

ARTSEEN

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## Emily Jacir: *La Mia Mappa*

by Alan Gilbert

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In 1907, an elaborate clock tower was built on top of Jaffa Gate, one of seven entryways into Jerusalem's Old City, to celebrate the reign of the Ottoman Empire's Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Its design combined Western and Ottoman influences, and two of the four clock faces surrounding its façade displayed the time in Europe, while the other two kept the local hour. In 1917, the British military began its colonial occupation of Jerusalem, and five years later the clock tower was removed when British authorities deemed it an eyesore and incongruous with the city's historical architecture.



Emily Jacir, *La Mia Mappa*, 2018. Installation view. Alexander and Bonin, New York.

At Emily Jacir's *La Mia Mappa* exhibition, archival photographs of the original clock tower and documentation of its destruction form an important node in the sprawling, research-based installation *Notes for a Cannon* (2016). Originally commissioned by the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), Dublin, for an exhibition in 2016 – 2017, and reconfigured by Jacir for its presentation at Alexander and Bonin, *Notes for a Cannon* is displayed salon style on five walls, and combines over one hundred items, including archival photographs as well as ones taken by Jacir, along with wall texts, videos, drawings, posters, reproductions of newspaper articles and government proclamations, a bell, and a pocket watch. The aim of the installation, the centerpiece of *La Mia Mappa*, is to make explicitly political and allegorical historical connections between Palestine and Ireland under British colonial occupation, with a focus on 1917 in the former case and 1916 in the latter. After all, 2016 was the one hundredth anniversary of the anti-colonial Easter Uprising in Ireland, and in 1917, martial law was declared in Jerusalem by the British Army after it defeated the local Ottoman forces, a series of events that would culminate in the formation of the state of Israel—concurrent with the Palestinian Nakba, or “catastrophe”—in 1948.

Born in Palestine and raised in Saudi Arabia and Italy, Jacir received an MFA in the United States before moving to New York City where she worked in collaboration with volunteers who sewed onto a refugee tent the Arabic names of 418 Palestinian villages destroyed or depopulated by Israeli military forces in 1948. Jacir currently makes a home in Rome, and *La Mia Mappa* (“My Map”) serves partly as an homage to that city, right down to its title in Italian. Nevertheless, Jacir is an artist whose work tends to be both literally and metaphorically more about the journey than the destination. In her early *Crossing Surda* (2002), Jacir hid a video camera in a bag in which she cut a small opening and clandestinely filmed herself walking through an Israeli Army checkpoint over the course of eight days. For another installation at *La Mia Mappa*, Jacir made casts of individual hand-carved paving stones—*sampietrini*, some of which are centuries old—she lifted from streets in Rome before returning each one to its original location. Seventy-seven reproductions in white synthetic gypsum form a low stack on a table at Alexander and Bonin, an ode as much to movement as to place.

## Alexander and Bonin

This approach applies to Jacir's formal processes as well. While the parallels she draws between Ireland and Palestine are fairly explicit in *Notes for a Cannon*, the objects in the installation leap between geographies, temporalities, and mediums, forming links in a network abetted by the salon-style installation, as opposed to a linear or chronological sequence. These links are occasionally interrupted by small, abstract drawings and blue watercolors (a few more of which are displayed in another gallery) or strengthened by a snapshot Jacir took of a



Emily Jacir, *La mia Roma (omaggio ai sampietrini)*, 2016

sign in Northern Ireland proclaiming: “Londonderry / West Bank / Loyalists / Still / Under Siege / No Surrender.”

*Notes for a Cannon* also reproduces a poster from 1981 featuring a photograph of Palestinian women in solidarity with Irish hunger strikers and indicating that colonialism is an open-ended and continuous struggle, especially in Palestine, and still to a certain degree in Northern Ireland.

Colonialism occurs not only in space but in time. One of the larger texts reproduced in *Notes for a Cannon* is a proclamation by the British government in the wake of the Easter Uprising synchronizing Dublin Mean Time with Western European Time (i.e., Greenwich Mean Time) for military and commercial purposes. As part of her

exhibition at IMMA, Jacir had the museum's clock tower set to Dublin Mean Time (an approximately twenty-five-minute difference) and had the sound of a single cannon shot play every day at noon, a gesture both threatening and commemorative—in the latter instance, perhaps for the leaders of the Easter Uprising executed at Kilmainham Gaol situated across the road from the IMMA. Recordings of a muezzin call to prayer were also broadcast as part of the weave of Europeans and Arabs, West and East that has remained central to Jacir's art.

Downstairs at Alexander and Bonin, a twenty-minute video from 2003 entitled *Nothing Will Happen (eight normal Saturdays in Linz)* aims an elevated stationary camera at people going about their normal business in an Austrian market plaza as an air-raid siren marks the end of the work week every Saturday at noon. The aural and conceptual juxtaposition of cannon fire above and an air-raid siren below is striking. Post-September 11, 2001, the normalization of war has become nearly global, and time and space continue their rapid collapse under capitalism. Jacir's *La Mia Mappa*, while political and at moments directly confrontational, aims to displace time and create a provisional space to pause and consider the specific and multifarious forms in which colonial oppression and resistance occur.

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### CONTRIBUTOR

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