

Gender and Feminist Identity

In Sobhiya Hasan Qais' work

Farid Abu Shakra



El-Sabar Association
Umm el-Fahem Museum of Art
Museum Director: **Said Abu Shakra**

Sobhiya Hasan Qais | **The Last Supper**

Exhibition

Curator: **Farid Abu Shakra**
Coordination and production: **Netali Breuer**
Hanging: **Ahmad Muhammad Mahajne**

.....
The Fishmonger, 2023, IbdAA Gallery, Kafr Yasif

Curator: **Farid Abu Shakra**

Gender and Feminist Identity

In Sobhiya Hasan Qais' work

Farid Abu Shakra

Catalogue

Editor: **Farid Abu Shakra**
Graphic design: **Wael Wakeem**
Hebrew copy editing: **Ronit Rozental**
Arabic translation: **Nawaf Atamnah**
English translation: **SZ Translation**
Exhibition photography: **Yigal Pardo**

All measurements are expressed in centimeters: height x width.

© 2024. All rights reserved to the artist, the El-Sabar Association,
and the Umm el-Fahem Museum of Art



Contents

Acknowledgements [7]

Gender and Feminist Identity Farid Abu Shakra [9]
In Sobhiya Hasan Qais' work

WORKS [43]

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to the artist Farid Abu Shakra, for his professional support during my bachelor's and master's degree studies, his support and assistance in developing my art and creativity, and for the advice and help in expanding my horizons and consolidating my ideas.

Thank you to artist Said Abu Shakra, director of the Umm el-Fahem Museum of Art, for his encouragement to prepare a solo exhibit at the museum, for believing in me and in the importance of my work, and honoring me by showcasing my work at the museum's grand opening.

Thank you to the management of IBDA in Kafr Yasif, for supporting me from my first steps until today, for the opportunity to present in group exhibits throughout the country and abroad, and for my one-person exhibit.

Thank you to professor Yael Guilat, former head of the Department of Art at Oranim Academic College and chair of the Association for Women's Art and Gender Research, for her support and accompaniment, her caring and professional advice on my final project, "Creative-Based Research", for my artist-teacher master's degree.

Thank you to Oranim Academic College, the warm home that enriched and expanded my knowledge and creativity; thank you to all of the lecturers and peers during my studies, who impacted my creative development on all planes.

Thank you to my students, who allow me to always be in the studio, among canvases and paints. I learn as much from you as you do from me. Thank you for allowing me to remain close to myself.

Thank you to my family for the support, patience, understanding and help, by creating an atmosphere that supports artistic thought and creativity.

Thank you to all the visitors to the exhibit. Thank you for every critique, which contributes to and enriches my creative development.

And thank you to the thoughts and feelings that have encouraged me to create.

Farid Abu Shakra

Gender and Feminist Identity

In Sobhiya Hasan Qais' work

This study aims to examine and analyse the artworks of the artist Sobhiya Hasan Qais, which reflect the dual presence of feminine and Palestinian identities. This is achieved through blending two movements: Realism, which appears as something beautiful and pleasing on the eye, and the Avant-Garde movement, which is led by struggling artists committed to their cause, who, through their contemporary works, seek to criticise hegemony, oppression, authoritarianism and the theft of land.

The social and political contexts of the arts, and especially the visual arts, are a broadly unfamiliar subject of research. Today, however, we are witnessing unusual trends in cultural studies, which adopt cultural analysis as a scientific methodology based on

a study of the cultural environment of political and social phenomena. The need for this type of analysis is particularly prominent in the Palestinian visual art scene and the Palestinian creative scene more broadly. Despite the unequivocal connection between Palestinian visual art and the Palestinian cause, this subject has not received sufficient research and study in the political and social contexts, compared to resistance literature, for example. The works of Palestinian artists have focused on the Palestinian cause in all its various dimensions and elements. This art has become a valid representation of Palestinian heritage, culture and tragedy in the battle against the appropriation of Palestinian symbols and the theft of land and identity.

Palestinian visual art is still built on a foundation imposed by the Palestinian Nakba, but we are witnessing diversity in the content it tackles, as it has begun to address topics in a more profound, private and intimate manner. Today, Palestinian art turns the Nakba into a subjective issue, reflecting the depth of Palestinian feeling about the issue and its impact on them on various social, human and cultural levels. The first thing we can deduce from this art is that the Nakba is not a historical event that has been and gone; rather, it is an ongoing presence in the individual and collective Palestinian consciousness. Edward Said states that Mona Hatoum's work is based on a "logic of

opposites”, which expresses what he calls “the memory of defiance”. Palestinian artist and researcher Kamal Boullata explains this description by demonstrating how Hatoum’s works express contradictions ranging from identity to exile, oppression to resistance and captivity to freedom¹.

Regarding the title of this article, male artists who have used the sabra in their work have placed this symbol in a position that requires its authenticity to be restored, and its identity repeatedly proven anew. Thus, along comes the artist Sobhiya Hasan Qais to renew her vow with this symbol, using the sabra as a feminine symbol and presenting her ideas from a feminist perspective that aims to confront masculinity and what it means in terms of oppression and racism against women, especially within the Arab context.

This study aims to identify the presence of men and women as creators in the Palestinian visual art scene, as it analyses and decodes the content of their artwork and explores their positions and trends through their experiences and frames of reference. The study also aims to conduct research comparisons between the works of male and female artists, using questionnaires and content analysis as study tools, based on personal,

1 Boullata, Kamal. “The world, the self and the body: Pioneering women in Palestinian art.” *Self-portrait: Palestinian women’s art*, edited by Yael Lerer and Tal Ben Zvi. Tel Aviv: Andalus Publishing, 2001.

qualitative, intellectual, political, social and visual approaches to art.

This study further addresses the differences between the Palestinian visual artist's view of women, who are often used as an aesthetic element and may face political challenges, and Hasan's view, which stems from her feelings about the social issues that women face in society. Women appear as a major element in feminist artworks. Meanwhile, in the political sphere they appear as a secondary element to men, who are driven more strongly to demonstrate their presence. This study also addresses how artists, both male and female, differentiate between positive and negative depictions of men and women.

The feminist experience in the contemporary Palestinian art scene is sometimes characterised by extremism and exaggeration in satirising events and circumstances, with the aim of evading the censorship of authorities. This study explores how artist Sobhiya Hasan Qais tackles the subject of the censorship faced by Palestinian artists, which is becoming increasingly severe and harsh.

We observe a lack of Palestinian visual artworks that express social phenomena related to women's experiences, such as oppression and repression, sexual harassment, and physical and psychological violence. The artist has posited recommendations of

unconventional solutions compared to male artists, with the aim of creating a change in the value system and legacies that sideline her existence. She also aims to dispose of the view of women as subordinate beings who must remain hidden behind social and institutional frameworks prepared ahead of time by men and the system. In other words, although the artistic act — and the related political, social and aesthetic questions — can be enriched by considering questions of gender, the artist's goals for her aforementioned symbols have an essential purpose and are supportive of the political cause. It also emphasises the importance of not neglecting or concealing historical information and data connected to Palestinian visual arts, especially those by Palestinian women artists, and the necessity of writing the history of the visual arts through the lens of gender and documenting the achievements of Palestinian women artists. The artist seeks to change the distorted image of women and confronts attempts to impose the male perspective, as the importance of this artistic context lies in trying to change the stereotypical image related to Hasan's activity from within and outside the artistic act.

In this context, the concept of gender comes in to reposition itself and recover the political and social essence of legitimate feminist thought. Gender studies originated with the aim of redressing unbalanced

power relations, which form the political dimension of this concept. They re-interrogate power techniques and their ability not only to maintain but also to reinforce their dominant discourse. If the humanities are a means of understanding and studying the world, then gender studies must therefore follow the same approach. Before dismantling and analysing this term, it is necessary to justify the artist's interest in this subject, which compelled her to employ her abilities and studies in her art, as the concepts of identity and gender have merged to become part of the general, cultural, academic and institutional domains.

With the fragmentation of institutional discourse, gender studies have lost their radicalism and rights-based nature. A pale, soulless, traditional version of the feminist project was born, chosen by the dominant power system and patriarchal male society. Thus, the artist Hasan appears, adding effort and gravitas to the ceaseless recording process, which gives her the opportunity and time to make her decisions and close the circles within a patriarchal society in which the individual is subject to its logic and control.

Thinker and researcher Hisham Sharabi² says on this

² Hisham Sharabi was a Palestinian thinker, who was born in Jaffa in 1927 and died in Beirut in 2005. He wrote on philosophy, sociology and literature. He attended the Ramallah Friends Boys' School and completed his studies at the International College in Beirut, graduating from American University in Beirut in 1947. He emigrated to the United States and worked there as a professor of

subject: “The patriarchal society has not achieved modernity in its original sense. It is not traditional in every sense of the word, as it lives within two discourses: the discourse of comprehensive, total truth and the discourse of defined, modern truth. What is salient is that it is unable to deal with either of them in a rational, orderly manner, whether in establishing their relationship with the past, history or reality, or with the present or future, through independent self-awareness. Thus, it is a conflicting society governed by contradictions in thought as well as in practice and daily life. So, for example, while it dreams of comprehensive unity, it practises disintegration and fragmentation. While it passes idealistic laws and constitutions, it uses only oppression and coercion. And when it calls for noble principles and human rights (such as freedom and justice), its actions and practices contradict all moral values, and all the rights of the citizen and the human being”³.

modern European intellectual history at Georgetown University in Washington DC. He continued to publish his writings in English for university studies until the 1967 Six-Day War, following which he moved to Beirut in 1970 and worked at the Palestinian Planning Centre and as a visiting professor at American University in Beirut. However, he left due to the events of the civil war in Lebanon. He contributed to establishing a number of institutions concerned with Arab affairs and the Palestinian cause, including the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University, the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine (now known as the Palestine Center) in Washington DC, and the Jerusalem Fund, a Palestinian organisation that provides scholarships to Palestinian students.

3 Sharabi, Hisham. *Civilizational critique of the Arab society at the end of the*

Erasing Palestinian symbols and ethnic cleansing

The sabra is one of the symbols that the artist employs in the Palestinian cultural scene. This symbol, which Palestinians have adopted as a means of delineating their land and protecting it from passers-by and from destruction, is used to denote the identity of the land and place. It also denotes the strong connections between Palestinians and their borders. Despite the destruction of villages and the displacement of their inhabitants, the sabra tree remained, surrounding a house that had been destroyed or a house that did not exist. The *Keren Kayemet LeYisrael* (Jewish National Fund) and the Jewish Israeli artist Danziger⁴ significantly contributed to the process of erasure and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian and Syrian peoples after the occupation of the Golan Heights. Israel destroyed the villages it occupied and established Jewish colonies in their place. In 1977, the Israeli artist Danziger “cleansed” the Golan through ethnic cleansing and the destruction of villages, using his art, the families of dead soldiers and also by covering the afflicted area with trees; a process that the Jewish National Fund used systematically to hide the remains of the villages that Israel had

20th century. 1st edition, Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1990, p.91. [Arabic].

4 Max Wilhelm Yitzhak Danziger was born in 1916 in Berlin, emigrated to Palestine in 1923 and joined the Palmach in 1940.

destroyed after its ethnic cleansing in 1948. The 1948 ruins were hidden by pine trees, which are not native to the area. But, with Danziger, we come face-to-face with a more intelligent coverage, by linking it to the oak tree, which is part of the region's nature and an element of its culture. Since the nineties, the Israeli academic institution has begun to clearly acknowledge the ethnic cleansing of the people of Palestine in 1948⁵. The process of erasing the Arab from the cultural space is nothing but an indication and a symbol of the development of the Zionist awareness of the erasure of Arabs from the geographical space, i.e.: the ethnic cleansing that will be carried out in the future. Yigal Zalmona, the curator and head of Israeli art at the Israel Museum wrote: "Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (the reviver of the Hebrew language) considered the Arabs, and the Bedouins in particular, to be the descendants of the ancient Jews, and likewise, the Yemenite and Eastern Jews, the children of the 'ancient settlement'⁶, as if they had preserved the way of life of the biblical era. They have all become empty, transparent indications filled with Zionist content when they were turned into biblical figures. From the Zionist perspective, this view

5 For more information, see: Mizrahi, Rahila. *How Israeli visual art appropriates Palestinian heritage*. *Al Adab magazine*, Issue 7-9/2008, <http://adabmag.com/node/69>. [Arabic].

6 Zalmona, Yigal. *To the East! To the East? In the East in Israeli visual art*. *Cabinet: Yigal Zalmona, Tamar Manor-Friedman*. The Israel Museum. [Hebrew]

expresses the idea that the land was given to its Jewish colonisers in advance, and that by force of this logic, they can appropriate the place. The Land of Israel has become a biblical text⁷”.

The Palestinian artistic scene has changed, with the entry of many women’s names into the artistic pursuits, diverse in their training and schools, their methods, backgrounds and artistic sensibilities. Thanks to these, they receive positive feedback from the public and the necessary reception from critics. Through their criticism and feedback, they affirm the development, richness and diversity of artistic practice in the country, with all the valuable artistic types and differences that have influenced the contributions of Palestinian women to the arts, and the recognition of their experience within the landscape of contemporary art, whether at home or abroad, on both the Palestinian and pan-Arab levels⁸.

In the environment of the Arab world, gender studies provoke much debate and heated critical discussions. These studies demonstrate a stark contrast between supporters and adversaries, with the disagreement sometimes escalating to alarming levels. On the one hand, there are institutions that are interested in

7 For more information, see: Mizrahi, Rahila. *How Israeli visual art appropriates Palestinian heritage*. *Al Adab magazine*, Issue 7-9/2008, <http://adabmag.com/node/69>. [Arabic].

8 For more information, see: Abu Shakra, Farid. *Wanted, on the works of Samah Shehadeh*, Umm el-Fahem Art Gallery, 2015. [Arabic].

gender studies, but support them with reservations and view them with suspicion, despite the increasing interest in this subject by Palestinian women artists. On the other hand, the Israeli establishment contributes to strengthening this topic within the Palestinian cultural scene, especially among female artists who have lived within the Green Line since 1948. These contributions receive financial support from academies and ministerial institutions. In contrast, we find that the Arab cultural scene is not prepared to study or fund such topics, which put the spotlight on creative women.

These studies in the Arab world face continuous attacks, as they are restricted to specific groups of researchers, who concentrate on topics of religion and Arab society, and carefully avoid “awkward questions” related to gender and difference. The rest is ignored because of the desire to give legitimacy to politics and the patriarchy at the expense of the presence of creative women’s opinions.

Integrating feminism and religion is not easy, especially for female artists. This integration faces opposition and objections from various sides, including clergy who consider feminism a threat to family values and deep-rooted social and religious structures. At the same time, the artist Hasan faces challenges from secular, liberal trends that view religion as a patriarchal system that must be confronted. Despite these challenges, religious

feminism among devoted female artists is expanding, accomplishing numerous achievements in the religious legislative establishment.

As the criticism increases, gender studies researchers face accusations of exploiting their studies for political ends. They are accused of using socio-political strategies that integrate religion and Sharia with sociology to confront the religious establishment. But this integration may contribute to enriching the dialogue and uniting researchers around a common goal, making gender studies part of the ideology that seeks to reshape society according to the values of gender equality. Within this context, in her artworks, the artist Hasan addresses numerous subjects and symbols, such as the sabra, oranges and olives, and the ruins of abandoned villages, in addition to scenes from the war on Gaza. These elements are mixed with religious scenes, hinting at similar influences in the works of other artists, such as Walid and Asim Abu Shakra.

The sabra plant denotes the identity of the place, and Palestinians have adopted it as a means of delineating their land and protecting it from passers-by and from destruction. It also denotes the strong connections between Palestinians and their borders. Despite the destruction of villages and the displacement of their inhabitants, the sabra tree remained, surrounding a house that had been destroyed or a house that did not

exist at all.

There are differences between the sabra of Hasan, that of the late artist Walid Abu Shakra and that of the late artist Asim Abu Shakra⁹. By focusing on depicting the sabra tree specifically, Walid integrated allusions to nature into his work, taking on their own dimension in the mental comprehension of the image. If we consider the artist's focus on using black ink on white paper as a kind of record of the features of the homeland, we can almost read this focus in the image of the sabra, the undulations of the word "*sabir*"¹⁰, which is used to refer to the sabra in the Palestinian dialect. By repeatedly drawing this tree, Walid makes visible the image of the Arabic word, which has frequently been repeated on the lips of those who are loyal to their land. While the artist objectively shows us how the sabra planted by our ancestors continues to grow under the shade of the olive trees, the viewer realises how the local landscapes, in this excavation, seem like mirrors that document the exchange between the rituals of the place and its features¹¹. As for how the artist Asim Abu Shakra used the sabra plant: he took it from the private sphere to the

9 Ibid.

10 Translator's Note: This word also means 'patience' in Modern Standard Arabic, giving it the double meaning that is referenced later in this paper.

11 Boullata, Kamal. *Evoking place in contemporary Palestinian visual art*. Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, 1st edition, 2000, p.201. [Arabic].

public, starting with the intimate space, and moving into the societal and political. He then moved on to the global public, updating and translating Palestinian symbols and references into a modern global language, using it to try to convey his messages and creations to the world. He used it to say that he is more entitled to this plant than the Jews coming from Europe, who adopted it as a symbol for the country's Jewish children who were born there, that he is more entitled to the fruits that have borne symbolic meanings for the Israelis since the independence of the State of Israel. This is because the fruit of the sabra bears a sharp contrast between its rough exterior and thorny texture, and its sweet, sticky nature. This statement was used to express the character of those born in the country, who bear the nature of Israel, which is characterised by external roughness, but whose true nature is sweet and gentle.

Asim uprooted the sabra plant and placed it in a pot on the windowsill of his home in Tel Aviv, as if it were a sacred plant that he had adopted to give him a blessing on his path. It was a bold, and even very cruel, attempt by the artist: to uproot it from its natural environment and domesticate it, so that he could unite with it, observe it, consider it artistically and intellectually, and perhaps talk about his alienation in Israeli society and close the circle of nostalgia. The importance of

closing this circle is no less significant than the way in which his cousin, the artist Walid Abu Shakra, tackles this sample of his subjects. He photographs murals of sabra plants, almond orchards and olive groves, which are surrounded by swarms of sabra, and then takes them with him to Europe for use as intellectual and artistic materials to work on his themes, and as spiritual and sensory materials to close the circle of longing and nostalgia. Asim and Walid Abu Shakra's taking of this plant and examination of it within enlightened, civilised societies arouses the curiosity of critics and raises many questions: 'Why did the artists take this symbolic plant and analyse it in a Western environment? Why did they put this symbol in a suitcase to be placed under a microscope in a non-Eastern environment? What did they want to say by doing this?' Perhaps they wanted to talk about their alienation, about the stimulation and drama alienation creates. In her article, *The shadow of alienation: On the drawings of Asim Abu Shakra*, Tali Tamir says, "The feeling of belonging and eternal alienation within a Jewish community, and the feeling that he is not where he belongs in Tel Aviv, is what charges this recurring motif in Asim's works, where we see the sabra plant in the pot. This plant is beautiful, despite being inside a fierce, tangled fence (with spikes)". Tamir adds, "The sabra plant that was uprooted from the great outdoors, where the earth embraced the penetration of its roots, became small, as it is the size of a pot for a

houseplant. This situation not only expresses a feeling of alienation and discomfort, but it is also a confrontation against taming nature and a protest against oppression and degradation”¹².

Walid Abu Shakra and Asim Abu Shakra each took the sabra plant from the village of Umm el-Fahem in their own way. One photographed it and documented it through the lens of a camera, leaving the borders of the homeland behind with it, translating its vocabulary into black, which speaks of the sabra as a witness. The other uprooted it from its land, put it in a pot and took it from the confines of his Arab village to a Jewish city to speak of the sabra’ stubbornness in continuing to renew itself despite death¹³.

Hasan studies this plant and carries out her practices as a woman, through an educational strategy of refuting standard forms. She uses this plant by targeting it to study gender, as part of the hidden and apparent human transactions, and to change blatant and dominant power relations, in an attempt to restore the political dimension of the feminist project. She cuts the sabra

12 Boullata, Kamal. “The world, the self and the body: Pioneering women in Palestinian art.” *Self-portrait: Palestinian women’s art*, edited by Yael Lerer and Tal Ben Zvi. Tel Aviv: Andalus Publishing, 2001, p.203. [Arabic].

13 For more information, see: Farid Abu Shakra. *The appearance of The Hidden, the inner and the outer; the Manifest and the Unmanifest in Walid Abu Shakra’s Prints and Abstract Works*. Tel Aviv Museum of Art and Umm al-Fahem Art Gallery, 2011. [Arabic].

plant, puts it in a bowl, then puts it in a jar to pickle it and places it on a separate shelf in her kitchen.

Let us take the example of her painting of *the Last Supper*, which represents an important moment in Jesus Christ's life, and is described in the Gospel books of the New Testament. It is one of the main events attributed to the life of Jesus Christ, a founding event in Christianity in general and has served as a source of inspiration for Christian rituals, theological ideas, popular myths and works of art. According to the New Testament, the 'Last Supper' was the last time Jesus ate dinner with his disciples ('the apostles') before he was tried before the Sanhedrin and crucified by Pontius Pilate. It is also described in all four Gospels.

Sobhiya Hasan Qais presents the concept of the Last Supper as a solo exhibition, and in one of her works also titled *The Last Supper*, 14 children come to eat and there is no feast. Some come to scream and beg for food, and there is no one to provide them with food, there is no one to help. It is a scene that takes us to bitter and harsh places, passing by the children of Gaza as they jostle for a little food in a large aluminium bowl, pushing and fighting to bring food to their displaced father, mother, brother, sister. Every exhausted child turns into a tormented figure on the Via Dolorosa, who may never return home and may be bombed after getting a little food. And their meeting around that empty table may

be their last.

In another work, the artist paints herself holding an aluminium bowl as she goes to beg for food. It is a kind of empathy and compassion, a kind of criticism, challenge, resistance and solidarity with an entire people of about two and a half million citizens, who cannot find anything to eat and who may not wake up the next day to their daily routine.

In her painting *The Fish Seller*, the artist tackles the event with sensitivity and transparency and blends everyday details within it to express a contradiction between aesthetics, the Nakba of the homeland and the memory of a people. A personal and collective memory that is born out of events and memory, and the ever-increasing pain of the Palestinians following the Nakba in 1948 and the June War of 1967. The artist created her expressions within the context of artistic paintings full of delicate feelings and honest emotions expressing the reality of life, recalling the scent of the sea and the everyday lives of the people of Gaza. It is as if she is documenting a day before the outbreak of the war. As if the artist wanted this life to continue, the smell of salted fish to continue, and the movement of the buyers and sellers coming and going to continue. She froze her work with the title *The Fish Seller* (2024), in oil paints on canvas, to become immortal. With full conviction that this everyday life will return to what it was before,

and the fisherman will sail to catch fish, and this old woman will bring out the catch, after her husband or son returns, to display the fresh, succulent fish for sale. Gaza's sea, its enchanting colour, the fishermen's nets and sails spread out towards nostalgia, freedom and the dream of returning. Recording these events in her paintings becomes a manifestation of a massive sense of belonging and complete alignment with her humanitarian cause first, and the true Palestinian cause second.

The artist chose a female fish seller, not a male seller, neither a man nor a child, but a woman in whom Hasan sees herself. As if this woman is Hasan herself, carrying the pains and hopes of the displaced peoples and migrants. It is as if she seeks to stimulate a new reading of women's issues and their position within the socio-cultural fabric of Palestine as a whole; a reading that sheds light on the Palestinian woman artist, not only as a subject with a real, social existence, but also as an artistic, aesthetic and formative subject. It relies on "bibliographical analytical" methods and an introduction to the works of artists and writers, to reach an understanding of her world, stopping at analytical tools and continuing through analysing and deconstructing her gender symbols. On the one hand, we observe that her aesthetic achievements offer something new for the eye of the academic researcher

and historian. Hasan's works can be categorised into two main approaches. The first falls within the context of "documentary motif"-type illustrations, formed according to the requirements of the group documenting the event and daily practices of the state of our society, in harmony with paths of literature and culture. The second is related to the realm of emotions and personal expression of the daily life of the Palestinian cause, the struggle of its people, and the lives of people in the camp, the son of the countryside and the son of the city, in their most beautiful, visual and formal form, within the context of harmonious contemporary visual perspectives.

Palestinian oranges as a symbol appear in the film *Jaffa — The Orange's Clockwork*, by the left-leaning Israeli director Eyal Sivan, which documents the theft and appropriation of oranges. The gist of the film is that Israel is trying to link oranges to politics; it has even exploited them for the purpose of advertising and placed them on tourism promotion boards. Thus they played a role in the tourism industry of the stolen country, as well as on postage stamps of pictures of Jews gathered in the orchard picking oranges together in a theatrical scene in which they appear as an authentic part of the land through their interaction with it. Sivan believes that, just as the orange symbolises the Palestinians and Jaffa residents' loss of their homeland and their hope to

return to Arous Al Bahr, it also symbolises the Zionists' project to establish the Zionist entity and transform it into an icon for "young, liberal Israel"¹⁴.

This analysis can equally be applied to the feminist model in contemporary artistic practices in the case of Palestine. For Hasan, devoting oneself to artistic work entails a set of gender, social, political, personal, anti-class and anti-racist struggles and conflicts with regard to the facts of art in the diaspora. This analysis may be a basic starting point for understanding the facts, dimensions and manifestations of the feminist spirit in Palestinian art, especially in light of the practices against Palestinian symbols and their appropriation, and in light of the war on Gaza.

We also observe a similarity between the work of artist Rana Bishara in her work depicting a jar containing a cut sabra immersed in water, as if representing the process of pickling a sabra, and Hasan's painting of the pickled sabra pieces in the jar. This is a special sign associated with the sabra of Palestine, which has become indicative of Rana Bishara's works, through which she symbolises Palestinians' ability to endure and be patient¹⁵. The sabra plant is the most capable of withstanding water scarcity and difficult environmental conditions. Thanks to this trait, it resembles Palestinian

14 Natsheh, Maha. *Jaffa oranges: A history of Jaffa oranges*. 2018. [Arabic].

15 This is a play on words with the Palestinian dialect term for sabra.

suffering in the homeland and diaspora. The sharp thorns of the sabra mimic the difficulties of Palestinian life, imposed by the occupier in all areas of their lives. On the other hand, the sabra of Palestine, despite its sharp thorns, harbours a delicious fruit, in contrast to the harshness of its exterior. Thus comes the paradox between the frustrating external circumstances and the hope planted inside Palestinians to return, liberate and attain freedom¹⁶. She uses sabra in her paintings and works to say, “enough is enough”, as a sign of discontent with the Palestinians’ long patience with their terrible situation. The most obvious example was when Bishara placed pieces of sabra in a vegetable container to tell the world, “We have been patient for so long that our patience has become pickled”. Inside the pickle jar, the sabra takes on countless meanings; it is a dispersed Palestinian, another whose patience has run out while waiting for a transit visa between the occupation checkpoints and a third who looks with longing at his homeland from within the diaspora... and the list goes on¹⁷. It evokes its artistic elements from the natural bounties of the earth, from sabra and olives, includes them in visual components that tell heritage stories full of private matters and uniqueness, and directs the human conscience with its art to what

¹⁶ For more information, see: Rashad, Angham. *The significance of sabra and olives in Palestinian visual art*. <https://youthpal.org>. [Arabic].

¹⁷ Ibid.

the Zionists are doing to the land of Palestine and its people, by destroying its heritage.

In the novel, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* by Victor Hugo, the character Quasimodo, whom Hugo portrayed as a monster, gave passers-by every reason to view him as subhuman, until the author came and gave this character the highest qualities of beauty, with the aim of criticising societies and the elite of humanity who do not listen to the voice of those who reject injustice in a time when justice is absent. In order to provide the appropriate environment for self-exploration and finding identities, we must overcome our concepts of those who are different, described as “the other”. Making room for the development of this group in society requires us to accept the differences and diversity among us. We cannot achieve this if we continue to view those who are different as an “other”, a helpless and powerless human being who threatens our existence.

The tyrannical ruler “I” has the absolutist voice, which has the right to what others do not; in truth, the voice has no voice other than its own, and all the voices of the “other” are nothing but his tools that he controls as he pleases. He speaks and the rest repeat, in the manner of “I am the truth!” and “the other is false”. This philosophy and education are reflected in public life and its details and are translated into a discourse

that turns the ego into a keystone or an absolute, and every other existence becomes relative in the world of the absolute ego. Everything that comes from the ego is turned into absolute truth and a standard by which the position towards the other is measured, judged and dealt with, meaning the nuclei are turned not merely into narcissism and self-love, but into identification with the first absolute that transcends time and space! Thus, you find the phenomenon of absolute tyranny, which creates the phenomenon of absolute, excessive, outrageous exploitation and the phenomena of cancellation, exclusion, marginalisation, arrogance and superiority. In politics, you find chauvinism — superiority, which gives one party the position of control and tyranny, and many other parties the position of marginalisation, confiscation, alienation, forced subjugation, contempt and barbaric practices¹⁸.

This comparison is an attempt to give an indication of the female presence in contemporary Palestinian visual art. This is partly why we are interested in contemporary Palestinian art, and why it is one of its most important topical issues. This is achieved through several roles represented in the presence of women as artists, as patrons and students of art, as inspirations for artistic production and as models, and finally as a

¹⁸ Al Alousi, Tayseer Abdul Jabbar, *The absolute and the relative between the self and the other. Alhewar Almutamadın*, Issue: 3355, 2011. [Arabic].

subject and topic in artistic work, which is not limited to the role of women. There are many examples of the works of Palestinian male artists who have strengthened the presence of women through their art.

If we take the symbolism of women in the works of the artist Sliman Mansour, we see that she represents the homeland and the land. She is the mother, the daughter and the beloved. She is the citizen who blends with poems about belonging, and she is the fighter who gives birth to martyrs. She is shown in Mansour's paintings with all her steadfast and prominent Palestinian beauty. She is the popular, towering pride and dignity. She is deeply rooted in history, while her children are a symbol of continuity and life. She embraces all worries, and the desire for freedom shines from her eyes. She connects the land with fertility, giving and seasons of joy. She appears in the painting in a simple, everyday yet panoramic way that tells the story of the historical presence on the soil of the entire homeland¹⁹.

In this text, we seek to explore the feminist interest of Palestinian women artists through examples of artists who have addressed issues related to the feminine entity and feminist issues, whether related to personal situations or public issues, and even those related to freedoms and rights. It is important to note from the

19 Bin Fatima, Bushra. *Sliman Mansour and the journey of fierce technical defence*. -ru.facebook.com/notes/creators- [Arabic].

outset that there are Palestinian female artists engaged in and dedicated to creative work, and feminist activists who adopt a new ideological discourse that rises to levels befitting them, through joint and diligent work with Palestinian men artists.

In fact, I suppose it is time to define a fully-fledged feminist discourse in Palestinian art, one that addresses all principles, starting with recognising women's freedom and their complete right to decide their profession and personal choices, all the way to achieving equality with men in terms of the value of their creative work and the opportunities available to them, after history has witnessed a great marginalisation of women in creative fields.

Hasan's works are not ordinary works; they can be exhausting, as they stem from higher states of honesty, and identification with private and public, social and political issues. In both cases, the artist shapes what is inside her to present a new vision of events. This vision is what distinguishes her work, not the event itself. This is true in the painting *The Fish Seller*, which revolves around the events of the war on Gaza without mentioning the war itself. In general, the artist's creations are distinctive in terms of the topics covered, and the formative and formal qualities of her works. This means that the artist's cultural and biological gender difference greatly affects the creative process

and formulation of her projects, ideas and artistic themes.

There is no doubt that the deviations resulting from the artist's physical nature and environment leave their imprint on her artistic product. I believe that this is evident first in her sensitivity to personal topics and events that she has experienced, and her interest in themes and objects that might not attract the attention of a male artist, such as knives and kitchen utensils. Secondly, this is evident in her sensitivity to materials, as the artist experiences her daily life through canvas, clothing, textures and organic materials that stimulate her senses, such as the Sharia clothing she wears, which has become part of her identity, reinforcing it and dismantling many of the male taboos in the Palestinian cultural scene. This organic interaction expands her ability to express herself and her imagination for a highly-sensitive physical and intellectual representation.

Her personal experience and daily life are her source of inspiration. Her adoption of the feminist struggle in the realm of her artistic activity questions society's behaviour towards her, starting from within herself, and the image of that self in its formal domain, represented by the body, and its intellectual domain, represented by memories from the 1948 Palestinian Nakba up to the modern day. In addition to the ideas and design of her works and artistic practices to convey an emotional

truth necessary in developing self-identity, the search for gender identity appears repeatedly in Hasan's works, through an investigation into the self and its characteristics.

The artist's inner world and its expression through all these contradictions, reflects her thoughts and feelings that are no different from the fears and concerns of any human being, whether an artist or otherwise, Eastern or Western. But these feelings stem from this land, from this people, from her heart and her feelings, where she translates ideas into works with a language of broad concepts and a formulation that relies on symbolic expressive elements accompanied by symbolic aesthetic elements that stimulate the recipient, leaving their mind in a state of confusion and curiosity, which brings them into the event's dialectic, accumulated in the minds of those who lived it. The event's incorporation into the structure of her works requires us to search for a mechanism for the relationship between the past and the present in a way that preserves the components of national identity in the face of displacement and migration. Here we must ask the question: Is the dialogue between the eye and the aesthetic form another part of this pain or event?

The past and present are metaphors for the inner psychological and intellectual voids that occupy the artist. She competes with a catastrophe that still occupies an

entire generation, who still see themselves there, in the past, at the heart of the event. She also competes with ideas taken from memory that have become symbols over the years. The abandoned villages surrounded by murals of sabra, oranges and olives, and the events of Gaza are like pointing fingers, linking that period to today. Her works may nod to those dramatic situations, inviting the recipient to enter into the mechanism of the historical and formative relationship together²⁰.

The debate this exhibition raises is: How does modernity view and deal with the past? How does it allow the viewer to enter this debate without distress or retreat? Especially if we take into account the same distress caused by the artist's works, where the contradiction between the clear and the incomprehensible, the overt and the covert, the present and the past, is evident. This attempt forces the viewer to extract the essence of the three trends: the human; the historical-political; and the professional-artistic; and to adapt them to their position as a viewer, trying to form a new relationship to deal with and interact with those elements.

The artist tries to remove the literary narrative idea in favour of the visual aspect, highlighting it and introducing it into the realm of the visual idea. The

²⁰ For more information, see: Abu Shakra, Farid and Eissa, Mervat. *The event "with consciousness" the event as an event, the present and the past, I and them*. Mahmoud Darwish Museum, 2002. [Arabic].

process of removing the narrative idea is not an easy matter, because the artist cannot remove the event. On the other hand, if the event is not associated with the literary and narrative text, it becomes impossible to convey it in the language of creation and beauty to the viewer. The artist is obligated first and foremost to understand and study the event in order to be able to translate it into texts and artistic creations. Therefore, the artist has to choose where to direct the focus. Should she shed light on historical events and sad and tragic dramatic stories? Or should her goal be to highlight artworks and the idea that sums up everything mentioned thus far? Should she then tackle them with a clean slate that serves the professional and artistic perspective?

Conclusion

When a people wakes up to their current situation, finds that they are not satisfied with the conditions in which they live and begins to search for change, they first need to think about their needs and aspirations to be able to further their existence. If a person does not recognise themselves and their identity, they will remain at the mercy of the authorities who impose on them what they should be in their eyes and logic, because they are unable to define themselves. Change does not come only by demanding, but by searching for the self.

No matter how much we demand, protest and express our dissatisfaction with the status quo, we must start by changing ourselves from within to be influential forces in the current situation, and able to direct our lives in a way that meets our desires and needs, not only the basic material ones, but also the intellectual, political, social, psychological, artistic and creative ones. The first step towards change is discovering the self, that is, discovering the identity²¹.

If the events that have swept our societies from the Palestinian Nakba in 1948 to the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011 are the beginning of a transformation, then the artist's imagination becomes a core part of an artist's being, whether male or female. It should also steer us onto the path indicated by Palestinian art, where change is a way of life, a state of existence and construction. Therefore, we can say with confidence that real art was one of the reasons for the change witnessed by the Palestinian cultural scene in particular and the Arab region in general.

The woman artist Sobhiya Hasan Qais acts as a heart that embraces delicate feelings, two hands skilled in implementing her techniques and an eye that turns the pages of memory and takes you to historical dimensions, to a stolen homeland filled with sabra murals, olive fields

21 Harb, Ali. *Criticism, truth and interpretation*. Beirut: Dar Al Tanweer for Printing and Publishing, 2007, p.196. [Arabic].

and the scent of oranges, to a sea that wears the blue of the sky, reflecting the transparency of flocks of seagulls and pigeons. And she searches and stands in solidarity with the figures who adorn her works with broken, hesitant rhythms, with a naked and hazy scream that raises many questions despite the clarity of the topics and techniques the artist presents, stacked with stories and tales of the homeland and other images from her own story, to tell us: There is a blended homeland called Palestine, and I am part of this blend.

