

## Artists push against Israeli wall

Contributed by Nurah Tape  
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Society + Culture,

Believing that art has the possibility to unite different cultures, more than 56 Palestinian, Israeli and American artists have combined pen, paint brush and camera, to protest against Israel's separation barrier.

Eric Laursen, one of the organisers, says the Three Cities Against the Wall exhibition, held concurrently in Ram Allah, Tel Aviv and New York, showcases paintings, sculptures, photographic montages and audio-visual installations that depict the barrier as "a form of oppression".

"The message is that the wall represents a form of oppression that destroys the humanity of both the oppressor and oppressed," Laursen told Aljazeera.net.

"The former by denying them their human rights and subjecting them to dispossession, death and military force by an invader, the latter by rendering them callous and indifferent to the suffering their own leaders are inflicting."

Selection for the exhibition required that artists reflect the barrier's impact on both Palestinians and Israelis.

'Land grab'

Not surprisingly, said Laursen, much of the Palestinian art dwells to some extent on the destruction of everyday life that the barrier represents.

"Much of the Israeli art," he continued, "focuses on the desensitisation that the wall has engendered in that society, and how it reflects on what the artists see as the materialism of Israeli cultural life."

The barrier, built by Israel under the pretext of national security and keeping Palestinian bombers out, is seen by Palestinians as a massive land grab.

Dubbed the "apartheid wall" by Palestinians and activists, the barrier cuts deep into the West Bank and in some areas, cuts off entire villages, private property and schools.

Response to the exhibition has been varied and not without problems.

Contributions by American artists arrived two weeks after the exhibition opened in Ram Allah, due to problems with Israeli customs, says Laursen.

Varied audience

The showing will be moved to an extra city, Hebron, in the West Bank, "in part, in solidarity with the Palestinian community there that is being hard-pressed by the Israeli army and settlers". "The entire thrust of Israeli policy has been to make it harder for Palestinians and Israelis to work together and discover common political ground. Bringing down the wall is going to require pressure from both sides"

Eric Laursen  
Exhibition organising committee

A mixed audience has visited the exhibitions, says Laursen.

In the US, a rabbi contacted the organisers to schedule a special tour of the show for his New Jersey congregants.

"This rabbi said he is not against the wall, but felt it was important ... to see the show to understand the other side", Laursen adds.

"To us, this indicates we are not just preaching to the converted and have a real chance to change some people's minds about the wall and Israeli occupation."

#### Bridging divides

Even before the showing launched, organisers say it succeeded in many ways.

"It has helped to establish new contacts and networks between Palestinian and Israeli artists who share opposition to the wall - which is very important.

"The entire thrust of Israeli policy has been to make it harder for Palestinians and Israelis to work together and discover common political ground," says Laursen.

"Bringing down the wall is going to require pressure from both sides."

Organisations supporting the exhibition include the League of Palestinian Artists and the Palestinian Association of Contemporary Art.

In Israel, the project was organised by a group of artists and activists associated with the Israeli Coalition Against the Wall and Anarchists Against the Wall.

In New York, Three Cities Against the Wall was organised through the arts centre ABC No Rio by a committee of artists and activists. ABC No Rio is a community centre for the arts that grew out of housing struggles on New York's Lower East Side.

The exhibitions run until 8 December.