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## Palestinian Hazem Harb brings his heritage alive through art

'Contemporary Heritage' explores the notion of heritage as unfixed and fluid

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**Jyoti Kalsi, Special to Weekend Review**



**tabloid!**



Work by Hazem Harb

Image Credit: Instagram

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Palestinian artist Hazem Harb is an avid collector of memorabilia such as photographs, coins, letters and maps of Palestine dating back to the years before and during British rule (1914-1948) and before the Naqba or exodus of his people from their land.

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@Tabari\_Artspace moves into the virtual realm with their current exhibition of Palestinian visual artist @h. output meditates on the constructed nature of heritage and history. Click the link in their bio to discover

Pictured:  
The Silk Line of Identity (2020)  
Layers of collaged archival fine art C-P photography on MDF wood. Diptych  
200 x 300 x 5 cm

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The artist — who was born in Gaza in 1980 and now lives in Dubai and Rome — uses these fragments of the past in his work to bring collective memories of Palestinian history, culture and identity into the present and to challenge their political exclusion from contemporary narratives.

Harb's multimedia artworks take viewers beyond the maps, social constructs and political struggles of today to show the rich culture and natural beauty of Palestine, and to reclaim and reaffirm Palestinian heritage and identity.

His solo exhibition at Tabari Artspace, titled Contemporary Heritage, explores the notion of heritage as unfixed and fluid by presenting his own heritage in a contemporary context. The United Nations marked its annual World Heritage Day last week, but this show is a reminder that some communities are fighting to preserve their forgotten

heritage. Also, while most of the world is learning to live in quarantine, Harb's work reminds us that some people have been living under severe restrictions for generations.

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Harb uses various media such as photography, film, installation, collage and textile, but he is well known for his 'contemporary collages' that combine memorabilia from his collection with drawing, painting and sculptural elements. He is showing several collages from his 2018 series, *The Place is Mine*, which expresses a universal notion of belonging.

The works in this series are in different geometric shapes, resembling floor plans of houses and referencing the shared notion of home. The artist has collaged together 1920s archival images of landscapes of Jerusalem and images of Palestinians wearing traditional dresses with the typical embroidery of that region.

The faded, fragmented images separated by thick frames or lines allude to the current landscape of Palestine, segmented by political boundaries and concrete walls.

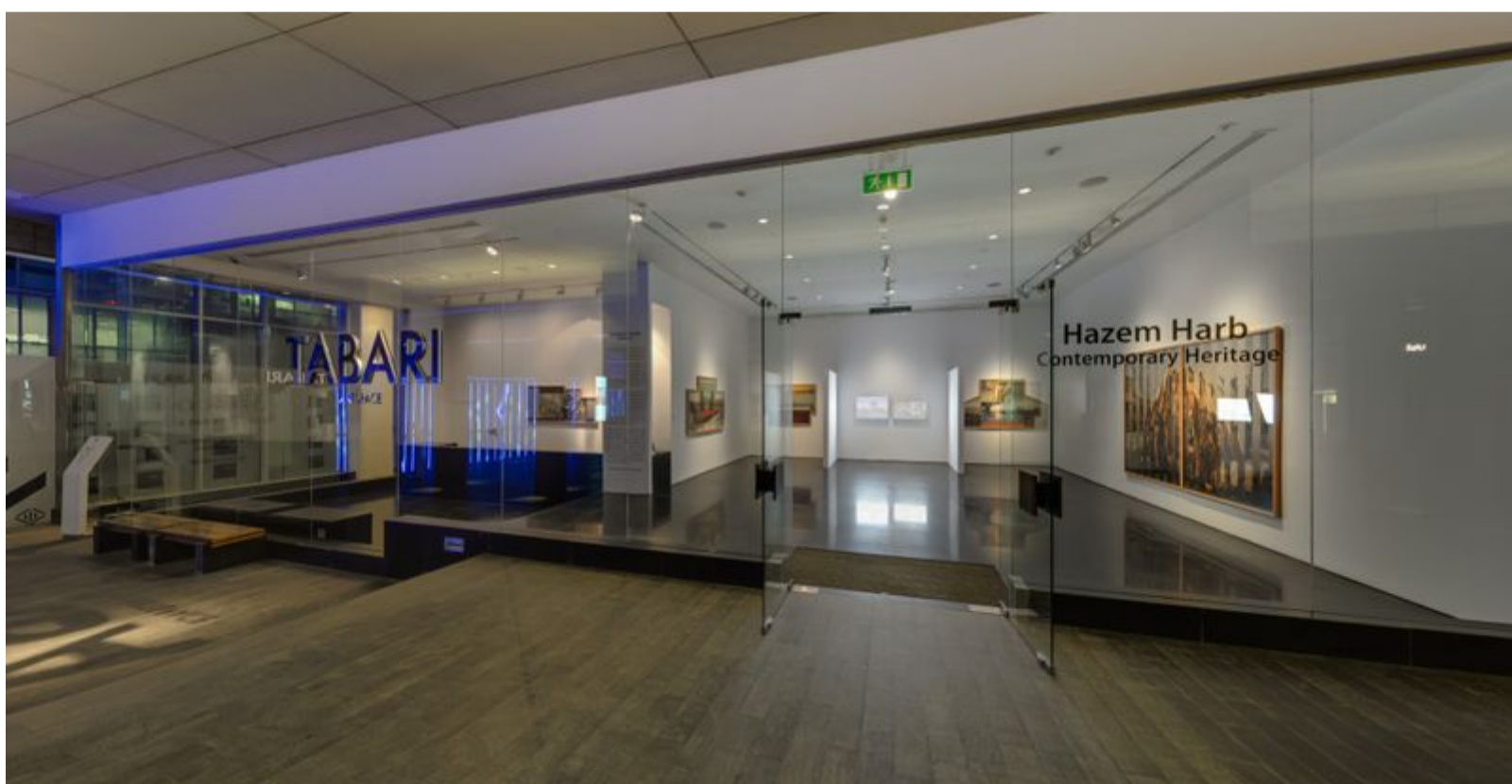
The spaces in between the photos are also metaphors for the deliberate gaps in historic narratives through which occupying powers seek to erase the culture, identity and memories of the original inhabitants of occupied lands. By playing with the photographs to create new narratives, Harb shows how the documentation of history can be manipulated.

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By discolouring some areas and focusing on others through bright colours the artist highlights the complexity and imperfect nature of memory itself. Although the series is deeply personal, it speaks about universal issues such as the longing for home, the idea of belonging, the nature of remembering, and the politics of power and space.

Another striking collage, The Silk Line of Identity highlights an important aspect of Palestinian culture – the fact that the rich embroidery patterns on traditional Palestinian dresses are so unique to each community that the design on a woman’s dress identifies the village she belongs to.



In this large-scale work, Harb has used an archival photograph from the late 1800s that shows a woman posing in a dress signifying Bethlehem. The image is special because a model posing for the camera was rare in those times. Harb has reformatted the image, placing it in the contemporary moment. He has sliced and collaged it to form a

pattern that recalls the mechanics of embroidery and its roots in Palestinian heritage. The woman in the centre appears like a monument on the landscape defiantly preserving memories of a lost homeland and forgotten heritage.

In his most recent work, 'Shade of Memory', Harb has mapped the social realities of Palestine using a painstaking, precise etching process that took over six months to execute. He has 3D printed his etchings of an archival image of a Palestinian protest from 1931 onto a lightbox illuminating a moment of collective resistance. The work in relief form is like a contemporary artefact similar to remnants of forgotten societies that are now confined to museums.



The artist says he used the technique of etching because it is associated with ancient cultures so as to imbue the image with the same cultural significance as ancient Roman and Egyptian artefacts. At a time when there is a global debate about looted antiquities, these reliefs, presented as archaeological findings not only preserve history, but they also highlight the ease with which certain communities become reduced to a historical exhibit in a foreign land.

For a 360 degree virtual tour of this exhibition at Tabari Artspace, DIFC go to its official website.

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