
CULTURE

A RARE RIDE

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From the rails that at once historically divided and connected, an exhibition asks what the next tool to unite Arab communities will be.

Words by Cassidy Walters



An untitled work by Jordanian artist Anees Maani for 'We Have Woven the Motherlands with Nets of Iron.' (Lindsey Leger)

Samir Harb and Nicola Perugini explore how different powers used rail lines to draw borders in "Epiphany of Dispossession." Comic-style line drawings reminiscent of Joe Sacco display scenes of Palestinian refugees pushed out of specific communities, searching, fighting, and moving onward after the railway, which lies near the Green Line, established a "fake border for the Jews of Israel." Perhaps most prominent is a tall, tent-like skeletal structure from Jordanian artist Anees Maani that, set in a field next to the station house, wraps discarded steel rails with a netting that evokes a giant hornet's nest. In its space, littered with yet more cast aside railway tracks, the construction appears strong and permanent and required six people to lift each piece, according to Maani. Left untitled, its meaning is purposefully unclear. The exhibition intends to ask viewers how we can navigate man-made borders to reach regional transcendence, yet itself provides no obvious answer. But the question seems especially pertinent after Syria's closure of the Ramtha crossing that, now, suddenly separates families who once easily crossed the border. To Touq, the train is not only a tool of transportation, but of communication and connection. Curators hope the ride and the ensuing exhibition will encourage viewers to take a larger role in their future. "Maybe endings can be different than what we've been taught and what we've always imagined," says Touq.

The exhibition We Have Woven the Motherlands with Nets of Iron runs through June 6 at Giza Station near Queen Alia International Airport. On June 4, a train will depart for the exhibition at 3pm from Amman Station.

**An earlier version of this article implied that Toleen Touq worked for Makan, however she collaborates with Makan on projects only.*

AS THE TRAIN ROLLED through the streets of Amman, fathers held their daughters to kitchen windows, boys with kites ran alongside the tracks, and even goats stared at the unusual sight. In early May, Amman's only passenger train shuttled families and art enthusiasts between Amman and Giza stations as part of the exhibition *We Have Woven the Motherlands with Nets of Iron* by the organization Apexart. Curated by Toleen Touq and Eric Gottesman, it features work by seven artists and three contributors who trace the Hejaz Railway's history and examine the confluence of identity across Middle Eastern borders. The train, a free means to access the exhibition's opening, transforms into a critical element of the exhibition itself, with passengers on show as it snakes through Amman and into the countryside. It ran along tracks thick with grass, and although there were some 200 people aboard, the ride was an unusual opportunity only to be repeated for the show's final events. The journey even overshadows the exhibition—modest after the two-hour trip—where work ranges from textile to photography, focusing on re-imagining the past, creating something new out of the old, and examining how borders, including the railway, affect identity. Syrian poet Ayham Agha examines myths and stories we take as truth and imagines new endings for them in "Longing," (delivered at the exhibition's opening from atop a boxcar) which poses questions like, "What if God walks on the sidewalks of Damascus?" Turkish artist Aslı Çavusoglu, in a series of images titled "The Demolition of the Russian Monument at Ayestefanos" recreates a monument's destruction that changed collective memory with its metamorphosis. And