



## Towards solidarity: 4 Palestinian arts organisations to visit during Qalandiya International 2018

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**The fourth edition of Palestine’s Qalandiya International opens under a banner of collaboration.**

On view in various locations until 30 October 2018, the biennial aims to re-energise and re-investigate concepts of community and collectivism.



Kurs, 'What Do We Know About Solidarity', 2018. Commissioned by Ramallah municipality. Image courtesy Qalandiya International.

## Qalandiya: bigger than biennial

Sharjah, Venice, São Paulo – all places that immediately conjure images of the biennial, the mega-exhibitions that feature prominently in the diaries of the contemporary art world community. Barometers of current trends and an artistic one-stop-shop, biennials are also platforms for discussion and assessment. Local and regional surroundings inevitably impact in some way, but the model – to the dismay of many – largely stays the same.

The **Qalandiya International (QI)** masquerades as one of these biennials, these elitist exhibitionary megaliths, but is, in reality, far from it. The name 'Qalandiya' does not signify a globally renowned city, and its immediate locale is a troubled one. It speaks to all occupied Palestinian territories, the West Bank, Judea and Samaria (depending on who is doing the naming) and Qalandiya itself, which is typically associated with the military checkpoint operated by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). A site of frequent clashes between Israeli soldiers and Palestinians, the Qalandiya checkpoint is one of the main points of entry into or out of the occupied West Bank. Yet 'Qalandiya' as a city, site and art space has other connotations that have been blurred or erased. It recalls the closed and abandoned Jerusalem airport; it is also the site of the Qalandiya refugee camp, and the village of Qalandiya now divided by the separation wall. A meeting place of contradictions, it is now a place, and symbol, of disconnection, isolation, segregation and fragmentation.



Tom Bogaert, 'Observance', 2018, video installation as part of the opening of "Interlude" hosted by The Palestinian Art Court – Al Hoash. Image courtesy the artist and Qalandiya International.

This geographically small but nonetheless highly pressurised environment, 'Qalandiya', as a name and place, is therefore loaded with meaning(s) and, when in 2012 a group of Palestinian cultural organisations collaborated on producing a 'biennale', they decided to reclaim the name for the first Qalandiya International.

Now in its fourth iteration, and taking place in various venues across Jerusalem, Gaza, Haifa, Ramallah, Majdal Shams, Birzeit, Bethlehem, Lydda, Qalandiya village, Kalandia Refugee Camp and Al Jib village, the **2018 edition** offers the world a new kind of biennale, one that does not approach its exhibitioners and programming from a place of sales and superstars, but rather aims to strengthen Palestinian cultural life and practice by placing loaded names like Qalandiya and Palestine into an international lexicon of locations. Running until 30 October 2018, QI has opened its myriad doors under the unifying thematic banner of 'Solidarity'. On this year's theme, Qalandiya

International commented:

*The notion of 'solidarity' has been synchronic with the history of the Palestinian struggle against successive colonial structures and regimes, although not always in perfect tandem with it. In Palestine, the term 'solidarity' has been, and still is, a buzzword in the struggle for liberation from consecutive colonial administrations. Its forms and ideological stances have morphed over time and geography, rising and sinking with the tides of change in the form of the struggle for freedom. The notion of the shared thoughts, values and objectives that bind us is stirred to re-energise and re-investigate meanings of solidarity and collectivism—values that have allowed Palestinian society to resist and stay alive for decades.*



Rawan Abu Ghoush, 'Shabas', 2018, in "Interlude" hosted by The Palestinian Art Court – Al Hoash.  
Image courtesy the artist and Qalandiya International.

### 1. The Palestinian Art Court – Al Hoash

While the ongoing QI has a full programme of exhibitions, workshops, city tours and lectures, there remains a few primary highlights nestled within the biennial's contributing partners. And though it is nearly impossible to shed light on specific artists without introducing the collaborators, galleries, city-sponsored programmes and NGOs that fuel much of their work – specifically in their QI exhibitions – *Art Radar* has selected a few not-to-miss highlights that feed into and off of the biennial's overarching 'solidarity' efforts.

The first is **The Palestinian Art Court – Al Hoash's** exhibition curated by Ahed Izhiman. Simply titled "Interlude", the group show represents Jerusalem's daily reality aiming to break the inherited barriers of place with the participation of a group of artists from Palestine, the diaspora and the world. "Interlude", the curatorial team **writes**, is

*the comforting silence in a musical or a play that allows you to travel to new spaces and helps you understand everything that happened and will happen, in an attempt to freeze the momen.*

For QI, "Interlude" offers an opportunity for artists to ignite different feelings, to underscore the importance of unanimity. Al-Hoash presents this theme through the participation of Palestinian artists from the diaspora in addition to local and international practitioners who are in solidarity with the Palestinian cause. The show represents both a nostalgia and mutual support for Palestinian communities, particularly in Jerusalem.



Blake Shaw, 'Invertigo', 2018, live broadcast video, in "Interlude" hosted by The Palestinian Art Court – Al Hoash. Image courtesy the artist and Qalandiya International.

Nostalgia is a key term here, and is the front-facing focus of **Noor Abed's** video installation *Out of Joint*, on view at the gallery's Al Zahra street location. Inspired by **Mark Fisher's** concept of Hauntology and the "nostalgia for lost futures", Abed's work plays with temporal disjunction in conjuring images of specific cultural events. As Izhiman states,

*The work derives from the formal nostalgia of the current moment rather than the psychological nostalgia per se. It deals with our incapability of producing the 'new', the 'now'. All that's left, therefore, is an endless return of dead forms.*

Abed's video, tinted by a dusky blue filter, examines these concepts through a unique filmic choreography where fact and fiction are blurred, where social possibilities are, at once, genuine and performed.



Noor Abed, 'Out of Joint', 2018, video, in "Interlude" hosted by The Palestinian Art Court – Al Hoash. Image courtesy the artist and Qalandiya International.

**Taysir Batniji's** piece *Wallpaper* is also prominently featured in "Interlude", consisting of collected images and internet screenshots that form broad wallpaper patterns. The artist's chosen imagery ranges from bits that are widely recognisable and those that are anxiety-inducing or horrifying. We see sites of bombings, weapons of war and violent arrest scenes that have become, for many, the physical setting of daily happenings. Batniji argues that the use of wallpaper neutralise these images, domesticates them:

*It affirms both their omnipresence in our lives and the relative detached disinterest we have towards them as a consequence of their repetitive nature.*

Though reduced to their simple geometries, the wallpaper images acquire an aesthetic quality and reveal their brutality only to the one who approaches them and gives them a thorough look. Here the "process of 'awakening'", as the artist calls it, is reversed; while shock and horror act as response-emotions, they are employed as the subject.



Taysit Batniji, 'Wallpaper', 2015, in "Interlude" hosted by The Palestinian Art Court – Al Hoash.  
Image courtesy the artist and Qalandiya International.

## 2. A.M. Qattan Foundation & Birzeit University Museum

The **A. M. Qattan Foundation** in cooperation with Birzeit University Museum has organised the collaborative exhibition "Lydda – A Garden Dis-remembered" for QI 2018. Inviting artists to examine the controversies dealing with the British colonial planning paradigm that transformed the city of Lydda to an ethnically cleansed and segregated city aiming at disempowering and suppressing Palestinian communities in favour of Jewish immigrants, the exhibition investigates the "long-engineered process of displacement" of Lydda's native Palestinian inhabitants, especially since the Nakba (Palestinian exodus) of 1948.



May Harbawi, 'Weeds Control' in "Lydda – A Garden Dis-remembered", 2018. Image courtesy the artist and A.M. Qattan Foundation.

The group show – featuring artists like Mahdi Baraghithi and May Herbawi – examines the controversies and analogies dealing with the imported colonialism and the resulting post-industrial spatial forms. "Lydda – A Garden Disremembered" looks at its exhibitionary location as an ethnically cleansed and segregated city that has been despotically altered. It looks at the systematic racial planning policies that aimed at disempowering and suppressing Palestinian communities in favour of Jewish immigrants. In the end, the curatorial team asks: do the now displaced citizens carry platonic memories of their city?



### 3. Riwaq's "urban tours"

Through a series of talks, walks and interventions in the public space titled "(ONE)H: Clustering, Reciprocity and Interdependency", the West Banks's centre for architecture and heritage preservation, Riwaq, will address the built environment as a medium of togetherness and a medium to think through notions of autonomy and social engagement.

Riwaq begins their series of programmes by reminding visitors that both built and un-built environments obtain special meanings and significance. In Palestine, it is not feasible to separate the built environment's configurations from the colonial spatial practices and surveillance structures. As the organisation comments in the QI 2018 press release,

*Colonialism that has been shuttering Palestine for the last century left its marks on both urban and rural Palestine in terms of destruction of the productive infrastructures, weakening the rural/urban interdependency and the deskilling of peasants into paid labourers depending on the colonial markets.*



Riwaq's Ramallah Urban Tour as part of "(ONE)H: Clustering, Reciprocity and Interdependency".  
Image courtesy Qalandiya International.

Riwaq's ongoing work attempts to accelerate restoration, to maximise the benefits of local communities and combat the embedded colonial processes at heritage sites. Instead of focusing on individual villages or towns, Riwaq will conduct a series of 'urban tours' through village clusters, tackling them as one entity.

This approach does not constitute surrender to the fragmentation of Palestine into small easily controlled enclaves. Rather, it is intended to ensure that no one is left isolated and no space is insignificant. It starts from the premise that all locales are equally important in any socio-economic-political-cultural project in Palestine. It also poses the question of what might happen if we dismantle borders and reconnect villages with each other and villages with towns across Palestine. In so doing, "clustering" becomes a concept, a vision, or a potential and medium for experimentation in the very contested and problematic field of space. Open to artists, curators and QI guests, the tours tie into the biennial's 'solidarity' theme, mirroring the exhibitions through public encounters and interactions.



Riwaq's Ramallah Urban Tour as part of "(ONE)H: Clustering, Reciprocity and Interdependency".  
Image courtesy Qalandiya International.

#### 4. Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art

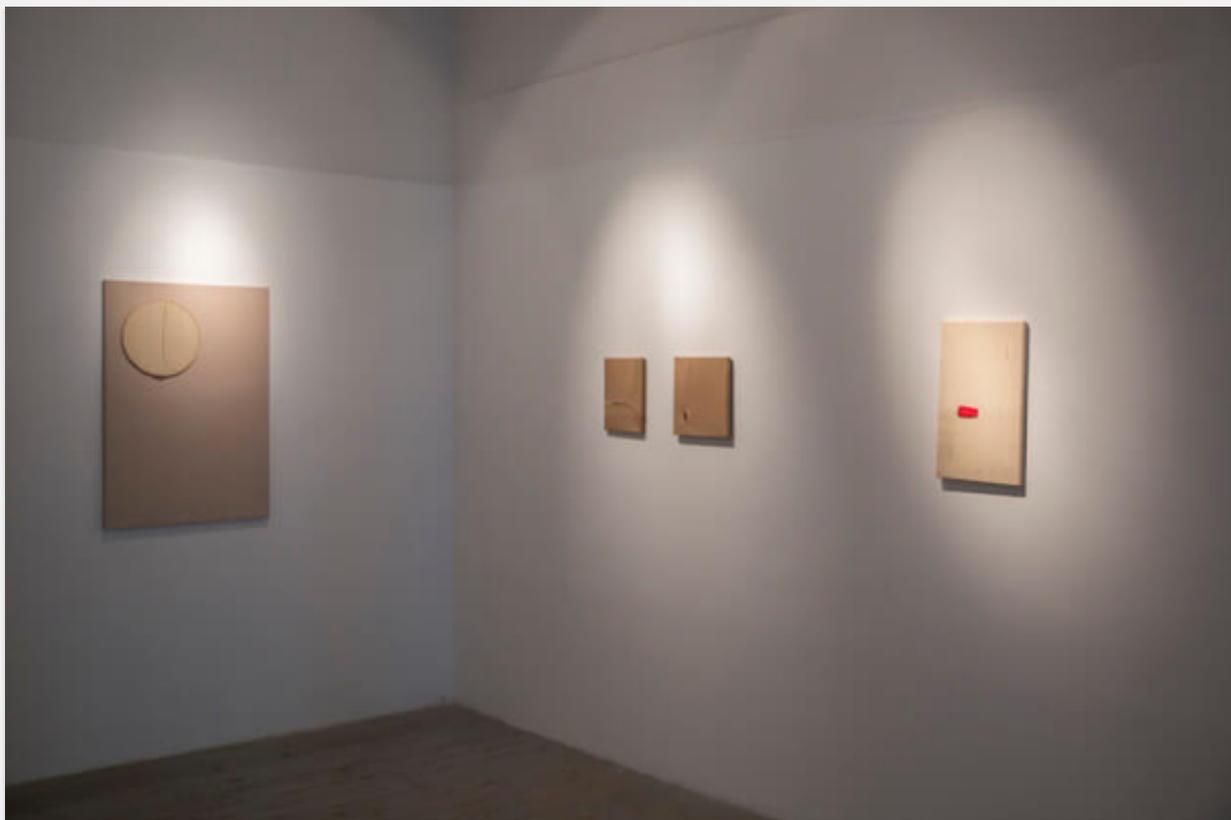
Now in its 9th iteration, the "Jerusalem Show", hosted by the **Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art**, ties together QI's momentous string of events. Titled, "Jerusalem Actual and Possible", the show shifts its mission from "displaying art in the city to, through art, yielding knowledge about the city". This begins, according to curators **Jack Persekian** and Kirsten Scheid, with Euclidean notions of time and space. They ask: what are time and space actually for? Does time move forward and preclude, with each second, options that were imaginable a few moments before? What does progress mean? According to the artists, traditional understandings of space and time are the instruments of Israeli occupation, the grounds of Palestinian division and the means of forever postponing future unity.

And yet, Jerusalem has long celebrated alternative ways of thinking about space and time. "Jerusalem Actual and Possible" pays tribute to this premise by reclaiming that imaginative capacity. Take, for example, Elias and Yousef Anastas's installation, *Analogy*. The commissioned stone structure considers how the architecture of Jerusalem combines disparate architectural elements brought by various foreign civilisations with local elements "**found in situ**". With the passage of time, certain architectural attributes, originally found locally, have been returned to Jerusalem as imported techniques.



Elias Anastas and Yousef Anastas, 'Analogy', 2018 in "The Jerusalem Show iX" hosted by Al Ma'mal Foundation. Image courtesy the artists and Qalandiya International.

Featuring an array of other Palestinian artists like **Benji Boyadgian**, Daoud Ghoul, **Inas Halabi**, **Jumana Emil Abboud** and **Noor Abu Arafah**, the "Jerusalem Show" follows the practices that have distilled in Palestinian art and the responsibility of Palestinians to "remember the future, to map the inaccessible and to excavate the unburied".



Noor Abu Arafah, 'The Untitled Paintings', 2010-2011, in "Interlude" hosted by The Palestinian Art Court – Al Hoash. Image courtesy Qalandiya International.

Collaborative in nature and ambitious in scale, QI 2018 is ultimately an attempt to join forces, resources and forms across a fragmented geography – an innovative response to the overworked biennial model and a necessary step in seeking solidarity.

**Megan Miller**

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***The 2018 Qalandiya International Biennial will run from 3 – 30 October 2018 across various venues in Jerusalem, Gaza, Haifa, Ramallah, Majdal Shams, Birzeit, Bethlehem, Lydda, Qalandiya village, Kalandia Refugee Camp and Al Jib village.***

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