

Self Portrait Palestinian Women's Art

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The Curator wishes to thank:

Shelly Cohen, Samera Esmeir, Mohammad Ghanaïem, Manar Hassan, Arin Hawari, Lucy Mair, Hadas Maor, Suleiman Mansour, Tali Rosin, Gabrielle Rubin, and Asaf Zippor

Danacode: 541-6

ISBN 965-508-005-6

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Andalus Publishing
P.O. Box 53036
Tel Aviv 61530
andalus@andalus.co.il
www.andalus.co.il

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Cover image:

Jumana Emil 'Abboud
(Untitled) 1999

cloth, lace, photograph, stone, 25 x 30 cm

"Self Portrait" is published in cooperation with **Hagar** and supported by the **European Union**



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Forward

“Self Portrait” deals with the modes of representation of women artists in a multi-faceted and changing Palestinian reality. It is an attempt to examine—in relation to the concept “self portrait”—the intimate spheres of women artists’ lives, the ways they define their identities, and the cultural and artistic arenas in which they operate.

The exhibit, which includes works by nine Palestinian women artists from both sides of the Green Line and—through the essays of Kamal Boullata and Tina Malhi Sherwell—the work of Palestinian artists in the diaspora, constitutes an integral body of Palestinian art. Veteran Palestinian artist and art scholar Kamal Boullata’s essay outlining the groundbreaking work of three Palestinian women artists over the last century, coupled with art scholar Tina Malhi Sherwell’s essay examining the representation of women in Palestinian art, serve to locate the work of the artists in this exhibit in the context of Palestinian art in general.

The exhibit “Self Portrait” was supposed to open at Al-Wasati Arts Center, East Jerusalem in October 2000, and at the Ami Steinitz Gallery, Tel Aviv and the International Center, Bethlehem thereafter. These exhibits have been postponed indefinitely due to the Al-Aqsa Intifada. Thus, to date, the only existence “Self Portrait” has is in catalog form.

Any work of art is also a political act. In the case of this exhibit, it entails moving out of the private sphere and exhibiting in the public—a sphere that is restricted (to say the least) by the present reality of occupation. We can only hope that this reality will change sooner rather than later, and that these artists will be able to freely exhibit their work first and foremost in the immediate spheres wherein they live and create.

Tal Ben Zvi,
Exhibit Curator