

## ARTFORUM

### Emily Jacir

ALEXANDER AND BONIN

For her second solo show at Alexander and Bonin, Emily Jacir presented a new film, *Lydda Airport, 2007–2009*, and documentation of *stazione, 2009*. In different ways, both works are emblematic of the artist's manipulation of subjective geographies to reimagine identity, history, and place. *Stazione* was commissioned as part of *Palestine c/o Venice*, a collateral event of this past summer's Venice Biennale. The artist had envisaged the temporary inscription of Arabic translations alongside the Italian names of the vaporetto stops on the legendary route number one along the Grand Canal. A trilingual (Arabic, Italian, and English) brochure was to have been distributed around Venice. In addition to a map, this pamphlet contained a summary of the historical influence of the Arab world on Venice since the sixteenth century, in terms not only of trade but also of cultural and scientific exchange—informing us, for example, that the blowpipe technique used by Venice's glassmakers was in fact invented in Palestine, and citing the incorporation of Arabic and Eastern stylistic codes into Venetian architecture.

Yet the project never happened. A brief statement inscribed on the wall of the gallery stated: "*Stazione* is a public intervention which was slated to take place at the 53rd Venice Biennale. It was abruptly cancelled by Venetian municipal authorities and remains unrealized." No further explanation was forthcoming, and we can only guess at what rattled the Venetian authorities so much that they put the kibosh on the project. Was it an irrational fear that Jacir's modification would confuse residents and tourists alike? Were they afraid that people would imagine that Venice had suddenly somehow become subject to Arab colonization? And, further, doesn't the act of censorship itself reproduce the very problems that Jacir sought to illuminate?

Installed in the rear gallery, meanwhile, was the short, looped black-and-white film *Lydda Airport*. It uses CGI technology in conjunction with photographs of the airport during its construction to offer a poetic meditation on the history of the British Mandate of Palestine in relation to the airport of its title, originally built in 1936 as part of Britain's "Empire Route." (The airport was captured by the Israeli Defense Forces in 1948, and in 1973 became Ben Gurion International Airport, as it is known today.) We observe a British plane flying over the airfield, taking off, and landing, intercut with images of a woman waiting at the empty airport. Jacir is here obliquely referencing the story of a Royal Air Force plane that disappeared in 1940 en route to the United Arab Emirates, as well as invoking the specter of Edmond Tamari, a transport company employee from Jaffa, who apparently was instructed to await aviator Amelia Earhart's arrival at Lydda Airport and welcome her to Palestine (she never arrived). The young woman digitally inscribed into these scenes is Jacir herself, suggesting a mapping of an uncertain identity/subjectivity onto the reimagined airport as palimpsest of repressed historical trajectories.

The exhibition also included an elegant white architectural model of the airport, installed directly behind the film—an apparition of history that reinforces the impression that Jacir would like us to reconstruct the airport as a heterotopic site, between the real and the imaginary, as much a contemporary airport as a phantom indicator of the contested historical/geographic/spatial narratives of the British,

the Palestinians, and the Israelis. Jacir here continues her poignant negotiation of a postcolonial, diasporic condition, invoking qualities of appearance and disappearance, longing and (not) belonging, and displacement and emplacement: of "in-betweenness," as Homi K. Bhabha once put it. Perhaps *stazione's* cancellation indicates to what extent the Venetian authorities recognized the power inherent in this concept.

—Joshua Decter

Emily Jacir, *stazione*  
(*Arsenale*), 2009,  
color photograph  
on aluminum,  
18 3/4 x 23 3/4".

