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Review of Points of Departure, ICA, London



An exhibition which takes Palestine as its focus will raise certain expectations, but this group show dashes all of them. *Points of Departure* looks at the earth and soul of Palestine, rather than solely at the protracted conflict surrounding it, making this one of those rare occasions when art truly serves vital human interests.

Collaboration between distinct bodies and artists has been absolutely key to the germination, realisation and success of the project. The starting point was a group research project into the concept of liminality – a netherworld between being and not being, a transition, a place of waiting – which was pursued through a cultural exchange between London and Ramallah. This is the locus of what is so refreshing about this exhibition: the work in this show has the weight of real human experience behind it.

The emotional force of experience, rather than mere armchair politics, transcends national and cultural boundaries, creating works that speak directly from the artist to the viewer. Olivia Plender, for example, presents *Blind Eye* (2013), part of which is a conspicuously empty museum vitrine that questions the role of museums in conferring historical legitimacy after a visit to Birzeit University in the West Bank. The emptiness the artist conveys here is not that of Palestinian history, of course, but of the plundering of culture by years of struggle. But far from being an angry political statement, this work communicates a sheer existential vacancy that is felt by millions who are too often represented only as statistics.

Bashar Alhroub presents an account of his time in London. *The road leads me to...* (2013) is a series of collages that loosely depict human figures, but they are made from everyday paper detritus he found whilst walking around London. Here we have a flaneur wandering the streets of a faceless metropolis, confronting his status as an outsider, not just in this city but in the geopolitical scheme of the Western world. On the other side of the exchange, Bisan Abu-Eisheh explores the disputed geography of Jerusalem with *Sorry, your search for "Palestine" produced no results* (2013), in which you begin to get the unsettling feeling that representations of geography are always liminal in that they are constantly just awaiting usurpation.

It is important that, although politically motivated and informed, these works do not come across as political cries or gestures. They are calls for change on the ground, but calls which issue from the guts of human experience, from people who have walked the land of Palestine, eaten its fruits and laughed with its people. There is scant mention of historical rights to land and little overt discussion of conflict or blame; instead there is a palpable love of the land and its culture, and a desperate wish the preserve it. A wish that cuts so deep that it is only through art that its urgency and sincerity can be expressed as a matter of the most profound human emergency.

Daniel Barnes


Points of Departure. In collaboration with Delfina Foundation, ArtSchool Palestine, Institute of Contemporary Arts and the British Council. 26 June until 21 July, ICA, The Mall, London SW1Y 5AH.

www.ica.org.uk

Credits:

1. Bashar Alhroub, *The Road Leads Me To...*, 2012. Installation View, *Points of Departure*, ICA, 26 June – 21 July 2013. Courtesy the artists
2. Bashar Alhroub, *The Road Leads Me To...*, 2012. Courtesy the artists

Posted on 3 July 2013

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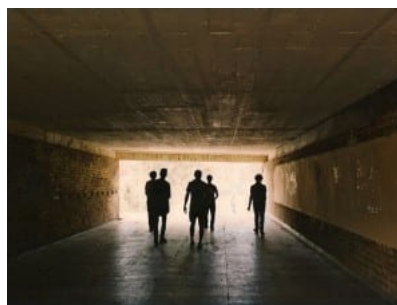
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Super Electric Party Machine

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The Next Generation: Interview with Rosaline Shahnava

In the 60th Edition of Aesthetica we celebrate the emerging photographers that are shaping the future of the image-based practice in The Next Generation. We have partnered with LCC to survey some of photography's rising stars.

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