

MOJERH

NEW EPOCH OF *Chic*

ISSUE 112 / DECEMBER / JANUARY 2023/24



The watermelon has been a symbol of Palestine since usage of its flag was banned in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by Israeli authorities in 1967. Here, Hajar Ali mirrors the devastation happening to Gazans

Shaken by the scenes emerging from Palestine, creatives are seeking artistic outlets for their emotions. MOJEH speaks to six female artists with roots in the region who are channelling their feelings — and hopes — through art

WORDS BY HAFSA LODI

Social media has been the news channel of choice for many seeking updates from Palestine over the past few months. And while raw footage of bombed buildings and hospital sites have been paralysing to witness, creatives are turning to the screens of their devices to combat the bleakness with vibrant colour and uplifting cultural symbols such as watermelons, poppy flowers, olive trees and the key of return, emblematic of the eventual recuperation of their lands and homes seized by settler colonies. Whether through digital sketches on their iPads or the innovative new realm of AI, art is an outlet through which expressions of angst and despair are transforming into statements of solidarity, resistance and hope, shared through social media and reaching millions across the globe.

HAJAR ALI

Some of the most evocative art inspired by the current crisis in Palestine has been created using AI, and Dubai-based, Singaporean artist Hajar Ali is no stranger to this art form, having used it for her work in real estate where she specialised in architecturally unique properties and luxury adventure trips to remote places. Nearing 400,000 followers on Instagram, she now posts dreamy AI-generated images of landscapes and interiors. In one carousel of images, Ali situates brightly-hued watermelons amid ruins, symbolising hope and resistance in the wake of widescale destruction. "At the crux of the Palestinian issue is the contestation over real estate, and I chose to present it as such," explains Ali. Influenced by the teachings of Edward Said, Ali has named her brand *Reverse Orientalism*. "My work considers post-colonial discourse while also exploring the opportunities afforded us by globalisation," she says.

Ali's Palestine-themed pieces are not currently available for purchase. Last year, she sold one of her artworks as an NFT to raise funds for the Turkey earthquake relief efforts, and is currently seeking a suitable platform to join forces with to help fundraise for Palestinian aid. Until then, many Instagram users are reposting and sharing these captivating visual interpretations of hope and resistance, giving a new dimension to the imagery serving as a call to action, despite the obstacles provided by what has proven to be a biased algorithm. "The algorithm is powerful," says Ali, "but social media has been a defining force in this crisis." [@reverse.orientalism](#)

YASMINA KEYROUZ

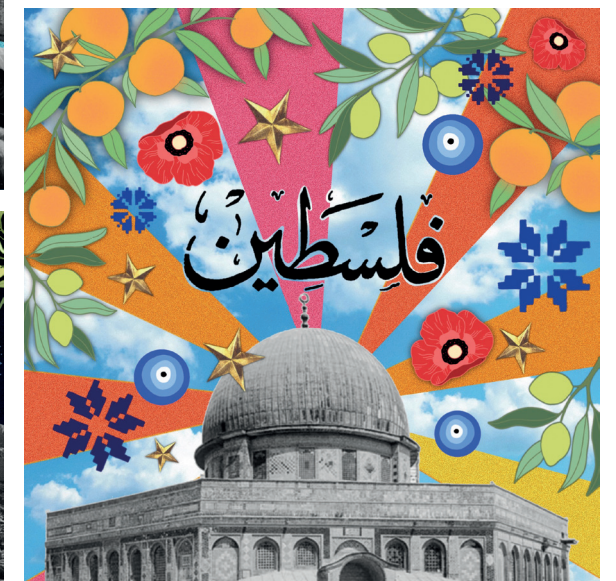
When Beirut-based illustrator and designer Yasmina Keyrouz was a fashion student in 2019, she learned how to turn her hand drawings into digital illustrations on her iPad, and ever since then, she has been posting her creations on Instagram. Bold and punkish with an abundance of vivid eye icons, female figures and pop culture references, Keyrouz's images are frequently topped off with quotes and slogans in creative typography. Her latest work focusses on the ongoing crisis in Palestine, and many of her illustrations are layered over old, collage-style images of the land.

"Just as it's important for people to see real time footage from what's happening on the ground in Gaza right now, it's also important to highlight

what once was, and will always be — the rich culture, the history, and the beauty of their land," says Keyrouz. Her colourful Al Aqsa Mosque piece, which features the iconic structure in black and white against a bright blue sky, red and orange rays, poppy flowers and evil eye emblems, is part of the Native Thread art fundraiser for Gaza, which is donating money to Medical Aid for Palestine (MAP). This piece, as well as many of her other illustrations, have been widely shared on social media. "It's amazing how many corners of the world my art has reached in this past month, and I'd like to think that my work is in fact helping in changing the narrative," says Keyrouz. "With art, you can use your imagination and envision a more hopeful future." [@aphroditeismysister](#)



Lebanese illustrator Yasmina Keyrouz uses creative typography and digital art to convey powerful messages



SARA MAHAYRI

One of the most harrowing aspects of this war has been the incomprehensible number of child fatalities. News, footage and images emerging from Gaza left Dubai-based Lebanese fashion and beauty content creator Sara Mahayri heavy-hearted, and so she turned to AI to create art with a focus on these tragically young casualties. Mahayri's images of a cotton candy-hued ice cream truck on a bombed Gaza road, surrounded by children with wings, has brought tears to the eyes of many social media users, especially after it was revealed that Palestinians were running out of cold spaces to store dead bodies.

"Ice cream trucks turn into morgues for bodies of children killed by Israeli air strikes in Gaza.' This headline, and the dreadful images and videos that followed, left me devastated. I kept thinking that they deserve to enjoy the innocent pleasures of childhood, such as savouring ice cream treats, but instead these Palestinian children endured so much pain, and ended up buried in the ice cream truck,' laments Mahayri. "I used my art to shine a light on the cruelty of the situation, and to show that they are now angels with infinite amounts of ice cream and hopefully no recollection of the traumatic things they experienced."

Mahayri is new to the world of AI art, and was attracted to the medium by the short period of time it took to create images.

"Even artificial intelligence needs human direction, and it's our creative imagination that gives AI art its true value," she explains. "My goal was to create an influential AI art image that could be used as a voice for those who went unheard in Palestine, in the hopes that it would also raise awareness and restore humanity."

In another piece, she uses the symbol of the watermelon as large balloons, to represent the dreams and determination of Palestinians. "These watermelon balloons float high in the sky to show the world their unyielding resilience in the face of adversity and destruction," she says. This image appears on a sweater created in collaboration with Jdeed Labs, with all profits being sent to the PCRf's urgent Gaza relief fund. @saramahayri



Sara Mahayri enhances her artwork with AI to depict scenes from inside Gaza

Hope, by Sheeren Audi, is a collage of emblems associated with Palestine

SHEREEN AUDI

With a degree in fine arts, passion for print-making and a list of art exhibitions to her name, Amman-based Jordanian-Canadian artist Sheeren Audi has been putting her talents to use raising awareness — and funds — for Palestine. In October, she created a piece called *Hope* — a collage-style compilation of watermelons, poppy flowers, keffiyeh prints, dancing women, evil eye motifs, flowers and birds.

Strength, confidence, resilience and optimism are themes consistently woven into Audi's art, and her Palestine-themed pieces are no exception. "I felt compassionate and obliged as an artist to create artwork at this time — I wanted to help draw attention to the situation but in a nice manner," she says. "I chose to use symbols that Palestine is known for, and to give a sense of hope to all of us and to everyone who sees the work in these dark times."

Similar versions of this piece appear with different symbols and layouts, all in Audi's distinctive colourful and cluttered aesthetic. She says that over time, she has fallen in love with the creative medium of collage, and that the more she experiments with it, on paper, canvas and even wood, the more she appreciates the craft. Audi has been donating prints from her range of solidarity artwork for Palestine to support various charitable initiatives and emergency relief auctions, and says she has felt encouraged by the many messages from fans saying that looking at her art gives them a sense of hope for a better and brighter future for Palestinians. @sheeren_audi



Eliza Karazah creates one-of-a-kind artworks that showcase her calligraphy skills, donating the proceeds to charity

ELIZA KARAZAH

With Levantine and Irish heritage, Chicago-based artist Eliza Karazah is known for her eye-catching Arabic calligraphy appearing on everything from pottery to rugs, and even on a collection of scarves created in a collaboration with American hijab brand Vela. Her one-of-a-kind creations sell out moments after she posts them online — a space where she felt she needed to contribute creatively to help raise awareness about the Palestinian plight. "I am not eloquent. I paint. I make. So I wanted to find a way to have my digital footprint mean something and go towards something, in my tiny corner of the internet," says Karazah. In October, she released a set of digital prints featuring maps of Palestine in different colourways, with all sales being doubled and donated to the Palestine Children's Relief Fund (PCRf). Shortly afterwards, she posted a series of intricate illustrations of hands in prayer, etched with the word Palestine. The engraving appears deeper in the later images, until the word starts glowing — a depiction of the strength of "the prayer of the oppressed."

"We have to believe prayer is powerful," says Karazah, who believes that having faith is the only thing binding the community together. She has also used the symbolic watermelon and colours of red, green and white in her work. "The algorithm boosts digital art and reels that don't have 'overt' imagery related to Palestine," she explains. "I depicted watermelons and hands as almost a dog whistle for people who want to help, who feel helpless, who want to be together in this. Navigating making things beautiful when everything is the most hideous we can imagine it, feels wrong. I'm not sure my work does anything for hope, but it may make us feel less alone in our hopes." @kweenkaraza



"The process of creating art can serve as an outlet for emotions"

AYA MOBAYDEEN, ILLUSTRATOR

AYA MOBAYDEEN

The Instagram page of Jordanian illustrator Aya Mobaydeen is a treasure trove of feminine graphics centring powerful females, flowers and cultural motifs in a soft palette of colours, completed with text in English and Arabic. Mobaydeen has long been advocating for Palestinians through her artwork, and believes that creating art during times like these can be uplifting. "It evokes positive emotions, provides a visual distraction, and fosters a sense of community and creativity," she says. At the same time, the illustrating process has been therapeutic for Mobaydeen, as she channels her feelings into her work. "I feel like it provides a means to express emotions, have a voice, and raise awareness. The process of creating art can serve as an outlet for emotions and a way to communicate complex feelings, contributing to a sense of empowerment and self-expression," she explains.

In one image, four raised hands featuring diverse skin tones and sleeve designs is coupled with the text: 'Stand up, Speak up, Against injustice.' Another piece depicts 'Palestine' in Arabic surrounded by flowers and birds in a vintage, cross-stitch style, and was included in an emergency relief sale organised by Gallery Bawa. Mobaydeen has also collaborated with social justice data and insights organisation Sama Consulting, to create illustrated maps and infographics listing death counts from Israeli airstrikes. She says that her Palestine-themed art is free for those who request it, and believes Instagram has been invaluable in sharing messages and spreading awareness about the crisis in Gaza: "Its ease of sharing and its ability to amplify voices make it an effective medium for promoting humanitarian appeals and encouraging actionable responses." @aya_mobaydeen



Aya Mobaydeen has used her works to raise funds for emergency aid, spread awareness about rising death tolls and encourage action

