

Exhibition of the Month Contemplations

By Mirna Bamieh



Hani Zurob, *Inana and the King - Siege of No. 2, 2004*, Yvette and Mazen Qupty Collection.

Al Hoash is organising the Fourth Collection Exhibition under the title "Contemplations," in an attempt to present and examine the art collection as a cultural asset and a modest yet valuable representation of the accumulation of cultural and visual production by Palestinian artists.

The exhibition seeks to open a discussion with the public about the notion of visual culture in relation to national identity. Presenting the collection comes as part of al Hoash's examination of its future development towards being a research-based, knowledge-producing organisation in visual culture. The role of the collection in this endeavour is found through the value of the participating works of art and their

relevance to Palestinian visual production. The evaluation, study, and analysis of the artwork come in the form of a debate with the Palestinian public. The exhibition examines and highlights the representation of the female form through the works of artists Nabil Anani, Sliman Mansour, Kamel al-Moughanni, Asem Abu Shaqra, Asad Azzi, and Hani Zurob, and observes as well as compares works by female artists Sophie Halabi, Samia Halabi, Rana Bishara, and Inass Yassin.

The main feature depicted in the works of Nabil Anani, Sliman Mansour, and Kamel al-Moughanni, particularly those produced in the 1970s and 1980s, was the representation of the female figure in a symbolic and iconic manner, referring to it in the context of nostalgic association and patriotic relevance, the woman as the mother and the land. During that time, this representation was consistent with the general Palestinian political situation and the revolutionary spirit in that era. Art then reflected the public's ambitions and pains under occupation, while it also established a visual illustration in the revolutionary context.

In the works of Hani Zurob and Assad Azzi, we see the representation of the female figure taking on a new dynamic that is open to more possibilities in a universal context. The female figures in the paintings of Hani Zurob and Assad Azzi reflect the mythological face of beauty – that of Aphrodite and Ashtar. In Asem Abu Shaqra's painting and Zurob's *Daydreaming*, the female figure is manifested in a more erotic and sensual manner, whereas Assad Azzi takes a totally different approach in his *Four Faces* painting, where he captures the woman's face in what seems like an anatomical examination of her facial features.

Given that the representation of the female figure came through the male artist's

gaze, we examined the collection artwork produced by four female artists and tried to compare them. Where the female figure was present, it was clearly a reflection of the self. This is visible in the paintings of Sophie Halaby, one of the pioneering female artists whose works go back to the 1930s. The artist Inass Yassin points more to the existential and the special, as well as to social change, in her painting *Transformation*. In Samia Halabi's painting we see her dealing with the olive tree symbol in an abstract manner, contrary to her male colleagues of the same generation. In her painting *Untitled*, artist Rana Bishara uses henna and tar, traditionally socially and politically charged substances, to compose the scene of her painting.

The exhibition will be inaugurated on January 26 at al Hoash Gallery in Jerusalem, and will be open until February 29. The opening will be preceded by a series of lectures and talks that will take place during the month of February, in an attempt to put

the theme of the exhibition and its artwork into a more comparative and analytic light in the context of the Palestinian art scene.



Sophie Halabi, 1930s, Yvette and Mazen Qupty Collection.

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