

# An archive of belonging

## VISUAL ARTS

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Home is often imagined as a place: a house, a street, a city marked on a map. For those living in exile, however, home becomes something far more elusive. It survives in memory, in ritual, in longing, and in the smallest gestures that connect a person to a place they can no longer reach.

Emily Jacir's *Where We Come From* (on view at Experimenter, Hindustan Road) is a profound meditation on this condition of displacement. First created between 2001 and 2003, the project began with a deceptively simple question posed by Jacir to Palestinians scattered across the world: "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" Holding an American passport at the time, Jacir could move through places that many Palestinians could not enter. The responses she received and their photographic documentation form the heart of the exhibition. Some requests are modest: eating a favourite meal, watering a tree, visiting a family home. Others are deeply intimate: hugging a mother, placing flowers on a grave (picture, left), praying in a church or a mosque. The photographs are accompanied by text identifying the requesters and the restrictions that prevented them from carrying out these acts themselves.

The photographs are striking in their restraint and mundaneness. These are not technically or even visually perfect. There are no dramatic scenes of conflict that have now come to be associated with Palestine. Instead, viewers encounter beaches, homes, family members, harvests, cemeteries and streets. Yet every image carries the weight of absence. A photograph



of a grave is also a photograph of a son denied the right to mourn. A meal becomes evidence of separation. A family gathering becomes a reminder of those who are missing. The everyday acquires extraordinary emotional force because it represents experiences that have been transformed into privileges.

Jacir becomes a temporary vessel for people whose bodies have been excluded from the places that shaped them. Each fulfilled request highlights an irreparable gap between presence and substitution. A photograph can document a visit, but it cannot replace the person who wished to make it. The project derives its power from this tension. It reveals both the possibility and the inadequacy of representation. More than two decades after its creation, *Where We Come From* feels both historical and urgently contemporary. It documents a landscape that has become even more inaccessible, while preserving memories that resist erasure. Jacir transforms personal longing into a collective archive of belonging. Her work



suggests that home is neither territory nor nostalgia alone. It is a network of relationships, memories and gestures carried across borders and generations. In giving form to these fragments of attachment, *Where We Come From* becomes a moving testament to the endurance of home in the imagination of the exiled.

Muzammil Hussain's paintings — part of the show, *Fauve Fables*, at the Ganges Art Gallery — draw on the expressive possibilities of Fauvism, particularly the chromatic intensity and emotional use of colour (picture, right). Saturated hues, flattened pictorial space and bold contouring structure compositions in which animals assume anthropomorphic identities, occupying scenes that oscillate between the everyday and the surreal. Hussain employs visual displacement and allegorical imagery, such as a cat wearing a Palestinian kufiya beneath hovering drones, to create layered narratives that invite multiple interpretations.