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Visual Discourse: *Boundaries | Blocks | Borders: Lines of Beirut, Jerusalem, and Nicosia*

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Barricades that repel and obstruct.
Walls that surround and exclude.
Cartographies that contain and divide.
Graffiti that communicate and express.

This contribution presents a series of photographs and an installation that interpret fragments of, and moments in, three eastern Mediterranean cities. The works engage relationships between barriers, boundaries, lines, and visual expressions. They are based on observations and experiences of spatial-cultural and socio-urban dynamics in the fabrics of Beirut, Jerusalem, and Nicosia.

While these cities are often referred to, or imagined, as places that in earlier iterations existed as complete or unified socio-urban structures, their (hi)stories betray pasts and presents of frequent and persistent division and fragmentation. Movement, flow, and communication, or lack thereof, of people,

ideas, and goods are constantly defined and redefined by numerous layers of visible and invisible barriers. The works interpret these layers comprised of natural and human-made structures and attempt to connect and recreate experiential findings from fieldwork in the three cities.

Cities can be divided in many ways. Some have been shattered by a wax pencil in the space of an hour, remaining split for decades by a “chinagraph frontier,” as in Nicosia. Others are restless battlegrounds scored by informal boundaries of varying degrees of permanence. Some cities develop sealed, semipermeable boundaries in response to particular episodes, seasons, or political events.

(Calame et al., 2012, 8)

Fieldwork included sketchbook drawing, journaling, and photography. The culmination of the study is the creation of a multi-panel, acrylic and spray-paint installation piece. The installation is comprised of six three-meter-tall banner-type paintings suspended from the ceiling and reaching the floor. One continues across the floor for another three meters and ends by draping across a structure that echoes a barricade element. Each of the three cities is addressed through two banners that recall a sense of place via color and structure that quotes and paraphrases graffiti and street art in customary materials and techniques.

The street art that informs the banners of each location represents a motif of recurring imagery. The most salient image and form elements from Beirut include the Lebanese Flag, clenched fist, circular-shaped stencils, cedar trees, and concrete or steel barriers. The Jerusalem banners feature tall limestone walls of uniform materials and relentless construction, religious symbols, and thickly brushed white or gray paint used to buff/cover/negate graffiti. The dominant motifs of Nicosia incorporate imagery of the walled city, barrels and barricades, concertina wire, and flags. Ambient elements for each city emerged from the experiences of urban fabric and events and were translated as analogous visuals.

The banners are in dialogue with each other through the painted imagery, and also function together in their materiality and objectness. They divide space, restrict circulation, obscure views, and limit access. In placement, the banners physically impose divisions and diversions within the exhibition space redolent of those found in the three cities.

The photographic works not only connect to the installation as research documents and interpretive conduits, but concurrently speak as individual compositions that evoke and evince the structural dynamics of place through composition, form, and subject.

Lines that are drawn on maps, lines that are drawn in our minds, and lines that are drawn on the ground. Lines that delineate, that differentiate, that exclude. Lines that form space and lines that form meaning. Lines that divide, segment, and contain, but also lines that can facilitate, communicate, and unite.

Images



Near the Ledra Street Border Crossing, Nicosia - 35.1742 N, 33.3619 E



Ledra Palace Checkpoint, Markou Drakou Avenue, Nicosia – 35.1775 N, 33.3553 E



Lidinis and Eptanissou, Nicosia - 35.1746 N, 33.3656 E



Artemidos and Vasileiou Voulgaroktonou, Nicosia - 35.1742 N, 33.3602 E



Alkiviadi and Lidinis, Nicosia - 35.1745 N, 33.3647 E



Nicosia banners



Rome Avenue, Beirut - 33.8965 N, 35.4884 E



Bechara El Khoury, Beirut - 33.8937 N, 35.5064 E



Emir Béchir, Beirut - 33.8949 N, 35.5044 E



Basra Street, Beirut - 33.8968 N, 35.4809 E



Emir Béchir, Beirut - 33.8948 N, 35.5052 E



Beirut banners



Church of the Holy Spulchre, Jerusalem - 31.7787 N, 35.2302 E



Shoshen Street, Jerusalem - 31.7792 N, 35.2238 E



Khavakuk Street and Mea Shearim Street, Jerusalem - 31.7882 N, 35.2206 E



Ibn Batuta and Ibn Khaldun Street, Jerusalem - 31.7874 N, 35.2319 E



Near Sha'ar Habarzel Street, Jerusalem - 31.7787 N, 35.2301 E



Jerusalem banners



Boundaries | Blocks | Borders Installation

Notes:

Calame, J., Charlesworth, E., & Woods, L. (2012). *Divided Cities: Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar, and Nicosia (The City in the Twenty-First Century)*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

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About the Author

Todd Lowery is an American visual artist. He holds a Master of Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York City and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Missouri State University. He is a Professor of Fine Arts at Drury University and has served as Chair of Drury's Department of Art and Art History. Since 2015, solo exhibitions of Todd's work have been held in Canada, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Sweden, and the US. He maintains studios in Athens and Springfield and divides his time between the US, Italy, Cyprus, and Greece.