be geared towards the subjugation of individual and social living conditions into a controllable order that allocates the coexistence of a myriad of different cultures and belief-systems. For this reason, the Birzeit University Museum's invitation to artists from metropolitan areas from around the world is exciting in that it brings about the occasion to examine how a culturally-diverse and historically-rich city may further its political ecology with integrity in this age of globalization.

This year's roster has included an impressive number of international artists. Juan Delgado presented a video installation that depicted his journey between Ebal and Gerzim called "Fluctuating Fragments." The famed Emily Jacir also participated in the show with her installation "Material for a Film" (2005), wherein she presented objects that form a narrative about the life of Wael Zuaiter; a Palestinian intellectual who had been assassinated by Mossad in the 1970s.

For her contribution, German artist Angelika Boeck installed placards throughout the city square that tell stories of notorious individuals from the area in a way that reinvigorates the past with new hindsight. The placards that had adorned the square were based on interviews with residents of Nablus who were then asked to describe "happy moments". Boeck's intervention involved replacing these texts with those whose focus tended toward the reality of the Israeli occupation. In such a way, she was able to silently interrogate and re-form the city's collective memory by uncovering those individuals that have gone unheard until now.

The artist, **Tom Bogaert's** installation "Ant Farm Nablus," was made specially for the exhibition. It includes an actual ant farm, vials filled with non-Newtonian fluids, in a space filled with sound and illuminated disco lights. The objects and sensuous elements that make up this piece weave a complex allegory that tells of the Israeli Defense Forces' secret use of tunnels set above-ground in Nablus in 2002, as well as their ambitions to eventually walk through the walls of the city. The IDF's efforts to maintain utmost military control has certainly put a strain on the local population's full entitlement to their city. Bogaert allowed the ant farm to cultivate itself, pointing metaphorically toward the Palestinians' rightful reclaiming of space.

The Cities Exhibition in Nablus is effective in that it transformed the urban environment into one of play and discovery, giving artists the power to enact unusual forms of social interstice. Overall, it concentrates on altering the politics of space and takes on the necessary duty to re-envision time; both that which has past and that which still lies ahead.