

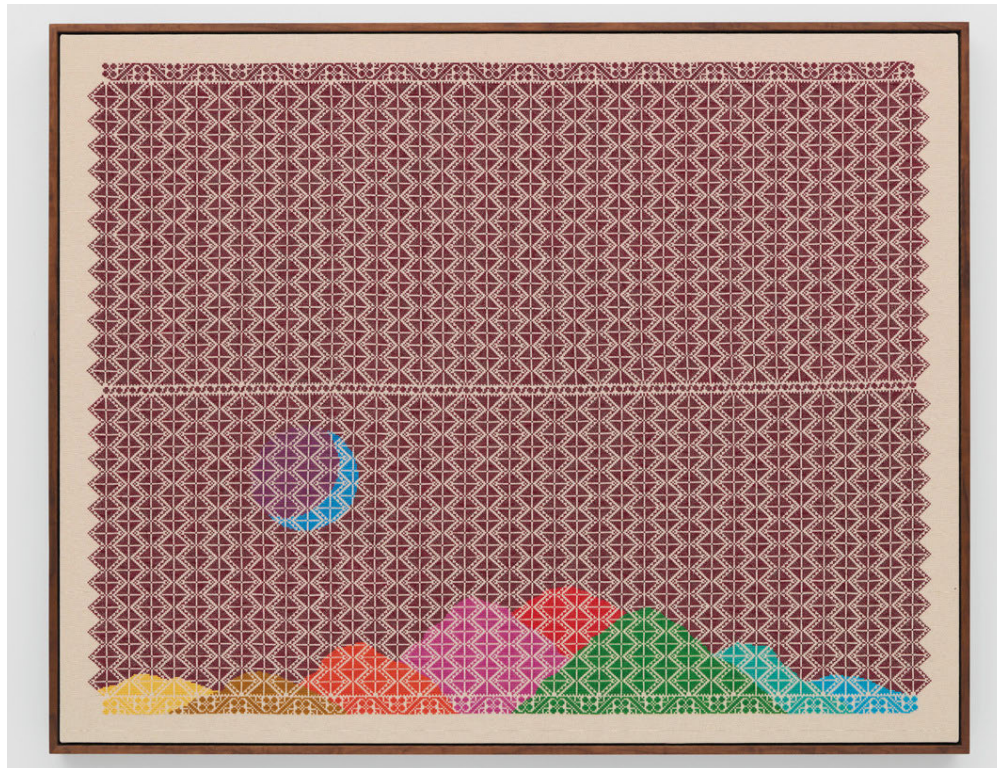
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# ARTFORUM

Critic's Pick: Jordan Nassar at Anat Ebgi

Written by Suzanne Hudson

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Jordan Nassar, *O Moon!*, 2022, cotton thread on cotton, artist frame, 43 × 54 1/2".

For his Los Angeles debut at Anat Ebgi in 2017, Jordan Nassar presented a selection of small cotton-on-canvas panels featuring silhouetted embroidered images of swelling, often mountainous terrain. Each thread painting offered a complex and surprisingly tender evocation of a landscape receding into pictorial space, seemingly predicated on a structuring of distance: These environments were simultaneously close but inaccessible, formal yet geopolitical. Much of this effect stemmed from Nassar's use of Palestinian *tatreez* embroidery, a form of traditional hand stitching used by women to decorate pillows and garments. This craftwork has, since the Nakba in 1948, emerged as a symbol of deterritorialization, manifesting literal patterns of history alongside stories of origin and forced migration. (Nassar has collaborated with West Bank embroiderers on his art for several years now.) "A Sun to Come," Nassar's third solo show at the gallery, continued his engagement with this technique via increased scale. The artist also introduced a new, related suite made from wood that suggests a coherent widening of material convention and reference.

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The landscape pictures, the threads comprising them so evidently pulled and crossed, highlighted the labor and tactility of hand stitching. Nassar here did all of the needlework, mediating the landscapes with intricately patterned screens composed of fleurettes and symmetrical geometries. Seen at close range, the threads appeared to vibrate against the fabric ground, emphasizing the grid, a regulating support. In many of these works, fields of monochromatic color—which often represented vast skies—evoked the optical diffusion of pixilation or registered something like the epiphenomena of a solar afterimage. Indeed, the abstract designs flickered in and out of primacy, materially imbricated within passages that contoured low, sloping hills—all of which were portrayed with a more or less uniform type of stitching. *O Moon!* (all works 2022) cuts a saturated field of pomegranate with a slender turquoise crescent coming into view against a violet orb; this blue-green sliver interrupts the tonal uniformity between the picture's violet and pomegranate elements. As does *A Sun Rolling on the Sky*, where two evergreen slopes cradle what is either a rising or a setting sun, the work imagines the time of the image as something contingent—on light and season, on sensation and memory—necessarily stilled but paradoxically burgeoning.

It is hard not to relate this nostalgic and temporal dimension to Nassar's statements, including one given in the press materials for this show, where he refers to the works on view as "versions of Palestine as they exist in the mind of the diaspora, who have never been there and can never go there. They are the Palestine I heard stories about growing up, half-made of imagination; they are dreamlands and utopias that are colorful and fantastical—beautiful and romantic, but bittersweet." He manifests these concerns anew in the aforementioned wood landscapes, rimmed with concentric sections of hand-hammered brass and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The five examples collectively titled *Third Family* are pieced together from many kinds of wood (e.g., Alaskan yellow cedar, black walnut, and purpleheart), their differently spaced and organized grains introducing ridges and would-be strata from within the tessellations. The attention to construction and what each material might yield extends from Nassar's recent incorporation of metalwork and furniture. Comprised of hard-edged shapes—triangles, rectangles, pentagons, hexagons, and heptagons—the effect is one of iterating portals invoking the plays of illusionism within their frames. Each individual artwork, tightly assembled, is sanded smooth and hard. These objects are solid, rich, tangible, but what exists beyond them remains utterly elsewhere, apart.