

Exhibition of the Month

Between Ebal and Gerzim

Cities Exhibition- Third Edition, 2011

Birzeit University Museum

Curated by Vera Tamari and Yazid Anani

It has been known as Nablus, Neapolis, the new city of Vespasian, or the Shechem of Abraham and Sara in the biblical land of Canaan. This city, flanked by its guardians Mount Gerzim and Mount Ebal, has witnessed its own destruction and resurrection twenty-two times. Nablus of the Abbasids and Ottomans is a Palestinian city that has stubbornly withstood wars and resisted occupation. Nablus, or *Jabal al-Nar*, is where the present and history coexist and where cultures intertwine, leaving their traces of splendour and change on architecture, art, cuisine, and social structure.

The Cities Exhibition, produced by the Birzeit University Museum, is a venue for artists to explore the rich history of Palestinian cities and its relationship with contemporary society, as well as the results of changes in social, economic, and spatial processes and practices. Nowadays, Palestinian society seems to be suffering from a learned helplessness syndrome that results in people confining themselves to their own cities and showing unwillingness to connect and explore the richness of their own culture, history, and geography. This isolation has caused changes in Palestine's values system, a disconnection from the landscape, the corrosion of heritage, and the social isolation of cities from each other. Accordingly, the Cities Exhibition is an annual project that attempts to draw attention to the variety of relationships between people, places, and time, highlighting the cadence and uniqueness of each city, and moving from the past to the present through the narrative of time. The purpose of this project is to go beyond the stereotypical representations of nostalgia and folklore. It juxtaposes past and contemporary

visual cultural evidence, not only to affirm the uniqueness of those cities, but also to challenge issues of memory, identity, and change as well.

The third edition of the Cities Exhibition takes Nablus as its site of investigation. The artistic interventions included in *Between Ebal and Gerzim*, the title of this exhibition, endeavour to respond to the city's contemporary challenges by reconnecting current social practices with the historicity of the city's geography and its collective memory. In this exhibition, art is not considered to be the reproduction of existing folkloric or contemporary aesthetics, as much as an intervention into the city's socio-political domains. It represents the challenge of bringing back the collective experience of public space in an effort to disclose knowledge and reconstruct the significance of that which has been marginalised. *Between Ebal and Gerzim* does not brand what is already known, nor does it replicate stereotypes of Nablus. Instead, it is an archaeology of knowledge on issues of change and transformation. It is also a way of bringing attention to the notion of pertinent contemporaneity in connection with social history.

This year's curatorial directions emphasise certain semantics and synonyms as a foundation for exploring Nablus. Words such as questioning, inquiring, revealing, amassing, problematising, researching, defining, and defending have been basic tools for the artists to play with and forge their artistic concepts.

Introducing international visual artists for the first time this year has the added dimension of breaking the isolation that Nablus has been subjected to for decades



now. Matters of loss and recovery are becoming entrenched in today's polemics. Contemporary art is focusing more and more on these universal issues using a multi-disciplinary approach to the process of creation. New forms of artistic expression, such as media, installation art, video, photography, and art in public spaces can be easily disseminated and shared, and will create more channels for exchange, dialogue, and critique.

This exhibition is part of the program and mission of the Birzeit University Museum, that of bringing the contemporary visual arts closer to the local community, while stressing on the importance of unconfined artistic practice and public interactivity.

The participating artists include: Angelika Boeck, Germany; Beatrice Catanzaro, Italy; Bashar Alhroub, Palestine; Emily Jacir, Palestine; Inass Yassin, Palestine; Juan Delgado, Spain; Nasser Soumi, Palestine/France; Patrizio Esposito, Italy; Iyad Issa, Palestine; Sahar Qawasmi, Palestine; Samira Badran, Palestine/Spain; Suleiman Mansour, Palestine; Nabil Anani, Palestine; and Tom Bogaert, Belgium.

The exhibition will run from 12 to 18 November 2011 in Nablus, and open on 10 December 2011 at the Birzeit University Museum.

Opening celebrations will be held on 12 November at the Nablus Historic Center featuring thirteen public interventions. There will be a gathering in front of the Nablus Municipality at 10:30 a.m.

For those who want to attend the opening, buses will leave from Ramallah at 9:15 a.m. They will meet at the International Art Academy Palestine behind the Arab Bank-Al-Bireh Branch.

After opening day, maps and information about the exhibition will be available at the Clock Tower in the Old City of Nablus.

Vera Tamari is a visual artist, curator, and founder and former director of the Birzeit University Museum.

Yazid Anani is an architect, curator, and is engaged in various cultural practices.

This event is produced by the Birzeit University Museum in partnership with Nablus Municipality and ArtSchool Palestine. It is sponsored by the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) and co-sponsored by Riwaq, the Goethe Institute, the French Cultural Centre, and the British Council.

