

Repackaging Jerusalem: interview with Palestinian artist Bashar Alhroub

November 23, 2022 at 3:20 pm | Published in: Interviews, Middle East, Palestine, UAE



Bashar Alhroub (Zawyeh gallery)

Naima Morelli [@naimamorelli](#)

November 23, 2022 at 3:20 pm



The new Dubai show of Ramallah-based artist Bashar Alhroub looks at his native city Jerusalem as a place with multiple identities. "When you are in Jerusalem," Alhroub told me, "you never feel you are in one single place. You never feel that the city is belonging to anyone, although everyone claims it as theirs."

The artist's new show opened on 14 November at Zawyeh Gallery in Dubai, and last until 5 January. Called "Tracing Boundaries", the artist focuses on Jerusalem as a religious symbol, while also looking at it as a subject of pop culture. He traces the boundaries between holiness and material culture and invites the visitor to observe a fine line between spirituality and commercial clutter.

"Jerusalem as a city has a lot of layers, whether historical, religious or mythological," Alhroub explained. "Everyone tries to create a new history around it, and with this show I did it too, according to the relationship I have built with the city over time. I materialised it through objects from reality, as well as from what I imagine when I walk around the city. Ultimately, it's an inner Jerusalem I'm talking about."

A sense of place is perhaps the only constant in Alhroub's large and varied artistic production. Across different mediums, his work constantly evokes a feeling of attachment, a sense of significant ownership of that place, which he expresses through photography, painting and installation works.

READ: Palestinians Abroad condemns 'Israelisation' of school curriculum in Jerusalem

"The common element in all my projects, all the different things that I do, is always just me," he reflected while sitting in his studio, surrounded by pieces of installations, big canvases and several boxes. "It all comes from my personal experience. This is my focus, rather than to build a cohesive easy-to-pinpoint body of work, or a cohesive art career as the art system would have it."

Freedom and unbound expression are indeed what drives his art production, and it all goes back to what he experiences in his daily life. "I don't want to get stuck in just one area, always repeating the same kind of research. That gets boring quickly for me. Travelling for residencies, experiencing new things, reading, exploring... this is what enriches me, and I consider this the true blessing for the artist. I'd say my art is about my daily life."

TRENDING THIS WEEK

- 01** **News**
Outrage as Egypt village celebrates girl's chastity after man...
- 02** **News**
Twitter suspends Palestine Online account
- 03** **Article**
Israel is running scared
- 04** **Article**
Iran is emerging as a drone superpower
- 05** **Article**
Who is responsible for Gaza's tragic fire?

Stay Updated

Subscribe to receive our newsletters straight to your inbox.

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

Subscribe

LATEST NEWS

November 24, 2022 Israel to use Palestinian land seized in 1984 for illegal...

November 24, 2022 Morocco: normalisation with Israel 'disgrace and deep humiliation', says official

November 24, 2022 Israel: chief of staff cuts short US visit after Jerusalem...

November 24, 2022 Turkiye: meeting with Assad is possible, says Erdogan

November 24, 2022 Turkiye hit 471 Kurdish targets in Iraq and Syria, says...

November 24, 2022 UK: Iran 'must never acquire a nuclear weapon'

November 24, 2022 Iran arrests British-Iranian citizen for communicating with foreign news channels

November 23, 2022 'Rising cooperation with Cuba important to Turkiye'

LATEST VIDEOS



ERDOGAN VOWS TO 'ERADICATE' KURDISH MILITANTS

READ: Military operation outside Turkiye 'possible' after Istanbul attack, Erdogan says...

For his new show in Dubai – which also presents several different media – he decided to focus on the symbols in Jerusalem and the history of the city. "One of the symbols I used was the Dome of the Rock. Its architecture is unique. I tried to detach the form from the holiness that is associated with it and make it in different colours. The sacredness of the place implies that people should be silent and respectful, but I wanted to change the atmosphere, making it colourful and playful."



For him, this is like looking differently at the familiar, and he felt entitled to do so, as Jerusalem is the city where he was born. "This place means a lot to me personally, more than politically and religiously. I just have a deep love for the city."

He has in the past tried to make work about Jerusalem from more of a political angle. However, he found that this perspective was already explored widely by other artists. There is, he said, a kind of stereotypical image of Jerusalem. "The Orientalist image is still so strong. So I tried to play with the concept of the city of Jerusalem, thinking of it as a playground. I was like a kid playing in his room."

Looking at his installation presenting a number of small colourful domes, one is reminded of the Buddha statues in different colours that we find in every other furniture shop. The viewer is reminded to commodify a system of beliefs, the market that flattens all differences.

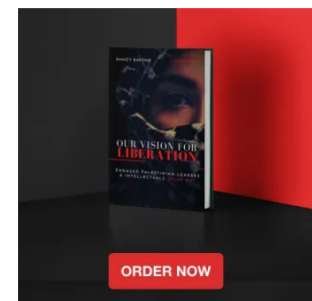
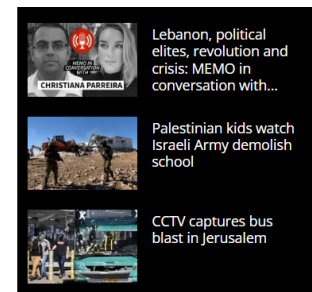
Although the artist is open to this reading from the audience, his initial intention was quite the opposite. While open to different readings from others, he intended to talk about the differences in beliefs. "In Jerusalem, people historically came from different places of the world and are still living there, making Jerusalem what it is now. So Jerusalem is not one colour."

This idea is also contained in another piece in the show called "The Holy Gates", which references the eight gates of the Old City. "Each gate has a history and is from a different period, being influenced by a different culture. Armies and believers passed under these gates. Additionally, each one has a different name, according to Muslims, Jews or Christians. They created new names depending on their different religious beliefs."



The artwork highlights this aspect; that one city can be experienced and even named in a different way. Along with the history, though, Alhroub wanted to focus on the design of the gates themselves. "I love the design and I redrew it exactly as it is, just making it a bit more minimal, taking away their colour. Jerusalem has a very historical colour, very hearty, you can almost smell it. But if you take that away, you just end up re-contextualising it."

In several works, the skies look golden, and the artist has employed the symbol of the two-winged beast known as Buraq, believed by Muslims to have carried Prophet Muhammad from Makkah to Jerusalem, and from there to the heavens. The scale of Alhroub's installations creates a strong impact and gives the exhibition a holy mystique despite his playful intentions. "For this show, I was interested in finding the secret of Jerusalem," he concluded. "It's a feeling, a sensation, and I hope I was able to convey some of it to the visitors."



After Dubai and another show in Jordan — "Salt Land" at Karim Gallery in Amman, presenting murals and sculptures — Alhroub plans to take some time to rest and let new ideas develop. He explained to me that inspiration is actually rooted in research. "There is theory as well; it's not something coming out of nothing. I reflect on my life, I absorb the work of writers, researchers, directors or philosophers. Then, when I least expect it, inspiration floods me. But it's not coming from nothing. Nothing is coming from nothing."

READ: Israeli extremists raid Al-Aqsa, cut down 2,000 olive trees

His creative process happens naturally, he pointed out, by observing reality, listening to subtle cues, and always by walking. "Walking is very important for me, everywhere I am. So a particular place, research or phase of my life would inspire an idea, and from there I go on finding a medium related to this idea. For me just doing painting all my life would be like having a diet where I only eat bread."

The artist has an upcoming residence in Marrakech next year, but isn't sure what kind of work he will do there yet. "But I believe that's what the research is about, not knowing what you'll find. I'm willing to encounter different objects and visual inputs. I don't want to carry with me the themes of past projects. I want to experience a new life, a new heart, and that will result in new work."

Categories [Interviews](#) [Middle East](#) [Palestine](#) [UAE](#)

1 Comment



Unless otherwise stated in the article above, this work by Middle East Monitor is licensed under a *Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License*. If the image(s) bear our credit, this license also applies to them. [What does that mean?](#) For other permissions, please [contact us](#).

Spotted an error on this page? [Let us know](#)



Related



Jerusalem: Islamic institutions do not recognise Israeli decisions on Al-Aqsa Mosque

May 24, 2022



Russia plans to regain ownership of Jerusalem historical religious sites

June 4, 2022



Jerusalem churches: Moving UK embassy to Jerusalem undermines city's harmony

October 11, 2022



Writing Palestine
Celebrating the tenth year of the Palestine Book Awards

Order Now

[SHOW COMMENTS](#)

Latest Opinion Pieces [Read our blogs & in-depth articles](#)



Article
Freeing prisoners is a collective and daily responsibility
November 24, Nasser Nasser



Article
"Equality Now" calls on MENA governments to urgent...

More Opinion [→](#)



Article
What did Russia lose from the Ukraine war?
November 23, Ahmed Muwaffaq Zaidan



Article
Xi vs. Trudeau: How China is rewriting history with the



Africa

Athens-Tripoli row: Why is Greece so angry with Libya?

November 24, 2022



November 23, Amelia Smith



Article
Does the FIFA World Cup tournament deserve \$220bn from Qatar...
November 23, Motasem A Dalloul



Article
The real cost of Palestinian resistance
November 23, Yvonne Ridley



Article
Decline of the Tigris spells doom for Iraq fishermen
November 22, Thomson Reuters Foundation



coio...
November 23, Dr Ramzy Baroud



Article
Donors withdraw millions in support for controversial progra...
November 23, Nasim Ahmed



Article
Israel is disappointed to be losing the narrative battle to ...
November 23, Dr Adnan Abu Amer



Blog
At World Cup, Saudi Crown Prince moves back on to global sta...
November 22, Reuters







ENGAGING THE WORLD

THE MAKING OF HAMAS'S FOREIGN POLICY



DAUD ABDULLAH

Order Now >

Follow us

Download MEMO App

Latest Updates

[Africa](#) | [Asia & Americas](#) | [Middle East](#) | [Europe](#) | [Book Reviews](#) | [Event Reviews](#) | [Film Reviews](#)

Columnist

[Dr Daud Abdullah](#) | [Ramzy Baroud](#) | [Kamel Hawwash](#) | [Amelia Smith](#) | [Yvonne Ridley](#) | [Asa Winstanley](#) | [Guest Writers](#) | [Interviews](#)

Regular Contributors

[Anjuman Rahman](#) | [Nasim Ahmed](#) | [Omar Ahmed](#) | [Jehan Alfarra](#) | [Khalil Charles](#) | [Ibrahim Hewitt](#) | [Muhammad Hussein](#) | [Maha Salah](#) | [Ramona Wadi](#)

Reports & Resources

[Briefing Papers](#) | [Fact Sheets](#) | [Reports](#) | [Documents](#) | [Interviews](#)

Stay Informed

[Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Youtube](#) | [Instagram](#)

Middle East Monitor

[About Us](#) | [Palestine Book Awards](#) | [Editorial Guidelines](#) | [Legal Pages](#) | [Press Releases](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [All Stories Archive](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Creating New Perspectives

Middle East Monitor is owned and operated by Ardi Associates Ltd
© Ardi Associates Ltd 2009-2022. All Rights Reserved | [Legal Pages](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

MEMO
MIDDLE EAST MONITOR