

Abd Abdi / Born in Haifa, 1942
/ Lives and works in Haifa.

Abd Abdi's art is chiefly rooted in the autonomous sphere constituted by the language of Arabic literature and the Arabic press. In 1964 he left for art studies in Dresden, where he created many drawings which were published in the Arabic press, portraying refugees in a geographically unidentified space. In *Untitled* (1968), a caravan of refugees wriggles like a snake under the blazing sun, like those long caravans of deportees heading toward an unknown future. Another drawing from the same year portrays a Palestinian woman and her child under a sabra hedge, attesting that the refugeeism described by Abd Abdi is not based exclusively on the experience of the refugee camps in the Arab world, but also alludes to internal refugees living within the 1948 borders.

Between 1972 and 1982, upon his return to Israel after graduation, Abd Abdi worked as the graphic designer of the Communist Party Arabic-language newspaper, *al-Ittihad*, and the literary review *Al-Jadid*, leaving his imprint on the visual culture of the Palestinian minority in Israel. From 1980 to 1982 a collection of short stories by Salman Natour entitled *Wa ma nasina* (We Have Not Forgotten), addressing the events of the 1948 Nakba, was published in the literary periodical *Al-Jadid*. The narrator was a furrow-browed old Sheikh. Each story commenced with a drawing by Abd Abdi, and its title was incorporated into the drawing. Thus, for example, the opening drawing for the story "From the Well to the Mosque of Ramla,"¹ features the old man, a sorrowful expression on his wrinkled face, extending his hands in a cross composition; next to him are wailing women, and at their foot—a dead body dressed in a shroud. Under the drawing, the "wrinkly-faced sheikh" describes what happened in Ramla's Wednesday market in March 1948, the explosion of the bomb that was placed between the vegetable stalls and caused many deaths. The tension between the text dealing with violence and loss, the horizontal composition of the drawing, the dark and heavy figures, and the location of the drawing in an abstract geographical space marked solely by a contour of a minaret charges the drawing with a timeless symbolical system. The prone body, its face concealed, is a victim at once specific and universal.

In other drawings the dialectic between detailed text and symbolical drawing recurs. One such example is *Trap in Khobbeizeh* depicting a group of women observing the worst of all. A group of women also accompanies the story "Like the Sabra in 'Eilabun," where a wounded figure is

lying on the ground, and a woman hesitatingly touching the face. Several female figures are presented in the back, covering their faces in grief. They are located in an empty space, far away from any place of settlement or help. The figure lying on the ground is mentioned in the story, and is identified with the main figure in the story of the 'Eilabun massacre, the Maronite Church custodian, Sama'an al-Shufani, whose body was left near the church.²

The tension between the detailed text and the symbolical drawing is also discernible in a preliminary sketch for the poster of the play *Men in the Sun*. Abd Abdi created the décor for the play when it was staged in Arabic at Al-Midan Theater in Nazareth in 1979 (director: Riad Masarwi). This preliminary study contains a square divided into two different parts: on one side stand three figures wearing keffiyehs, their bodies sketched in contours only; the crowded figures raise their hands upward, as if they were about to fall to the other side of the drawing. Lying on the ground on the other side are three figures that look dead; the face of one is turned upward, whereas the other two face the ground. While the standing figures cry and their keffiyehs identify them as Arabs, the lying figures do not wear keffiyehs, and thus represent universal suffering in an entirely abstract space.

In the refugee drawings, in drawings from the series "Wa ma nasina," and in those which accompanied the play *Men in the Sun*, the figures are located in an abstract geometrical space, which is sometimes sketched graphically with only a few lines. The figures are positioned on the white paper, drawing their local, concrete power from the textual, literary space. This textual space includes rich literary writing by authors and poets, among them Emile Habibi, Anton Shammas, Taha Muhammad Ali, Salman Natour, Samih el Kassem, and others, who lend the drawings the concrete political contexts of their time.

Osama Said / Born in Nahaf, 1957
/ Lives and works in Nahaf and Berlin.

Osama Said's landscape paintings featured in the exhibition were created in Berlin following his graduation from art school. *Untitled* (1990) depicts a forest comprised of black felled trunks, whose rhythm and nature hint at an olive grove. The grove, in turn, attests to man's presence in nature and to a productive agricultural cyclicity which reflects the rural lifestyle of planting and picking, watering and pruning. Nature is personified, and the trunks appear human, ostensibly progressing, as one group, toward the horizon.

1 Salman Natour, *Wa ma nasina* (We Have Not Forgotten), from *Al-Jadid*, 1981-82, see the exhibition website: <http://www.wa-ma-nasina.com/wamanasina.html>

2 For an elaborate discussion of the massacre in 'Eilabun, see: Benny Morris, *The Birth of Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004).

The expressive image of the felled trunk has recurred in Said's works since the 1980s. This image of the Palestinian landscape attests not only to the loss of Palestinian land in 1948 or the confiscation of land as part of the policy aimed at "Judaization of the Galilee" in the 1970s, but also to an ongoing, continuous political reality of struggle over the land. All these together generate an affinity between the traumas of the past and the present reality of the Palestinian minority in Israel. It is a post-traumatic painting repeatedly returning to the scene of the crime, to the felled trunks, to the landscape of the Palestinian village, if only in order to decipher the secret of the violence whose signs appear on the surface.

A post-traumatic consciousness has accompanied an entire series of works created since the 1990s, in which Said continually revisits Giorgio Agamben's image of the Homo Sacer (the sacred man), the figure of the victim who is beyond language and outside the boundaries of human society. In *Untitled* (1992) the entire body leans on the arm, a type of giant hand which creates a triangle and a basis for physical and mental support. The wide-open, screaming mouth generates ambivalence between helplessness and defiance. The work corresponds with the Arabic maxim "*malaksh g'eir d'raa'k*"—"you have nothing but your arm," or "one's arm is one's sole support." The root of the Arabic word for arm (ذراع), however, is also—as in Hebrew—the root of the verb denoting to sow or seed, as well as the root of the words denoting measure and endurance. In other words, the arm is the yardstick by which the human resilience to pain and suffering is gauged. In the painting, the figure offering itself as a powerful sacrifice forms a metaphor similar to the sabra (prickly pear cactus) symbol, namely—a metaphor for tenability and tenacious clinging to the land (*sumud*).

In *Untitled* (1993), the figure of the Homo Sacer is at a distance from the village, standing against a colorful, blazing red backdrop, as if it were a bridge. This image of a human figure stretched as a bridge over the ground is inspired by depictions of the goddess Nut (Nuit) in Egyptian mythology. The Egyptians believed that Nut, the sky goddess, physically introduced a barrier from the chaotic powers threatening to break into the orderly, rational world, and therefore depicted her as a woman bowing, with the world protected under her belly. Said's figure stretches a metaphorical bridge between chaotic forces and an orderly world underlain by inner logic, while underscoring the price—the physical and mental pain—the figure must pay for continuously straining all its muscles in an ongoing effort to bear the weight of the taut body.

The experience of a body in distress is conveyed in a series of drawings created in 1988, about a year after the outbreak of the first Intifada. These drawings in acrylic on paper portray the so-called Stone Intifada in three colors—ochre, red, and black; this 'Greek-urn' coloration implies a mythological tale of power and strife. In one drawing the feet of the fleeting figure merge with the ground, in sharp contrast to the hand gesture indicating flight from the soldiers represented by a schematic delineation of helmets and rifles. Created in Berlin in the 1980s and 1990s, these works address ongoing human suffering, placing man at their core as the victim of chaotic forces immeasurably greater than he.

Asad Azi / Born in Shefa-'Amer, 1955

/ Lives and works in Tel Aviv-Jaffa

Asad Azi's series of paintings from the 1980s are based on a local landscape—the Tel Aviv-Jaffa beach—employing it as a surface for a mythological story which generates tension between sanity and insanity, between ostensible serenity and erupting violence.

The fisherman series was created between 1981 and 1985, a period in which Azi already lived in Jaffa. The image of the fisherman is widespread in the history of art. The major Arab cities—Acre, Haifa, and Jaffa—were fishing centers, and this image, much like the sabra, manifests endurance, steadfastness, and tenaciousness, representing the continuity of routine Palestinian life in the coastal towns after the Nakba. The fisherman metaphor, however, does not only express continuity; it also serves as a testimony and reminder of the thousands of fishing boats which carried thousands of destitute Palestinians from these ports to the refugee camps in Saida (Sidon) and Beirut.

Purple Fisherman (1985), portrays a solitary fisherman surrounded by waves in shades of dark gray and purple; the ground drops under his feet, and he appears as though he is standing on the water. In the painting *Fisherman in Profile* (1985), a solitary fisherman stands on the pier, naked and vulnerable. The oil paint layered with a spatula on the paper generates expressivity and movement. Vivid red, the sea appears like a river of blood. In his hands the fisherman holds a pole-like rod as if trying to balance himself in the turbulent water. The sense of vulnerability is reinforced in *Fisherman* (1985), where a white-haired fisherman stands on a surfboard, old and naked, his conspicuous penis directed downward, at the boat. The rod in this work is a very short pole which he holds in both hands, very

close to its end, to prevent him from falling into the water.

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. A tension is created in the works between the image of fishing as a tranquil practice, a source of livelihood, and an arena signifying Arab identity and longing for the olden days, on the one hand, and the sense of a near fall into the water and ensuing helplessness, on the other.

The tension between the false tranquility on the beach and scenes of erupting violence is also repeated in the series "Mother and Child" (1987), painted against the backdrop of the first Intifada, and based on a recurring composition: a mother and child in bathing suits on the beach are seen on the left, the child's face is erased and merely contoured. Two soccer players are depicted on the left, their feet swinging forcefully as they move forward, toward the center of the painting. In some of the paintings the center of the binary composition changes, and is supplemented by a third element—the figure of the madman. In *Mother and Child 2*, the madman appears in the bent figure of a naked man with a protruding penis and a bird on his head. In this painting, the faceless child holds a cross, associating him and his mother with Christian iconography of the Madonna and Child. In *Mother and Child 3*, the same figure of a bent, naked madman turns its gaze away from the foot of one of the soccer players which strikes his hand.

The mother in the paintings appears vulnerable and limited in her ability to maneuver, protecting the child lying next to her; the madman is situated in the middle, in-between the two parties, further accentuating the scene's illogical quality vis-à-vis the expressive body movements of the soccer players who comprise a senselessly moving mass. In Azi's works, the masculinity—of both the naked fisherman and madman, and that of the athletes—is not translated into control and power capable of changing the figures' fate. The mythological story offers neither real nor symbolical logic to the helplessness and vulnerability presented in the works, and the figures are ultimately fixed in a composition of frozen violence.

Ibrahim Nubani / Born in Acre, 1961

/ Lives and works in Maker.

In his works, Ibrahim Nubani creates a painterly frame which circumscribes the tension between economically painted colorful geometrical shapes and the more expressively painted monochromatic pictorial space. This tension juxtaposes two different painterly languages, reinforcing the sense of structural transience arising from the works. This is exemplified in *Cemetery*, painted in 1988, approximately one year after the outbreak of the first Intifada. With its brown frame, this painting appears like

a gaping hole when observed from above. The painterly surface eliminates the skyline, whereas sky-blue and soil-brown are inverted. A cypress tree of sorts hovers at the center of the painting, ostensibly demarcating the boundaries of the cemetery, its branches signifying eternal life, mourning, and lamentation. Painted next to the cypress is an entrance door which does not lead to another possible space, but rather sinks in the mud. Three geometrical elements, akin to gravestones, are marked in bright oil paints on the muddy surface—an orange square demarcated by a black contour, a yellow square, and a red circle—signifiers which likewise float in a deadlocked and muddy, expressive painterly sphere.

The sense of entrapment and closure conveyed by the composition is enhanced in works created after the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada. In the catalogue of Nubani's exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, curator Efrat Livni pinpointed the turning point in Nubani's work:

"The outbreak of the second Palestinian popular uprising (Intifada) in October 2000, and police brutality at Palestinian-Israeli demonstrations within Israel ... erupted volcano-like into Nubani's studio. These developments, coupled with the grim outcome of the violent clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli forces in the Jenin refugee camp, transformed Nubani's feelings of disenchantment and despair into a rage that demanded expressive outlet."³

The scream is clearly discernible in the self-portrait *Untitled* (2004). The painting features a face which is also a landscape, becoming a part of verdant ivy, climbing and penetrating a wide-open mouth which exposes a yellow abyss. Painted in yellow and green, the eyes appear like a spiral. The body itself is cut and fragmented; the arm and shoulder are replaced by a stump, which is likewise akin to a spiral penetrating the torso. Nubani's wounded amputee is voiceless, his eyes are filled with pain, but the scream remains unheard, only echoing in the gaping mouth before us.

In a series of works from the past decade Nubani returns to the image of the labyrinth in which the human figure disappears, and only human signifiers, such as eyes and locks of hair, burst forth from a dead-end geometrical space. In *Untitled* (2007), a labyrinth of squares generates depth; the tension between the inward motion and the black frame, between revelation and concealment, reinforces the sense of entrapment within the painterly sphere. In another *Untitled* painting from the same year, the artistic crossing of geometrical abstract with painterly symbolism reaches its culmination. The geometrical surface buries local symbolical elements in the concrete which previously emerged in his works, creating a maze and a trap; a disintegrating, imploding construction which leaves chaos and traces behind.

3 Efrat Livni, cat. *Ibrahim Nubani: In-Between*, trans.: Jesse Mishory (Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2004), p. 22.

Asim Abu-Shakra / Born in Umm el-Fahem, 1961 / Died 1990.

The image of the potted sabra in Asim Abu-Shakra's works is one of the only Palestinian images to have entered the canon of Israeli art. The sabra image was at the core of Abu-Shakra's one-person exhibition at Rap Gallery, Tel Aviv, before his untimely death, at the age of 29, and of his posthumous comprehensive retrospective at Tel Aviv Museum's Helena Rubinstein Pavilion of Contemporary Art in 1994.

Concurrent to works depicting a potted sabra, Abu-Shakra painted a very different series of works on large-scale canvases centered on sabra hedges. He juxtaposed the domesticated, tamed, circumscribed potted sabra with an image of the Palestinian thicket—a bifurcated, threatening and boundless vegetal image. In *Untitled* (1988), multiple circles generate a thicket of sabra hedges which take over the entire canvas, threatening to break out of the frame. Black, orange, and red paint blots are scattered amidst the leaves in the bottom section, reminiscent of combustion, sparks of fire, and scorched earth. In this context, the sabra attests to the violence inscribed in the land by the occupier. In the painting *Sabra* (1988), the sabra hedges are delimited within a pointed, prickly frame, and the hatching rendered in-between them call to mind sharp glass shards. In another work from the same year, *Sabra*, the red sabra flowers appear like bloodstains. In these works the sabra hedges transform into a fortified wall, an impenetrable thicket which offers no shelter.

Unlike the potted sabra, which preserves the bifurcating relationship between the tree and its roots, the image of the boundlessly sprawling sabra thicket offers a different metaphor for contemplation. The sabra thicket refuses to become a national territorial marker or a landscape which is an agent for conveyance of cultural values. The sabra thicket is not a tree which indicates structure and genealogy within a stable, hierarchical array of spatial relations; it is not a landscape which delimits the geographical contours of the mountains and hills with forests and woods. The image of the thicket is juxtaposed with the traditional genre of landscape painting identified with European imperialism, which documented the hegemonic point of control over the landscape, leaving behind ruins and wreckage. In Abu-Shakra's sabra thicket there is neither a point of control nor a focal perspective; the thicket is a signifier of multiplicity, of constant deterritorialization and ongoing violence embedded in the ground by and within culture.

This tension between violence and culture is discernible in the painting *Self-Portrait with Necktie* (1988). Representing European high culture, the tie is depicted as a weight, a foreign body, cutting the artist's head; his face is marked by three circles, two eyes and a mouth

open as if in a scream. His face is virtually assimilated into the background, compressed inward by the double framing and the same monochromatic coloration. The artist's body is an armless torso. It is a portrait which voices a cry, holding onto the tie which deviates from the frame—possibly as a life line, possibly a halter. The portrait expresses the conflicts of identity and foreignness which accompanied Asim Abu-Shakra in his short lifetime.

Michael Halak / Born in Fasuta, 1975 / Lives and works in Haifa.

Michael Halak's self-portraits address fundamental questions pertaining to the politics of identity and the self-representation of young Palestinians in Israel. The ability to go (or not go) through modern life, through normal time, without immediately being identified as an "other"; the ability to rely on the appearance of an unmarked face, devoid of ethnic features, and to assimilate in the crowd without being stopped, examined, exposed.

In *Untitled* (2008), the artist is portrayed in a black leather jacket and a white T-shirt, one hand holding the other, thus reducing the dimensions of his body which is demarcated by a meticulous frontal angle. The artist is swallowed in the dark, shady background, and the figure appears as though it is absorbed into the darkness. A frontal representation of a portrait is often discussed in the context of police mug shots of suspects and interrogees. In this context, the artist's figure appears nondescript; his eyes are shaded and unclear, therefore there is no eye contact with the viewer. His figure is devoid of unusual identifying details, and it appears as though he is trying to look as natural as he can so as not to attract any attention to his figure in the painting. The juxtaposition between the meticulous, detailed painterly realism and the bodily gestures creates a sense of exposure, discomfort, and perplexity.

The fear of the possibility of exposure clearly arises in *Untitled 1* (2008), where Halak closes both his eyes. In this close-up painting the artist is portrayed at home. The eye-shutting in the domestic interior represents a double blindness, both internal and external. In many cultures the eyes are identified as windows to the soul. Closing his eyes to the viewer thus represents a barrier, an obstruction, disallowing intimate acquaintance with his figure. The shutting of the eyes in one's own home also implies detachment and solitude.

Untitled 2 (2008) is based on a photograph portraying Halak in a woolen hat, his eyes narrowed, as he breathes onto a glass plate behind which he poses. On the canvas, the glass plate remains invisible, and the exhaled breath blurs the mouth area, lending it an airy quality. As opposed to the dramatic eye-shutting, the blurring of the mouth may be construed as a visual attempt to confront questions

of silencing and the ability to speak, while presenting the process of breathing and externally manifesting the artist's breath as well as his inner world.

Halak's self-portrait does not explore whether the portrait faithfully represents his facial appearance; rather, it engages in a dialectic attempt to generate exposure and obstruction, a realistic presence and a deliberate blurring at the same time. In this context Max Beckmann's assertion comes to mind, "If you wish to get hold of the invisible you must penetrate as deeply as possible into the visible." In Halak's case, however, the penetration seems to encapsulate anxiety of real physical injury or hurt, and a human need to protect the artist's inner soul.

Durar Bacri / Born in Acre, 1982
/ Lives and works in Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

Durar Bacri's works engage in architectural mapping of his neighborhood in the city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa. From the rooftop of his building he documents Chlenov Street which links Salame Street to the south with the Begin Road to the north, west of the old-New Central Bus Station. This urban compound in the city's south has been identified from Tel Aviv's beginnings as a borderland between Jaffa's Arab population and the Jewish inhabitants of the new neighborhoods.

The series of paintings "Untitled" (2008) features the buildings on the street painted from a high vantage point, a perspective based on spatial control, overlooking the city all the way to the horizon. People are nowhere to be seen in these works. The residents of the city's southern regions are absent. As an inhabitant of the neighborhood, Bacri witnesses a constant change of tenants, a neighborhood where people come and go—new immigrants, foreign workers who are being expelled, refugee labor immigrants, day laborers who stay in it for limited periods. Bacri freezes an imaginary tranquility of an urban space on the verge of being violated. The entry of a human element into the painterly frame holds the potential of threat and destruction. Its absence charges the space with a sense of danger and emergency, further reinforced by the apocalyptic pink-orange twilight sky in many of the paintings. For one apocalyptic moment, the neighborhood in Tel Aviv's south, on Jaffa's pre-1948 border, appears in Bacri's paintings as a ghost town, implicitly alluding to the Palestinian villages which existed there before the Nakba: Sheikh Munes, Samu'i'l, al Manshiyyah, Salame, Abu Kabeer, Irsheid, etc., places of settlement which were located in what later came under the jurisdiction of the city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, were emptied of their inhabitants and kept unpopulated.

In the history of Western photography, erasure of the human element in architectural photographs of the modern era is common. In this tradition the buildings and the city emerge as objects of modernity and progress,

whereas people, with their class and ethnic specificity, might interfere with the timeless pretension of the new city. Bacri's realistic meticulousness is influenced by this tradition, but the visual information conveyed by the paintings undermines the timelessness of the new city by exposing timeworn electric lines, rusty sewer pipes and water boilers, old buildings and cracked balconies and walls.

The imprints of the time that has passed are discernible in the unusual painting *Timeworn Fishing Boat in Jaffa Port* (2008) where Bacri depicts wreckage of a fishing boat on the Jaffa beach, with its decaying wood and broken beams. Bacri, however, portrays the boat from within, from a unique perspective that generates a structure, a construction, of the wooden beams, which also serves as a shelter. The sense of shelter offered here alludes to the memory of the human experience of the Palestinian fishing boat, and its function in the daily life of the fishermen in the port. Bacri created several paintings of these boats, tipped on their side, half-buried in the sand, which serve as memorials for a history now gone, removed from the beach by the city's bulldozers.

Rani Zahrawi / Born in Majd al-Kurum, 1982
/ Lives and works in Majd al-Kurum.

Rani Zahrawi employs a realistic style and the airbrush technique, regularly used for murals and graffiti, to present images of streets, houses, and bare walls devoid of all markings. Focusing on his village Majd al-Kurum, Zahrawi's paintings depict the village's daily routine in the morning, after the children have left for school and the adults for work, when the roads are empty of cars and people.

In *The Spring Neighborhood* (2008), the alley leading to a square in the village's oldest neighborhood is portrayed. The foreground is slightly blurred, and the eye lingers on details which are sketched with utmost accuracy, such as lamps, pipes, and electric lines. *Untitled* (2008) portrays a private home with several stories—one of them plastered and with doors, and three additional stories under different phases of construction with concrete balconies and bare blocks. One storey for each family member who gets married; forced high-rise construction due to the lack of available land in the village for so-called "land attached" construction. The balconies are empty, the doorways and windows are dark, and the structure itself is likewise empty of any villagers whatsoever. The human absence inspires an air of melancholy in the public space and a sense of emergency is felt in the air.

The state of emergency is clearly discernible in *Childhood* (2008), depicting the familial home of the artist's fiancée hit by a Katyusha during the Second Lebanon War. On July 14, 2006 a Katyusha fell in Majd al-Kurum. The Magen David Adom emergency center reported eight with bodily injuries and four additional people suffering from

anxiety attacks. Ambulances and intensive care vehicles evacuated the wounded to hospitals in Nahariya and Safed. In the absence of public bomb-shelters in the village, in a state of emergency there is nowhere to turn, and the house was supposed to protect the family. Of all this drama, Zahrawi depicts only the empty building shortly after it was hit. The building did not collapse, and Zahrawi paints the parts which collapsed, the hole gaped in the wall, the black smoke, the burnt and scorched shutters.

The empty houses attest to an emergency state that has become a permanent state. The war, in the past and present, is not a drama created *ex nihilo*. It only externalizes the constant subterranean violence underlying everyday life and the appearance of normalcy.

Raafat Hattab / Born in Jaffa, 1981
/ Lives and works in Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

Raafat Hattab's video piece, *Untitled*, presents the artist drawing water with a bucket, lengthily watering an olive tree as he rubs its leaves and softly caresses its trunk. Lebanese singer Ahmad Kaabour's song *Hob* (Love) is heard in the background. The song came out in 1976 in a record called *Unadikom* (I'm Calling You), expressing the need for Palestinian solidarity. The song likewise turns to the sense of belonging of a collective Palestinian audience: "For you I return // with bleeding hands / in the corner of my room / the smells of crying for thousands of eyes // for you, if my clothes are torn // I shall become a temple / for you, if I have forgotten a word that could have saved me from death / for you, my suffering [...] I love you. For you I leave the place."

"I leave the place" is the refrain. The camera follows the artist's hands, gently holding a handful of olive leaves. For a split second it appears as though the work deals with memory, with the image of the olive tree in Palestinian culture as a national lyrical sign of the Palestinian village, as a sign of the Lost Paradise before the Nakba. But the metaphor of "the right of return" is forthwith undermined when the camera zooms out, revealing that the olive tree next to which Hattab is standing is planted at the heart of the tiled concourse of Tel Aviv's Rabin Square, and that the source of the water for the tree's irrigation is the fountain pool adjacent to City Hall. The olive tree is demarcated within a small square between the tiles of the concourse at the heart of the square, a place identified with political demonstrations, with celebrations of Israel's Independence Day, and with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The tree is indeed planted on the land of Palestine, but it looks detached and foreign in the concrete frame threatening to choke and isolate it at the heart of the country's largest Zionist metropolis.

The Arabic title of the work, *Bidun Unwaan* means 'untitled,' but also 'devoid of mailing address,' while

the meaning of the Arabic word for title (عُنْوَان) is also embodiment, essence. The soundtrack for the video is the crux of the matter for Hattab as far as the question of localism is concerned. Hattab is a performance artist whose works always combine Arabic singing and music as a sphere of language and culture, as the sphere of an imagined community which deviates from clear-cut geographical borders. It is an ideological political poetry written from afar, marking a space of rootedness, feelings, and longing. "I leave the place," the song turns to the refugees and exiles, the absent-present, the homeless, and those with addresses. The discrepancy between the sense of collective identity arising from Kaabour's song and Hattab's consciousness of the place introduces the question: how can one return to a place he has never left?

Scandar Copti / Born in Jaffa, 1975
Rabia Buchari / Born in Jaffa, 1980
/ Live and work in Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

In Scandar Copti and Rabia Buchari's video piece *Truth* (2003), two Palestinians from Jaffa visit non-touristy sites in the city, recounting the "history" of the place as if they were tour guides. The text is a fictive narrative ostensibly anchored in that which is seen on the surface. Thus, for example, next to a deserted structure, a debate evolves over the Temple and the location of the Tables of the Covenant in the structure's windows; in Jaffa's old Muslim cemetery, al-Kazachana, the camera wanders between the gravestones and on the cliff overlooking the shore, while the background dialogue revolves around the nature of the dead buried there; in a refuse dump by the beach a discussion takes place about the "vodka plant" growing in the Jabalyyah beach and the Donolo A alcohol factory; and next to the water tower an argument begins over identification of the building as the Messiah's "Holy Grail." Jaffa Port, the cemetery, the water tower, and the deserted building are ironically depicted by Copti and Buchari as sites of historical significance.

Israeli culture frequently refers to the erasure of the city of Jaffa lying beyond the hyphen (Tel Aviv-Jaffa). This erasure is still alive and kicking in contemporary Israeli art; one may even say that representations of Jaffa as an Arab city are a rarity. This video work brings up the issue of memory, remembrance and forgetting, in Palestinian culture in general, and in the city of Jaffa in particular; a long-lasting oblivion which is part of the general erasure of the Palestinian cities in 1948. Ironically, however, the work does not generate a meaningful, representative Palestinian national narrative.

Copti and Buchari launch an intricate process: their film refers both to the tradition of documentaries aiming at exposure of the "truth," and to the tradition of Orientalist

tour-guiding which became established in Jaffa. At the same time, they also direct irony at the Arab world; the fictions they unfold are part of a tradition of popular tales, horrifying rumors, and propagandist materials. "I'm not sure whether building an entire society on a lie is the best way to build a society," one of them says, emphasizing the inability to adopt one truth over another. This refers not to a postmodern discourse, but rather to the harsh reality of the Palestinians in Israel, who do not trust the official mouthpieces of information of the State of Israel, nor those of the Arab regimes. Against this backdrop, Copti and Buchari create an alternative parody which they ironically dub *Truth*, as one of them asserts: "I don't know whether this is the real truth, but this is the truth they want to hear."

Fahed Halabi / Born in Majdal Shams, 1970

Ala Farhat / Born in Buka'ata, 1977

/ Live and work in Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

Syrian artists Fahed Halabi and Ala Farhat's joint artwork is based on their work in the past decade as construction workers, day laborers, and contractor workers. The video *Working Day* (2009) describes a workday in the building site of the stately Georgian Synagogue in Ashdod. The video artists, Halabi and Farhat, specialize in the construction of columns which follow the Ionic and Corinthian orders, in classical Greek or Roman style, reeding and fluting the columns. The new building, with the Star-of-David at the façade, is decorated with tall pillars, standing out as deviant against the backdrop of Ashdod's neighborhoods.

The camera oscillates between the carving work taking place on the scaffoldings surrounding the synagogue, and the conversation of the Palestinian construction workers 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 young boy. With much sincerity he exposes the intricate politics of identity typifying his life with his Jewish friends, his Palestinian friends in Israel, and his childhood friends in Gaza, saying: "If I were in Gaza now, if I still lived there, I believe that there would only be a picture of me on the wall—a *shahid* (martyr)." Throughout the conversation he identifies with innocent people being hurt both in Sderot and in Gaza,

among them his friends killed in the recent war in Gaza.

The builders' conversation employs a mixed slang blending Hebrew and Arabic, biographical exposure, class consciousness, and personal and political criticism. Together all these generate a complex identity of Otherness, which includes an Arabic-Syrian identity on the northern Golan Heights, Palestinian identity in Israel, and Gazan-Palestinian identity, raising questions concerning alienation, identification, and yearning.

In Fahed Halabi's work *Sheinkin-Melchett* (2009), the artist is seen casting the concrete roof of a building on the corner of these two streets in central Tel Aviv. From the point of view on the rooftop, the city of Tel Aviv is exposed with its roofs, balconies, and new high-rise apartment buildings. The camera moves between the signs of advanced modernity and irreplaceable manual labor, focusing on the artist's hands holding a plastic pipe through which he pours the concrete. The motion of the pipe calls to mind a dance or alternatively, Jackson Pollock's expressive "action painting" technique used in his famous drip paintings. As a virtuoso artist, Halabi controls the cement flow, regulating it to fill the gaps, and the cement is smeared, pouring, dripping sensually on the surface of the roof as if it were a large-scale canvas. Halabi creates a painterly surface with gray monochromatic aesthetic alongside disillusioned, ironic class awareness.

Dance movements combined with ironic class consciousness are also evident in another video work by Halabi, *To You with Love* (2006), in which the artist, dressed as a builder, a tool belt around his waist, performs a belly dance to a song by Lebanese singer Nancy Ajram. During the dance Halabi takes off his shirt in a gesture reminiscent of Palestinian existential reality in the past decade, where many Palestinian men are forced to expose their bodies when crossing the checkpoints, getting on a bus, and as a routine procedure during encounters with Israeli security forces. In this work Halabi exposes an Arab-Oriental male body to Western eyes. He challenges both the stereotype regarding the Palestinian man as a security threat and a ticking clock, and the Orientalist stereotype of belly-dancing as a cheap dance performed by Eastern women. He dances sensually and with manifest pleasure with body movements that continue a long lasting tradition of Eastern-Arab dance.