

Emily Jacir and Michael Rakowitz's "That thou canst not stir a flower Without troubling of a star"

Cathryn Drake



Emily Jacir & Michael Rakowitz's "That thou canst not stir a flower Without troubling of a star," 2024. Commissioned and curated by LOCALES as part of "If Body," at La Città dell'Utopia, Rome, 2024. Courtesy of the artists and LOCALES. Photo by Alessia Calzecchi.

November 22, 2024

Città dell'Utopia, Rome

October 12, 2024

In the San Paolo quarter of Rome, artists Emily Jacir and Michael Rakowitz staged a "performative" dinner to commemorate the life of Palestinian poet and translator Wael Zuaiter, executed by Mossad agents at his home in the city fifty-two years earlier. Organized by curatorial collective Locales, it was the final event in a public program focusing on the body as an artistic medium for learning and transformation. Nearly one hundred guests gathered at long tables on the terrace of Città dell'Utopia, an international social laboratory dedicated to communitarian activism located in an eighteenth-century

farmhouse that was a trattoria and antifascist hub founded by Augusto Volpi in 1907 and later a refuge for resistance fighters during World War II. Now an anachronistic apparition surrounded by apartment blocks, it is still a welcoming, convivial hive.

The poignant title, evoking the far-reaching repercussions of every action, is taken from a poem by Francis Thompson that Zuaiter quoted in an article published in *L'Espresso* shortly before his assassination. Zuaiter was the first victim of the Israeli operation Wrath of God, ostensibly targeting those held responsible for the massacre carried out by Black September at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. In 1980, several Israeli agents were tried in absentia for murder by a court in Rome. While they were acquitted for lack of conclusive evidence, the judges concluded that Zuaiter, a representative in Italy of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), had been “murdered by an organization that planned the physical liquidation of members of the Palestinian liberation movement” and found no evidence of his involvement in terrorism.¹ The following year the court officially attributed the murder to Mossad. In 2011 a top Mossad official who had accessed the file admitted in an interview with writer Ronen Bergman that “it was a terrible mistake.”²

The dinner was the product of a dialogue between the collaborative practices of both artists, a continuation of Jacir’s project on Zuaiter, *Material for a Film* (2004–ongoing), and a reflection of the efforts of the artist-run space Dar Jacir, in Bethlehem, to foster cultural healing through collective activity. The menu, created by Rakowitz and prepared with Khaled Karri (founder of the Makan nomadic food project), started with Zuaiter’s own recipe for hummus—which substituted peanut butter for hard-to-find tahini, conveying how immigrants adapt to new contexts. Rakowitz, whose Jewish family fled Iraq in the wake of the 1941 Farhud pogrom, noted that the meal was taking place on Yom Kippur, and “in the calendar of my religion, today is the day of atonement.” He explained that he wanted “to create a space and the circumstances through which we could bring Wael out of the sphere of death and into the sphere of the living.” To the clanking of bells, he and Karri carried a gigantic pot of Mhasha—vegetables and grape leaves stuffed with rice spiced with sumac—through the cheering crowd.

Throughout the evening people were invited by Jacir to share poetry and reminiscences drawn from her extensive archive of materials and interviews gathered over the years. Among them was journalist Samir Al-Qaryouti, one of a group of young Palestinians, along with Zuaiter, studying Italian in Perugia in the late 1960s. He talked about the difficulties of integrating as an *Arab*, a term that was seen as synonymous with *terrorist*. “The Italians told us and the other Arab students to be attentive to the possibility of provocations,” he recalled. “We had to have relationships with whomever supported our cause, except the fascists—the fascists, no!” It was the start of Italy’s *Anni di Piombo* (years of lead), two decades characterized by violence between extremist far right and left groups including the Red Brigades, with whom the PLO was allegedly aligned. Al-Qaryouti said that the situation for Palestinians living abroad has not improved and that Israel’s “objective is to destroy the Palestinian culture.” He continued: “This is not a war; it’s the extermination of a population. ... They are committing an enormous crime against humanity, with the objective of demolishing all of the Palestinian refugee camps. Today Palestine, tomorrow Jordan, the day after Lebanon.”

Among Zuaiter’s friends in Rome were leftist Jewish politician Piero Della Seta and writers Jean Genet, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Alberto Moravia, whose

tribute was read by Cesare Pietroiusti: "Wael was a chivalrous, fantastic, ingenuous, kind, and unreal man. With his good nature, his sense of humor, his imagination, and his wandering temperament, he made one think of a world without frontiers and nationalisms." For a short period in 1972 he opened an Arabic bookshop providing literary and political publications that was frequented by students. Rakowitz read a remembrance of Zuaiter by scholar and professor Enrico Mistretta: "He was a marvelous intellectual with a passion for music and for literature. He had learned by heart a good deal of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. He was the most peaceful person I've ever met in my life. We spent a lot of time laughing together about everything."³ Zuaiter's partner at the time of his death, the Australian artist Janet Venn-Brown, has described how, "when Munich happened in September 1972 [...] he immediately told me, 'We are not this, we are not this.'"⁴

A large black-and-white photograph of 38-year-old Zuaiter's body with blood pooling around his head, published in the left-wing newspaper *Paese Sera* on the morning after his assassination, was affixed to the exterior of the villa. On the previous weekend many others were surreptitiously pasted on walls around the city, often in multiples, like exclamation marks or echoes of the brutality of history. "I met Wael Zuaiter through his body stretched out on the asphalt with his head hanging down, a violent image like those we see every day during this year of genocide," curator Sara Alberani said. "With comrades and friends, we mapped the city of Rome according to sites of resistance ... to allow his body to speak." The diners included curators, artists, and activists such as the collective Mabasta! (But enough!), which organizes performances and talks in support of Palestine, alongside Jacir's students from the Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti and residents of the American Academy in Rome, a supporter of the event. As we listened and ate, the subject of the image became more fully human, and the distant event more immediate.

Jacir stood up and narrated the salient facts: on October 16, 1972, as Zuaiter approached the elevator inside his apartment block, Israeli assassins fired twelve bullets into his head and chest at close range. Another bullet pierced the spine of a copy of *One Thousand and One Nights*, which Zuaiter was translating at the time. In an interview, Venn-Brown said that before leaving her apartment he told her he had finished reading it and planned to write an article "to indicate that in the history of the Arabs and the Jews there has never been any antipathy." Jacir recalled returning to Rome in 2005 to talk to Wael's old acquaintances and explore Venn-Brown's extensive archive. "Janet told me, 'He was a poet. He was completely lost without poetry.'"

Notes

- 1 See Jesse Cox, "A Palestinian poet, an Australian artist, and a Mossad-led assassination in Italy," Australian Broadcasting Corporation (April 28, 2015): <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/radionational/archived/radiotonic/the-palestinian-poet-assassinated-by-israels-mossad/6416658>.
- 2 Ronen Bergman, *Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations* (New York: Random House, 2018).
- 3 This quote is from an interview with Enrico Mistretta conducted by Emily Jacir in 2004 as part of *Material for a Film*.
- 4 Tommaso Di Francesco, Interview with Janet Venn-Brown, *Il Manifesto* (November 11, 2023). "Quando ci fu Monaco nel settembre 1972 eravamo in questa stanza e mi disse subito: 'Noi non siamo questo, non siamo questo.'" <https://ilmanifesto.it/wael-zuaiter-fatah-e-le-ragioni-della-palestina-una-cartolina-dagli-anni-70>.

Is miart a fitting prelude to the Venice Biennale?

With a defined focus on emerging artists, miart in Milan makes for a compact pitstop on the way to the Venice Biennale.

by [Tabish Khan](#) Published on Apr 16, 2024

On entering the 2024 edition of miart in [Milan](#), the question that crossed our minds was – can it carve out its own path in an arguably over-saturated international calendar of art fairs? In a calendar that includes behemoths such as Frieze in four locations and [Art Basel](#) in three and many smaller fairs throughout the year, what does this [art fair](#) offer that makes it stand out? [STIR spoke to director Nicola Ricciardi in the run-up to the fair to find out what we could expect.](#)

miart certainly has a sizeable footprint, with over 1,000 artists presented by 178 galleries from 28 countries. It's at that size where it feels like there's a lot to see, but a single visit to the fair is still enough to take it all in.



Stazione (Rialto Mercato), 2009, Emily Jacir Image: Courtesy of Emily Jacir and Simóndi Gallery

Among the Italian galleries presenting [contemporary](#) works, one highlight was Simóndi from [Turin](#). They have photographic mock-ups by Emily Jacir, who wanted to supplement the Venice vaporetto stops with their names in Arabic during a previous iteration of the [Venice Biennale](#) (it was approved before the local authorities pulled the plug for no given reason). Alongside her works are [photographs](#) by Kurdish artist Fatma Bucak, who has pictured hands holding jars filled with dark liquids from the ink of newspapers that didn't cover an ongoing massacre of Kurds at the time. The political nature of these two artists' work makes Simóndi's booth stand out.

The Index **The Top 5 Booths at MiArt 2024**

14 Apr 2024

Share

X

[WHATSAPP](#) [FACEBOOK](#) [INSTAGRAM](#) [PINTEREST](#)

With the global art fair market becoming more dominated by the behemoths Frieze and Art Basel, and all the satellite fairs that pop up alongside them, MiArt in Milan is carving out its own path with a 2024 edition that includes more than 1,000 works displayed by 178 galleries from across 28 countries. We've picked five booths from this year's MiArt that impressed us the most and we think you should visit at the fair.



Nuova Galleria Morone at MiArt 2024 Milan

NUOVA GALLERIA MORONE, MILAN

The history of humanity is the history of stories and Maria Lai's work weaves these stories into her works, specifically the Sardinian stories of fairies that turned into women – the artist lived out her later years on the island of Sardinia. A fabric book with string-like tendrils emanating from it is more typical of her work but it's the large scale wall-based pieces that draw us in. A piece made of wooden boxes references the homes of fairies and the golden thread linking together is based on that of a loom. While a terracotta wall of panels also works in thread like textures on to their surface. The solo booth is filled with intricate details and fascinating histories.



operating table. Using a lot of found material makes us feel like this set is made to be broken for much longer.



Emily Jacir, stazione (Rialto Mercato), 2009, courtesy the artist and Simóndi Gallery

SIMONDI, TURIN

In a powerfully political booth we're confronted with a large red and black banner that states us in Arabic. It's a work by Emily Jacir that draws us to her smaller photographic series of her planned event for the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009 where all Vaporetto stops would also have their names in Arabic inscribed next to the Roman stop. It was all approved until the Venetian authorities pulled the plug without giving a reason. Another political artist on the booth is Fatma Bucak who remarks on how the Damascus Rose, famed for its beautiful scene and used in perfumes, is threatened in its native area by war – whose contrasting foul smell is overpowering the rose's sweetness.



Lorraine O'Grady, Emily Jacir Among American Academy of Arts's 2023 Awardees

Artist Faith Ringgold and scholar Helen Hennessy Vendler received this year's gold medals.



Taylor Michael 3 days ago



Left: Lorraine O'Grady (photo Lelanie Foster / Trunk Archive);
right: Emily Jacir (photo Andrew H. Walker/Getty Images)

Artists and activist Faith Ringgold, photographer and philanthropist Susan Unterberg, and literary critic Helen Hennessy Vendler have received the highest honors from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for their contributions to the arts. The announcement comes a week after eight artists — Emily Jacir, Tala Madani, Mary Miss, Lorraine O'Grady, Sandy Rodriguez, Cameron Rowland, Cauleen Smith, and Ouattara Watts — received this year's art awards. Recipients will be honored at a ceremony on May 24. (...)

Another artist to receive that prize was Emily Jacir, whose films, photographs, installations, and performances often focus on themes of displacement and exile related to the Israeli occupation of Palestinians. For *Where We Come From* (2001-03), Jacir assembled 30 pairings of photographs, texts, and videos and asked participants both restricted from returning to Palestine or moving freely in the occupied state, "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?"

MoMA's Biggest Video Art Survey in Years Is a Winner

BY ALEX GREENBERGER March 6, 2023 10:40am



Installation view of “Signals: How Video Transformed the World,” 2023, at Museum of Modern Art, New York. PHOTO ROBERT GERHARDT

Let's start with a sad fact: the last time New York's **Museum of Modern Art** staged a sizable survey of **video art** was in 1995, nearly three decades ago. Better late than never to remedy that, however, and right now, the museum's spacious sixth floor is filled with moving images in that medium—roughly 35 hours' worth, to be exact. That's not even counting works whose durations are not listed on the show's checklist.

The exhibition, titled “Signals: How Video Transformed the World,” offers more footage than anyone could ever absorb in a single visit. Individual pieces in the show only seem to reinforce the idea that this is indeed the point. (...)

Video has made it impossible to separate what's happening at home from what's taking place abroad, these artists suggest. That much is made literal in Emily Jacir's *Ramallah/New York* (2004–05), in which quotidian-seeming images filmed in the West Bank and Manhattan—bland offices, buzzy bars—are placed side by side. In a tiny gesture of video-based magic, more than 5,000 miles of space is collapsed by way of two monitors set inches apart. (...)