

35 Prints – 35 Years of Occupation

A new acquisition by the British Museum

By Venetia Porter

As part of its continuing policy of acquiring modern and contemporary art from the Middle East, this short article highlights an exciting recent acquisition of a set of prints by Palestinian and Israeli artists. It was made thanks to the generosity of a newly formed group of supporters who are helping the British Museum source and fund appropriate acquisitions.

The works that interest us for the growing collection include those that tell powerful stories about contemporary life or historical events in the Middle East. The Israel-Palestine conflict is the single most important narrative that continues to dominate the politics and the daily lives of the peoples of this region and this set of screen prints was the product of a desire by Palestinian and Israeli artists to promote their ideals of a shared peaceful future. The idea came about in June 2002, and this is the artists' accompanying statement:

"In defiance of the painful situation in which we presently find ourselves - violent, oppressive and seemingly without a solution - and in a direct challenge to the renewed threat of population transfer, re-occupation and terror, we, as artists are determined to persist in our efforts to promote peaceful dialogue, towards a shared peaceful future for both peoples."



Rula Halawani

On June 7, 2004, when our group reached the Wall, people from the West Bank for the first time, and it was difficult for the soldiers to understand them as well. I could feel their own effect. When we decided to show the first pilgrimage in northern Jerusalem on the following Sunday, the history of the Wall was exposed hundreds of thousands of people taking part. The pain of feelings of a generation would express themselves in the chance to touch the stones of the Wall and move, to go to the holiest of Holy Places. But then how would these hundreds of thousands track the Wall through the labyrinthine narrow alleyways? The main answer was to do away with the three levels of the Magharbi Quarter, to make the so-called first, second, and third floors, called a meeting of Yehuda Yehoi, Yehoi Yehoi, the architect Adish Sharihi and several others. My counterpoint, which was the first, it was an impossible to do it again, and it was to show, to make the decision for me. I started in my own Magharbi group, and they approved themselves as well. Then the archaeologists and other experts came to the Wall and show a map of exactly what should be seen down and what should not and we found people who were interested in the families that were living in the West Bank. On the night of Sunday, June 14, the work of clearing the Magharbi Quarter began. In two days it was almost finished. Once the Wall was made accessible, an endless stream of people started moving in. After the Magharbi area had been cleared, the next obvious step was a road from West Jerusalem to the Wall. We had built a temporary road across Mount Zion so that people could reach the Wall without crossing the Arab part of the city, where some tension was still going on. On Sunday, June 14, 2004, the road was closed to the road by the Shalev holiday. Three days later, Israeli police started to remove road blocks. It is believed that in 2004, in 2004, the road was closed for the first time since 1967, more than 30,000 people were

David Reeb

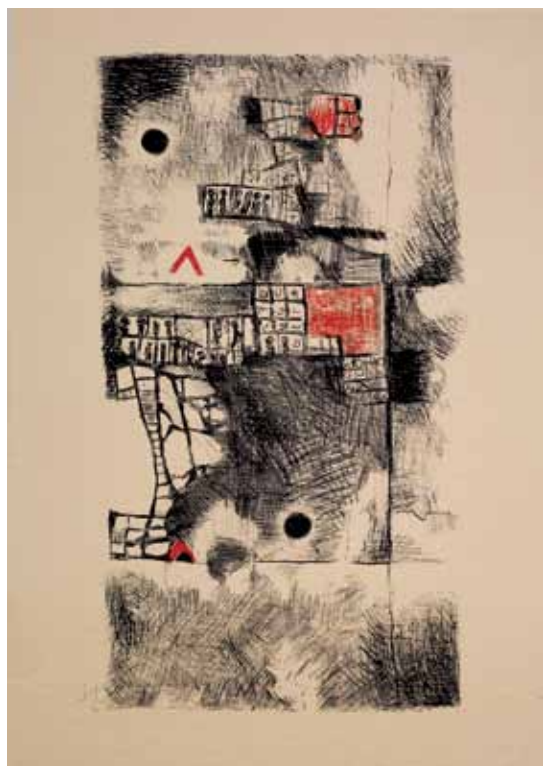


Khaled Hourani



Asad Azi

Nabil Anani

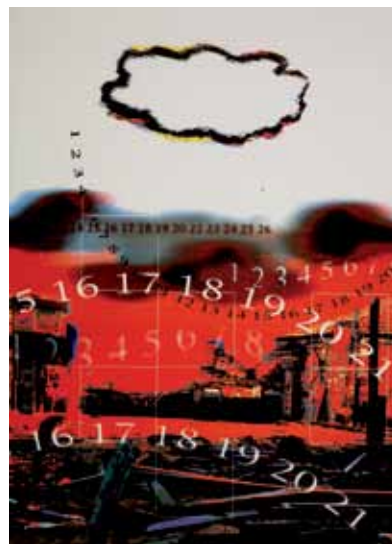


The entire portfolio of 35 prints - referring to 35 years of occupation (between 1967 and 2002) - was printed at the Har-El Print Workshop in Jaffa. Nafas Art Magazine highlighted this remarkable effort in 2004¹ and placed it within the context of joint projects by Palestinian and Israeli artists that have been undertaken since 1981. However, surprisingly, given the superb quality of production and the calibre of many of the artists involved, this set of works has not achieved the attention it deserves.

Seen together, the prints present as fractured and complex a picture as the politics demand, capturing moments in time and complex identities. Acclaimed artist-photographer Rula Halawani presents her travel document issued by the state of Israel showing her place of birth as Jerusalem and her nationality as Jordanian; graphic artist and curator David Tartakover from the

¹ http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2004/35_prints

Benazel Academy, depicts a map of the West Bank as a glowing red sore; Asad Azi's sculptural naked man covered with faint Arabic writing is entitled *Sono Blanco* (I am white). His artist's statement describes himself as 'a spark of the collision of the Eastern and Western cultures, which has created an art that is active, nervous, and seeks to unite two cultures into art'. David Reeb superimposes text describing the capture of East Jerusalem by Israeli forces in the war of 1967 onto a photograph of the Western (Wailing) Wall. Emily Jacir who is known for works 'that blur the boundary between art and life, with a frequent emphasis on global mobility and political exile'² presents imprints of feet going round in a circle where she has inscribed the words *rihlat al-awdah* (the journey of the return).



Hosni Radwan

2 From a review of the exhibition Ramallah –New York 2009

Tayseer Barakat



David Tartakover



Emily Jacir



Tayseer Barakat and Khaled Hourani (along with Nabil Anani and Husni Radwan also represented here) were among a group of artists who created the famous exhibition of 'found' objects *Eyewitness* in Ramallah in 2002 following Israeli army incursions into Palestinian villages. Barakat is a founder member of the Jerusalem Wasiti arts centre and part of the movement 'New Vision'. He loves to use natural materials: burnt wood or henna. Characteristic of his work are silhouettes and, in the *35 years* series lonely figures are juxtaposed within a grid with pyramids, reflecting perhaps the influence of his time as a student in Alexandria. Kamal Boullata describes his work as a visual narrative in which 'legends (are) perpetuated by the spoken word.....silhouettes and human figures occupy their place in relation to each other in a rambling structure not unlike that of speech'.³ Khaled Hourani, Arts Director of the International

3 Kamal Boullata, *Palestinian Art From 1850 to the Present*, London (Saqi books) 2009, p. 254

Academy of Art Palestine, participated with Miri Segal in the powerful exhibition *People Land and State* at the Israeli Centre for Digital Art with a sound installation describing his experiences while crossing the Gaza-Ramallah border. The work in *35 years* is a beautiful patchwork evoking landscapes and textiles and also hinting at designs of mosaic or arabesque in Islamic art. Finally Michal Rovner, best known for her remarkable animated figural projections onto a range of different materials – stones, buildings, rooms – in a powerful image entitled *Would you be afraid?* seems to highlight the result of how the lack of a peaceful resolution and the constant conflict result in the continuing distrust of 'the other' – the people just like you but across a great divide.

This important acquisition tells us much about the arts in Palestine and Israel and demonstrates how art can offer the possibility of bridging what appear to be irreconcilable differences in the Israel-Palestine conflict. For a museum of history, works such as these allows the museum to continue to highlight in evocative ways the history of the world through its collections.

Dganit Berest



Hisham Muhsin





Jawad Al Malhi



Dina Shenhav



Gal Weinstein

Venetia Porter, Curator of Islamic and contemporary Middle East art, The British Museum.

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Gershon Knispel



Michal Rovner





Sigalit Landau

Michal Neaman



Bashir Abu-Rabia



Ibrahim Mozayen



Igal Tumarkin





Sharif Waked



Micha Ullman

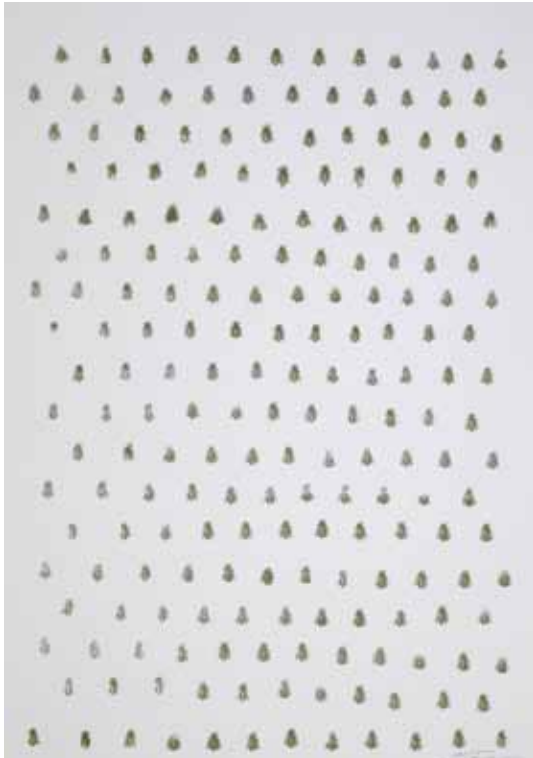


Samir Salameh



Itzhak Livne

Suleiman Mansour



Moshe Gershuni



Larry Abramson



Yousef Ragib



Taleb Dweik





Tal Matzliach

Yair Garbuz



Karim Dabah

