

## Press release

Beirut Contemporary presents

### *Solidicity*

Mohammed Joha

Beirut Contemporary art space is pleased to announce the launch of its first exhibition **Solidicity** with the artist Mohammed Joha.

#### **Meet the artist:**

The artists presence is postponed until further notice due to new travel restrictions.

New dates of the exhibition: 06 April – 29 May 2021

**Beirut Contemporary** is an art space founded by Rasha Salah and Joachim Liebscher, located in Rua Ferragial 3, 1200-182 Lisbon.

#### **About us**

Art matters. Beirut Contemporary is building a reference for contemporary Middle-Eastern Art in the historical city center of Lisbon, Portugal.

It exhibits contemporary artists backed by cultural events and side exhibitions.

Beirut Contemporary conducts festivals as well as art and culture projects.

Culture matters. Beirut Contemporary consults in organizational culture and positive scenario building. Culture is who we are and who we will be.

#### **Director's note**

Camps in Gaza are not cities. They are megacities if population-density is the key.

Architecture is not solid. There is no market for building material.

Not meant to be solid, buildings are devastated, rebuilt and expanded with whatever there is. Population grows like elsewhere.

There is no way out. Designed for temporary use, people live here since generations.

This defines them as cities. The lack of hope for better for generations to come makes them solid.

Joha shows that there also is Beauty. People don't give up. They cannot.

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# BEIRUT بيروت كونيتمبري CONTEMPORARY

Joachim Liebscher

## **Curator's note**

The work of Mohammed Joha holds a beauty that defeats all the ugliness and toughness of a sieged city.

The colorful sheets holding a home that is supposed to be temporary and yet it stands there as much as it can for more than 70 years.

How to rebuild when you struggle to leave the temporary, how to remain colorful when darkness surrounds you and how to close your eyes and dream when only protected with thin sheets.

Choosing the collage as a medium to remember his own city, Joha shows all the layers that a life in Gaza offers.

Houses, streets, walls and people have all printed their memories and smells on sheets that make their daily intimacy.

The water colors are here to experiment lightness and fluidity.

Solidicity reminds us of the will of a people who, despite all the wars, simply want to remain people.

Rasha Salah

## **Solidicity – Artist's statement**

Prevailing public opinion of the Refugee Camp is not far from the reality of its chaotic construction and design, the simplicity of its streets and its alleys, and the lifestyle associated with it.

The faces, vocabulary and daily life of the Refugee Camp are a reflection of this overpowering visual congestion, of the heaviness of both form and color, rationally beautiful and hideous at the same time, denying the laws of geography and refusing to be subject to elegant construction standards. We often feel the camp to be fragile, frail and temporary as if awaiting its own demise or renewal, despite our conviction of its solidity and durability, which is consistent with the theory of its existence.

As a Gazan artist coming from this local environment, I have worked to construct and structure the camp in line with my own perspective and vision using a flat formative style devoid of many details that the observer may find exhausting. My ongoing search around form, and creating illustrations of houses and streets in my work is an attempt to reduce and replace this congestion with a variety of simplified spaces, whether reflecting the construction, the colors or the multiple

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surfaces and their textures that have been built from cloth and paper. It is a reproduction born of my imagination so that I may present a new perspective of the Camp.

Mohamed Joha, November 2020



"Soldicity #01" Fabric and paper collage on canvas. 140x140cm - 2020.

**The artist's Bio**

MOHAMMAD JOHA  
born in Gaza, Palestine

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# BEIRUT بيروت كونيتمبرج CONTEMPORARY

living in Paris, France

Mohammed Joha, born 1978 and having grown-up in Gaza, currently lives and works between France and Italy. A graduate in Art Education of 2003 from Al-Aqsa University in Gaza, he participated in a workshop residency in Darat Al Funun, Khalid Shoman Foundation in Amman Jordan, supervised by artist Marwan Kassab Bacchi, sparking off his path as a painter.

Already in 2004, he won the AM Qattan Foundation's Hassan Al Hourani Young Artist Award and was selected as their Artist of the Year. Joha was subsequently an artist-in-residence at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris during 2005, 2008, 2017 and 2018.

Mohammed Joha has developed a unique expressionistic style of collage with a strong esthetical appeal and multilayered narrative.

Joha's recent compositions are built on a skeleton of architectural horizontal and vertical lines, organically bent into variation, crossed by precise details appearing on the scene and brought to Life by the colorful materials he uses, which are old cloth, paper and carton.

The depth and appeal of his artwork derives from the formal and clear composition on the one hand, alongside with the playful, organic and carefully placed colorful and light interaction of material and, on the other hand, the serious, suffocating and devastating reality behind his compositions.

Representing the chaotic and organic architecture in Gaza, destroyed, rebuilt, devastated, rebuilt again with only cloth and whatever else there is as building material, Mohammed Joha tells the endless story of living in over generations institutionalized confinement, under the ever-underlying threat of re-destruction, while the over-densely populated area steadily grows in terms people living in it.

The architectural representation in Mohammed Joha's work hints in an unobtrusively direct fashion at the society it houses, caught for eternity between the explicitly temporary nature of their homes, whilst throughout latest history becoming the only perspective there is since and for generations.

Mohammed Joha's work explores topics revolving around childhood and loss of innocence as much as freedom, the overcoming of physical and psychological barriers imposed by conflict, resilience and identity are recurrent themes and along with the friction between the concepts of fragility and solidity his works become fascinating, multilayered and complex compositions.

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Mohammed Joha has worldwide created numerous solo shows: 2020, *Fabric Of Memory*, CAP, Kuwait. 2019, *Fabric Of Memory*, Tabari Artspace, Dubai, UAE. 2016, *Joha - The Journey*, Rich Mix Gallery, curated by Arts Canteen, London, UK. 2016, *Inside x Outside*, Artspace Hamra, Beirut, Lebanon. 2016, *Traces and Revelation*, Oriental Museum, Durham University, curated by Arts Canteen. 2012, *The Jasmine and Bread Revolution*, Courtyard Gallery, Dubai, UAE. 2011, *Dream in Black and White*, The Mosaic Room & AM Qattan Foundation, London, UK. 2011, *All that is Unknown*, Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Jerusalem, Palestine. 2008, *Art Behind the News*, EineWeltHaus, Munich, Germany. 2008, *IN x OUT*, Cité Internationale des arts, Paris, France. 2006, *Passages of Time*, National Ethnographic and Pre-historical Museum Luigi Pigorini, Rome, Italy. 2006. -2007, *The Shade and the Shade of the Other*, Horti Lamiani Bettivo Gallery, Rome, Italy. 2006, *Burned Dolls*, Al Mina Gallery, Gaza, Palestine. 2005, *The Cage*, French Cultural Center, Gaza, Ramallah, Nablous, Jerusalem, Palestine. 2005, *Tales*, Cité Internationale des arts, Paris, France. 2004, *Clothes Line*, AM. Qattan Foundation, Ramallah, Palestine. 2003, *Clothes Line*, The Peace Center, Bethlehem, Palestine. 2003, *Flower Poets and Stories*, Khalil Al-Sakakini Cultural Center, Ramallah, Palestine.

Mohammed Joha was also part of a number of group exhibitions: 2018, *El Beit*, Tabari Artspace, Dubai, UAE. 2014, *Faces... A Glimpse in Time*, Palestinian Art Court - Al Hoash, Jerusalem, Palestine. 2013, *Resilience and Light*, Studio 3Gallery University of Kent, curated by: Arts Canteen, Kent, UK. 2012, *Despite*, Rich Mix Gallery, curated by Arts Canteen, London, UK. 2010, *Creative Palestinian Arts*, Competition/Exhibition/Publication, Art Sawa, Dubai, UAE. 2009, *Gaza 61 + Seoul 59*, Gallery Young (Samchun-dong), Seoul, South Korea. 2009, *Posi on de a Morlai au Oudour*, Morlaix, France. 2008, *Five Artists from Gaza*, Algerian Cultural Center, Paris, France. 2003, *September Harvest*, Darat Al-Funun, Organised by lite artist: Marwan Qassab Bacchi, Amman, Jordan. 2002, *Artists have a Different Opinion*, Rashad Al-Shawa Cultural Centre, Gaza, Palestine. 2002, *2x12*, Arts and Crafts Village, Gaza, Palestine.

Mohammed Joha was hosted on the following art fairs: 2019, *Abu Dhabi Art*, UAE. 2016, *Beirut Art Fair*, Beirut, Lebanon. 2016, *Bahrain Art Fair*, Manama, Bahrain. 2011, *Munich Contempo International Art Fair*, Munich, Germany.

"I am trying to build something beautiful and colourful with light from the darkness", says Mohammed Joha when asked about his work.

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“The houses in my paintings can contain all or any of the homeless from all over the world and from different cultures.  
My ideas thus come from these strong values which I believe in, and that offers the greatest motivation to keep doing my work”.

### Insight

#### **Beirut Contemporary: Which of the camps are you referring to in your paintings?**

**Mohammed Joha:** I shed the light on the whole Gaza “city and camps”, seeking to give a simple image through this work in order to present the new reality of Gaza how I see it.

After three destructive wars, which transformed the city to something like a big camp made of different surfaces such as blankets of fabrics, metal roofs, wood and plastic.

The unusual alternative and temporary artificial structure as well as the alien colors didn't fit into the crowded gray city.

*Solidicity* in this context means “stable-fragile”.

We see camps as a fragile geographical spot crowded with multiple contrasting details, which we would consider temporary and renewable over time, but with the chronic condition of the ongoing occupation of the land we discover that they are solid and sustainable.

#### **B.C.: How does the site differ from a place called “city” in your opinion?**

**M.J.:** Naturally and after these massive changes of the infrastructures in question, the city has become a large and scary pile of devastation, which canceled out the known and common features of the roads and streets as I remember them since my childhood until now while living in diaspora.

I am keeping my mind on the last image of my historical Gaza, the “developed” one that I knew and lived in.

Recently, a big part of it has been transformed into a camp built by all those solid-fragile surfaces, which I use as objective materials in my artworks in order to create an honest and newly rebuilt view that describes the reality of daily life.

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**B.C.:** What is or are the most solid characteristics of the site in your view, be they of positive or negative nature?

**M.J.:** As someone who comes from this reality, I believe that the most important thing is to keep looking at the changes as a temporary issue in order to be able to reshape a new positive image of our home.

As an artist, this concept helps me to find a practical solution through my artistic practise in order to resolve this central problem of fragility versus solidity.

In my artwork I aim to analyze the difference between the solid or sustainable character of the camps and the nature of the temporary or the not sustainable.

**B.C.:** How do you relate to Gaza today?

**M.J.:** Since my family and friends still live in Gaza and my memory of having grown up there is vivid, I have a strong attachment to my city.

As an artist who sees different kinds of realities because I live abroad since more than 15 years, I nevertheless keep regular contact with my beloved to follow all changes happening in the political and social scene in Gaza. My last visit to Gaza was in 2012.

**B.C.:** Your collages show building or repair works with materials found on the spot or exchanged with neighbors.

**M.J.:** I decided to use these materials in order to give real images of Life in Gaza. People use fabrics or blankets and other primitive materials instead of using concrete to build their destroyed city. Building materials are forbidden to enter Gaza since 12 years.

I usually get the oldest clothes from friends to embed them in my work.

**B.C.:** As a bottom-line, what makes you optimistic, what inspires the beauty in your collages?

**M.J.:** I am known as an optimistic person who believes in positive people and ideas, which I translate into art.

I am trying to build something beautiful, colorful and light from the darkness.

Houses in my paintings can contain all homeless from all over the world of

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different cultures and behavior. My ideas come from these concepts which I believe in and this great motivation leads me to create art.

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