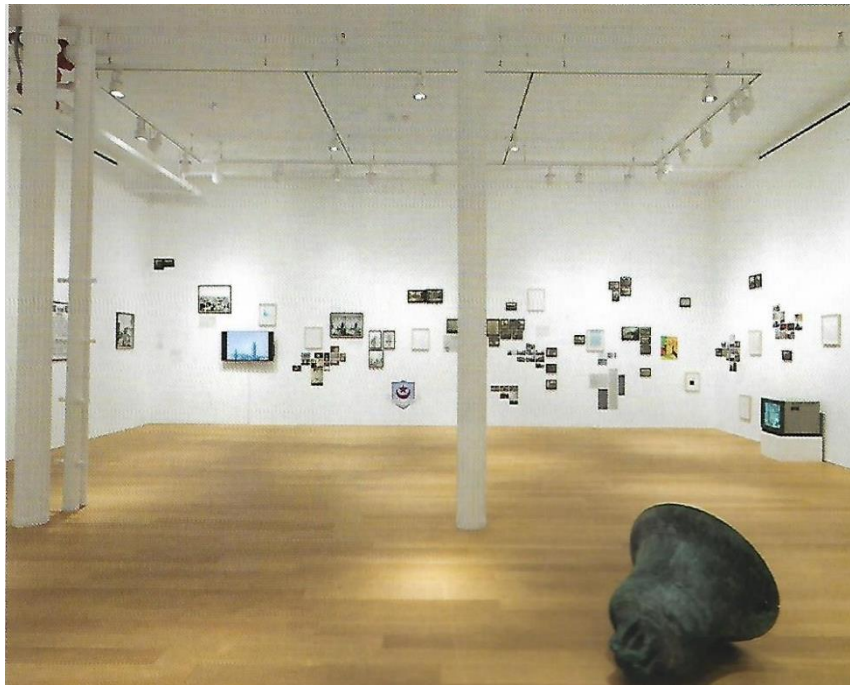


ARTFORUM



Emily Jacir, *Notes for a Cannon*, 2016, mixed media.
Installation view. Photo: Joerge Lohse

Emily Jacir

ALEXANDER AND BONIN

Emily Jacir's work on time and power summons an unlikely thought: The consensus that everything takes place in a universally shared present is old but not without origin. Her installation *Notes for a Cannon*, 2016—which sketches, with brilliant looseness, the British imposition of timekeeping systems on both Ireland and Mandatory Palestine in the early twentieth century—brought to mind Aristotle's take on the subject in *Physics* (ca. 350 BCE): The "now" is a universal "identity" that "accepts different attributes"—all the events of the world within its total advent. But people, he observed, reductively identify time with the sequence of apparent changes, and this conception permits the existence of "many times at the same time" among "more heavens than one." *Physics* thus inadvertently describes a *practice* of time, one that different regions would take up in differing ways for millennia to come, until what historian Benedict Anderson has called the modern "conception of simultaneity" resulted in the "obscure genesis of nationalism."

Alexander and Bonin

Time and the heavens were unified by the British Empire during the long nineteenth century. Jacir's installation that dealt in moments of the aftermath (the artist described its exploded salon format as resembling a sketchbook thrown open) dominated this show with an intricate but nonchalant-feeling accumulation of mostly point-and-shoot prints, videos, Xeroxes, and one large, oxidized bell. Ephemera included a 1916 notice of the Time (Ireland) Act, which provisioned a shared present for London and its neighbor colony within a one-second margin; in case the abstract matter of temporality appeared less than violent, Jacir juxtaposed more straightforward souvenirs of colonialism, such as a photograph of a poster (impaled with thumbtacks) offering ADVICE TO HOUSEHOLDERS DURING HOUSE SEARCHES. For Palestine, timekeeping was an overtly secularizing imposition that displaced the call to prayer as the structure of days. But given the fact that the Ottoman Empire had already imposed its own system decades earlier, Jacir's documents of the British destruction of Jerusalem's Arab-European clock tower in the name of aesthetic authenticity ("to preserve the ancient monuments") read as one empire marking its temporal territory over another's.

Three other pieces, gracefully absent of conceptual shoehorning, appeared in the show: the photograph from which the exhibition took its name, *La mia mappa* (My Map), 2013, which depicts a Roman building reflected in what is probably the basin of a fountain; *La mia Roma (omaggio ai sampietrini)* (My Rome [Homage to the Sampietrini]), 2016; a table of borrowed and returned Roman cobblestones reproduced in plaster that look like the excised molars of a city; and Jacir's 2003 video *Nothing Will Happen (eight normal Saturdays in Linz)*, a thematic echo of synchronization in which pedestrians, accustomed to the city's noon siren, go about their business despite its wailing. The video was an unnerving piece, given associations with European urbanity and World War II bombing campaigns. But I read these relatively quiet works mostly as concretizing supports for *Notes for a Cannon*—visualizations to keep the installation's anthropology from floating away.

What remained for me of the parallel national narratives in *Notes for a Cannon* was an image of cross-colony solidarity embodied in a mural depicting Palestine painted on the facade of the Museum of Free Derry in Northern Ireland. For one thing, such international and "racial" identifications are harder and harder to imagine from the point of view of US identitarianism (Asad Haider laments this fact in his recent *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump*). But the presence of such an image also poses the question of how time practices in themselves might serve to reverse political homogenization. The bell on the floor reminded me of artist David Horvitz's *Let Us Keep Our Own Noon*, 2013, in which an eighteenth-century carillon that once sounded across neighboring cantons in France was melted into forty-seven smaller bells, suggesting a return to temporal microclimates. Jacir's own proposal that the Irish Museum of Modern Art run on Dublin Mean Time for the duration of her exhibition was realized—not at the museum, but as the climax of my apprehension of her essay. Which suggests another protest of synchronization: that of seeing and understanding.

—Abraham Adams