

# MADE IN PALESTINE

## Participating Artists' Bios

**Zuhdi Al Adawi** taught himself to make art while imprisoned in Ashkelon prison. His expressionist drawings depict the psychological anguish and physical torture he endured there. Pictures such as the man trapped at the bottom of two steep, ravine walls evoke feelings of confinement. Other images, such as the image of a baby emerging from the face of an older man, convey an abiding optimism for the future. Al Adawi now lives in a refugee camp in Damascus, Syria.

**Tyseer Barakat** creates his images by burning them onto wood, suggesting the damage and cataclysm of *Al-Nakba* ("The Catastrophe"). Barakat lives in the West Bank town of Ramallah where he runs Ziriab, an art space that doubles as a salon for the artists and intellectuals of the West Bank.

**Rana Bishara** uses materials that connote issues of durability, fragility and ubiquity. Her materials have a metaphoric reach. Her previous work has involved cheap, inflated balloons and cactus in a wide variety of forms. Here, she recounts the news in glass and chocolate, drawing upon the properties of chocolate as a medium for images of violence culled from over 50 years of Palestinian suffering. Each pane of glass symbolizes one year of Israeli occupation. Chocolate bears a striking visual resemblance to caked blood. The sweetness of chocolate is a bitter contradiction to the tragic subject.

**Rajie Cook's** *Ammo Box* is a pun on weaponry. The United States supplies Israel with the most sophisticated and powerful military equipment – Cobra helicopters, F-16 jet fighters, Merkava tanks, and intensive military training. These arms are primarily used against a civilian population that has little more than stones with which to defend themselves.

**Mervat Essa** lives in a small town in northern Israel not far from the town in which her grandmother lived. These ceramic sacks memorialize the depopulation of Saffurya and other Palestinian villages in 1948. Saffirua was left to deteriorate, but most other villages were completely razed, their residents driven into exile, their buildings and natural resources left to waste.

**Ashraf Fawakhry** lives in Haifa, Israel. The xerographs and illuminated plastic hearts in *Line 13* pay homage to the first 13 martyrs in the current uprising, the Al Aqsa Intifada. The donkey, known for its toughness and obstinacy, is a comic symbol for the Palestinian people. These 48 rubber stamps on wood blocks are part of a serial work in which he casts the donkey in an enormous number of situations and permutations. They range from the whimsical to the poetic and they serve as reminders that the Palestinians living in Israel retain their older identity as Palestinians.

*(So when did it all begin? When i was born again, thanks to an ass. During the fighting in 1948 they waylaid us and opened fire, shooting my father, may he rest in peace. I escaped because a stray donkey came in to the line of fire and they shot it, so it died in place of me. My subsequent life in Israel, then, was really a gift from that unfortunate beast. What value then, honored sir, should we assign to this life of mine?)*

– Emile Habiby, *The Pessoptimist*

**John Halaka's** drawing, created with acrylic paints and a rubber stamped phrase, "Forgotten Survivors," memorializes the Diaspora of the Palestinian people. Their forced marches from their homes recall the Cherokee 'Trail of Tears,' a similar exodus that bordered on genocide. It also challenges the wholesale historical revisionism, which has sought to erase their history from memory. By maintaining the cultural anonymity of the figures, Halaka underscores the universality of political displacement and invites the viewer to project his or her own cultural history and responsibilities as oppressed, oppressor, or both, onto the image. Halaka lives in San Diego, CA.

**Samia Halaby's** abstract paintings let us see the world through her eyes, delighting in the motion of nature and reality. Carefully balanced in organization and color, they allude to the things she loves in the Palestinian landscape. Her large assemblage-like painting, *Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River*, is a map of Palestine in textures that correspond to the shores, the mountains, and the desert of Palestine. Halaby, a passionate artist and activist, has recently published a brilliant history of the liberation art of Palestine.

**Rula Halawani** lives in Jerusalem and teaches photography at Birzeit University, near Ramallah, in the West Bank. Her press credentials enable her to travel from Jerusalem to the West Bank with less difficulty than most Palestinians encounter. These credentials also enabled her to capture these photographs in the midst of incursions wherein Israeli tanks and soldiers rampaged through the streets and buildings of Ramallah. The photographs capture the devastation she witnessed – acts of brutality that have become so regular that they threaten to replace the very idea of the normal. Because these images are printed in negative they force the viewer to pay closer attention to the unfolding drama.

**Mustafa Al Hallaj's** print creates a continuum of fantastic and folkloric imagery that spans ancient and modern times. He juxtaposes a vast and often idiosyncratic menagerie of symbols -- bulls, camel men, birds, lizard-like creatures and fish, with fantastic landscapes and episodes of ancient and modern Palestinian life. The animal hybrids of Hallaj are reminiscent of Hieronymus Bosch. This was to be his masterwork, a fable casting himself as man, god and devil, an imaginary release from the boundaries of political regimes and from time itself. Sections of the original print were damaged and destroyed in the fire that ended his life in December 2002. The print exhibited here was made by the Palestinian Artist's Union in Syria to pay homage to the artist. Mustafa Al Hallaj was born in Salame, near Jaffa, Palestine. He studied art in Egypt, exhibited his art extensively and spent his last years in Damascus, Syria. The *Made in Palestine* exhibition is dedicated to his memory.

**Jawad Ibrahim's** drawings of *shaheed* ("martyrs") come from the same tradition as Francisco Goya's *Horrors of War*. They are dense and phantasmagoric. In them, crumpled bodies swathed in funeral garments with elongated rifle-barrel eyes, shoot intense stares that seem to accuse the viewer of complicity. Ibrahim lives in the West Bank town of Ramallah, where he has been imprisoned for months at a time without charges by the Israeli authorities. When asked why he had been arrested, he replied "I don't know...ask them."

**Noel Jabbour's** photographs portray the families of martyrs gathered around photographs and other reminders of their murdered loved ones. A bleaching light permeates these photographs, suggesting absence or a spiritual escape from worldly affairs. Jabbour lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

**Emily Jacir** splits her time between the West Bank town of Ramallah and New York City. *Crossing Surda*, shown in the current exhibition, is a document of Jacir's experience – some banal, some harrowing – of crossing the militarized Surda checkpoint that separates Ramallah, where she lives, from Birzeit University, where she works.

**Suleiman Mansour** is a major figure in Palestinian art. He creates clay "emblems of decay" that are "dry, cracked and distorted," reminding us of dispersion, waste, pain and death. Ismael, son of Abraham and Hagar, the subject of his masterpiece, is the revered ancestor of the Arab people.

**Abdel Rahmen Al Muzayen's** masterful pen and ink drawings of the destruction of the city of Jenin reflect his commanding love of his country. The figure of a woman, Anat, the ancient goddess of the Canaanites, symbolizes the soul and the strength of Palestine.

**Muhammad Rakouie** taught himself how to draw with the materials he could acquire while imprisoned in the notorious Ashkelon prison in Israel – crayon and cut pillowcase linen. Palestinian artists were prohibited from using the colors of their flag or making overt reference to their struggle for liberation and autonomy. The design elements within his smuggled paintings refer to Soviet abstraction and Social Realism. He risked great pain and additional punishment by creating these images, which stylize prison life and captivity. He now lives in a refugee camp in Damascus, Syria.

**Nida Sinnokrot's** rubber-coated stones recall the rubber-coated metal bullets that Israeli soldiers regularly shoot at Palestinians. They also suggest the iconic image of Palestinian children, armed with nothing but stones, confronting tanks in the streets of their cities. Loose stones are plentiful in the Palestinian territories, as tank incursions have reduced many of homes and roads to rubble. *Al-Jaz/CNN* compares the framing of the news and the biases of its handlers. Each of these monitors displays a constantly changing stream of stories, filtered through different languages, different editorial teams, hence, different geopolitical perspectives. The installation is open-ended; its content is perpetually changing. Nida Sinnokrot is currently making a documentary about the Apartheid Wall the Israeli military is constructing at enormous expense. This militarized superstructure intrudes well beyond the territorial conventions of the Green Line and coils around invaluable water resources.

**Vera Tamari's** iconic installation refers to the hundreds of olive trees that have been destroyed. Not only an essential food staple, the olive is also a medicine, a cosmetic, and a symbol for the attachment of Palestinians to the land. The wanton destruction of hundreds of these ancient trees by settlers and military forces is one of the many great tragedies of the occupation of Palestine.

*"Vera Tamari pays tribute to the olive trees, a persistent theme in her work, now a dreamy vision in myriad shades of pastel blue, pink, purple and ochre yellow: The olive tree, green and solid, giving birth to coloured miniatures in itself, tired of its ancient form and of its constant symbol, breaks norms and transcends tradition, bursting into a dazzling rainbow for the future."*

– Tania Tamari Nasir (March 2000)

**Mary Tuma's** dresses make notice of the absence of the human form, and by so doing, provide a metaphor for the status of a people who are known more for the shadow they cast on current events than for their own personalities and culture. Tuma teaches art at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

## Curator & Consultant Bios

### **James Harithas, *Made in Palestine* Curator**

Born in Lewiston, Maine, Harithas received his undergraduate degree at the University of Maine and his graduate degree at the University of Pennsylvania. He has also studied at Harvard University, the Ecole National des Beaux Arts and the University of Nancy, France, the University of Frankfurt, Germany, and Institute Montana, Switzerland. After holding curatorial positions at the DeCordova Museum, Boston and The Phoenix Art Museum, he became chief curator and in 1968, director of The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. He went on to direct The Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York, in 1972, where he established the first video department in an American museum, The Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, in 1975, The Ineri Foundation in 1984; and in 1998 and 2002, he co-founded and now directs the Artcar Museum and the Station Museum of Contemporary Art in Houston. He has taught art history at the School of Visual Arts and Hunter College, New York City, Syracuse University, and the University of Houston, and applied arts at the Auburn Correctional Institution (Maximum Security). He has organized over 200 exhibitions, including first one-person museum exhibitions of Yoko Ono, Salvatore Scarpitta, Frank Gillette, Nam June Paik, Joan Mitchell, Julian Schnable, Luis Jimenez, Paolo Solari, and Juan Downey. In addition, he has organized large scale exhibitions, such as *Contemporary Mexican Artists*, Phoenix Art Museum; the *31st Corcoran Biennial*; *Air* at the National Museum in Melbourne, The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas; *From Within* at the Smithsonian Institution, the L.A. County Museum, the Baltimore Museum, and the Menil Museum; *Norman Bluhm* at the Padiglione d'Arte, Milan; and with two of his curators, *Made in Palestine*, the first museum exhibition of Palestinian art in the United States.

### **Samia A Halaby, *Made in Palestine* Consultant**

Born in Al-Quds (Jerusalem) in 1936, Samia A. Halaby departed Palestine with her family for a few days only to find themselves denied their right to return to their home and places of work, losing all their possessions to confiscation and looting. After living in Beirut for over three years, Halaby emigrated to the US as a teenager. She graduated from Indiana University with a Master of Fine Arts in painting in 1963 and began teaching, including 10 years as professor at the Yale School of Art. Halaby has produced a body of artwork which spans four decades and has been exhibited internationally and is in numerous museums. She is the first artist from North America to have been invited to participate in the Havana Biennial. During her many visits to Palestine, she worked in collaboration with Birzeit University and other NGOs as a teacher and visiting artist. In this arena she is developing a documentary of drawings and essays on the Kafr Qasem massacre of 1956. Halaby has published a book on the "Art of Palestinian Liberation" for which she interviewed 46 artists living in Amman, Beirut, Damascus, Gaza, Haifa, al-Jaleel (The Galilee), the West Bank, and Yafa. Palestine as subject matter enters into her abstract artwork as well as her politically explicit art. Her most recent work is inspired by the textures of Palestine. Her maturing forms have taken her to painting in acrylic on canvas without a stretcher. They are cut and stitched shapes, which hang in groups together on the wall. Halaby has played an instrumental role in assisting the Station Museum meet Palestinian artists and gather the artworks for the *Made in Palestine* exhibition.