



Nafas Art Magazine

Framed-Unframed

The Changing Representation of Women in Palestinian Visual Arts, Ethnographic & Art Museum, Birzeit University.

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Hosted and produced by The Ethnographic and Art Museum in partnership with the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University, Framed-Unframed is the first critical exploration of the transformation in the representations of women in Palestinian visual arts within a changing political context. The time frame is from the 1970s to today.

Palestinian artists, whether living under occupation or in the diaspora - artists such as Ismail Shammout, Nabil Anani, and Sliman Mansour - took the lead in the 1960s and 1970s in using the Palestinian female form in their classically rendered paintings. Until today, and despite the changing times, the same iconic depictions of Palestine as the peasant woman in an embroidered traditional costume is used over and over in posters and other mediums, for collective political mobilisation for Palestinian resistance.

The post-1967 iconic or foundational works, mostly by male artists, are represented in this exhibition by Sliman Mansour, Nabil Anani, Kamel Moghanni, Naji al-Ali, and Burhan Karkutli (a Syrian artist who devoted his art to Palestine). These artists have expressed through the female figure the complex meanings of nation, rootedness, resistance, fecundity, and Palestine itself. *Salma* (1978) by Sliman Mansour, is solidly "framed" within such political notions; she represents a monumental Palestinian woman wearing a peasant dress and holding the fruit of the land in her labourer hands.

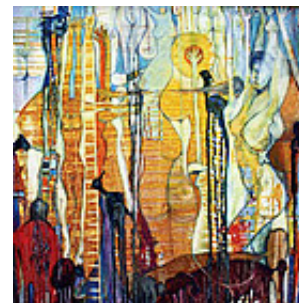
While these foundation themes of representation of the female figure continued into the early 1980s, they arguably exhausted themselves by the beginning of the Oslo period.

The earlier trends were also juxtaposed in the 1980s by the emergence of a new dynamic in Palestinian art and more contemporary representations of the female body, continuing with vigour today. Across various geographies and "unframed" by conventional media, Palestinian women artists employed the female body in a surge of challenging works as a reflection of the self, as a critique of feminist discourse, and as a strong conceptual comment on

social, political, religious, or environmental issues. The highly charged political works of Mona Hatoum in the 1980s heralded the creative engagement of artists with contemporary modes of expression and the use of technology, video art, photography, installation art, and performance, among others, to convey provocative thoughts and reflective observations. Challenged by these contemporary and versatile expressive modes, many Palestinian women artists started to use the female body, often their own, to express strong, individualised, and critically engaging views, thus taking Palestinian visual arts into universal realms of critical debate and conceptual engagement.

Framed-Unframed, which is curated by Vera Tamari and Inass Yassin, will open at the Ethnographic and Art Museum at Birzeit University on 19 September 2011, and will run until 29 October. It offers a selection of works dealing with the female figure by prominent Palestinian artists including those listed above as well as Laila Shawa, Mona Hatoum, Raeda Saadeh, Mary Tuma, Jumana Abboud, Amer Shomali, Vera Tamari, Inass Yassin, Samira Badran, Hani Zurob, and Rula Halawani, Layan Shawabkeh, Ahlam Shibli, Ayman Issa.

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