

Inner Cover

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All Portraits and paintings of the following artists

Soheil Salem, Mohammed Al Dabous, Salman Nawati, Dr. Shafiq Radwan, and Abdel Nasser Amer, Reham El Hadad, Naser Abu Daff.

Fayez El-Sersawi paintings Majed Shala.

All other art have been photographed by the artists themselves.

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Contents

My thoughts about Gaza

As I sat in a café of a small French town watching the yachts and boats docked nearby, the beachgoers walking down the paved road to the shore I remembered a space I left behind 1694 miles away. The same Mediterranean but a different time, space and soul. Where I was sitting was in sharp contrast with where I was a month ago: Gaza. The reality of Gaza is so very different than what I was experiencing right then and there. For the residents in Gaza space and time are restricted, even the vast sea bordering the length of the strip is confined. It is within this claustrophobia, closure and confinement where the men and women presented in this book create their art.

These artists are the modern day scribes, they document events and history, that affect them personally; and since they do not live in a vacuum, those of the 1.5 million other Palestinians who live in Gaza. Their art be it painting, videos or installations reflect history. This book's intention is to document those reflections and to make a collective scroll of stories of the incursion at the end of December 2008. They reflect the darkness, the aftermath, the waste and destruction paradoxically they also demonstrate humanity, support and hope.

This is merely a glimpse of some of their work, a small example in the chronology of their lives marked and interrupted by major events. We are introducing you to a pause in this journey of their personal and collective history through their art.

I have tried to include a range of ages as a means of illustrating the depth and the breadth of the contemporary art scene in Gaza. Life is not easy there. A couple of days after I arrived I woke up to the sound of distant bangs. The Israeli military had carried out air strikes 4 of them near Khan Younis, in retaliation for the death of two Israeli soldiers. Electricity went out quite often during the evenings, but not for long periods of time because the hotel would switch to generators, but not everyone has these luxuries. Some artists would lose electricity for hours or even a day. Damaged or half constructed buildings dot the landscape. Despite this there is resilience in their spirits which ultimately translates into hope of a better future.

Before embarking on my journey I began my research looking for sources, books and information about Palestinian art. I discovered only a handful of books in English addressing this subject. The most recent and comprehensive is Palestinian Art: from 1850 to the Present written by Kamal Boullata, an artist from Jerusalem living in the Diaspora. Ms. Asma al-Ghoul a journalist who writes about culture in Gaza was also instrumental in putting art in the context of the restrictions within the strip.

There are many foundations and international organizations scattered around Gaza. I was lucky to have visited several that focus on the youth. These organizations work on educating the children of the future, namely UNWRA, the Red Crescent Society and the Palestinian Music Institute. There are two other organizations that have been directly instrumental in the lives of many of the artists in the book. The Qattan Center for the Child; an environment that encourages youth see beauty and to express themselves in music, theater, painting in addition to a myriad of other activities. As you may recall the two youth in the book are students at the Center. The other influential centers are the YMCA and the French Cultural Center.

I would also like to acknowledge the influence of Syrian born artist Mr. Marwan Bachi Qassab who has a very special link to several of the artists. While I was in Gaza his works were on exhibition. He was also gracious enough to include his thoughts for this book. He mentored some of those artist as his students during workshops at the Darat Al-Funoun Academy in Jordan and has maintained his ties with them. I would also like to thank Setareh Sabety for her help in editing the text.

I want to express my gratitude to Roberto Valent, Dania Darwish at the UNDP/PAPP office in Jerusalem for giving me the opportunity to produce this book. Finally a thank you to my husband and daughter: Jafar and Soraya for supporting me in this project.

UNDP

WINDOWS FROM GAZA for contemporary art.

The window is a means to see the outside world and in many instances a conduit to glimpse inside a structure. Gaza may be isolated, cordoned off, but the eyes of an artist can see beyond the wall and border through his vision and sensitivity which ends up as an image on paper, canvas, video screen or installation. This group's priority is to gather and nurture the glimpses from across the barriers and in return reflect the creative process that is born from the special circumstance of Gaza and send it back out to the world. Of the five members three of them Shala, Al Maqousi and Sarhan, profiled here, create and express their experiences from within and exchange them with the two other members who are in Europe: Hazem Harb, Shadi Al Zaqzouq and Mohammed Joha. It is a symbiotic relationship where each member nourishes the other and attempts to look and breathe through the minuscule windows that appear in the walls. These artists nurture the youth through various workshops and organize many exhibitions as a means of spreading the visions of Gaza beyond the confines of their center and their geography. The six artists have had many exhibitions abroad. They are now organizing video art festivals, where the internet can permeate through any wall.

Eltiqa

In the pages that follow you will be introduced to a group of artists who are members of Eltiqa. It was created in 2002 by Mohammad Al Hawajri, Abdel Nasr Amer, Raed Issa and Abdelraf Al Ajouri who wanted to assemble a forum for positive thought through art. Eltiqa means meeting in Arabic. It is a place where artists can come together to discuss and exchange ideas. Its an attempt to free their minds, spirits and in turn their creativity from the realities of a the politics involving their homeland. Through dialogue they exchange ideas from their experiences inside Gaza and abroad (most of them have participated in international workshops and exhibitions). It is an effort to support and nurture each other with new ideas and visions. Through their art they overcome the obstacles and the negativity-- not only for themselves but for all Gazans. Their's is not just a mission to help artists but one to restore hope to Gaza. They organize workshops and exhibitions establishing yet another forum for creativity and culture, a place to escape or rather to surmount the harsh realities of life in Gaza.

Abdel Nasser Amer

Date of Birth: 17 November 1970
Place of Birth: Khan Younis



“As a refugee living in a war-torn land, I seek to foster peace and understanding through my art,” claims Abdel Nasser Amer and that is exactly what he does. Even though he is unable to leave Gaza he still keeps hoping. The main theme of his art revolves around women and children. As a father he understands their condition. He has a series of mixed media works. He collected papers, torn bags, cardboard and other bits of life from destroyed homes and placed them to his canvas. In creating these works he attempts to preserve the memory of the many lives that were disrupted by the war. His choice of using random items owes to his belief that everything was marked by the incursion.

The theme of women is prevalent in a series of abstract paintings where he creates an imprint. Despite the damage caused by war the memory of the role of woman as the propagator and protector of the next generation remains in the bits and pieces that survive.

Although he has had no formal art education Nasser is an important figure in the Palestinian art scene. He founded the Red Crescent Arts Studio in Gaza. He is also involved in nurturing the future generation by organizing workshops to train young artists and promoting them in various exhibitions. His works have been displayed in the region and internationally in Egypt, France and the United States.



Untitled, Acrylic on Paper, 30 X 30



Untitled, Acrylic on Paper, 30 X 30

Abed El Raouf Al Ajouri



Date of Birth: 29 May 1977
Place of Birth: Jabaliya Camp

When the Red Crescent building was bombed the works of art belonging to some local artists that were housed in the studio, were destroyed. They included everything that Abed El Raouf Al Ajouri had created between 2002 and 2007. He also lost some paintings when his home was damaged. After calm returned to Gaza he and several artists, some of whom are featured in this book, organized an exhibition sponsored by the French Cultural Center in the ruins of the studio. The exhibit put on display the tattered remnants of their works.

This series was painted during the war. During the bombings his frightened children huddled together seeking security in each other's arms. Their screams were drowned by the sounds of war.

The scene of masses standing in line for aid was another common feature of life in Gaza during those days. People had to stand in line for hours to receive basic provisions from international organizations that were distributing aid. The triptych illustrates how people's spirits were broken by feelings of hopelessness while waiting for the bare necessities of life that are elsewhere taken for granted.



Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas 90 X 270

Al Ajouri graduated from the Al-Aqsa University in Gaza in 2006. He attended a number of workshops. His works have been exhibited in a number of solo and group shows.



Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas 90 X 180

Ayman Issa

Date of Birth: 23, May, 1974
Place of Birth: Gaza



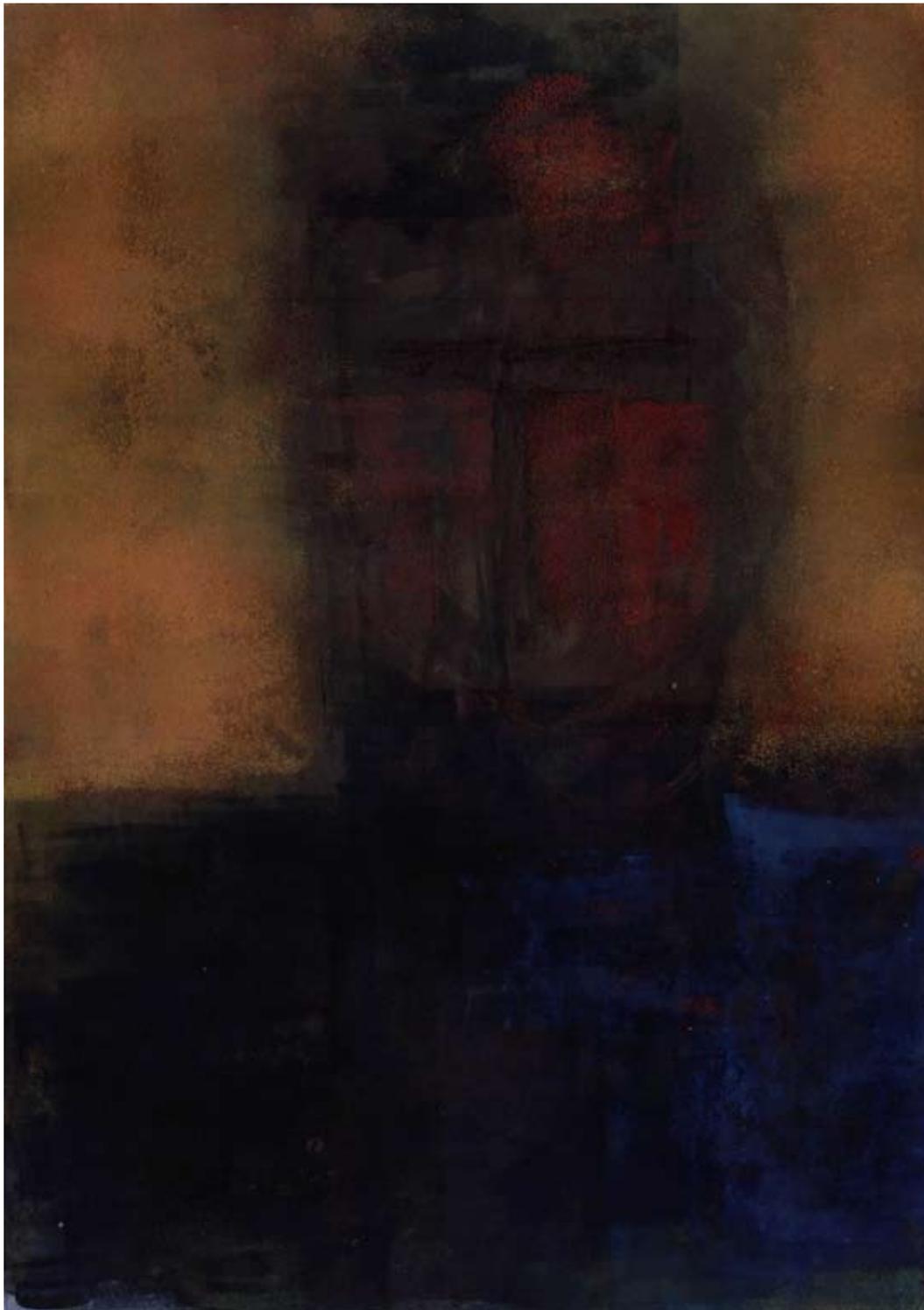
Ayman Issa was in Cairo at the university working on his Masters of Fine Arts when the bombing began. His wife and children were in Gaza. He spent his time in front of the television watching the news and events unfold, worried for his family back home. Whenever his phone rang his heart sank, expecting the worst. After several attempts he managed to return home on the last day before the ceasefire. He plans to complete his degree in the near future.

While in Egypt he felt guilty of not being with his family and found himself unable to paint. When he returned home Issa only took pictures of the damage. When he painted, he created darkness on canvas. It was an effort to restore normalcy but gradually he persevered his technique and creativity returned.

Issa graduated from the El Najah University with a degree in Fine Arts in 1999. He has participated in exhibitions in France, UK, Italy and the region.



Untitled, Oil Paint and Pastel on Canvas 70 X 100



Untitled, Ink and Acrylic on Paper 50 X 35

Basel s. Al-Maqousi



Date of Birth: 29 June 1971
Place of Birth: Gaza City

Basel Al-Maqousi uses everything he can lay his hands on to make art. When the incursion ended he returned to his home which had been destroyed. He saw a dove perched outside the door of his damaged house. Was the dove a sign of a brighter future? Did the dove represent the future of Gaza and Palestinians?

Most of his work was destroyed in the bombings with the exception of a couple of canvases that were protected by an overturned mattress. One of his damaged paintings of a landscape has been patched up with a large gauze bandage and is hanging on the wall of an office in Gaza. His wife, mother and sister were reportedly capture by Israeli soldiers and imprisoned for four days. During those difficult days he worked and involved his children in the process to keep them busy. In his recent works he stresses the element of solidarity and support that has blossomed in Gaza. His works comprise of scenes like that of family, neighbors and strangers gathered together to share a meal while the planes drone above. He uses the brush and the camera to express his inner thoughts and feelings.



War images, Acrylic on Paper 100 X 70

Al Maqousi completed his degree in fine arts at the Gaza City YMCA in 1995. He teaches art at the Jabaliya Rehabilitation Center in Gaza. He was given the bronze prize by the Union of Arab photographers in Germany for Best Photo. He has participated in many local and international exhibitions.



War images, Acrylic on Paper 100 X 70

Dina Mohamed Mahmoud Matar



Date of Birth: 13, April, 1985
Place of Birth: Gaza

At first glance Dina Matar's paintings are a collection of fun geometric shapes, a collection of bright colored designs. But take a closer look and the hidden images of her works will slowly unravel. Upon inspection the forms start morphing into reality. A helicopter emerges from the shapes or an airplane. Most of her recent works are a parody of war. A tragic event is transformed into an image that is not usually associated with war. This is Matar's way of expressing the strength of the people of Gaza, her way of showing how a people's dignity and humanity is not weakened but nourished by adversity.



Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas 90 X 90

Matar was pregnant during the incursion while her husband Mohammad Al Hawajri was in France unable to return. When her baby was born, healthy and robust, she took that as a symbol of hope for the future.

Dina Matar graduated from the Al Aqsa University in Gaza in 2007. Despite her youth she has participated in a large number of exhibitions and has acted, like many other artists in this book, as mentor to the youth. Matar has also collaborated on several projects with European artists.



Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas 90 X 65

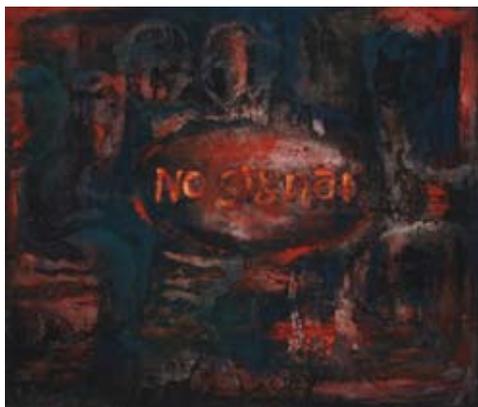
Fayez El-Sersawi

Date of Birth: 24 June 1961
Place of Birth: Gaza



The offensive began on a beautiful sunny day. While Fayez El-Sersawi was thinking about his next series of work he heard a blast. His first thoughts were about how to organize his family's safety. As the days progressed he felt a need to grasp the meaning of the situation. He spent every moment he could at the studio. He needed to reconcile these events with his reality. He let his feelings move the paint brush on the canvas and it just flowed, like it had a life of its own.

The day after the withdrawal he took his sons to look at the aftermath. The Red Crescent building where his sons used to take music lessons was in ruins only a twisted metal remained with chunks of cement. He calmed his son's concern about the location of their lessons promising that he would find them another place to practice their music. The music teacher vowed to rebuild the center which was done in a short three months! The idea of organizing an art exhibition came to El-Sersawi when he was standing in front of the ruins of the Red Crescent building. He decided to call it: **The Birth of a City.**



Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas 60 X 50

On opening day five hundred people showed up in solidarity not only with the artists but with the idea of reclaiming hope. Many of El-Sersawi's works were somber and dark but later he felt that he needed to reverse that trend because he refused to embrace a negative fate.

El-Sersawi has been a mentor and teacher to most of the artist in this book. He ran the classes at the YMCA Art Programme. He now wants to promote a positive vision for the future and to use art of Gaza artists as a conduit for the message of hope. "We cannot change reality or the result of the devastation but we have to restart, to rebuild, first from inside to work on the soul!"



Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas 60 X 100

Iyad Ramadan Sabbah

Date of Birth: 20 January 1973
Place of Birth: Gaza



Iyad Sabbah's recent works address the human qualities of empathy and camaraderie. The war brought people together and mobilized them to help one another. The hardships far from destroying the people's humanity- enhanced it. A father of five, Sabbah was teaching when the shelling started. He remembers everyone panicking, worrying about loved ones and trying to escape to safety. His neighbor's house was razed to the ground. He and his family escaped physically unscathed but rendered mentally fragile.

The reds in his painting represent rage like a burning fire. In his installation he equates buildings with humans. Partially damaged figures are built with cement: the main material used in building construction. Its symbolism is easily understandable.

Sabbah teaches in the Fine Arts Department at Al-Aqsa University. He is a member of the Fine Artists Association and the General Union of Artists. He received his training in Egypt and in Libya where he graduated from the department of Fine Arts at Al Fateh University. His works have been exhibited in the region and in France in 2007 as part of a group exhibition called Artists from Gaza and in the region.



Fire behind the wall, mixed media, 46 X 63, 2009



Untitled, Installation, 100 X 50

Maha Mostafa El Daya

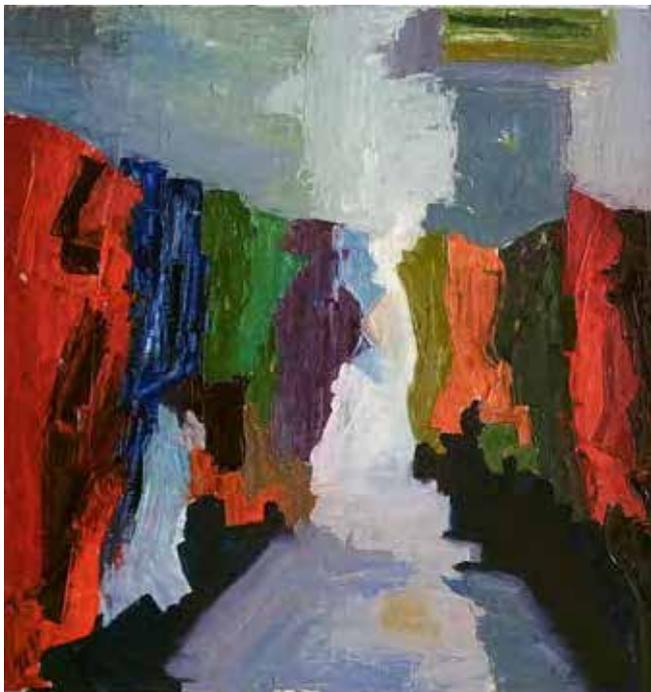


Date of Birth: 17, February, 1976
Place of Birth: Gaza

When Maha El Daya realized that the incursion would take longer than expected, she took her children to live with a relative. Her husband, Ayman Issa, who is also featured in this book was in Egypt and contacted her whenever he could. During that time there was almost no electricity and El Daya's main concern was her children's safety.

For a while after the withdrawal she could not pick up a paint brush because she was too depressed. It took a few months before she emerged out of her despair and began to paint again. For her, painting was a way of affirming the fact that life would go on regardless of setbacks.

She worked on embroidered images, a traditional craft in Gaza. In this way her art reflected the longevity and resilience of Palestinian people and culture. The abstract painting is of laundry hanging out to dry. It is in essence a symbol of believing there is a tomorrow and a return to normalcy. People wash their clothes; clean the dirt with the intention of wearing them in the future.



Untitled, Oil Paint on Canvas 40 X 40



Untitled, Mixed Media 100 X 100

Majdal Nateel

Date of Birth: 11 April 1978
Place of Birth: Shati Refugee Camp, Gaza



Majdal Nateel's works are strewn with symbolism. She links her art to her home: Gaza and her people. As with many other Gaza artists she uses her art to shed the sense of tragedy that resulted from the incursion. She uses bright colors such as yellow in her new works. Now life and death, destruction and hope co-exist in her works. During the bombings she would put her brush to paper and let her emotions flow through it.

The portrait shown here is very personal. She painted it a few months after the incursion ended. It illustrates her continued reflection of what happened and she feels somewhat separated; almost like an observer in a dream, from what happened to the people in Gaza.

The hanging laundry is once again present, a belief that there will be a tomorrow, in shades of navy. A colour that replaced her earlier blacks. Throughout the incursion she just painted with black ink. She needed to let the emotions out, but with no set idea of what will appear on the paper.

Nateel graduated with a bachelor in Fine Arts from the Al Aqsa University in Gaza in 2009. Like many of her colleagues she donates her time teaching drama to children in the UNRWA schools in Gaza. She is also instructing children in the art of animation and drawing cartoon drawing. Nateel was one of the artists who participated in the drawing of the Human Rights Mural in Gaza. She has been selected to participate in a number of workshops and exhibitions including one at the French Cultural Center in Gaza.



Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas 100 X 70



Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas 100 X 70

Majed Shala

Date of Birth: 18 september 1960
Place of Birth: Gaza



“ I like to go to the sea because I breathe there” is what I will always remember from my meeting with Majed Shala.

At first glance Shala is reserved. Once one sees his works we are intrigued by his creativity and thought process. His creatively spans all medium from painting to video art.

He honors the victims of the incursion in this painting of blank faces. They represent those who perished, faces that could be anybody. In another series of paintings he speaks about the lack of space physically and emotionally. The melding faces, too many faces in one space. The pressure from outside on the residents of Gaza.

His talents are passed on to one of his sons, who recently has had a solo exhibition in Gaza called Children without Childhood. His sensitivity illustrated in his works reflects the situation at home Gaza. He is not only an artist but a mentor to the youth of Gaza. He received his Masters in Art from Scranton University in the United States. Shala's works have been on display in many local and international exhibitions in the Middle East, United States, Italy, Norway, South African Hungary and Brazil.



Too many faces / Seige, Acrylic on Canvas 80 X 64



Martyrs, Acrylic on Canvas 100 X 100

Maysaa El-Bardaweel



Date of Birth: 17 March 1986
Place of Birth: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia



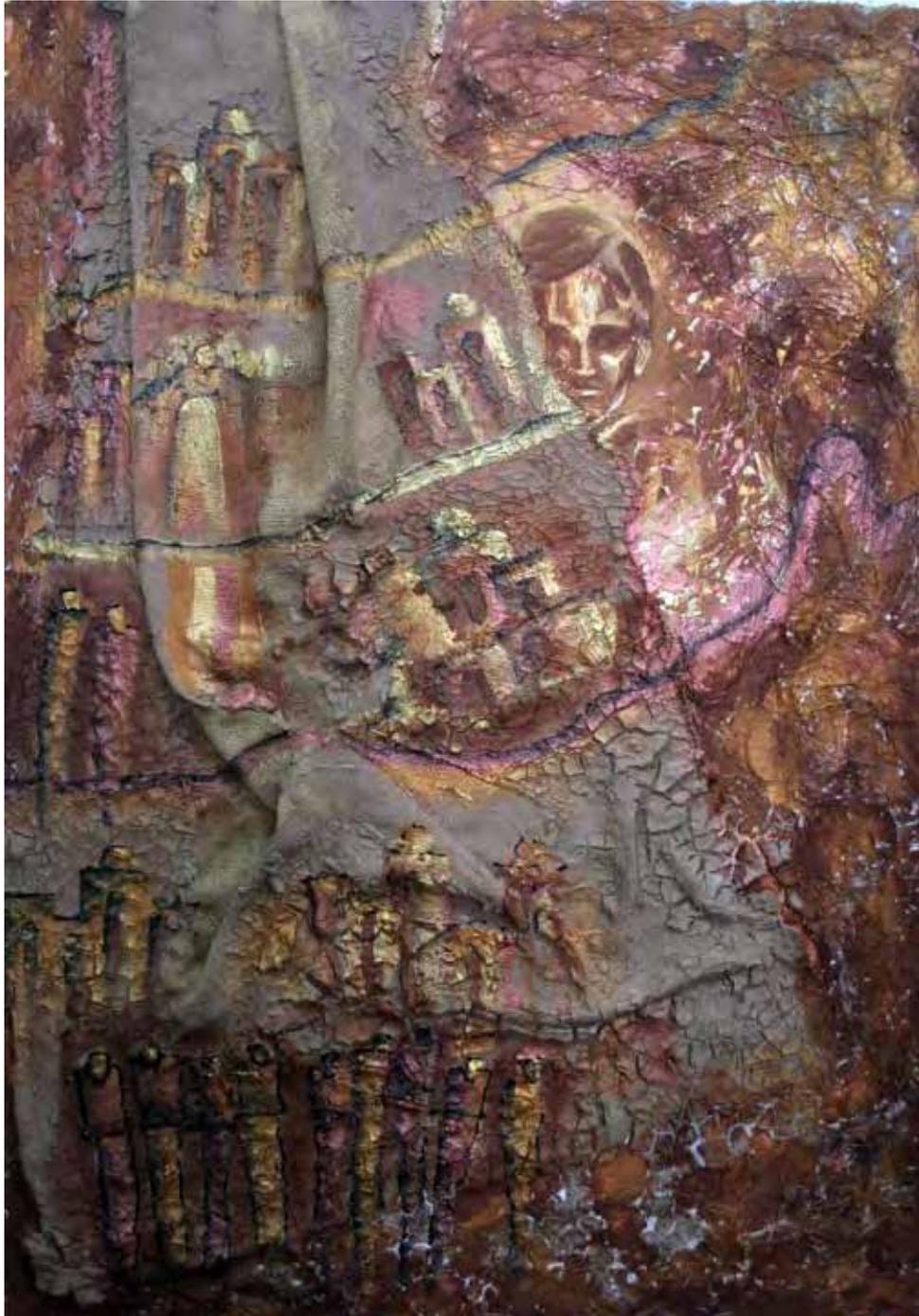
From the heart, Acrylic on Canvas 100 X 100

Maysaa El-Bardaweel is quiet and very unassuming until you see her art which exudes command. Her most recent exhibition is a testament to the quiet power of women in this traditional society. It is comprised of a series of installations created with barbed wire. The thorny wire symbolizes separation, the obstacle to movement, and the hardships of war.

El-Bardaweel sees that despite all that they have endured, Palestinians have dreams and hopes for a better future. In her work she expresses the optimism that endures through the perseverance of the people and the resilience of the local culture. In the painting of a protruding heart she attempts to show this positive angle. She stresses unity not "grief and politics."

The artist's thirst for expressing her feelings made her use mud, glue and bags of rice when art supplies were unavailable. She created the piece with anything she could lay hands on. Apart from materials she used that were abundant during the incursion, the colors, or lack of them in essence are a symbol of the darkness because of interrupted electricity in the homes and in the heart.

El-Bardaweel graduated from the Al-Aqsa University with a BA in Fine Arts. She started showing her works at the young age of fourteen. Since then she has participated in a number of local exhibitions.



Untitled, different materials, need text

Mohamed A. El Halabi

Date of Birth: March 27 1983
Place of Birth: Tayef, Saudi Arabia



The recent works of Mohamed El Halabi are few but extremely powerful. He recently displayed two of his installations at an exhibition in Gaza. One of them is this figure illustrated here. It is made using, exclusively, cardboard strip and fishing lines. It is a contradiction within itself: between dreams and reality. It is a human body yet empty. The octopus symbolizes the bombs falling on Gaza highlighting the contradiction of spectacular explosions that are beautiful like fireworks but result in devastation.

El Halabi graduated with a BA in Fine Arts from Al-Aqsa University in Gaza in 2008. He had attended an UNWRA school and before that he was a student at the YMCA where he took art courses. Like many of his colleagues he works with children. He has taught at an UNWRA workshop for animation and drama and currently lectures at the Khan Younis College of Science and Technology in painting, interior design and theory. He has also taught drawing theory and design at the Al Quds University in Gaza.

He has displayed his works in various group and solo exhibitions both locally and internationally.



Untitled, different materials, need text



Untitled, Installation

Mohamed Abusal

Date of Birth: 5 October 1976
Place of Birth: Al-Bureij Camp, Gaza



Mohamed Abusal works and lives in Gaza. He is not only a professional artist but also a teacher who donates his time by giving art lessons to children; the new generation of Palestinian artists. He has recently created a number of works focusing on 'light'. These pieces reflect the ways that he and thousands like him used to cope during the incursion, more than a year ago, where electricity was cut off and rarely available. The pieces reflect the attempts to bring light to darkness. Many of his works come in series; an earlier group explores the themes of separation and exile, while another focuses on a Palestinian symbol of resoluteness: the cactus.

Abusal is currently organizing a website called, "Palestinian Art." He has been compiling information and works of artists as a way to promote Palestinian Art through the internet.

He is another artist with no formal art training in university. He graduated with an accounting degree from the Islamic University in Gaza in 1999 but did go on to take various art courses and was even nominated to attend workshops for artists.

His works have been exhibited locally and internationally in France, UK, UAE and USA.



Lamp, Acrylic on Canvas 35 X 35



Lamp, Acrylic on Canvas 35 X 35

Mohamed Harb

Date of Birth: 12 January 1979
Place of Birth: Gaza



In a series of portraits, that look more like sketches, of Palestinian women Mohamed Harb expresses his thoughts and feelings about the war. He sees woman as the embodiment of life, a symbol of the future and the fertile land. Women as protectors of children and the guardians of the future have a special place in the eyes of this artist. His portraits depict women in a distorted yet potent manner reflecting the anguish that they endured and the hope that they convey as resilient matrons who guide and nurture the next generation.

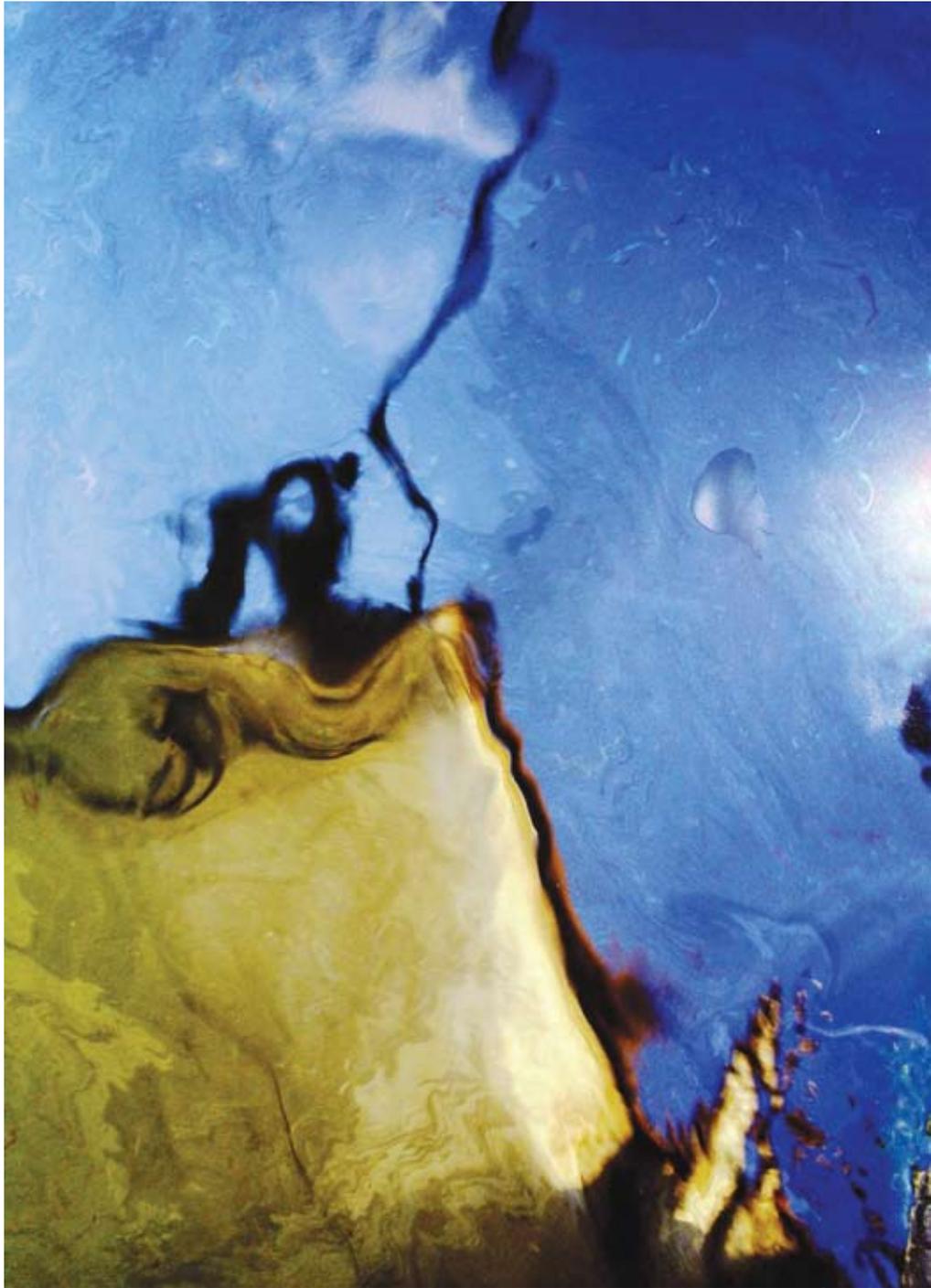


Bodies and Configuration, 50 X 70

Harb also worked on another series of photographs of the sea, depicting the waste left behind when the Israeli army withdrew. In these he manipulates the water by adding pigments and shooting through a filter recreating the surreal ambiance of Gaza during the incursion where incredible colors spelled much destruction. It is also a reflection of the life of the residents in Gaza, a kaleidoscope of events that bend the reality.

Harb studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Al-Najah University in Nablus. He began his career as an artist as a teenager thanks to workshops organized by the UNDP and other organizations. His creativity blossomed after attending art classes at the YMCA in Gaza where his vision and talents were honed and strengthened. Since then he was able to grow as an artist and express his thoughts and feelings in a more refined manner.

Harb has expanded into video art as well as photography exhibiting his works in the Middle East and Europe. He has been the recipient of several prestigious prizes in Germany.



Reflections – Gaza, Photograph

Mohammad Al-Hawajri

Date of Birth: 30 January 1976
Place of Birth: Al Bureij Refugee Camp



Mohammad Al-Hawajri was in Paris during the incursion, physically removed but mentally back in Gaza where he had left his pregnant wife, son, family and friends. It was impossible to return so he spent those weeks worrying and creating a large number of works on paper, illustrating the situation at home. He painted his baby protected by his mother's womb, surrounded by the calligraphy of the word: Palestine

Weeks later Al-Hawajri was able to return home, where he was reunited with his loved ones. His new works comprise a combination of photographs, installations and paintings. The cactus, symbolizing steadfastness, takes on a new meaning for Palestinians and grenades replace colorful flowers. Another series draws from animal fables: the strong eat the weak; our lives are like those of animals.

He is always experimenting. At one point he drew on bones of dead animals as a way of depicting death and separation. In another group of work he used spices as a medium for his creations. As an active personality in the art scene he not only creates works of art but also organizes artists' exhibitions and workshops at the Eltiqa.

Mohammad who essentially taught himself is one of the important young artists from Gaza. He was nominated to attend several workshops in Europe and the Middle East and his works have been displayed in a number of solo and group exhibitions locally and internationally.



Untitled, Ink on Paper, 80 X 80



Untitled, Acrylic on Paper 180 X 80

Mohammad Musallam



Date of Birth: 28 August 1974
Place of Birth: Gaza

For Mohammad Musallam art is a language of hope and freedom. On the canvas, with his brush or pen, unlike in the real world, he feels like he has control. He can give free reign to his heart and mind; mold his thoughts and emotions and turn them into creative expressions.

The hardships of the incursion have made Musallam focus his art on the theme of humanity and its paradoxes. He and his family were evacuated from their home during the incursion. They had to go live with relatives until calm was restored. When they returned home weeks later they found that their house had been raided, the rooms had been ransacked, and several of his beloved paintings had been cut with a knife.

His recent works in France, where he was on scholarship, are connected to life in Gaza and the incursion. There is no reason to explain the symbolisms in his works, because they are so very well represented as we can see from the two profiled here.

Musallam received his Masters of Arts in Painting from Helwan University in Cairo in 2006, after completing his Bachelors degree at the Al Najah University in Nablus. He just completed a scholarship with the Cite Des Arts in Paris. His works have been exhibited in France, Egypt and the region.



Mer Blocus, mixed media 27 X 40



Les Larmes Des Oiseaux, mixed media 54 X 65

Mohammed Al Dabous

Date of Birth: 7 December 1978
Place of Birth: Jabaliya, Gaza



Mohammed Al Dabous' paintings are very different from what they were before the incursion. His home and entire neighborhood were destroyed. Like other colleagues he was depressed during the incursion and found it difficult to express himself through art. Some of his new works are of damaged buildings and structures which represent not just the physical wreckage caused by incursion but also broken spirits. The cool colours are in direct contrast to the inferno of reds and oranges of his vision of what the physical and the spiritual looked like during the incursion.

Yet amidst all this debris and damage in his other works there is a sense of hope that one can also witness amongst other artists. This element of hope and the support that artist receive from one another and within the local community provides a solid ground from which art can sprout.

Al Dabous's childhood dream was to become an artist. He realized his dream when he graduated with honors from the College of Fine Arts and studied classic art at Helwan University in Egypt in 2002. In the past he also taught art classes at the Red Crescent Society in Gaza.

His works have been in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Gaza, the West Bank and France.



Untitled, 90 X 90



Untitled, 90 X 90

Mossab Jamal Abusal



Date of Birth: 21 February 1988
Place of Birth: Mecca, Saudi Arabia

Mossab Abusal's style went through a revolution after the incursion. Those weeks were a turning point in his evolution as an artist. For him the experience of those weeks transformed his sensibility and vision of lives. The form of his art changed from classical to the abstract. Now his still lifes are not static but dynamic, representing change and flux. He creates a series of each object. For example, he takes a chronological look at his favorite fruit, the tomato, recording its different phases. This represents the ever changing nature of human life which is constantly transformed by place and time. Living in Al-Bureij refugee camp he derives his inspiration from the fruit and vegetable markets.



Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas 50 X 50

Mossab is one of the younger artists in Gaza. He received his diploma from the Science and Technology College in Khan Younis. He has worked with children in several summer programs organized by UNWRA. He has participated in several exhibitions in Gaza and one in London.



Untitled, Photograph

Nabila Abd-El Hadi Toman



Date of Birth: 13 December 1972
Place of Birth: Tripoli, Libya



Moment of Fear, Acrylic on Paper 25 X 30

After the withdrawal, Nabila Toman's paintings deal, overwhelmingly, with the incursion. She addresses the strange paradox in the bombings: the explosions possessed an eerie grace yet they caused destruction.

Her sea is not painted in the calm blue that is normally associated with the Mediterranean but an inferno of pinks and oranges. It is a sea in the beautifully perverse colors of war a simple yet potent way of showing the fear that people felt at the time.

She has a number of other works painted during and after the incursion that address hope and support an idea prevalent in several works of other artists.

Nabila was born in Libya and completed her Bachelor of Art at the Al Fateh University in Tripoli. She moved to Gaza after she married Iyad Sabah, a fellow painter who also appears in this book.



Blaze from the sea, Pastel on Canvas 40 X 50

Nidal Mohammed Abo Oun



Date of Birth: 15 May 1971
Place of Birth: Jabaliya Camp

heard the explosion and immediately thought about my daughter in the kindergarten; frightened. I had to save her. She is my hope. She and all the young children are the future. They will stand strong like the olive tree and one day live without fear.

Nidal Abo Oun lost all his art work in the incursion. Nothing was left of his home. It took him some time to settle down both mentally and physically. He began this series after the war ended. The paintings (and they are only paintings, no wood parts) are a culmination of several dominant elements that ultimately merge into a symbol of the determination to obtain a bright future.

The wood from the olive tree, the color blue and women are the constant elements in his art. Women are symbols of hope for a better future by virtue of their roles as mothers and creators of the next generation. The olive tree is a symbol of perseverance because it is sturdy and difficult to uproot. The color blue is not only Abo Oun's favorite but it is also the color of the doors of the schools here in Gaza; behind which children feel safe. The symbols come together to convey strength, hope and faith in positive change.

Abo Oun's formal training as an artist came through two years of an art program at the YMCA here in Gaza. Despite this short formal training he has been one of the artists that have garnered international attention. His works have been exhibited locally and elsewhere in the Middle East. He is a member of the Union of Palestinian Artists. He also teaches art in workshops organized by the Palestinian Ministry of Culture.



Dream, Acrylic on Canvas 120 X 120



Henna Night, Acrylic on Canvas 120 X 120

Raed Issa



Date of Birth: 13 May 1975
Place of Birth: Al Bureij Refugee Camp

Soon after Raed Issa returned to Gaza after completing a scholarship in Geneva, the incursion began. Like many colleagues he has yet to be able to leave again.

He has two visas, one to France and one to Italy, where he planned to travel in order to expose his work, which may remain unstamped in his passport because he is unable to leave. He looks at a subject like a documentary producer. He observes and sees through the surface detailing the thoughts and feelings of his subject. Though his creativity was interrupted by the incursion his works are a testament to the strong will that keeps people going in times of misfortune. The picture of the man standing is proof. The subject can be seen as a victim of the incursion, someone who has lost a limb. Or he can be seen as a defiant survivor standing with his arms laced with each other, his leg bent, leaning against the wall.

Issa's educational background is far from art. He graduated from the Islamic University in Gaza with a degree in Computer Science 1997. He later focused on studying drawing, oil painting and murals.

His works have been on display in exhibitions in the Middle East, Australia, France and Switzerland. He was been a recipient of several scholarships to attend workshops abroad.



Untitled, Installation



Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas 200 X 90

Salem Awad

Date of Birth: 20 May 1986
Place of Birth: Gaza



Wound in time, 30 X 75

It was one o'clock in the morning when neighbors warned Salem Awad and his family to evacuate. His family members started collecting essentials like clothing and documents while he gathered his paints and brushes. Despite the urgency of the situation others were amused that the only items that Awad cared for were his tools for creating art. Although some of his paintings were wrecked by the incursion his house was not severely damaged. Awad received a scholarship to study in Egypt but his chances were dashed when the incursion forced him to remain in Gaza. For one year after that the subject of his paintings was the devastation of those weeks. But now his works are different, he focuses on hope and the need to move on. He searches for a world of peace and hope. The works from the period of incursion are dull but the new ones are bright and full of movement and color. He uses colors and his brush strokes to convey an idea or a theme of hope.

Awad has been drawing and painting since he was a child and pursued this love for art through university, graduating in 2008 from Al-Aqsa Fine Arts department in Gaza. He shares his passion for painting with the youth, teaching children at workshops organized by the UNRWA and the Al-Qattan Foundation for Children. His works have been in several exhibitions in Gaza and he has been involved in painting several murals.



Forgotten melody, 41 X 54

Salam Muzafar Nawati

Date of Birth: 21 December 1987
Place of Birth: Gaza



Salam Nawati's love for the sea is an underlying theme of his art. His most recent works reflect and highlight the sorrow and confusion that were a result of the incursions in late December and early January 2008/9.

Some of the works are direct renditions of his dreams transferred to canvas. For him time is an all important element. He calls it the enemy. Nawati claims he wishes that during the incursion time would have stopped and resumed after the withdrawal. That is why in his installation, made of a broken bicycle tire, time stands still.

The doves perished during the incursion, their bodies resting on steps that were damaged. He tried to stretch the canvas to fit the frame, but it was too small, so he improvised and used rope to connect the two. Perhaps the act of succeeding in mounting the canvas is a subconscious indication of hope; that things can be accomplished if one sets their mind to it.

Nawati is a prolific artist who has traversed a number of phases at a young age. Looking at his work one can see immediately if a painting was created before or after the war. Most of his paintings from after or during the war depict destruction, especially of the sea. Abandoned and overturned fishing vessels and ruined and damaged structures populate his paintings.

Nawati a recent graduate from Al Aqsa University (2009) is a teaching assistant at its Faculty of Fine Arts. He works with the youth at several organizations including the Qattan Foundation. He recently held his first solo exhibition. Nawati's works have been on display in Germany, Egypt, Canada and the region.



00:00 , Installation 60 X 80



War, Acrylic on Canvas 80 X 100

Shareef Sarhan

Date of Birth: 25 November 1976
Place of Birth: Gaza



Shareef Sarhan paints from the heart. He makes art for art's sake. He has been painting since he was 16 years old.

He studied under the guidance of Mr. Sersawi at the YMCA. Sarhan was selected to attend a workshop with the renowned Syrian artist Marwarn Qassab Bachi in Jordan. A whole new world opened to him, he learned new techniques and got to see up close the work of the masters. The experience propelled him into life as an artist. He returned to Gaza with a new vision that he nurtures dotingly.

He has an infectious optimism and love of life which shows in his persistent attempts to organize workshops and exhibitions. Sarhan was involved in organizing several exhibitions after the incursion as a catharsis to the gloom clouding the blue skies of Gaza. "Rescue", one of these exhibits, was organized in the wreckage of the Red Crescent Hospital with Shala and Al Maqousi. All the installations were built from what was found in the wreckage of the building. Sarhan illustrated the attempted rescues by displaying hundreds of surgical gloves reaching out to the victims of the incursion.

The recent developments have limited his exposure to the West but he relentlessly seeks to pave new paths. He is constantly conjuring new ways of exposing his fellow artists in Gaza to the world. Sarhan founded the Gaza International Festival of Video Arts and with his colleagues at "Windows" he arranges shows and exhibitions for the newly emerging artists.

His works have been exhibited in the United States, UK, Jordan, and the region.



Colourful dream, Acrylic on Canvas 200 X 90



Exit, Installation

Shehda Ahmad Durgham

Date of Birth: 27 December 1967
Place of Birth: Al Bureij camp Gaza

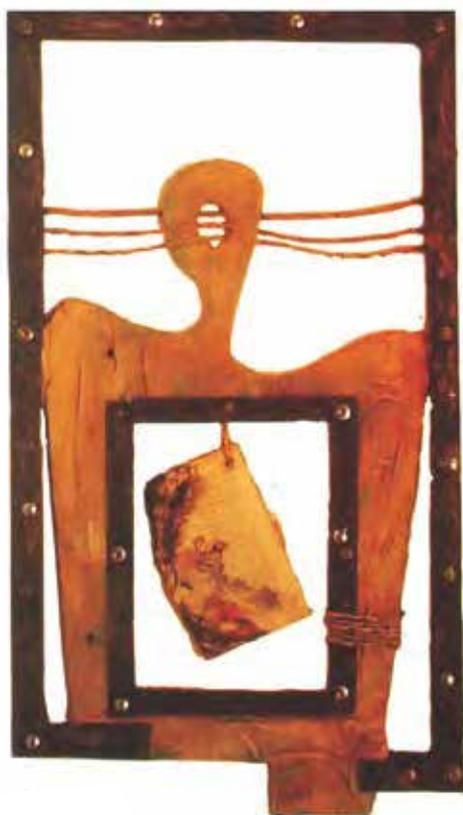


The Israeli operation began on Shehda Durgham's forty-first birthday. He spent the next few weeks with his family in a small space supporting and protecting each other. Though the circumstances were difficult the family drew strength from their love for one another. Through his art Durgham tries to convey the irrationality of their predicament. In one absurd instance, for example, a female relative had to escape the surprise bombings by running outside her home in only her underwear, a profane act in a traditional society!

In the wood and metal installation he illustrates the destructive nature of fighting in the guise of a book that paradoxically still hangs on a thread, which signifies a ray of hope in a sea of darkness.

Durgham received his masters in Art Education from the Sudan University of Science and Technology in 2006 and his B.A. from the Al Aqsa University in 1999. He is continuously investigating and experimenting with different art forms.

He teaches at the College of Science and Technology in Khan Younis and is a part-time lecturer at the Al-Azhar University in Gaza. Durgham has received numerous awards for his poster designs and has participated in several exhibitions in the region and abroad.



State of siege, Mixed Media 120 X 70



Physiological state, Acrylic on Canvas 45 X 55

Soheil Salem

Date of Birth: 8 December 1974
Place of Birth: Gaza



“ It is all the same. Before the war we struggled as we do now. War is yet another facet of the world we live in.” Indeed the incursion left its scar on Soheil Salem’s life, one of his brothers was killed and another injured in a bomb explosion near his home.

During those weeks of the incursion he was unable to work. Since January 2009 until recently he has been able to create very few paintings leaving a gap in his artistic career which he now is trying to fill.

He painted a portrait of a man and his wife as a tribute to his late brother and his sister-in-law whom he feels symbolize the fortitude of Palestinians. He had a prophetic dream before 2008 of giant waves destroying the shores. Soheil has only recently been able to express that dream on canvas.

Salem received his BA in the Arts from Al-Aqsa University in 1999. The main themes of his art are the desire for freedom and the search for compassion. His works have been exhibited in Switzerland, UK, France and the region.

While we were researching this project, Soheil was blessed with the kind of news that is the ambition of most artists in Gaza: permission to leave to Paris for a residency at the famous Cite des Arts.

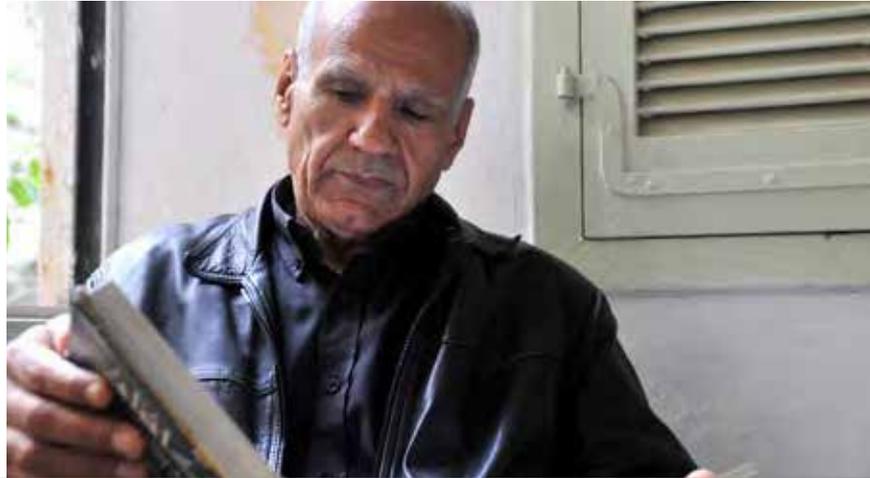


Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas 100 X 100



Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas 100 X 100

Dr. Shafik Radwan



Date of Birth: 1 February 1941
Place of Birth: Najd Village

Dr. Shafik Radwan is one of the most renowned and influential artists in Gaza who is well respected in the art world. "I need time for reflection," he says when asked about his art during and after the Israeli incursion. He drew but did not create works that reflected the incursion. He needs time to digest and meditate before he can express his reaction on paper and canvas. Radwan's creativity was not stagnant during the war because he took to writing and wrote poems.

He spent his formative years of education in Russia. For seven years he studied at the V. Surikov Moscow State Academy Art Institute in Russia where he received his PhD in Philosophy of Art in 1989. Dr. Radwan received a degree from the same institute in graphic and posters arts and a Bachelor of Fine Art from Cairo University in 1964. Apart from painting his major works are quick drawings with pen on onion skin paper or blank white paper of portraits sometimes humorous in nature, as a way to record his impressions of the world around him. But after the incursion none of them reflected the actual event.

Dr. Radwan's reach is far and wide. Many of his articles have been translated from Arabic. He is a true nurturing teacher and mentor. Dr. Radwan has taught in a number of institutions of higher education in the region and in Libya and Sudan. He was also the dean of the faculty of arts at the Al-Aqsa University until 2008. His works have been exposed all over the world and he is revered by his former students.

Obituary

A year ago
I closed my notebook
And went out to stand by the wall
To write and draw a clear declaration
A tomb and an opening remark
In a mourning house
For a martyr

Pedestrians in a hurry
With lips and eyes
Pointed to a procession from afar
Filling the horizon with songs
And a promise of joy
To planes
Threatening to bomb again

In a moment of fear
Between life and death
I decided to
Shut my ears
To the roaring planes
Went back to the same wall
In danger of crumbling
I painted seven lines
Colored, a stalk of wheat
Wheat growing
Seven stalks of wheat
And an arch
A rainbow

Dr. Shafeeq Radwan
10 December, 2009

اعلان تذكاري

من عامٍ
أقفلتُ دفترتي
وخرجتُ إلى عرضِ الجدارِ
لأخطءَ وأرسمَ صريحَ إعلانٍ
بضريحٍ ونصٍّ يافتتاحِ
بيتِ عزاءٍ
لشهيدي.

مشاةً مسرعونُ
بالشفاهِ والعيونُ
أشاروا، إلى موكبٍ بعيدٍ،
يملأ الأفقَ غناءً،
وتباشيرَ فرحٍ؛
إلى طائراتٍ مسرعاتٍ
تهددُ بقصفٍ جديدٍ.

في لحظةِ الخوفِ
ما بين الحياةِ والموتِ
كان القرارُ أنني
أصممتُ أذني
من هديرِ الطائراتِ
واتجهتُ إلى ذاتِ الجدارِ
المهدّدِ بالسقوطِ والدمارِ
ورسمتُ بخطوطِ سبعٍ
ملوناتٍ، سنبليةً
قمحاً تتبّت
سبعٍ سنابلٍ
وقوسٍ
قزحٍ.

د. شفيق رضوان
١٠ ديسمبر ٢٠٠٩

Future Artists

Reham El Hadad



Date of Birth: 29 March 1996
Place of Birth: Gaza

Reham has been attending classes at the Qattan Center for Children for four years now. Painting makes her happy. There is a comfort in letting her emotions flow. For her it is the best way to express her feelings. Her dream is perhaps a universal one shared by artists the world over: to one day study art in Paris!



Untitled, different materials, NEED TEXT

Future Artists

Naser Abu Daff



Date of Birth: 4 September 1994
Place of Birth: Gaza



Untitled, different materials, NEED TEXT

Naser is one of the other students at the Qattan Center. He was one of the youngsters whose neighborhood was destroyed by the incursion who sought refuge at the Center. He has been drawing since he was four years old and was recognized by his art teacher as a budding young talent. He drew a lot after the incursion. Sometimes he has an idea in his mind, but when he starts drawing it something different materializes. His dream: to attend summer camp with all the famous artists.

A Promise to Create

I do not feel qualified to write about Palestinian art due to my lack of sufficient knowledge on the subject. I am happy, however, to write a few lines about my personal experience with young Palestinians, specifically those from Gaza, during a period that started in the late Nineties and ended in the fourth year of this decade during which I taught at the Summer Academy at the Shuman Foundation in Amman.

It was important to me, having taught for over two decades at Berlin's University of Fine Arts, to pass on my experience to these young women and men from my homeland, with the aim of bringing them hope as well as motivation to bring out their uniqueness.

Human history is full of wars and tragedies with numerous accounts of destruction, devastation and usurpation. But the tragedy of the Palestinians is and will remain to be unique because it has been going on for decades with no ending in sight, where a land has been usurped and its people displaced by others who came from all over the world while this world remained silent, even worse, it colluded and conspired with those invaders to continuously deny the displaced their natural rights. All this in the context of an age that claims to be civilized, humanitarian and free.

What would be the artist's position when he is living in this atmosphere of catastrophe and mass imprisonment, and what are his ways and means of expressing this tragedy that has become embedded in the collective conscience of his people?

Undoubtedly, painting is no longer the only means for artistic expression. Other media, such as photography, video and installation are in the arena and have opened new and important doors, some of which are perhaps more successful in revealing the extent and magnitude of a personal and collective tragedy of this nature and in expressing the artist's internal experience and vision.

In contexts of this nature, except in rare cases, both the artist and the recipient (viewer) would find a painting too confined in its delivery of a concept or a vision. However, video and photography which allow the presentation of ideas through sequences and serializations do facilitate this task. And many Palestinian artists have used this media to create splendid works of art that tell of their predicament and that of their people.

Perhaps there are two parts to the way an artist views his work when expressing such experiences. The first part is descriptive and relies on literature and narrative, the second relies on his internal private vision, which vision is in itself part of a whole. If the artist succeeds in presenting both, he would be providing a picture that reveals what is going on inside him which would mirror what others are thinking and feeling, while at the same time he would be presenting us with a testimony of history whose endurance is assured by its credibility and uniqueness.

There are many ways to create and the artist must always be diligent in his quest to discover the way to be truthful and unique in his work.

Most of the Palestinian students in Amman were from Gaza. My main concern was to help them find their artistic self instead of busying them with technical aspects, which I knew would be the easier part.

The experiences of the Palestinians are harsh, as harsh as one would expect from living in conditions of oppression and isolation.

The years I spent at the Academy in Amman gave me a rare chance to go out and explore the artistic self without losing identity and to find symbols that linked the picture to the personal story.

And those years with Gaza's youth proved to be both fertile and important...they were given the message and in response came their offerings.

The painting is the mirror and testimony and the artist has to always search for what is within him. This could result in the portrayal of a flower, a cactus or an olive tree... Metaphors that can offer hope and assure identity and in doing so, they are as important as photographic or video arts in revealing this ongoing catastrophe - all being more important than transforming a journalistic image into a painting.

The youth of Gaza promised to create, and they are fulfilling this promise by offering what is in their hearts and minds to those who are waitingand tomorrow thousands of flowers will blossom in the fields of Gaza and Palestine.

Marwan Bachi Qassab
June 2010

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