

Stone Stills Johny Andonia

Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art
Al-Jawalida Street, New Gate, Old City, Jerusalem

By Rana Anani

Johny Andonia's *Stone Stills* liberates stones from their physical functionality as construction material by emphasizing their aesthetic qualities. He is particularly interested in flawed stones left aside, rejects in the small stone-carving workshops. Out of these leftovers, he creates temporary structures, rather intimate compositions that elevate these discarded stones to the status of "still life" objects in his paintings.

Natural lines negotiate their ways through unique contours, tones, and textures, with shades of grey, pink, yellow, and transparent white. The stones pose in the paintings with their cracks and fractures reflecting imperfection but also boasting the magical beauty of Palestinian geology. The strong sense of calmness and purity reflected in the paintings contradicts the stones' own reality as representations of a fading traditional craft.

Andonia's passion for stones came about as a result of spending a significant part of his childhood in and around small stone-carving workshops in Bethlehem that belonged to his mother's family, a craft that is slowly disappearing along with its old-fashioned tools that are no longer suitable for a fast-paced age of commercialization. In a sense, painting cracked and broken stones with distinct bends and curves becomes a sort of documentation of the ways stone is cut and curved, and of a waning traditional craft.

In his first paintings in the series, the shadows, the background, and the shelf appear in a clear manner. Yet as he progresses into the project, the settings gradually



disappear, leaving the stone structures seemingly suspended in the void. Standing coldly on the shelf or hanging in midair in a heavy act of retreat, the stones in Andonia's paintings look somewhat like gravestones waiting for a burial to occur. Their stillness suggests a testimony to the disappearance of a small craft in the face of atomization and industrial advancement hastening a future without restraints. Quarries eating big chunks of the Palestinian mountains have become more of an

ordinary scene around Bethlehem, where Andonia comes from, and elsewhere in Palestine. Another act of destruction that is faced with a state of silence and numbness.

Stone Stills is an invitation not only to appreciate the aesthetics of stones beyond their normal functionality but also to contemplate the state of stones and their masons who are transformed into still and silent spectators of events.

