

Ibrahim Abumsmar

(Khamis, Saudia Arabia, 1976)

Using cutting blades of the type commonly available for sale, Ibrahim Abumsmar created *Cutting Edge* in 2012. Arranged one next to another, with the diagonal cutting edge turned upward, the blades are driven into a base about one meter high, with the result that the piece as a whole asserts itself in the space as a threatening, potentially lethal presence. The artist has stated that the work is a direct reference to the wall Israel has constructed in the West Bank, beginning in 2000. Also known as a “security fence,” a “barrier of Israeli separation,” and, for Palestinians, a “wall of racial separation,” the barrier is made of barricades, barbed-wire enclosures, electronic doors and reinforced-concrete walls, eight meters tall. It follows a winding path that partially coincides with the Green Line and in portions extends into the occupied Palestinian territories, for a length of almost 700 kilometers. The subject of serious controversy, the wall has been justified by Israel as a defense against violent terrorist attacks of Palestinian origin. Condemned by numerous international courts but still under construction, the wall, according to its opponents, prevents regular movements of entire communities, cutting off access to work, fields, health care, and water resources. The blades in *Cutting Edge* have the object’s characteristic hole near the top edge and revives the iconography of the cement blocks that make up the wall, just as the small drawings on it repeat, in miniature, some of the graffiti and paintings that sporadically alter the wall’s gray surface. One that is particularly recognizable is The black silhouette of a young girl raised up by balloons, stenciled by Abumsmar on a portion of the piece is for example a direct reference to a wall painting by the English artist Banksy who, between 2005 and 2007, painted various stretches of the wall on the Palestinian side. In Abumsmar’s work the number of blades he uses is also significant. There are sixty-five of them, a number that corresponds to the number of Palestinian villages that the wall currently isolates in drastic fashion and, from the artist’s viewpoint, alludes to their reduction to lands traversed by painful and invalidating amputations.

Pressing political and social issues are often central to Ibrahim Abumsmar’s work. The artist intentionally avails himself of recognizable objects pertaining to daily life. With minimal modifications, they become the material for works capable of speaking a clear and direct language that, moving beyond linguistic and cultural barriers, is intended to reveal the many contradictions and cruel realities of the contemporary world. (MB)