

Emily Jacir

We Ate
the Wind

26.5.2023–
27.8.2023

Exhibition
leaflet

MUSÉE CANTONAL
DES BEAUX-ARTS
LAUSANNE
Espace Projet

The works of Emily Jacir draw on archival and historical research as much as subjective or biographical narratives. They unearth and lend form to histories that have been silenced, focusing mainly on exchange, translation, resistance, and movement. Based in the Mediterranean, the artist uses a wide range of media and methodologies that include film, video, photography, sculpture, installation and performance to investigate personal and collective movement through space and time. Many of her works are made in response to particular contexts and deal with issues of kinship networks, migration, and cross-border lives; the artist is especially interested in the way historical memory is inscribed over time or across geographies. Over the past thirty years, Emily Jacir's works have depicted both banal vestiges of violent dispossession in everyday lives and extraordinary stories of resistance.

Extending her thinking about the politics of translation and a need to acknowledge multilingual and intercultural histories, her project for the 53rd Venice Biennale, *stazione* (2008-2009), aimed to expand the inscriptions of the 24 piers at which the vaporetto line 1 docks along the Grand Canal with Arabic names of the stops, but the project was abruptly cancelled by Venetian authorities. Her poetic gesture, elegantly underscoring the long history of the influences and exchanges between the Arab world and Venice, was only visible through the brochures she distributed as a way to circumvent the erasure of her project. For a recent project titled *Pietrapertosa* (2019-2020), the artist produced a permanent circular stone sculpture for a small town in the Basilicata region of Southern Italy. The project sprang from Emily Jacir's conversations with the inhabitants about the area's Arab heritage, whose influence can still be seen in the town's customs and language. Carved in *gorgoglione*, a sandstone that is found only in the region, the large medallion bears an inscription in Arabic and Italian that reads, "You have come amongst our people and your life is secure."

While migration, whether voluntary or forced, lies at the heart of much of her practice, Emily Jacir is particularly interested in the question of the processes of "recognition," in a political and judicial sense, and

their consequences on the politics of belonging. For her intervention in the Espace Projet, she presents a two-channel film installation made up of recent images as well as archival documents that addresses questions of visibility and invisibility, proximity and distance, hospitality and exclusion, in order to explore a recent aspect of Swiss immigration policy and its impact on individuals and communities. Indeed, in the aftermath of World War II, Switzerland devised a policy largely based on recruiting “guest workers” who were not meant to settle permanently in the country, including over two million Italians. This led to the development of a status (abolished in 2002) that would become emblematic of immigration in Switzerland, that of seasonal workers, a condition that excludes family reunification and in certain cases, for the children of immigrants, lead to hiding, invisibility, and silence. Today these thousands of “closet children” are seeking reparations and acknowledgment by the Swiss government of this violation of human rights.

In collaboration with her community of dancers and musicians, Emily Jacir addresses questions of family separations and fragmented communities, public and private space, and more broadly questions of acknowledgment and reparations. Drawing on rituals such as dance, processions, and games, the artist traces the way space, community and social affiliations foster collectivity and memory. Echoing her own personal history (like many Palestinians, she grew up in the Gulf the daughter of guest workers and was forced to leave her family at the age of fourteen), Emily Jacir summons images of community dances from the Salento region of Southern Italy, in particular the *pizzica*, from the family of *tarentelle* dances, which have links to healing rituals, and which the artist has practiced for over a decade. Thus, the silence imposed on children is contrasted with sound, solitude and confinement with the joy of rhythm and movement, living apart and in the shadows with gathering together in public spaces. Between those who are forced to whisper and those who can scream, between proximity and distance, between personal history and collective trauma, Emily Jacir gives form to historical memory through the fragmentary montage of images and sound.

Biography:

A graduate of the Memphis College of Art and the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York, Emily Jacir is the founder and director of Dar Yusuf Nasri Jacir for Art and Research in Bethlehem, Palestine. She teaches at the Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome, the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York, and the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation in Abu Dhabi.

Her works have been widely exhibited all over the world since 1994. Solo exhibitions include the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2016-2017); the Whitechapel Gallery, London (2015); Darat il Funun, Amman (2014-2015); the Beirut Art Center (2010); and the Guggenheim Museum, New York (2009).

Emily Jacir is the recipient of several awards including a Golden Lion at the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007); a Prince Claus Award (2007); the Hugo Boss Prize at the Guggenheim Museum, New York (2008); the Alpert Award (2011) from the Herb Alpert Foundation; the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Rome Prize Fellow at the American Academy in Rome (2015); and the American Arts and Letters Award (2023) among others.

Publication:

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Events:

Guided tours for the Amis-e du MCBA (in French):
Thursday 6 June at 12:30pm
Thursday 24 August at 6:00pm
With Nicole Schweizer

Guided tours (in French):
Thursday 15 June at 6:30pm
Tuesday 22 August at 12:30pm
With Nicole Schweizer

Reservation required
for all events
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Further information:
Access, hours → www.mcba.ch

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Musée cantonal
des Beaux-Arts
PLATEFORME 10
Place de la Gare 16
1003 Lausanne
Switzerland

T +41 21 318 44 00
mcba@plateforme10.ch
www.mcba.ch
Instagram @mcbalausanne
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