

meticulously choreographed, and mischievously clever in the way Sansour's expression most often is.

This exhibit crowns an already impressive career that includes exhibits at the Tate Modern, the Arken Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, the Third Guangzhou Triennial in China, the Contemporary Art Biennale in Nîmes France, the 11th International Istanbul Biennial and the Busan Biennale in South Korea. *A Space Exodus* was nominated for the Muhr Awards for short film at the Dubai International Film Festival.



Courtesy of the Artist

### ***The Novel of Nonel and Vovel***

Published by Charta 2009, 188 pages with colour illustrations throughout.

*Nonel and Vovel* is a multidisciplinary project run by the artists Oreet Ashery and Larissa Sansour. Israeli born Ashery, and Palestinian born Sansour, have started their collaboration in 2007, culminated in the publication of their highly experimental political graphic novel, *The Novel of Nonel and Vovel*.

This special graphic novel raises questions on the nature of artistic practice, agency, authority and authorship, and offers an eye-opening take on Palestine.

Nonel and Vovel are the artists' alter egos, compromised superheroes who contract a virus during an art opening, resulting in a chain of encounters that leads them to save Palestine with extensive help from local ninja women.

*The Novel of Nonel and Vovel* presents a bold mixture of art, politics, graphics, games, sci-fi, story telling and other experiments. Two essays by the curators Reem Fadda and Nat Muller have been specially commissioned for the book.

## Raeda Saadeh

By Juliet Cestar

*Threatened, therefore living,  
Wounded, therefore being  
Fearful, therefore frightening,  
Erect, therefore a flame tree.  
Who will make me real?*<sup>1</sup>

This poem, written over thirty years ago, has inspired one of Raeda Saadeh's best-known works, *Who Will Make Me Real*. In this photographic self-portrait, the artist reclines defiantly, like a present-day odalisque, wrapped in a copy of *Al Quds* – the Palestinian daily newspaper. The work comments on the interplay between women and politics, issues that are important for Saadeh in her daily life and that run throughout her work. For Saadeh, woman is tied to the reality of her place and time, and aspires to another and better world.

Saadeh was born in Umm Al-Fahem, Palestine, and educated at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, where she now teaches. Her life in Jerusalem is one of several states of occupation and contradiction: a concrete wall, fences, checkpoints, curfews, stone barriers and also a home, a language and cultural and social expectations. She is a Palestinian with an Israeli passport, and also an artist and therefore an unconventional, even rebellious woman living in a traditional Middle Eastern society. Through installation, performance and photography she focuses on her own body, like a Cindy Sherman of the Middle East, to address her concerns and frustrations and bring them to a wider audience.

For example, *Crossroads* is a photographic self-portrait of the artist standing in front of her house with a suitcase, ready to leave were it not for the large block of concrete

<sup>1</sup> From: Nadia Tueni, A Bilingual Anthology, Lebanon, Poems of Love and War (Syracuse University Press, 2006 New York)

that encases her left leg. She is immobilised physically – through the political obstructions to daily life imposed by the Israeli occupation – and domestically and socially – by the cultural expectations of women in a traditional Middle Eastern society. For Saadeh:

*"The woman I represent is filled with ambition, weighed down with oppression; she is more sane than she should be, and yet a little mad. She is both fragile and strong; she is fully awake and responsive, while constantly on the move. And every move she makes, every act, is an act that exhibits awareness towards her surrounding environment, while simultaneously being an act of revolt towards social conditions."*

Different gender issues feature in many of Saadeh's works. Basket, for instance, is a photograph and video work of the artist walking with a green plastic shopping basket fixed over her head. Her vision is impaired by the green plastic grid in front of her face, like looking at the world from inside a cage – a statement about women being prisoners of domesticity. Dark, however, is a self-portrait of Saadeh wearing a man's business suit backwards, a comment on the multiple domestic roles that many Palestinian women have to play – father, mother, man and woman – as many are widows or their men folk are absent, imprisoned in Israel.

Inspired by well-known European Old Master paintings such as Da Vinci's Mona Lisa and Vermeer's Milkmaid, Saadeh has re-created each work as a contemporary photograph, placing herself as the central character and subtly changing the background to reflect her own situation and the landscape of the Occupied Territories.

In *Mona Lisa*, a demure Saadeh mimics the pose of Da Vinci's model, but while the enigmatic Mona Lisa represented an idealised woman in an imaginary landscape, suggesting only the slightest link between humanity and nature, Saadeh poses in front of a far-from ideal contested landscape, the hills filled with fortified Israeli settlements. Similarly, in *Milkmaid*, Saadeh pours milk in a ruined house without a roof, grass growing underfoot. She herself occupies the territory of the Old Masters, while also subtly commenting on the position of women and the Palestinian people. Her poignant and often witty response to the Palestinian situation has

won her an international following, with exhibitions in the Middle East, America, Australia and Europe, most recently in "Rêve et Réalité: Art Contemporain du Proche-Orient" at the Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern, Switzerland (2009). Her work is also in the permanent collection of several public institutions, including the V&A in London.



Raeda Saadeh, *Mona Lisa*, 2007



Raeda Saadeh, *Who Will Make Me Real*, 2005



Raeda Saadeh, *Crossroads*, 2003