

*The sound reverberated in the tank, and almost pierced his eardrums as it came back to him. Before the echo of the rumble that his first cry had set up had died away, he shouted again: 'Hey there!' He put two firm hands on the edge of the opening and, supporting himself on his strong arms, slid down inside the tank. It was very dark there, and at first he couldn't make out anything, but when he moved his body away from the opening a circle of yellow light fell into the depths and showed a chest covered with thick grey hair which began to shine brightly as though coated with tin. Abul Khaizuran bent to put his ear to the damp grey hair. The body was cold and still. Stretching out his hand, he felt his way to the back of the tank. The other body was still holding on to the metal support. He tried to find the head but could only feel the wet shoulders; then he made out the head, bowed on the chest. When his hand touched the face it fell into a mouth open as wide as it could go. [...]*

*The thought slipped from his mind and ran onto his tongue: 'Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you say anything? Why?' The desert suddenly began to send back the echo: 'Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you bang the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why?'*

Ghassan Kanafani, *Men in the Sun*<sup>1</sup>

The exhibition "Men in the Sun" explores contemporary Palestinian art, whose practitioners live and work in Israel. It borrows its title from Ghassan Kanafani's story by that name. Published in 1963, the novel unfolds the journey of three Palestinians of different generations who seek work in the Emirates in an attempt to deliver themselves and their families from their harsh conditions of life. Lacking the necessary transit permits, the three are forced to hide in an empty water tank carried by the truck transporting them, before reaching the border crossing between Iraq and Kuwait. At the border station the guards detain the truck driver in idle conversation, and the three Palestinians die in the desert heat, on the outskirts of an unknown city. The story concludes with the desperate cry of the truck driver: 'Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you bang the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why?'

The story of the three refugees illustrates the vulnerability and fragility of Palestinian life. Kanafani stresses the rickety temporal dimension of their being,

where, among other things, they are doomed to such cruel death due to loss of time or suspended, detained time.

In his essay in this catalogue,<sup>2</sup> Amal Jamal notes that Kanafani's story reflects a profound temporal consciousness which refuses to accept the reality created in the wake of the 1948 Nakba. This temporality—namely, the Palestinians' perception of time—is based on their exclusion from history, on the emptying and suspension of their time: "Palestinians living in their homeland," Jamal writes, "also experience daily a sense of exile and estrangement from time and locality. This issue refers to the quality of the experience common to all Palestinians in the wake of the Nakba: suspended time, an attenuated existence over which there is no control, and the lack of normal continuity. All Palestinian communities, wherever located and irrespective of the quality of their lives, confront the same crisis. They share a festering sense of temporariness, the suspension and emptying of time, of waiting."<sup>3</sup> This temporality, he maintains, is reflected in the work of Palestinian writers and artists who address the experiences of loss, estrangement, alienation, and the challenges of temporariness wherever they live.

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The exhibition "Men in the Sun" revolves around two axes of meaning which recur in the works. One—"The Shadow of Silence"—continues the tragic, fatal silence of the three refugees in the water tank in the blazing desert. This silence echoes in many of the works in the exhibition. Silence, in this context, is a faithful expression of the impossible daily tension accompanying the circumstances of life and art-practice of Palestinian artists. The other side of the silence coin is a coded symbolical allegorical spectrum which draws away from artistic realism. Although this allegorical configuration partly responds to concrete historical events, it is mostly latent, and does not emerge in the explicit interpretation and discourse regarding the works.

The other axis—"Temporality as a Palestinian Space of Consciousness"—is centered on temporal contemplation of the space. The time-space relationship is present in the works both in the images of emptiness or absence of people from their surroundings, and in the images of the thicket and the labyrinth. The awareness of continuous temporality, or the long conscious wait in anticipation of change, is present in the work of these artists from the very outset, yet is gradually replaced by a new consciousness of temporality as a type of normalcy which increasingly takes over their existence.

1 Ghassan Kanafani, "Men in the Sun," in *Men in the Sun & Other Palestinian Stories*, trans. Hilary Kilpatrick (London: Lynne Rienner, 1999), pp. 71, 74.

2 See Amal Jamal's essay in this catalogue, "The Struggle for Time and the Power of Temporariness: Jews and Palestinians in the Labyrinth of History," pp. E/08-E/23 (trans. Nina Reshef).

3 *Ibid.*, pp. E/19-E/20.



Right: Abed Abdi, *Wa ma nasina (Lod)*, published in *Al-Jadid*, 1981

Left: Abed Abdi, *Wa ma nasina (Trap in Khobbeizeh)*, published in *Al-Jadid*, 1981

**The Palestinian Art Field**

The thirteen artists participating in the exhibition are all Palestinian citizens of Israel, who began operation in two very different periods in the history of the Palestinian minority in Israel: Five of them—**Abed Abdi** (b. 1942, Haifa), **Osama Said** (b. 1957, Nahaf), **Asad Azi** (b. 1955, Shefa-Amer), **Ibrahim Nubani** (b. 1961, Acre), and **Asim Abu-Shakra** (b. 1961, Umm el-Fahem)—were born into a reality of military government which continued from 1948 to its official abolishment in 1966; the remaining eight artists—**Fahed Halabi** (b. 1970, Majdal Shams), **Michael Halak** (b. 1975, Fasuta), **Scandar Copti**, (b. 1975, Jaffa), **Ala Farhat** (b. 1977, Buka'ata), **Rabia Buchari** (b. 1980, Jaffa), **Durar Bacri** (b. 1982, Acre), **Raafat Hattab** (b. 1981, Jaffa), and **Rani Zahrawi** (b. 1982, Majd al-Kurum)— were born after the 1967 War.

The artists of both groups have formal art educations, and their work is underlain by some important landmarks in local Palestinian history, such as the geographical unification and reunion with the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza in the wake of the 1967 War, the 1976 Land Day, the First Lebanon War in 1982, the first Intifada in 1987, the second Intifada in 2000, the Second Lebanon War in 2006, the war in Gaza in 2008. It is also underlain by discrimination, decrees, and various types of limitations and restrictions under whose shadow they lead their lives as individuals and as artists.

Due to the Palestinian Nakba and life under a military regime, Palestinian artists began operating within Israel's borders only at a relatively late stage, some 25 years after the establishment of the State. The military government period sentenced the artists who remained within the borders of Israel to severe isolation. The enforcement of military rule on the majority of Arab residential zones

by virtue of the British emergency stipulations, was intended to restrict, as it did indeed, the Arab citizens' freedom of expression and movement, as well as their freedom of association and right to organize. Thus, after the abolishment of the military regime, young Palestinians began enrolling in art studies in Israel and overseas.

The socialization process undergone by Palestinian artists who study in Israeli academic institutions displays several post-colonial characteristics: first, the language of the local art field—Hebrew—forces the artist to develop his/her creative modes of expression in a foreign linguistic setting; second, the curricular "habitus"—its cultural and artistic context—is well anchored between the Western and the Israeli art fields, excluding the Palestinian artist's culture; third, being a national field, despite its universalist aspiration, the Israeli art field tends to regard Palestinian artists as "other." Not only do this field and its power systems avoid representing the Palestinian artist, they also exclude him and erase his Arab-Palestinian cultural identity. In art schools, and subsequently in systems of display, interpretation, and criticism, these artists come face to face with the "legitimate" knowledge of the Israeli nation-culture, knowledge based on what may be termed a "denial of the Nakba" and rejection of Palestinian history, culture, and identity. This built-in negation is intertwined and assimilated into the inner logic of the Israeli art field, which was shaped as part of the broader logic of the developing Israeli nation-culture from the establishment of the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts to the present.

Vis-à-vis this "legitimate" knowledge which is anchored in the space of the Hebrew language, a fertile and diverse cultural activity has taken place in the fields of Arabic literature, poetry, and journalism from the 1950s to the present. This activity is based on the Arab literary elite,

- 4 Kamal Boullata, "Facing the Forests: Israeli and Palestinian Artists," in *idem.*, *Palestinian Art from 1850 to the Present* (London: Saqi, 2009), pp. 249-276.
- 5 Ellen Ginton, "The Asim Abu-Shakra Passion," in cat. *Asim Abu-Shakra*, trans. Sara Kitai (Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 1994), p. 91; Tali Tamir, "The Shadow of Foreignness: On the Paintings of Asim Abu-Shakra," *ibid.*, p. 89.
- 6 The Oslo Accords and the constitution of the Palestinian Authority have had an immense impact on Palestinian art. A certain sense of sovereignty led to the establishment of cultural centers and art galleries, such as Anadiel Gallery (in 1992), Al-Wasiti Art Center (in 1994), and the Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art (in 1998), all three in Jerusalem; the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center (1996), Zhiryab Gallery (1998), and Al-Kattan Center (1998) in Ramallah; Al-Kahf Art Gallery, which operates at Bethlehem International Center (1995). The process still continues. In 2005 the Al Hoash Art Gallery was opened in Jerusalem, and the First Biennial of Contemporary Art was held in Ramallah (2008).
- 7 "The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel" by the National Committee for the Heads of the Arab Local Authorities in Israel; "The Democratic Constitution" by Adalah, The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel; "An Equal Constitution for All?" by the Mossawa Center: The Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel; "The Haifa Declaration" by Mada Al-Carmel, Arab Center for Applied Social Research, see: <http://www.mossawacenter.org/default.php?lng=1&pg=13&dp=1&fl=19> <http://www.adalah.org/heb/constitution.php> <http://www.mada-research.org/hebrew/index.html> [http://soc.haifa.ac.il/~s.smooaha/download/Arab\\_Visionary\\_Documents.pdf](http://soc.haifa.ac.il/~s.smooaha/download/Arab_Visionary_Documents.pdf)

whose conspicuous representatives frequently publish books of poetry and prose, concurrently writing for literary periodicals and supplements of newspapers published in Arabic, such as *Al-Ittihad*, *Al-Jadid*, *Al-g'ad*, *Al-Sinara*, *Kul al-Arab*, *Panorama*, etc. Emile Toma, Emile Habiby, Michel Haddad, Samih al-Qasim, Taha Muhammad Ali, Mahmud Darwish, Salim Joubran, and Taufiq Ziyad are among the writers and poets who have incorporated both these aspects in their work. Palestinian artist and cultural researcher Kamal Boullata notes the textual impact of Arabic literature, poetry and spoken language on Palestinian visual art. In this context, he identifies hidden connotations of words, that have become latent ingredients of Palestinian art.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, many of the works in the exhibition attest to such an affinity.

As aforesaid, in the restricted conditions created following the Nakba, and in the absence of Israeli political recognition of a Palestinian identity, the Palestinian art field within Israel began to form at a later period. The five artists comprising the more seasoned group in the exhibition are a representative selection of visual artists active since the 1970s in the Palestinian as well as the Israeli art fields. Due to the absence of Israeli political recognition of the Palestinian identity, until the 1990s the Israeli art field defined these artists as "Arab-Israeli" artists, and it was in this capacity that some of them were incorporated in group exhibitions in Israel and abroad.

The first Intifada and the peace process which got underway in the 1990s marked a turning point in this respect. The discourse about Abu-Shakra's work reflects the transformation of the Israeli art field in relation to the work of Palestinian artists, graduates of art schools in Israel. Thus, in essays about Abu-Shakra's work from the 1980s and 1990s he is defined as an "Arab-Israeli artist," whereas in the catalogue published by the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in 1994, after his untimely death, the definitions "Muslim Israeli Arab" and "Arab-Palestinian-Israeli" appear side by side.<sup>5</sup> This change—resulting from the transformation in the recognition of Palestinian artists, graduates of Israeli art schools, in terms of the intricate nature of their identity—has been gradual, reaching its peak after the Oslo Accords and the year 1998,<sup>6</sup> the 50th anniversary of the Nakba. This significant political-cognitive change infiltrated the consciousness of major players in the Jewish-Israeli art field and discourse, reinforcing their interest in their Palestinian counterparts and enhancing their willingness to be exposed to them.

The Oslo Accords and the political process toward establishment of a Palestinian nation-state within the boundaries of the Palestinian Authority have been highly charged in terms of the Palestinian minority in Israel, as they discussed solutions for two major Palestinian groups—the Palestinians residing in the West Bank and Gaza, and the Palestinians in the diaspora. The debate



Ibrahim Nubani, *Untitled*, 2004, oil on canvas, 40x30

over the future status of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, however, was absent. Among the events commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Nakba (1998), the issues of the refugees and the right of return were addressed, but the notion of the Nakba, as it is perceived by the Palestinian minority in Israel, is still largely absent from the documentation and perpetuation enterprises, and from the Palestinian public discussion.

After the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada and the bloody events during the demonstrations in the country's north in October 2000, in which thirteen Palestinian citizens of Israel were killed, the top issues on the agenda of the Palestinians residing in Israel came into sharper focus: the civil struggle for equal rights and status of the Palestinian citizens of Israel and the recognition of their identity, on the one hand, and the demand to be recognized by the Palestinian people to which they belong, on the other. The internalization of this double system—of civil belonging, on the one hand, and national identity on the other—has led to repudiation of their designation as "Israeli Arabs," and its replacement by the definition "Palestinian citizens of Israel."

In 2006-07, four "visionary" documents about the future of the Palestinian citizens of Israel were published,<sup>7</sup> all of them containing the argument that the Palestinian public space within the 1948 borders is a space denied a history; hence the demand emerging in them to recognize the Nakba, namely—to acknowledge the historical narrative



and the catastrophe of the Palestinian people. The discussion pertaining to the unique historical narrative of the Palestinian minority in Israel culminated in 2008, during the events marking the 60th anniversary of the Nakba; it also brought about a fundamental change in the Palestinian discourse about Palestinian art created in Israel. This change established the uniqueness of the art field of the Palestinian minority in Israel, transpiring in-between the Palestinian and the Israeli art fields, with more than 200 active Palestinian artists, graduates of Israeli art schools, and with exhibition spaces in Arab towns and villages in Israel.<sup>8</sup>

The exhibition "Men in the Sun" illustrates the influence of this cognitive change on the configurations of practice, interpretation, and criticism of contemporary Palestinian art in Israel. It does so while relating to the post-colonial debate, to the discourse about the politics of identity and self-representation, to the relationship between center and periphery, to ethnic questions and international processes of globalization. The exhibition's basic assumption is that due to the increasingly multi-cultural nature of the field, artists—citizens, minorities, residents of occupied territories, refugees, exiles and immigrants—may create and exhibit contemporary art in a more intricate, multifaceted manner.<sup>9</sup>

### The Shadow of Silence

*'Suffocate? It was to breathe free that I came to this cellar, to breathe in freedom just once. In my cradle you stifled my crying. As I grew and tried to learn how to talk from what you said, I heard only whispers.' [...] 'Careful what you say!' 'Careful what you say!' Always 'Careful what you say!' Just for once, just once, I want to be careless about what I say!' 'I was suffocating! This may be a poky little cellar, Mother, but there's more room here than you have ever had! Shut in it may be, but it's also a way out!'*<sup>10</sup>

This is how Emile Habiby, in his novel *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist*, describes the suffocation felt by the Arabs in Israel during the 1950s and 1960s. Habiby employs ironic and allegorical forms of expression which draw away from artistic realism to articulate silence and silencing, silenced speech, scream and cry.

The oxymoronic representation of opposites—silence as a frozen scream with mouth agape—emerges in several works in the exhibition. Thus, for example, in Ibrahim Nubani's self-portrait *Untitled* (2004), a face becomes a part of ivy climbing up and penetrating an open crater which exposes a yellow abyss. Similarly, in Asim Abu-Shakra's painting, *Self Portrait with Necktie* (1988), the artist's face is presented with the tie as a weight, a foreign body, "decapitating" him, while three circles—two eyes and a wide open mouth of sorts—are marked on it; it is

a portrait devoid of lips, tongue and teeth; the sensory system is erased from the artist's face, leaving only a circle as an empty signifier, devoid of a language. The sound of silenced scream arises from Osama Said's paintings. In *Untitled* (1992), the victim's entire body leans on the arm, a type of giant hand which creates a triangle and a base for physical and mental support. The wide-open screaming mouth expresses an ambivalent relationship fluctuating between helplessness and defiance. Silence as defiance is also present in Michael Halak's works. In *Untitled* (2008) the artist is depicted in a woolen hat, his eyes contracted, his breath blurring the area of the mouth to the point of its erasure.

The silences and possibilities of speech accompanying the works call to mind the notion of *différend* coined by French philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard to describe an unbridgeable gap between two types of discourse:

*A case of différend between two parties takes place when the 'regulation' of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom. ... What is subject to threats is not an identifiable individual, but the ability to speak or to keep quiet ... The différend is the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be. This state includes silence, which is a negative phrase, but it also calls upon phrases which are in principle possible.*<sup>11</sup>

The hushed speech or silence are present not only in the art works themselves, but are necessarily also part of the circumstances of artistic practice. In this respect, silence is a faithful expression of the impossible daily tension accompanying Palestinian art in the existential reality of the Palestinian minority in Israel. A similar ironic position to the one manifested by Emile Habiby in his literary works regarding the tension between silence and the ability to speak and create a historical narrative, may be pinpointed in Scandar Copti and Rabia Buchari's video piece *Truth* (2003). The artists masquerade as tour guides in Jaffa, recounting the "history" of the place as a fictive narrative, while creating an alternative parody which they ironically dub "truth."

The dialectics between a detailed historical text and a symbolical representation is discernible in Abed Abdi's drawings which accompanied Salman Natour's collection of short stories *Wa ma nasina* (We Have Not Forgotten) issued from 1980 to 1982, perpetuating the events of the 1948 Nakba. The heavy black figures are presented in these drawings as transpiring in the abstract scene of a specific event, devoid of geographic identification. The tension between a text dealing with violence and loss that occurred in a specific time and

8 In 1994 the Ibdaa Association for Improving Art in Arab Society was founded in Kufr Julis, which set up a gallery in Kufr Yassif in 2007 [see: <http://www.ibdaa-art.com>]. In 1996 Hana Kofler initiated artistic activity at Beit Hagefen, Arab-Jewish Center in Haifa's Wadi Nisnas neighborhood, including annual projects such as the "Arab Culture Week" and the "Holiday of Holidays" exhibition; the Umm el-Fahem Art Gallery was inaugurated in 1996 [director: Said Abu-Shaqra] (<http://www.umelfahemgallery.org>); Hagar Art Gallery was opened in Jaffa in 2000 [curator: Tal Ben Zvi; [www.hagar-gallery.com](http://www.hagar-gallery.com)]; the year 2005 saw the opening of an art gallery in Tamra [curator: Ahmad Canaan], and in 2006 the Ramla Municipal Gallery and the Rahat Art Gallery were inaugurated. For an elaborate discussion of these spaces, see: Tal Ben Zvi, "Variance through Unity: Contemporary Palestinian Art," in *Jama'a: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Middle East* (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev, 2009) [Hebrew]; Tal Ben Zvi, *Hagar—Contemporary Palestinian Art* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Hagar, 2006).

9 The exhibition "Men in the Sun" was initially formed around the core group of artists active in the 1970s, which were mostly men; from there it continued to evolve to the work of the young artists. A significant entry of women artists into the field of art occurred at the late 1990s, addressing gender issues which have expanded the post-colonial discourse and introduced further intricacies. For an elaborate discussion of Palestinian women's art and artists, see: Tal Ben Zvi, "Palestin(a): Palestinian Women's Art," *Maariv*, Jewish New Year Supplement (1998), p. 35 [Hebrew], see: <http://www.hagar-gallery.com/palestin.html>; Tal Ben Zvi and Yael Lerer (eds.), *Self-Portrait: Palestinian Women's Arts* (Tel Aviv: Andalus, 2001); Tal Ben Zvi (ed.), *New Middle East: Eleven Exhibitions, 1998-1999*, at Heinrich Böll Foundation, Tel Aviv [Jaffa: Hagar Association, 2000]; Tal Ben Zvi and Moran Shoub (eds.) *Brunette: Sixteen Solo Exhibitions at Heinrich Böll Foundation*, Tel Aviv [Tel Aviv: Babel, 2003].

10 Emile Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist*, trans. Salma Khadra Jayyusi and Trevor LeGassick (London: Zed Books, 1985), pp. 109-110.



Raafat Hattab, *Untitled*, 2009,  
video, 3:50 min

place and the abstract space charges the drawing with a timeless symbolical system, both local and universal. This tension is also discernible in Osama Said's drawings created approximately one year after the outbreak of the first Intifada in 1988. These drawings, in acrylic on paper, depict the Stone Intifada in three colors, ochre, red, and black. This coloration, which calls to mind the palette of classical Greek urns, generates a mythological story of power and strife. In *Untitled* (1993) a female figure is stretched as a metaphorical bridge between chaotic forces and the orderly, logical world. Said underscores the toll of physical and mental pain which the figure has to pay for straining all its muscles in a continued attempt to ward off the forces threatening its world. Asad Azi's series "Mother and Child" (1987), based on a recurring composition, was painted against the backdrop of the first Intifada. In his allegorical configuration, the mother and child are depicted on the beach on the right, with soccer players on the left, and the figure of the naked madman in the middle. The masculinity represented by the madman and the footballers is not translated into domination and power which might have changed the figures' lot. The allegory does not offer a logical or symbolical solution to the helplessness and vulnerability presented in the works, and the figures are ultimately fixed to a composition of frozen violence. Similar helplessness is also evident in Azi's fisherman images. In *Purple Fisherman* (1985) he portrays a solitary fisherman surrounded by waves, appearing as though the ground had dropped under his feet, and he is ostensibly standing on water. In the painting *Fisherman in Profile* (1985) the naked, vulnerable fisherman stands up, whereas the sea, colored in vivid red, appears on occasion as a river of blood. The sense of frailty and imbalance is heightened in *Fisherman* (1985), where a naked, white-haired fisherman is standing on a surfboard holding a conspicuously short rod/pole in his hands, as if trying to avoid falling. In Azi's fisherman paintings the sea is far from a protected space; it is an expressive space

threatening to swallow the solitary, naked, fragile human figure standing within it.

Between silence and allegory, the sense of suffocation, helplessness and vulnerability expressed by Emile Habiby in *Saraya, The Ogre's Daughter*,<sup>12</sup> and his ironic-lyrical version of Plato's Allegory of the Cave are manifested.

#### Temporality as a Palestinian Space of Consciousness

"Normal temporariness," writes Amal Jamal, "thus allows reconciliation with the immediate needs of daily life without renouncing former rights and claims. The past loses neither its value nor its force from the renunciation of its continued existence in physical space. It presents itself consistently in Palestinian collective imagination, possibly strengthened by its very conversion into nostalgia. It follows that longing for the past can become a factor within Palestinian awareness capable of motivating the future without persisting in exacting payment for the past. This stage in the development of Palestinian awareness of time has yet to be fully legitimated; it requires rephrasing in formats other than Darwish's poetry or the visual arts, both of which have successfully freed themselves from the chains of tangible and immediate pain of displacement and exile. It requires the metaphysical contemplation of exile, of human existence, but especially of Palestinian existence."<sup>13</sup>

In the awareness of temporariness described by Jamal, the relationship between time and space is articulated. The imprints of this time-space perception may also be identified in the exhibited works. The emptiness, the absence of people precisely in their living quarters, generates anticipation for their return or a suspended time in a sequence of images which reproduce this absence. The meticulous realistic description of the structures only reinforces the human absence, perpetuating the transience by transforming the temporary situation into a permanent state or a situation of continuous present. Another conspicuous concern in the works is the movement

11 Jean-François Lyotard, *The différend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges van den Abbeele (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 9, 11, 13.

12 Emile Habiby, *Saraya, The Ogre's Daughter: A Palestinian Fairy Tale*, trans. Peter Theroux (Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2006).

13 Jamal, op. cit., p. E/23.

in space as movement within a thicket or a labyrinth. Such movement hinders progress, and involves disorientation and a distortion of the sense of time.

In this context one may discuss the representation of temporal consciousness via the “architecture of temporality,” and the keys required to decipher its laws and inner structure. Such “architecture of temporality” is found in Durar Bacri’s series “Untitled” (2008) where he depicts the buildings on Chlenov Street in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. The inhabitants of the city’s south are not present in the paintings and their absence charges the space with a sense of danger and emergency, which is reinforced in many of the painting by the apocalyptic pink-orange shade of the twilight sky.

Similarly, Rani Zahrawi, who paints in realistic style in airbrush technique, presents residential areas in his village Majd al-Kurum while omitting their human element. This absence inspires a melancholic ambience on the public sphere. A real state of emergency is discernible in *Childhood* (2008), portraying his fiancée’s family home after it was hit by a Katyusha in the Second Lebanon War. Zahrawi depicts only the empty building shortly after it suffered a direct hit.

In contrast, Asim Abu-Shakra plants his image of the sabra thicket in a diffuse space, in which the perspective disallows movement. One of his Sabra paintings from 1988 portrays lines reminiscent of sharp shards of glass amidst the hedges; another painting depicts the red cactus flowers as bloodstains. His sabra thicket does not represent structure and genealogy within a stable, hierarchical array of spatial relations; there is neither a point of control nor a focal perspective; the thicket signifies multiplicity, constant deterritorialization, and especially—ongoing violence embedded in the ground by and within culture.

A diffuse space with similar perspective devoid of movement is also evident in Ibrahim Nubani’s works. In two *Untitled* paintings from 2007, the geometrical surface seems to bury the concrete, local symbolical elements which emerged in his previous works, generating a labyrinthine sense of trap; a construction that has disintegrated and imploded, leaving traces of chaos behind.

Amal Jamal notes that the sense of ongoing temporariness involves suspension of existential normalcy, “the protracted temporariness has stimulated formation of a new awareness incorporating the temporariness and normality, not as stability-shattering contradictions but as features to be implemented by means of a unique type of integration.” He calls this cross “temporary normality.”<sup>14</sup> This hybrid consciousness may be pinpointed in Raafat Hattab’s video piece, *Untitled*, where the artist is seen drawing water with a bucket, watering an olive tree, as Lebanese singer Ahmad Kaabour’s song *Hob* (Love) is played in the background. For a while it appears as though the work deals with memory, with the image of the olive tree as a national lyrical sign of the Palestinian

village, but this metaphor is soon undermined when the camera zooms out, revealing that the olive tree and Hattab are, in fact, at the heart of Tel Aviv’s Rabin Square. The work addresses the normalization of temporality as a precondition for the continued existence of the historical subject and for the artist’s sense of localism in the big city.

Temporary normality as an everyday reality is manifested in Fahed Halabi and Ala Farhat’s joint artwork, based on their jobs as construction workers. The video *Working Day* (2009) describes a workday in the building site of the stately Georgian Synagogue in Ashdod. The camera fluctuates between the columns decorating the building and the Star-of-David at the façade, and the conversation of the Palestinian builders taking place at its foot. The conversation centers on the story of a young worker of Gazan-Palestinian origin who arrived in the Israeli city of Or Yehuda as a child. It exposes a biographical testimony, politics of identity and class awareness. Together, all these introduce a complex Palestinian identity, marked by alienation, identification, and yearning.

### Epilogue

The exhibition “Men in the Sun” focuses on contemporary Palestinian art created in a cultural field typified by post-colonial majority-minority relations and national-ethnic tensions. In his essay “The Voyage In and the Emergence of Opposition,”<sup>15</sup> Edward W. Said describes the operation of culture taking place as part of post-colonial writing as a “voyage in”—as a type of cultural hybridization performed by Third World intellectuals and scholars who write out of political or human urgency influenced by the unresolved political situation which is very near the surface. A sense of political and human urgency also characterizes the artistic practice of the artists in this show. It is a practice based on their personal experience, on the unique power relations within and against which they operate, and on their point of view and interpretation.

Via countless intersections, the show’s two axes, “The Shadow of Silence” and “Temporality as a Palestinian Space of Consciousness”, unfold an intricate system of affinities and contexts, visual and narrative strategies and interpretations in Arabic and Hebrew. This system reflects the artists’ dialectical space of existence in the tension between being from within and from without, inside and outside; between belonging and otherness, between national cultural fields and differentiated borders.

The exhibition is steeped in this dialectical tension. It sets out to unravel the overt and covert stitches which tie silence to speech, temporariness to normality, the sense of collective urgency to the position of the subject seeking a place for himself in which to create and exhibit, while also striving to change the charged history of representation and the positions stemming from it, and to sketch a horizon of change.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. E/21-E/22.

<sup>15</sup> Edward W. Said, “The Voyage In and the Emergence of Opposition,” in Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. 258.