



Creative Palestinian Art: Art Sawa, Dubai - UAE

By Reem Fekri

Under the patronage of H.E Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahya, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and in partnership with the Welfare Association, Art Sawa presents a juried, non-for-profit competition. The exhibition showcases contemporary art from Palestine, where 45 established artists and 11 emerging artists participate, in hope to win – where there will be three winners in total.

The members of the jury consist of; H.E Owais, Minister of Culture (UAE); Sheikh Sultan Al Qassimi; Zaki Nusseibeh, Advisor at the Presidential Court and interpreter for the President of the United Arab Emirates; William Laurie, Head of Sale at Christie's Dubai and charge of the department of Modern and Contemporary Arab & Iranian Art worldwide; Ali Khadra, founder and publisher of Canvas Omar Donia, co-founder and publisher of Contemporary Practices Journal; Massimiliano Lodi, Project Manager for TDIC Cultural Department.

During this past year, there has been a multitude of events for contemporary arts from Palestine and the Diaspora, proving to be one of the most incredible times for the region and the arts. For example, the Palestinian Pavilion that featured at Art Dubai last March and the inaugural Pavilion at the Venice Biennial during the

summer are just a few of the key exhibitions to feature and highlight artists from the area.

Whilst the Occupied Territories are still under attack and despite Obama's reiteration of US support for an independent Palestinian state, artists are providing the world a different view to what the media portrays.

At the time of print, the exhibition was being hung at Art Sawa. Taken on a private, guided tour through the collection, Amel Mekkawi, the director of Art Sawa, delicately lifts and unfolds sheets of bubble wrap to reveal some remarkable artworks that have been released and shipped to the UAE. Makkawi passionately asserts that despite the Palestinian's struggle for independence, art is still very much relevant; giving a voice to a nation that is struggling and acting as an antidote to the current situation.

One of the most provoking works that is shown to me is by Laila Shawa, a renowned Palestinian artist, who is known for her *Walls of Gaza* series. For Creative Palestinian Art, she presents *Letters to Omayya*, recalling the death of her cousin who lived in Palestine. Shawa's cousin was diagnosed with cancer, but like many others, she was prevented from traveling to Jerusalem for treatment. Another work that stands out is Sama Alshaibi's *Sketch 5* and *Sketch 10*, which depicts shadows of toy guns imprinted on the sand, with an arm reaching to play with them. Alshaibi asserts that these subjects are presented "anonymously and without a context: abstracted body parts, contested resources (such as land and water), as well as concrete definitions of bullets, flags and territorial lines".

These are just a few of the 56 artists that are presented at Creative Art Palestine. Although the winner has yet to be announced, it can be agreed that all of these artists have won – through their artistic practices, they have admirably given themselves, and their nation, a rightful voice of hope and courage.

Creative Art Palestine runs from the 15th March – 16th April at Art Sawa, Dubai. The winner will be announced on the 14th of March.