

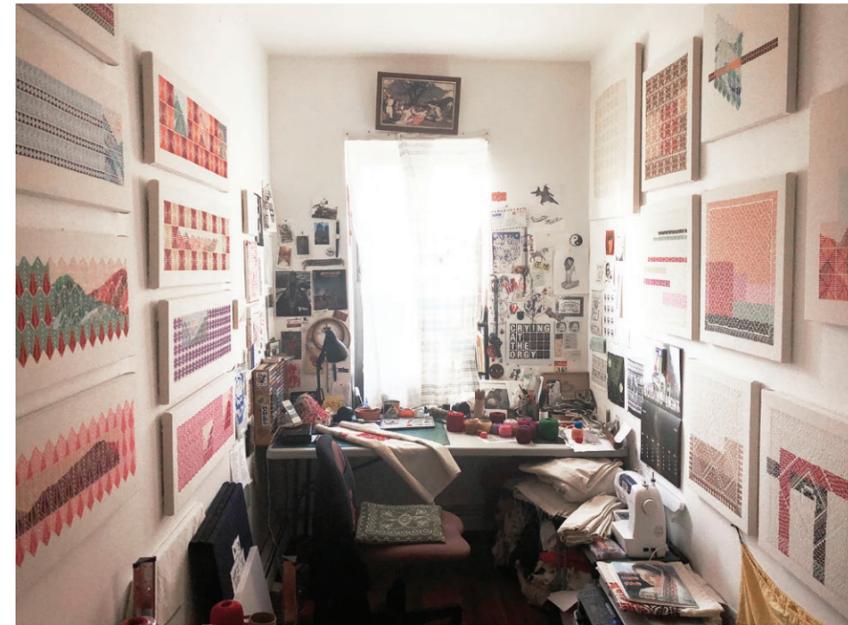
BEHIND THE SEAMS WITH JORDAN NASSAR

Stitching together Palestinian embroidery with Modernist landscapes, Jordan Nassar presented new collaborative pieces for his first exhibition in Dubai entitled *For Your Eyes* (ran until 28 February) at The Third Line. By disrupting traditional craft with imaginary motifs, Nassar articulates his relationship to inherited memory in conceptual and formal experiments.



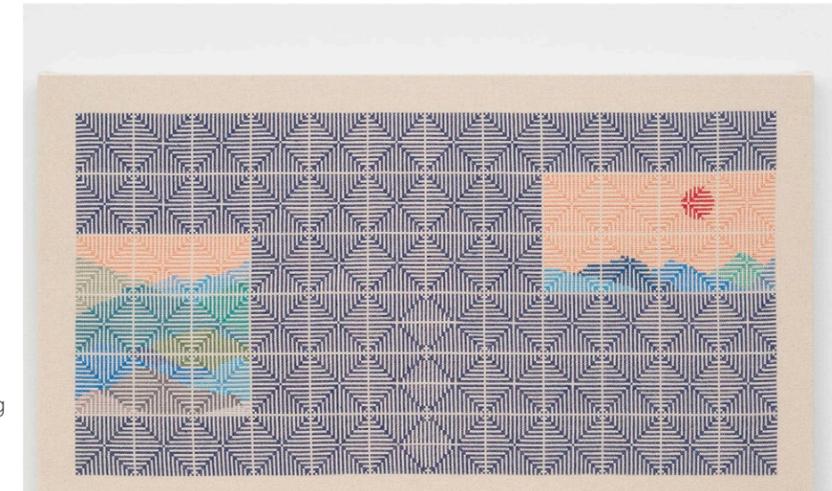
"Palestinians who have not been to Palestine have these ideas about it that are full of poetry, imagination and stories from your grandparents. I've started to love the idea of thinking about these landscapes as Palestine, not as it is, but as it exists in the imaginations of diaspora Palestinians around the world that can't go there. I was raised hearing my father's ideas about it, which are already filled with his own imagination. So I'm receiving a version of it that is half made up by him, and half informed by the stories his parents told him. It's interesting to trace the lineage of imagination. In my family, I'm the only one among my brothers who really goes to Palestine. In a way, I've kind of 'corrected' these imaginary visions of it."

"For this body of work, it's the first time that I have made collaborative pieces with women in the West Bank who do this embroidery not as art, but as a living cultural practice passed down through generations. I love the effect of having the traditional patterning interrupted by a landscape. For me, it has to do with my trying to connect and realising my own kind of Palestinian identity – a Palestinian from New York. I'm executing the traditional patterns, but I'm also doing it 'wrong'. It's exciting to see them on one canvas."



"Before getting into Etel Adnan, my work was very minimal and conceptual. Then I became so inspired by her landscapes that I decided to experiment and challenge myself technically, to make a shape out from the colour on the grid. After that, the flood gates opened. I started making art from a different place. I started painting using embroidery, and now I think of those minimal works as technical training – getting good enough at the embroidery and getting familiar enough with the patterns so that now I can freestyle with them. I do sketch and plan a composition, but it all changes. I'll work with it as a painting, where I look at it and look at the composition and colours as I go. And all of that is coming from the emotional place of letting it go and not trying to hide, to conceal the fact that I don't really speak Arabic perfectly. Just letting it be what it is, and understanding that I am Palestinian. It's just not your usual type of Palestinian. I hope people see that honesty in the work – because they're very much who I am."

"What was most moving for me about Etel Adnan was her prose. I learned more about her biography and realized we had a lot in common in terms of our internal struggles, though she's in the context of Lebanon and the Civil War. She considers herself as being in 'self-imposed exile' because of it, and grew up at a time when the Lebanese middle class mostly spoke French, so she never became fluent in Arabic. She felt that she wasn't Arab enough because she didn't speak the language. And I grew up the same way, where I can read and write Arabic, but I'm not fluent. It was something I was very self-conscious about, and I would kind of hide, even with the Arabic music that I grew up listening to. I felt embarrassed when someone heard me listening to it – as if they'd think I'm not really Arab, I'm American. So seeing how Etel Adnan approached those very same issues, where we stuck her finger in the wound and made work about it; it inspired me to stop hiding."

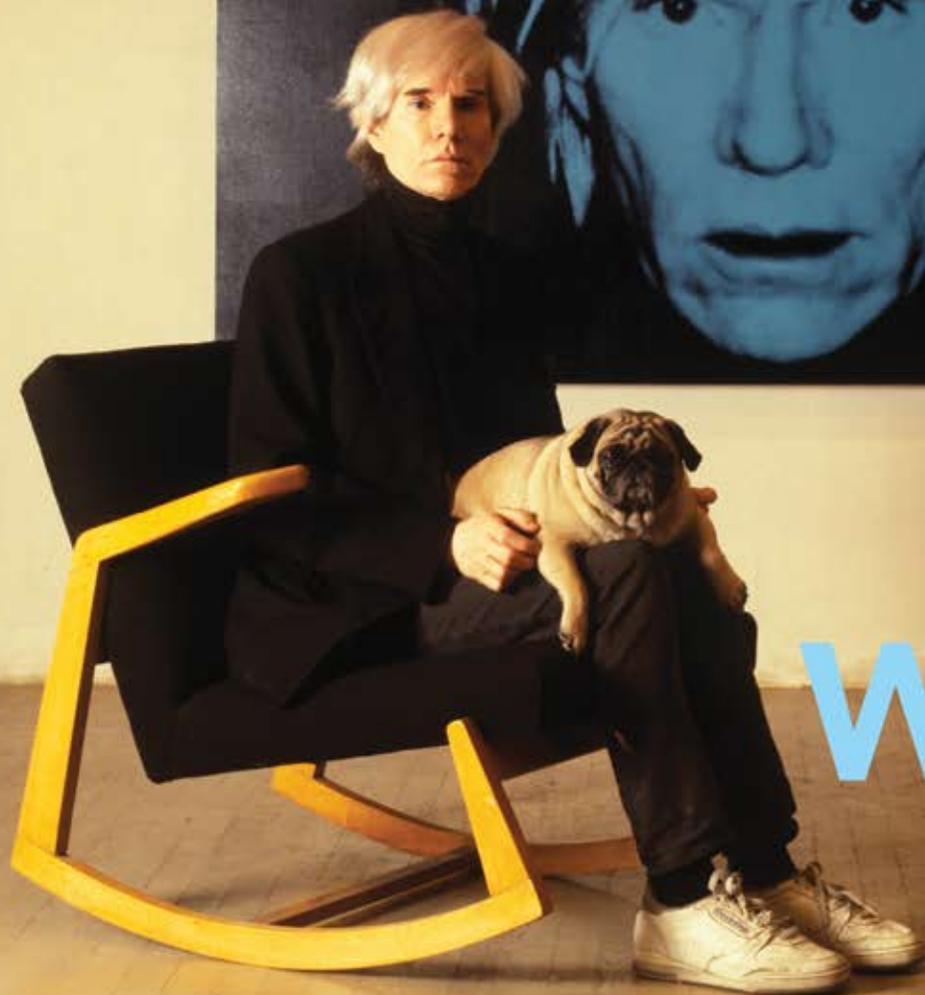


Interview by
Alexandra Chaves.
Studio images
courtesy of the artist
and The Third Line,
Dubai. Stills from
Canvas' interview
with Nassar in
February 2019.
Find the full video
on [YouTube.com/
CanvasInsider](https://www.youtube.com/CanvasInsider)



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