

Art Palestine International

Art Palestine International is a New York-based cultural organization dedicated to Palestinian contemporary art. We collaborate with museums, galleries, and non-profits to produce art exhibitions, events, and publications.

This blog is a research tool that allows us to chart our research and invite others along on the journey.



[Content RSS](#)

Jun 12, 2009

[**Khalil Rabah, Palestine c/o Venice Artist Spotlight**](#)



For the next several days, we will be running profiles of past projects by artists featured in the [Palestine c/o Venice Pavilion](#). – ed.

For his extensive ‘[Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind](#)’, artist Khalil Rabah has created a fictional nomadic museum that collects and classifies the natural environment of Palestine. He describes it as follows:

The Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind was established in 1936 to inspire wonder, discovery and creations, which provoke curiosity and deepen understanding of our natural and cultural world.

Adopting the display methodology of a Western museum, Rabah displays fossils, bones, plant life, rocks, and other specimens in flat files and vitrines for exhibition. Each artifact not only narrates its specific anthropological history, but also its history in relation to colonialism and man’s domination over the natural world.



The Palestinian Museum of Natural History has shown at a wide range of venues worldwide: at the [Brunei Gallery at London's SOAS in 2007](#); at [De Appel in Amsterdam](#) in 2006; the 2005 Istanbul Biennial. For each of these iterations, Rabah embraced a new topic and a new set of concerns. In Amsterdam, he investigated the natural history of the tulip, tracing its origins back to Palestine. In Istanbul, he presented a series of man-made and natural specimens (pictured below) that appeared to be “authentic.”



Each of the objects, from meteorites to lumps of coal, were actually fabricated by Rabah from olive trees. By playing fast and loose with reality, Rabah shows us how an authoritative, colonial voice – that of the museum – can confer authenticity, revise history and even change olive wood into a meteorite, treating the world as specimen.

Rabah's work is included in this year's Venice Biennial, [Palestine c/o Venice](#), with fellow artists Taysir Batniji, Shadi Habib Allah, Sandi Hila (with Alessandro Petti), Emily Jacir and Jawad Al Malhi. His multi-

media installation, performance, and video work “explores the epistemology of the biennales suggesting new strategies for these international events unrestricted by space or time.”

Top: Installation view, Brunei gallery, London

Middle: Installation view, the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens

Bottom: Installation view, Istanbul Biennale

◀ [Elia Suleiman at Cannes](#) [Jawad al Malhi, Palestine c/o Venice Artist Spotlight](#) ▶

Grid Focus by Derek Punsalan [5thirtyone.com](#).