

كَلِمَات

Kalimat

Ghalia Khouja:

The Fluid Paintings of the Spider Poet

Number 17 (English), March 2004

العدد السابع عشر (إنكليزي)، آذار/مارس 2004

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Kalimat

Kalimat is a fully independent, non-profit periodical aiming at celebrating creativity and enhancing access among English and Arabic speaking people worldwide.

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Number 17 (English), March 2004

العدد السابع عشر (إنكليزي)، آذار/مارس 2004

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Kalimat 17

Editor & Publisher

Raghid Nahhas

Editorial Advisers

**Noel Abdulahad, Hikmat Attali, Judith Beveridge, Damian Boyle,
Bassam Frangieh, Manfred Jurgensen, Sophie Masson,
Raghda Nahhas-Elzein, Bruce Pascoe, Eva Sallis, L. E. Scott**

Advisers

**Khalid al-Hilli, Nuhad Chabbouh, Mona Drouby,
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CORRESPONDENCE AND CONTACT DETAILS

P.O. Box 242, Cherrybrook, NSW 2126, Australia.

Phone/Facsimile: 61 2 9484 3648

Electronic Mail: raghid@ozemail.com.au

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SNOWFLAKES

The Death of Abdurrahman Munif

We were particularly saddened by the death of Dr. Abdurrahman Munif, one of the greatest novelists in the Arab world who died early January 2004 at the age of 71 after a long illness.

Peter Indari remembers Munif in an article we publish under *In Memoriam* in the present issue. I met Munif in Syria in August 2002 and was very impressed as I mentioned in *Kalimat 11*: 'Abdurrahman Munif, the author of the famous novel "Cities of Salt" and other distinguished novels, received me at his home in Damascus with his wife and son along his side, a refined lovely family. Munif showed a great interest in *Kalimat*, and gave me a lot of advice and suggestions.' Since that meeting, I spoke with him by phone on a few occasions, the last of which was about a month before his death to thank him for an article he contributed about Jabra for *Kalimat 15*.

When I rang his wife to offer my condolences, she responded with the elegance of a princess and the graciousness of a goddess. She was more interested in praising *Kalimat* than hearing any word of sympathy.

The Centenary of Antun Saadé

The first of March 2004 marks the centenary of the birth of Antun Saadé, one of the greatest intellectuals the Syrian and Arab nations had during the twentieth century. Saadé founded the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, emphasising the importance of unifying people as well as the land in any quest for unity. This is why it was important to establish a unified Syria, that is geographically, demographically and economically viable, rather than having a short cut into a pan Arab unity in response to a romantic quest¹ that allowed politicians to play on the feeling of the masses to gather popularity, with disastrous consequences such as the collapse of the United Arab Republic.

All of this is beyond the scope of the present remarks, but the major issue we would like to highlight is that Saadé was executed in Lebanon 1949 accused of instigating riots

¹ See article by Inaam Raad, *Al-Mashriq*, (2) 6: 53-65.

against the establishment. He was betrayed by the Syrian leader of the time, who handed him to the Lebanese authorities. A mock trial was conducted, and Saadé did not have a chance to be properly defended. The whole episode carries the hallmark of an orchestrated conspiracy against a strong secular voice that must have been a threat to the colonial plans of the time, including western continued interests in changing Syria into sectarian states.

Our main point here is that Saadé's execution is a major landmark on the path of modern Arab decline. The mentality of despotism and denial of intellectual, political and social freedoms, enabled the establishment to continue by eliminating the "other", but the consequences were clearly manifest in the loss of Palestine, the Lebanese civil war, the continued decline in Arab intellectual, literary, political, social and economic standards, and the emergence of terrorism.

As Abdo Wazen in the next section indicates, it is rather difficult to isolate politics from culture. This is why it is still difficult to publish a magazine such as *Kalimat* in many Arab countries, even though it is mainly a literary periodical. Granting a permission to publish is not really sufficient for writers and creative people to voice their concerns, or simply state their emotions. There is a need for an environment of intellectual democracy, with unbiased freedom. Without practically implementing concepts such as "the presumption of innocence until guilt is proven", no politician or poet can feel safe. It is about time, Arab societies realize that the decline will continue as long as despotism continues, and as long as there is no recognition that democracy in terms of free elections is only a vehicle to the essential feat of freedom.

Abdo Wazen & 2003

'2003 passed with its adversities... and the cultural questions it posed are still searching for answers'

This is the title of an article in Arabic by the renowned Lebanese journalist and writer Abdo Wazen.² After emphasising that culture is a timeless dynamics that cannot be framed within any year, he poses the question of what have we learned from a year that was a continuation of the disasters that prevailed in the opening of the twenty-first century.

He then mentions that 2003 was the year of Iraq *par excellence*. 'It was the year of the Iraqi disaster which almost made us forget the unceasing Palestinian calamity. It is true that we were happy for the fall of the dictatorial regime and the arrest of the dictator, but our sorrow was, and still is, great about Iraq which fell suddenly as if it had

² Republished by el-Telegraph 05/01/04, Sydney.

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never been— neither historically nor in reality. Soon the Ba’th establishment collapsed and the internal tragedies, long hidden behind a massive décor built by the corrupt regime, became exposed.’

Wazen goes on to make a point that has always been felt by many, including us: ‘We speak of culture, yet find ourselves attracted to politics. It is really no longer possible to separate the two, particularly in our Arab world which is witnessing increased backwardness. Add to this the waves of blind terrorism here and there, expressing the darkened state in which we live.’

After explaining that 2003 was loaded with ingredients for despair, he makes another point favourable to us in *Kalimat*, namely the possibility that culture should take a leading role in the world: ‘Despair and sorrow are not useful, particularly at the start of a new year. So let us be optimistic in any way possible. Perhaps, culture is our only means of allowing us to hold on to the floating timber that can save us from drowning. We mean culture as an individual or collective product, not as an official product. It is the culture of struggle and strife for freedom, self-fulfillment, modernization and harmony with our times— in order to remove ourselves from the abyss into which we were thrown by the politics that was imposed on us, rather the one originating from our daily life.’

‘Let us be optimistic as long as we can write and read despite the heavy shadow of the red tape. Let us be optimistic as long as artists and literary figures are making another life at the margins of this distressed, broken and captive life.’

‘Let us be optimistic as long as we can say “no”, albeit in a low voice that might only be heard by the select few who still care about such a “no”.’

‘Let us be optimistic despite the black smoke masking the Arab scene in the twenty-first century and the thick clouds that fill our skies.’

Wazen continues by listing some cultural events and questioning which was the most significant in 2003. One of these is the death of some prominent Palestinians: ‘Or is it the loss of five prominent Palestinians one after the other, a loss that was perceived as part of the grand Palestinian tragedy: Edward Said, Hussain al-Barghouthi, Ihsan Abbas, Mohammad al-Qaisi and Fadwa Tucan?’

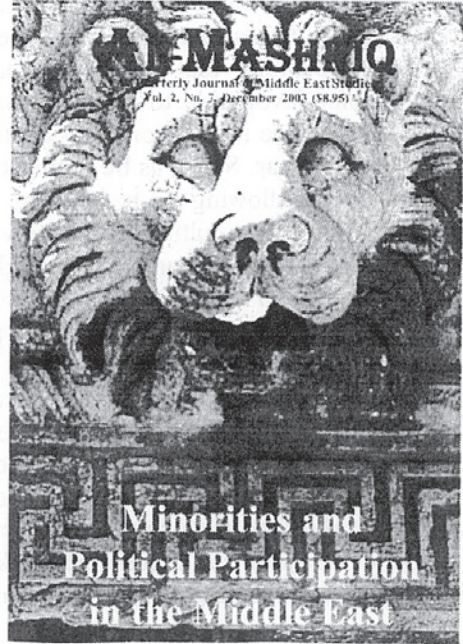
He ends the article by questioning whether the next year would be different from the one before, but we would like here to emphasise the great feeling of loss due to the departure of the thinkers mentioned by Wazen. One of those is Fadwa Toucan who stayed in her hometown of Nablus all her life. Her plight as a Palestinian woman thinker and poet was described to us by Issa Fattouh in an article he contributed to the Arabic issue and was published in *Kalimat 14*.

Al-Mashriq

Another reassuring undertaking is the publishing of *al-Mashriq* in Melbourne, Australia. *Al-Mashriq* is a socio-politically focused periodical, but akin to *Kalimat* in its quest to attain quality and survive. The publisher and editor Dr. Adel Beshara outlines below the reasons behind his initiative.

‘The Middle East, that most volatile of geographic regions, has long been the subject of much heated debate and controversy. Fountainhead of civilizations, birthplace of the world’s three major monotheistic religions, cherished prize of sundry imperialist powers throughout the ages, and venue for one of the most intractable conflicts of our conflict-ridden era, the conundrum posed by this strikingly convoluted and multi-faceted region has exercised some of the best minds of fields as diverse as political science, history and sociology. Now, fresh on the heels of the 21st century, comes a journal whose aim is the fusion of all the above academic pursuits into a single, integrative approach to a regional set of political, historical and social factors all too often fragmented into separate categories of study.

Al-Mashriq offers the reader a holistic view of the political, the historical and the social, as pertains to the region from whose bosom have sprung some of the most fascinatingly complex political, historical and social configurations. Subjects of articles included shall run the gamut from politics and government to Islam to secularism to Zionism to gender and sectarian relations to ancient history, all carefully crafted so as to afford the greatest possible insight into their respective spheres, even as they are identified in relation to the larger politico-social and historical whole within which they operate and achieve expression.’





Dr. Adel Beshara, Editor-in-Charge of al-Mashriq, is a senior tutor at the University of Melbourne, Department of History. He is the author of several treatises including *Syrian Nationalism: An Inquiry into the Political Philosophy of Antun Sa'adeh*, and *Politics of Frustration: Society and Politics in Lebanon*, and *Said Taky Deen: Master Satirist*.

On *Kalimat* 16

It seems to me that *Kalimat* is becoming an eternal passion for us! Number 16 confirmed the periodical's continuing progress and ability to bring joy to its readers.

Your translations go much beyond conveying the meaning, into cracking the depths of the heart and conscious of this world, particularly through introducing us to a group of fair-minded intellectuals such as Anthony O'Neil and his concerns about acknowledging the Arabs' contribution to culture.

Your lively interview with the wonderful Sophie Masson brought us face to face with her objective views of the world. We felt we were with you during the conversation, and it is our belief that intellectuals such as Masson are more capable than the politicians in steering the ship of humanity towards safe shores.

Remembering Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, signified the eternal yearning to the time of the creative giants. It was an appropriately rich appreciation of a man of his calibre.

Nuhad Chabbouh, Homs, Syria

The Fifth Year

We would like to start our fifth year by registering our appreciation of all those who have been instrumental in making *Kalimat* what it is today: writers, readers, advisers and sponsors.

The difficulties in publishing *Kalimat* and maintaining its quality remain enormous, and whilst the courtesy of a number of people who voluntarily devoted their time in providing advice and feedback has been crucial for the integrity of the work, the reality is that without proper funding it would not have been possible to continue.

A recent meeting with our individual sponsors revealed a great understanding of the problem, manifested in their pledge to continue their support. Some sponsors such as John Maait doubled their donations, and Saad Barazi pledged to cover this year's deficit and started contributing on that basis.

It is our hope that having more sponsors would eventually ease the burden off the few individuals who are currently contributing.

The increase in subscription fees this year is the first since we published *Kalimat*, and it is another measure we felt necessary.

Some of our advisers have been playing an important role in promoting *Kalimat* via various means, including the media. This has resulted in some positive outcomes such as having new contacts and more subscribers.

Sophie Masson was kind enough to interview Raghid Nahhas for an article published in *Spectrum*, a supplement to the *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper, on 17-18 January 2004. The article was aptly titled "When a good read talks in two tongues". We are grateful to the *Spectrum* editor Michael Visontay for this opportunity. The article generated a lot of interest and the following are some examples.

Congratulations, Raghid, on the piece that Sophie Masson wrote for *Spectrum*. Excellent! I like what you say about multiculturalism. I am left cogitating on the point that perhaps human societies expect us all to blend in rather than care to value difference. Perhaps Australia is more bluntly conformist than older societies.

I will be in Boston and New York during April, doing some research on the late Gerry Glaskin, a writer of Western Australia. If there is anything I can do for *Kalimat* whilst I am at Boston University or in New York, let me know. I will be reading Gerry's correspondence with Han Suyin which is housed in the Special Collections at the Boston University Library.

Carolyn van Langenberg

I was very delighted to read the article about you in today's *Sydney Morning Herald*.

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You've been working very hard, I'm sure, and it's about time *Kalimat* gets such a wide-scale attention.

The article is informative and has a strong human element. Sophie Masson has done a good job. I also liked the photo. It's taken from a good angle, and has the right balance of light and shade.

On a different note, below are a couple of paragraphs which sum up my thoughts on September's issue of *Kalimat*.

The September's issue of *Kalimat* is yet another collection of rich and assured writing. From Raghid Nahhas' "Dancing with the owl," academic in its depth yet intimate enough you could imagine yourself chatting with the Syrian poet over a demitasse of coffee; to Ryn England's passionate and lyrical "Two Feathers"; to L.E. Scott's graceful, wistfully intimate and, indeed, memorable "What should be is remembered"- but these are only a few of many, and already I am guilty of omission.

Literary merit aside, *Kalimat* does more than provide readers with quality writings. It bridges cultural gaps and, in the process, gives us a glimpse of the world that happens to lie on the other side of the fence. And in a global village growing more complex by the day, how important is a literary magazine which highlights the richness of the human experience but, more so, its universality.

Kennedy Estephan

Great to see the article about you and *Kalimat* in the Saturday Herald... and hope it will bring welcome support for the journal and you.

Leonora Howlett and George Martini

Congratulations on an excellent interview. I particularly liked your definition of multiculturalism, and feel that *Kalimat* embodies this... hoping others will agree, and that *Kalimat* will attract more readers and funds.

Susan Beinart

Just seen the article in the Herald written by Sophie Masson. Good on her, beautifully stated.

Eileen Marshall

It is also heartening to have a number of readers and writers who continue to take initiatives in promoting *Kalimat* in whichever way available to them. To go a step further from enjoying the reading is of great added value that will eventually secure the number of subscribers necessary to sustain the production of the periodical.

G R E G B O G A E R T S

Tickling the Ivories

When I was a kid I suddenly found I was to learn classical piano. This came as a complete surprise. One moment I was happily playing cowboys and Indians in the backyard and catching spiders in glass jars with my cousin, the next moment I was propelled into the serious world of Bach, Haydn and Beethoven.

The pianoforte teacher lived directly across the road but it was a main road of four lanes full of speeding cars and trucks and it seemed an eternity to get there by the time I pushed the button for the lights to change so I could cross. Many a time, as I walked across the crossing, I received a mouthful of abuse from some truckie who'd had to pull to a stop and start again a rig carrying a full load of steel skelp or wool bales. An eight-year-old kid stopping them was just the limit. And they told me so but in language I'd only come to appreciate the meaning of later in life when I did a stint labouring at the BHP.

But after several lessons with my music teacher, Mrs. Bolt, I came to prefer the colourful abuse of a truckie compared to the cold and glacial personage of Mrs. Bolt who kept her dead husband's shaving strop on a small wooden table beside the piano.

At my first lesson I couldn't take my eyes off the thick and wide and long black leather strap and before we were half way through the half-hour curiosity got the better of me.

'What's that black leather strap for Mrs Bolt?' I asked.

I shouldn't have asked.

'It's for little boys and girls who don't practise enough and keep making mistakes. I slap their fingers with it. And I use it on little boys who can't hold their tongues and mind their business,' she said icily.

So saying she seized the strap, doubled it in two and flicked it with expert skill across my winter raw red knuckles. The pain was dreadful, worse than when my cousin, Gary, and I let a big black spider, with a white cross on its back, escape from one of our glass jars. The spider bit both of us and we howled with pain for hours.

Clutching my wounded fingers under my armpits, I hunched over the keyboard while Mrs Bolt waited, evidently bored by the usual reaction she got from one of her charges when she administered punishment with the leather strap her dead husband once used to sharpen his cutthroat razor before shaving.

At night, as I lay in my bed with the din of trucks changing gears and brakes

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squealing rising from the four lanes below my window, I created visions of that cutthroat razor drawn slowly across the scrawny chook's throat of my pianoforte teacher; a long line of thin blood in the heavily powdered flesh, a line of blood that bloomed into the death throes of the woman.

The constant threat of punishment of the physical kind is never a deterrent for anything and the threat of having my fingers slapped with hard leather if I even placed a finger incorrectly on the yellowed and aged keys, was hardly conducive of any creative musical effort on my part. The more I was hit, the more mistakes I made.

Music lessons were a misery but my parents, like many who'd lived through the Great Depression, eating bread and dripping, living in shanty towns in shacks cobbled together with drift wood and old iron, selling solder stripped from the seals of empty preserved fruit tins, wanted more for me than they'd had. And a good education was the most important thing they felt and learning classical piano was part of that education. Education was an escape from a time when every shilling was a prisoner.

I practised at home and home was above a shop directly opposite the house of Mrs. Bolt. I would sit there carefully, slowly running out the scales, carefully, slowly playing the simple pieces for the piano, fingering my way through the bars like a blind man trying to read Braille for the first time.

And I kept my head down because I was convinced Mrs. Bolt was standing at her window watching me, her head stuck out over the lanes of traffic, straining to hear any wrong note I might play. I was convinced that when I made a mistake at home she could simply lean across the four lanes of tar and flick me with that black leather strap.

Sometimes, after a particularly punishing lesson, I would walk back across the crossing looking at my hands because I thought Mr. Bolt was sure to have left some of his whiskers on the strap. And seeing that I'd been hit so many times in the past half-hour then some of those whiskers were sure to be on the back of my hands.

Eventually we moved to Merewether and I was sure that I'd escaped the learning of classical pianoforte. Fool! As soon as the removalist's van was out of the driveway, my mother was on the phone to the convent near the beach. Two days later, knees knocking, I crossed the threshold of Sister Mary Ursula, a nun of eighty years of age, with hands the size of dinner plates.

Those hands belonged to a shearer, the knobs of arthritis made them seem larger and the mesh of blue veins made the flesh bulge menacingly. I tried to block out of my mind what terrible punishment those hands might inflict on me when I made a mistake.

It was a freezing morning, that first morning. Sister Mary Ursula instructed me, in a quiet voice, to place my hands on the palm of her left hand. I held my breath waiting for the other hand to squash my small hands to mash. But Sister Mary Ursula gently placed her right hand over my hands; she held my cold hands with her enormous, soft and warm hands so the cold would leave the joints, so I could play.

PETER INDARI

Abdurrahman Munif

The man who traded politics for literature, but the concerns of the Arab people stayed with him till the end.

Munif's first novel appeared in 1973 under the title "The Trees and Marzouk's Assassination". He was forty years old when he found his way to the world of fiction. In 1974, he published the novel "A Magian Love Story". Less than a year later, he published "East of the Middle". This was followed by "The Ends", "When we Left the Bridge" and "The Long-Distance Race".

This series of novels was achieved within five years, carrying Munif into the peak of transformed Arabic fiction writing, with his unique style of identifying with his characters, expressing their feelings and depicting their environment and the barriers they face.

In 1982, a novel carrying the title "World Without Maps" was authored jointly by Munif and another literary giant Jabra Ibrahim Jabra. This unprecedented feat in Arabic fiction writing brought a bombshell in its depiction of the lack of political, social and cultural vision in the Arab world. It was almost an accurate prediction of the state reached by the Arabs in their present stage.

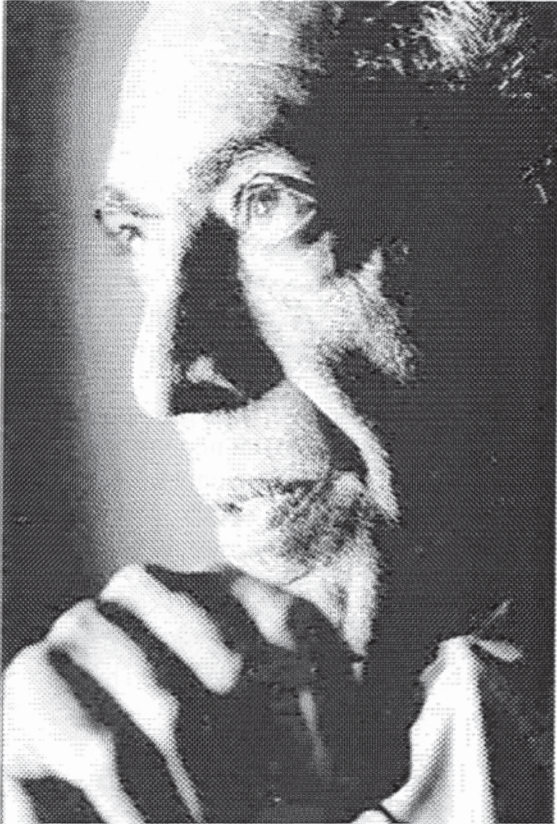
Munif published "Cities of Salt" in 1984. It was a novel of five volumes depicting the history of Saudi Arabia and its people before and after the discovery of oil when individuals changed in appearance, dress and buildings, but never actually left their caves of ignorance and superstitions. The flood of oil resulted only in the construction of cities of salt able to dissolve at the fall of a raindrop or crumble at the blow of warm wind.

The shockwaves caused by "The Cities of Salt" continued for years. The effects of this novel made the Saudi rulers strip Munif of his Saudi citizenship. Munif was a Saudi, but he never actually lived in Saudi Arabia. He was born in Jordan of a Saudi father and an Iraqi mother. His wife is Syrian. He lived moving among Amman, Damascus, Beirut, Baghdad, Cairo, Paris and obtained his doctorate in the economics of oil from Belgrade University.

Munif's last novel was in 1999. It was a trilogy titled "The Land of Blackness";

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almost a prophecy of the current state of loss and humiliation reached by Iraq and the Arab world. The novel depicted modern Iraqi history and emphasized that Iraq would be the second greatest sacrifice after Palestine.



Munif's novels aimed at human liberty and the acceptance of the "other". His main characters were engaged in a bitter struggle with authorities, always suppressed and subjected to assassinations. Even the rational, peaceful citizen is not accepted by Arab regimes because he does not glorify the ruler and his achievements. In the Arab world, you are either a jailor or the jailed. This is Munif's equation, expressed through one of his characters: 'I am burdened by misery, confused by the past, the present and the future. I feel a bitter disappointment. I am losing my certainty'.

Munif escaped the world of politics and partisan struggle where he was once a prominent member of the Baath Party, of which he said in my presence: '...it is the only party capable of saving the Arabs and leading them to face cultural challenges, but gaining power or governing in its name stalled all hope...' This was in 1979, many years after Munif gained his intellectual independence and abandoned his partisan commitments.

He escaped, or moved to fictional creativity, achieving international success even though he did not get what he deserves in the Arab world where fiction has not reached the status of poetry. This transformation did not reduce his concerns, because the collapse came at all levels: governmental, institutional and cultural. He was not happy about abolishing the "other", denigrating the intellectuals and molding creative people according to the wishes of the authorities.

Munif differed from his compatriot Dr. Abdullah al-Kossaimi, who was also stripped of his Saudi citizenship. Munif considered the authorities to be responsible for

I N M E M O R I A M

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repression, persecution, the plundering of freedom and sanctifying retardation. Al-Kossaimi considered the style of Arab thinking and the rigid adherence of individuals to the supernatural, to be the main reason for backwardness and submission. The two, however, shared the same goals and had the utmost respect for each other.

Munif's characters were running away, surrendering, seeking refuge in the unknown or in the free environments of the west, yet continued their life of terror and fear from assassination. Those who escaped murder, were followed by the phantoms of dread and horror wherever they went.

Some critics say that Munif depicted the miseries of the Arabs caused by their rulers without providing an alternative. However, the mission of the creative writer and artist is to portray reality and convey the picture to generations, present and future, and this is what Munif committed himself to in his twenty novels and many critical and political articles.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the death of Munif came at the time his novels disappeared from the Cairo Book Fair where they were mysteriously confiscated. A quantity of torn copies of "Cities of Salt" and "When we Left the Bridge" were found destroyed in the customs office cabinets. Munif's death spared him this grim discovery.

"The Cities of Salt" remains, in my opinion, the most important novel in the history of Arabic literary fiction. In its 2445 pages making the five volumes, we read the history of an important era in the lives of the desert inhabitants, and the drastic change in their condition after the discovery of oil which Munif always considered to be the curse that befell the Arabs.



بطرس عنداري

Peter Indari is a pioneer of the Arabic press in Australia. He is an adviser to *Kalimat*.

JIHAD ELZEIN

The Poem of Istanbul
Translated by *Ragbid Nabhas*

The Poem of Istanbul

a poem of eleven ships

The First Ship

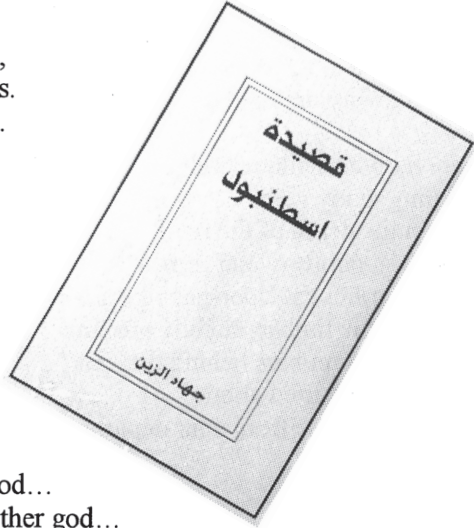
The sailor's wife has told me that the sea is not water
all those who thought it was, drowned...
The sailor's wife has told me that the sea is colour and space
a violation of colour, and a passion of pearl...
It derives from the earth, carried on waves of dust.

Submersed up to the wrists in its illusions,
Like water it clarifies, creates and sparkles.
Oh sea that reaches Istanbul an old man...
Oh sea that leaves Istanbul a sultan
whose girl-slaves are dust
Here is history's rattle... and
the passion embellished with
the seductions of heaven

Everything in Istanbul
exudes with the scent of extinction.

Passion preys upon a knight and
throws him on the horseback of another god...
another language on the horseback of another god...

Oh master— how your language conquers me
How you seduce me with
the breath of the deserts and the seas



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and then you let me down...
When the horses became dissatisfied
with the repulsiveness of the deserts,
they summoned their knights among the tents
and went north
The land was monotonous
they were bored by its invasions
and by the river's apple¹
and the woe of peace!
desires ceased to differ
stabs were no longer varied
they turned their tyranny unto themselves
to discover their journey within
and when they found no prophet in their midst
they became frightened and their bodies became
exposed with the vanity of words.

She spoke to me wearing her Roman caftan and a shawl
healed by the pleasant Anatolian mornings

The sailor's wife at the door...
This door is my assured abode

An empty harbour hallucinating
and whistling in my veins
drowning in the depth of the room...
and the door is far away and firm
but the light strikes the door-gap like a knife
cutting the fragile timber, slightly pushing
and the shawl disappears behind the door...
This door is my assured abode
every scent will come from your departure.



The first herds of
of a million ibexes...
coming each by each,
departed my yearning

¹ In reference to inland fruits.

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and crawled towards me through the rugged path
from the tips of the mountains of wakefulness.
At the end of the room,
under the timber roofed with tiles,
the blue spread dark like a shade
when the Bosphorus released it
in preparation for the afternoon

The sailor's wife sets out between
the narrowness of the coast and life
and in my fractures

At the end of the room where my satisfaction
floats in the bed of time, lie
two centuries of passion
and lushness and embankments
for my bridges

Under this timber impregnated with lust
I am the happiest corpse in the universe
how a fair woman could
strike at my roots

At the door, there is a deer of royal lineage
bred by the inland shepherds...
how come it does not know that this sea
is the conquest of the inland plains!

It knows the sea and the ceremonies of noble betrayals
It knows about the northerly wind and the northerly seductions
then it cries whenever on the waves a gasping captive appears:

Salonika... Salonika...²

Don't say: 'A Roman land betrayed the salt,'
but say it charmed it...

It assembled its primary fragments...



² Currently part of Greece, but was once a famous Ottoman city.

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and went on a mysterious wandering
I am Istanbul O Master
my names as well as my graves
shall drift away
from the sea in which I
entrusted all the cunning of gods
all my names carry the blood of gods
the mood of gods
the stubbornness of gods

The Second Ship

The Lover:

Oh sailor's wife return your wine,
spilled from the fish of words...
Now I paint your two shores, and
in the heart's bay there is a saline gale
and the wrecks of the fantasy of arrival.

How happy are the ships that arrive
How happy are the ships that beckon and go
How miserable are the ships that arrive
How miserable are the ships that beckon and go



Istanbul:

My legs are two dancers in the waves that dance with me
and I am my own splendour, my much-trodden road and the flirting of my steps
My passion makes love to me and throws me aside,
so I do not give birth
I am the head of the nobility— captive and trembling...
My passion creeps in my lust and my mind,
splits me in half
and I become one.

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The Lover:

Vanish... as though you have never been in the silk of my torment
so that I sleep in difficult times to bring you back to my prospects...

A Third Voice:

In this market of fornication, there is a fountain of virtue
water is its wing and its source
and water then water is its infidel and infidel.

Istanbul:

Don't we call it "civilisation" when you flee to your skies?
And I... I am Istanbul...
How could you, as a teenager, paint me
only to leave me when you become middle-aged?
Is it true that you are leaving me a blue hell and dumb minarets
to stand witness to your captivation?
My ships are tired of fighting the others under your light
Remove this defiant curse off the fates' back,
because I shall not sleep without your garment.

جهاد الزين

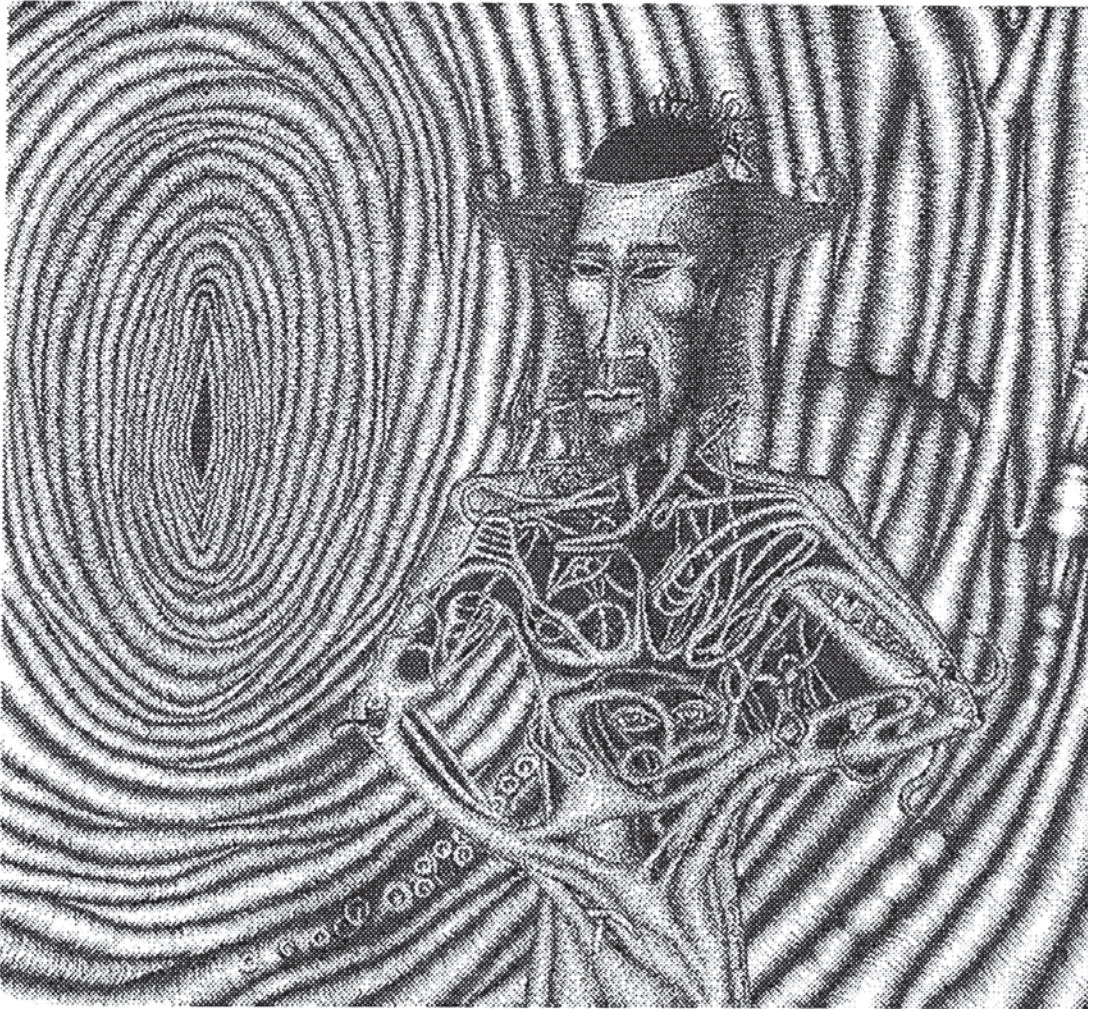
Jihad Elzein is a leading Lebanese journalist. A graduate of law, his love for exploration led him to report on many countries around the world, establishing himself as a first-class journalist. He is renowned as a political columnist, a feat he has undertaken with leading newspapers. In addition to numerous articles, he is a contributor to some books.

In 2002, he surprised the press and literary circles in Lebanon and Syria, and revealed his poetic talent by publishing his first poetry book titled *Qassidat Istanbul* (The Poem of Istanbul). The book, published by *Dar al-Fikr al-Hadith* in Beirut, comprises three parts: a long poem that carries the same title as that of the collection, seven poems written as *Statements of Gratitude to the Impressionists* and five poems under the title *Women*. The poems are masterly in their style and content, modern with fine use of metre. "The Poem of Istanbul" as originally published comprised "nine ships", but now it is a poem of eleven ships, after late in 2003 the author added a finale.

Kalimat is honoured to have been entrusted with the translation of this book.

JOHNNY BEINART

Three Drawings



***The black void through the window of my womb,
so I hid in a man-shaped shell.***

Felt tip pen, scalpel. Approximately A5, 2002.



Johnny Beinart

Multi-headed foetus dispenser.

Ball point pen on paper.

Approximately A5, 2003.

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It's raining cats.

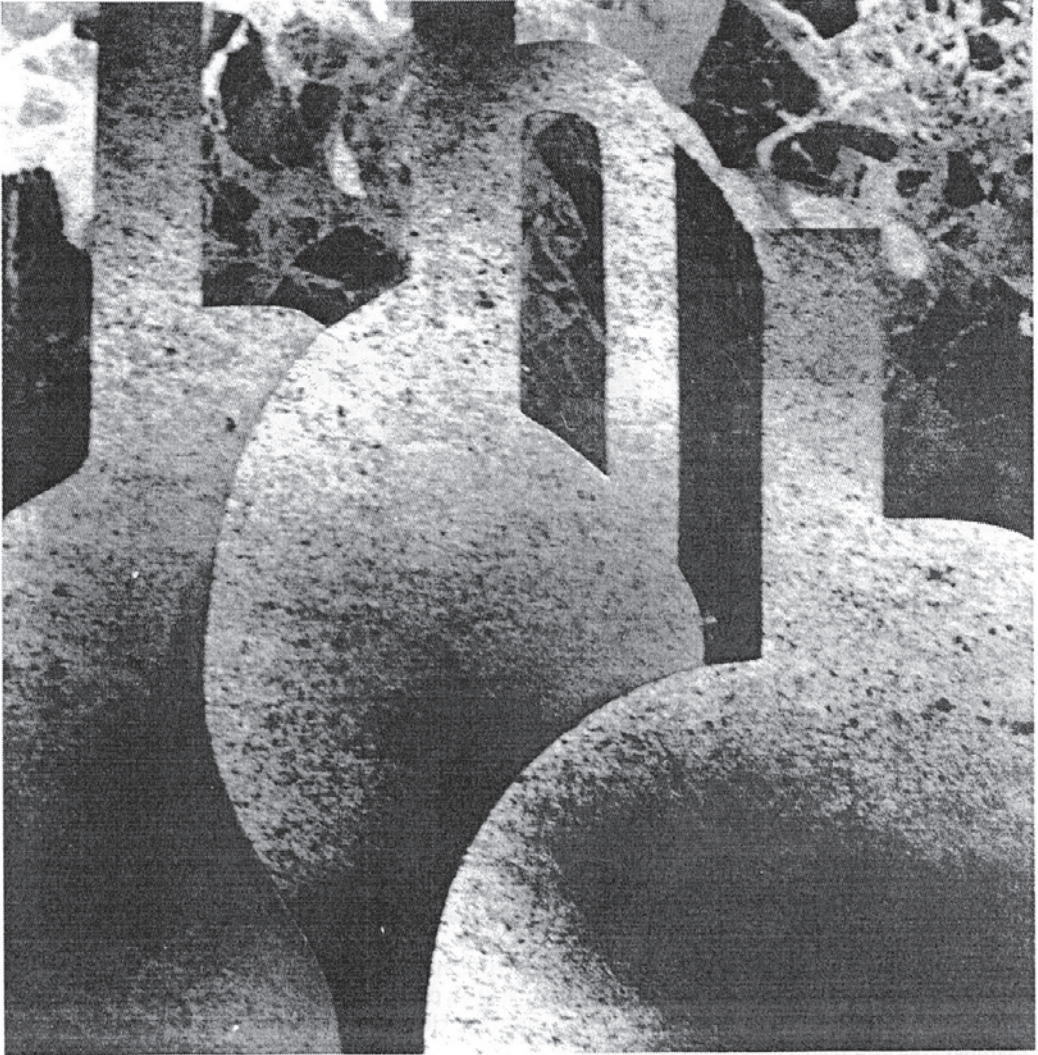
Felt tip pen. Approximately A4, 2004.

Johnny Beinart is a 24 years old self-taught artist who partially makes his living by selling his prints, designing album covers and fliers for bands, and undertaking various commission jobs. He says: 'Drawing for me is a subconscious process. I only realise what I am drawing half way through a piece, or at the end. This gives me insight into my subconscious, which I believe is important for self-discovery and emotional development.' '...I draw because I love it. I love creating little worlds and watching them grow to maturity.'

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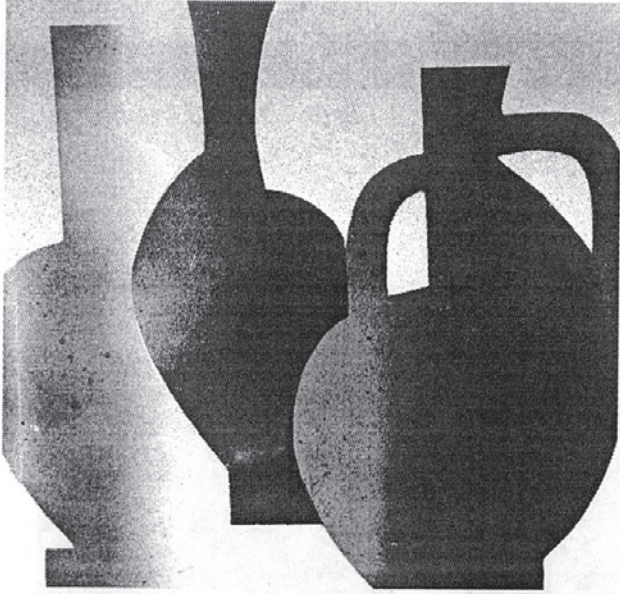
BASSAM JUBAYLI

Three Untitled Paintings



A R T S

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Bassam Jubayli is a graduate of Economics. His love for the Arts made him pursue special tuition. He is keen on painting, sculpture and photography. He has participated in many exhibitions inside and outside Syria, in addition to his several solo exhibitions. He is from the city of Homs where he currently lives and works for a textile factory.

RAGHID NAHHAS

Ghalia Khouja: The Fluid Paintings of the Spider-Poet

Upon reading Ghalia Khouja's first poem she submitted for publication in the Arabic issue of *Kalimat*, I knew I was dealing with something extraordinary and that the author would certainly cause some controversy among readers and writers who would be perplexed by both the structure and the content of her work. The poem was typical of Khouja's modern, free style of poetry, a form adopted by many Arab poets, but I felt that her method exceeded any we have seen over the past forty years. At first reading, it seemed very exaggerated and pretentious, particularly that it was painstakingly long—almost an attempt at writing an epic. Nevertheless, I felt it was very engaging for the power and complexity of its imagery and dynamics, as if I was reading directly into Khouja's subconscious. What fascinated me most was that Khouja, a city girl from Aleppo,¹ was able to skilfully invoke nature in the expression of her endurance as she navigates in the oceans of her imagination. Colours, sounds, scents, touches, movements, animals, plants, landscapes, birth, death, pain, breath... interwoven into a web that appears like a fantasy, but soon its reality is felt as the sunrays refract in the bedewed threads of her mind.

Violet Fantasy

From another world...
 I hear the knocking on the doors of music
 endless melodies,
 whispers that can almost be seen
 a hellish dance of the cymbals
 linden burning the music
 a twig
 a leaf,
 a flower...

¹ Syria's second city.

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The gate of madness opens
the dreams of light
My soul is a poem,
a poem,
wandering...

The images,
the sentences,
the expressions,
the pauses,
the scenes,
the margins:
unseen birds.

With every flutter,
I transform
my transformation is
a knock on change...
there,
beyond the mist.
Our dreams migrate
with fountains of light
there...
before the mist
where we had left our bodies
to become trees...
our eyes,
coloured butterflies...
perhaps,
we lost our memory in the sun.
The foxes approach the tree-
trunks
many bees enter the hollow trees
ants crawl with the bends of
roots...
the rustle is that of snakes
that do not know the beginning...
and the jellyfish light the fire,
symbols in the snow
and the snow leaves its marks
on the fire.

The North rushes towards the
South...
the South rushes towards the
North...
the clouds shed their bark
buried women wear wheat spikes
the hills trill in joy
and the slopes advance
with their primordial scents...
The elements flirt,
just like my wandering soul
Just like beginnings that had not
begun,
mysteries appeared on earth
bursting with wonder
The horizon was thick
neither ascending nor descending,
but dancing mysteriously
Plants that would never be...
perhaps became green
Ancient storms
a sound rising like ever-migrating
forests
and fragrances escaping
the formations of time.
I shall not say from eternity...
because I saw them:
pale thorns on the cactus leaves.
Movement bursts with fingers of
smoke
on them I still walk
as if darkness has not yet
recognised blackness
and because I shall remain lonely
in a lonely song
I imagined innocence a stormy sea
its seed is the sound of its
formations
it told me:
to be magnificent,

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I shall resemble you...
it sprinkled its words with
its emerald fist
and from every word sprang:
 hanging gardens
 castles,
 alphabets...

Then she continues with feverish
dynamics combining the physical and
the sentimental:

The sun with two bare legs
erases the coastline
The lemon trees
exchange pebbles
The sand grains soar
like the flowers of passion
A touch of blueness
and the jellyfish open the shells...

And she can't help herself but get
involved, starting the next few lines with
"I" strewing herself with the wind and
casting her breath over the mountains,
and even after engaging in concrete
physical descriptions, including citing
different types of trees, she reverts to the
world of fantasy as the source:

I uproot the wind like weeds
and strew part of myself with it
The valleys preserve
the footmarks of the lavender
The mountains keep my breaths
The shadows shelter my ancient
snow
even in the desert...
And from a mysterious space,
we sway

in displacements known to you:
oak, palm and coconut trees...
Also,
those shining presences on the
wave...
from which violet fantasy did they
spring?

The whole Universe is no longer
enough to hold her:

I slip away...
I fall off the arms of the universe:
 mornings,
 salt water,
 woodlands...
Why do I look like desolate
death?

but only to wonder:

For how long do I
remain wandering like the sky
abstracting the unseen...
planting its tears in what will
never be
and exterminating the bleeding of
the clouds?
Lost harbours shimmer
fake heaps of myrtle
and a glow to guide the stars,
as if I found my heart...
otherwise why do all these signals
play
what the music cannot play?

Her poem *The Poem of Fire*² is an
example of her theatrical compositions.

² *Kalimat 6*, June 2001, 70-72.

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It is divided into three parts: *Opening Movement*, *The Operetta of Burning* and *The Lyre of the Oysters*. In her *Opening Movement*, we read:

The aeons
Lie in the North of time
and the Earth
sleeps in the South of the poem
my insights are
 legends
and my words are
 giddy wine behind the sky,
 it will be stolen by the shooting
stars
 and drunk by the signals...
The aeons incline on their axes
and the Earth departs...
Here is a gesture:
 poetry ran away from all
points
I stamped out the erasure
and...
had a look at myself too...
My dreams did not escape
the fire that burst into my
imagination
and dispersed
what
is not
known
by the unknown!

In another part we start feeling more magic:

Why do I
wane?
Eternal chants,
migrate with the dawn,

and the mountains,
and the clouds,
and the

violet...

Soon you shall steal the ashes of
my dreams
you shall pile them into threshing
floors where
you shall hide the fields of
blueness and wandering and the...

oceans

Perhaps you will disappear in the
memory of trees
and appear in the imagination of
the jasmine
or... may be
you will hang to the wing of a
sparrow that shall never be born...
The winds of nothingness quiver
and the ashes submerge me
waves without water,
 crawl...

In *The Operetta of Burning*, we read these mystical lines (which end on a harsh note):

In its primordial innocence,
my soul returns to the plants of
god...
Soft prayers begird me...
There is only a pious pearl
behind the abandoned temples—
I mean:
my corpse...

No sooner are we in touch with the
mundane than we are uplifted again as

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we can read in *The Lyre of the Oysters*:

The future is
pure music
when it touches the water surface
the present melts:
seeds in the soil
and the margins submerge in the
wave after the last
I am a human of ashes,
standing in the no-place
whenever things exude their pulse
my inward depths echo
and I disband...
whenever my pulse diffuses in
things
I become wandering meteors
as if I will not be seen
or thus thought my text...
behind me, songs continue to
carve their sorrow,
to travel among villages and
remain legend-kissing stars,
and waves that embrace their
skeletons...
and dance.

In her poem *The Illuminism of Death*,³
she writes:

When...
the shade glows,

³ Original Arabic published in *Kalimat* 8,
December 2001. (We originally translated
the title as *Radiance of Death*, but
“Illuminism” is probably appropriate in view
of the philosophical nature of Khouja’s
works.)

the words say:
we would like to kiss the shade...

The meanings may
remember my skies...
The songs shall never forget
those fields set alight by
my

r... a... i... n...

The trees,
approach
me
Every death...
I go along...
Would... you
spin,
with our stars?
Time sleeps
near the river of words...
And the moon stealthily
enters the text
for ever...
Ocean stories,
dance... and dance...

Let time travel afar...
With every sunrise,
I climb from the black word
to the
blue word...

In part 11 of this poem she asks:

Why...
there is no
single language
that can help me
write *my* self?

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Blue is a resurrection of the nation, nature and humankind. It is the resurrection of love that gives value, existence and fate to all things.⁷

Najmuddine Sulaiman, in his review of the book,⁷ emphasises the poet's quest for a new form of poetry as well as her passion for strange vocabulary, including some terms he could not find in the dictionary. He likens her poetic experiment to someone trying to find the keys to her voice behind "seven seas". He selects some extracts to support his points, and I provide their translations here:

It was a desire for
a different parturition,
and a song...
for the leaning of the trees
whenever my green strikes me
and disappears
its thunder overfills me
and surges (p28)

Space called on my dwellings
at night and threw its dawn
into your resonance...
Your eyes are poetry... Read!
Poets departed their rubble and
prophets sought
your company. (p10)

Headless trees migrate...
The fruits of the first years...
are impure
The woman is in the sludge
of a nightmare

The woman...
before her wedding to the river
offers the first ember of her charm
and the secret of her redness
to a mad god... (p48)

In his comments on the same book, Adib Hassan Mohammad wrote:⁸ 'The poet Ghalia Khouja is considered among her peers one of a few Syrian writers of the nineteen nineties whose creativity consistently produced poetry, prose and critique. We hardly hear about any literary competition that she does not have a share in its winning. We hardly open the pages of any literary periodical in Syria or in the Arab world without seeing her name.'

When he specifically starts addressing the collection, he explains how the title itself is the first indicator of Khouja's passion for making a difference. She is passionate about 'the manifestation of the surreal and Sufi schools of thought in literature... There is nothing more indicative of this than her choice of some of the titles of her poems, such as *The Mucus Lily*, *The Cooing of Jasmine*, *The Glass of Vision*, *The Space of the Opposite*, *The Fire of Fading*, etc... There is a constant search [in Khouja's poetry] for everything strange, and for whatever fulfills the human tendency in delving into the mysteries of the universe in an attempt

⁷ Alkifah al-Arabi (newspaper), 29/06/1998.

⁸ *The Resurrection of the Blue... A Poetic Tour in our Hidden existence*. Athawra (Syrian daily newspaper, in Arabic), No.11921, 15/10/2002.

to find answers to the questions that besiege humans in their short journey in life— a journey bound by pain, calamities and sorrow. *The Resurrection of the Blue* attempts to touch on this human fear, starting from the depths of the mysterious human spirit and moving towards the spirit of the surrounding natural environment.’

I think that the above sums up Khouja’s poetic endeavour, particularly her projections from the innermost of the self towards the outermost of the cosmos, regardless of which direction she takes. What interests me most is her tendency to deal with the human self and the universe as one. Mohammad goes on to confirm this when he further explains Khouja’s style of Sufism: ‘The Sufism of Ghalia Khouja is not a Sufism of gnosticism or illuminism, rather it is cosmic in the sense that it probes the dynamics of the essence of the elements of the universe in an attempt to make them speak [to us] so that we can identify with them, after eliminating any differences and boundaries between them and humans. [To this end, we read in Khouja’s poetry that] storms sleep, thrill sprouts, the dawn wakes up, etc.’

Mohammad draws our attention to the fact that even from the beginning of the collection, Khouja is seeking ‘an “explosion”, bargaining that a poem might have a role in erasing the despair and the uncertainty resulting from the materialistic streams that run against nature and the remaining aesthetic values inside the castle of the human soul.’ Khouja starts her collection with

the following “opening” (she uses “Fatiha”, the same word used for the “opening” Sura of the Koran):

After an absence,
they went to the olives
and negotiated a home for
a grave for the wheat spike
They went...
but the fingertips of our lightning
did not go
they were sketching
two poems
and a bomb
over the sky.

In general, she tends to exaggerate the use of punctuation and the splitting of words in the original drafts of her poems to an unnecessary degree. In editing her work, examining her punctuation becomes a major task. In some cases, her punctuation is appropriate to emphasise an image as in the following lines from her poem *A Reading in a Hurricane*.⁹

My secret
re
fra
cts

a light
that awakens me.

But in many cases it is just a poet being carried away in the act of creativity. The problem with this, I feel, is that the

⁹ Translation first published in *Kalimat 9*, March 2002.

exaggerated “physical” images tend to undermine the very spirituality intended by the deep meanings adopted by the writer. These meanings often become powerful by the choice of words and the ability to weave them together with the intricacy of a spider’s web and the elegance of an oriental piece of mosaic, into sentences that resemble music compositions in their harmony. To me, Khouja is a singing spider. She weaves a remarkable web of emotions, but when she over-punctuates, it looks too covered with dust particles. I prefer to see the primordial web that reflects the spirit of the poet, particularly that I can feel the pulse of this poet.

The last part of *A Reading in a Hurricane* is an example of another quality of Khouja’s work, namely the vivid use of colours.

Who will wash the night of fire
with my colour
when its dawn peeps out wet with
my resounding
and flutters in my language with
the chirping of fire?
Who will run with the whiteness
between the path of the grass and
the prayer of the wind
and ignite his turmoil with the
scent of myth?
Inventing me with his folly...
I, with the neighing of his space
and my horses will open wide the
song of the trees
and with a thundering lantern
we seek freedom
in my homeland...

Let us concentrate on “whiteness” in the above piece. It describes a state (and I do not simply say a “space”) between ‘the path of grass and the prayer of the wind’. The grass has a “path” and the wind has a “prayer”. Everything here is dynamic, yet the whiteness comes in between as if it were the “snap” that will allow us for a fraction of a second to picture this painting by Khouja. This is what I call a “fluid painting”. It is a painting where you can see everything in its place, with the clarity and power of a still picture, yet, with the energy of a never-ceasing movement.

This whiteness is so predominant that when the horses are mentioned in the next few lines, it is difficult to visualise anything but white horses. After all, the piece ends in “freedom” and “white” is a very suitable quality of freedom. Many Arab poets tend to associate freedom with the colour “red” due to the bloody price a people pays to achieve freedom. However, I like this optimistic ending to this piece, particularly that most of Khouja’s poetry is disturbingly pessimistic. The power of her poetry is in her ability to go on her “integrative” weaving, as I might find myself constantly repeating. In the above piece, there are images interwoven with other images. One imagery we mentioned, used “colour” as the substance of its web. But what about “sound” as in “neighing”, “chirping”, “thundering” and “flutter”? Or “scent”? Does it really matter? Every one of these sensual qualities used by Khouja is used in a way that is capable of invoking all

senses simultaneously. This is done and felt elaborately, because as I indicated earlier, Khouja speaks directly from the subconscious. Perhaps for her, the conscious and the subconscious are one, but to be able to convey this state to the receiver is indeed an extraordinary quality.

Colour, however, seems important in Khouja's choice of titles. In addition to *The Resurrection of the Blue and Violet Fantasy* mentioned earlier, another long poem of hers is titled *The Odyssey of the Violet*.¹⁰ Although she uses "violet" to indicate the flowers, the emphasis on colour cannot be missed. Like all her poems, however, colour is only a part of invoking all senses. This particular book is not one of my favourites, and I believe it can do with a lot of technical editing. However, I would like here to present extracts showing the power of Khouja's expression.

With my death,
I used to ignite his silence (p8)

Like the sea's primordial words,
the drowning fire penetrated
the poem's words and
subdued the waves of
the presence. (p10)

Like the gardens of Hell,
you are addicted to my death
so that you become eternal. (p11)

Your dream is still

strolling in
the blood of confession
and beyond...
absence
it lights the spirits of charm...
beyond
the intentions of the unknown
the departure
of music blossoms...
How often did it exile itself
to the lust of the summit
in order to follow me... (p16)

I saw your tune
a sea clasped by the senses
wandering inside me (p18)

Like a goddess rebellious
against the blue
I wander in me
and lose my way
I suspend my circumstances
between the anguish of the text
and the anguish of the dream...
(p31)

The myth of fertility
passes its silt over the language
behind it,
eternity dances bare-footed
behind us,
poetry springs... (p32-33)

I emerged from your blood
to my anxiety
I emerged from my blueness
to the throne of song
I feel your vision
teetering in the mosques of
my body
opening up with my madness

¹⁰ Published by the Cultural Development Centre, Aleppo, Syria, 1999.

and covering you from eternity
to eternity... (p35)

Eternity takes the shape of
a bleeding space...
The image disperses its poet
as if awe rains its first drops
and in my name becomes
an explosion of
the chemistry of the poem... (p51)

My solitude is, alone, glowing
as if whiteness is
smoke torn out of a question
and because its embers know
how to harvest the night
I have become
the ashes of the language... (p58)

Khouja's first poetry book is *The Odyssey of Blood*.¹¹ (Again here, the colour indication is very direct.) She dedicates it as such:

No matter how
different guillotines are
a wound takes many freedoms
but martyrdom is one.
From a lilac that drove away
all hurricanes until the blood of
words became green
To...
a self-made homeland bleeding
with ascending blueness...
and streaming...

The choice of difficult terms and
expressions is stark from the beginning.

¹¹ *Eliathatul Damm*, Published by Dar al-Hiwar, Latakia, Syria, 1997.

The author is keen on showing her passion and affection for the struggle against occupation. To her, this issue shocks the foundations of her spirit, this is why she does not seem to be able to express her feelings in simple ordinary terms. As we mentioned before, this extravagance in the choice of the complex is not necessarily the most appropriate style in conveying the true passion, particularly that it might seem very pretentious.

The author describes her work as a symphony of six "resurrections". These are: *The Phoenix of the Lilac*, *The Decomposition of the Sea*, *The Incinerators of the Roses*, *The Blow of the Dream*, *The Punch of Lightening* and *The Eclipse of the Purple*.

From *The Decomposition of the Sea*, we read:

The land
was migrating
to our feet,
and a sprouting silence
hanging...
The gel of words
climbing our absent pulse
and we merge
dancing flames...
Da
nc
ing
on their wounds.
Colours...
bleed
in their quiver. (p28)

In the second part of *The Punch of Lightning*, we read:

Fates have stealthily deserted
their flowers...
Whatever was created,

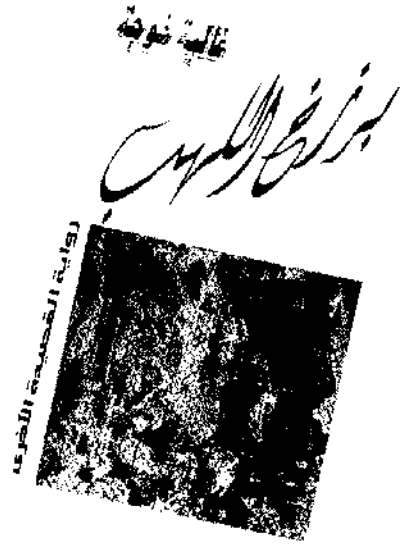
was not created for one instance...
Whatever was not created
stuck to my pulse like
the ashes of formation. (p70)

Khouja has so far published nine poetry books. The present landmark concentrates on the poetic side of Ghalia Khouja, but she writes short stories and fiction for children (four story collections and two novels), teenagers (one novel), the youth (a story collection) and adults (eight story collections and four novels). Khouja is also an acclaimed literary critic whose star continues to rise.

The poetic influence, however, is enduring in all her fiction writings as can be seen in her novel *Barzakh al-Lahab* (The Isthmus of Flames).¹² The subtitle of this novel is "The Narrative of the other Poem". She starts the book by a quote from the Chinese poet Lu Chi from his poem "Fu", and the first words are: "We the poets..." And she does not disappoint: reading this novel, one can feel the poetry flowing with every word and structure; the subtitle can be easily reversed to become "The Poetry of the Narrative", and I feel that "other" is as unnecessary as the whole subtitle itself. Creative work needs no justification, and might be better left to the receivers to judge.

The exception to the poetic nature of the book is, in my opinion, her two-page introduction where she agonisingly invokes the most sophisticated words and elaborate expressions to justify her style. I felt that this introduction, which read more like an incompetent philosophy text rather than a creative piece, was out of place both in style and content.

Fortunately, the book itself is in sharp contrast to its introduction. From the first word one reads to the last, the music never ceases and the melodies smoothly carry one on a journey of enchantment. She begins:



¹² Aram Publications, Dair Azzur, Syria 1999.

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If only the wind did not interfere with daydreams
the universe would have been

a dance

forever...

Thus I turned your memory's pages, wiped the grass of my
questions off your forehead, and lit with your silence the first
step of the way and the memories of lovers, forgotten on the
garden steps.

The clatter hidden in the rose attracts you...
and you bend against the instance,
your shadow does not follow you.

Mohammad Jamal Barout, in a review of the book,¹³ described it as an attempt to adopt a new class of modern Arabic writing that depends on breaking away with traditional types and surpasses them. He emphasises that whilst modern writing assumes that it is becoming free of any literary type, it is actually formulating a new class in which confines it is rapidly falling. Barout calls this new class the "text". (I feel that the implications are that it is not poetry or prose, it can be either or both.) Those of you who read our Landmark article about Ghada Samman¹⁴ might recall that we indicated that Samman is one of the supreme examples of those who do not believe in boundaries among different classes of writing.

The "text" Barout is referring to, is one where the narrative cannot be separated from the poetic. He mentions in reference to Khouja's book that 'We are not in front of a novel, even though Khouja wants us to believe or she believes that she is writing a novel of a different kind... Khouja abandons the plot, but she does not entirely remove the tale, as much as she presents it in its gelatinous form.'

Nevertheless, Khouja's "text" or one might say "The Khoujaic Verses" are a good indication of the Koranic influence on Khouja. The influence of the Koran on Khouja's style of writing is very clear in her poem the *Odyssey of Blood* discussed before, but the techniques she borrows from the Koran are also encountered in a number of her poems. I do not believe these techniques added any value to her work, but because she deals with issues such as creation, death and resurrection, she seems to have opted for borrowing some of these expressions, notwithstanding that the Koran is not only the masterly source of the Arabic language, but also an ultimate work of creative writing both in structure and style. As such, it has been an inspiration to many writers. When it comes to a "text" not strictly poetry, Khouja is blatantly fascinated by the Koranic style of writing. In every case, the musicality associated with the power of expression in the

¹³ Al-Hayat (Arabic international newspaper, Paris).

¹⁴ *Kalimat 15*, September 2003.

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Koran is overwhelming. The *Isthmus of Flames*, is exactly as Barout suggests, and the Koran is a text where the plot loses itself to many tales. The Koran included many pieces that can now be considered modern poetry, despite their presence over 1400 years before this type of Arabic poetry started to take shape.

The *Isthmus of Flames* is Khouja's own love tale. It can be described as an epic poem in celebration of the poet Issam Tarshahani. Although the text is full of personal emotions elaborated upon psychologically and philosophically, it focuses on the tale and attributes of Tarshahani who appears to us like Khouja's epic hero.

He is a Palestinian who, as a child, had to leave his birthplace *Tarshiha* in Palestine after his family, like many others were forced out by the Israeli occupiers in 1948. After struggling through several places in Lebanon, the family ends up in a refugee camp in Aleppo, Syria.

Khouja starts her text by addressing her hero and mostly goes on with the "second person" for the first fifty pages:

'You are still on the banks of insomnia amassing your steps and the spells of water that expectorated coldness and heat in you, and when the flame amasses your shadows, they clash with the seasons and what is beyond winter, spring, summer and autumn turns in your fist. And suddenly you let it loose into the heart of the earth, so that people harvest your name and your perpetual solitude from the sources of the word, their eyes blazed with the age of change, victory and the restoration of virginity to the Arab land.' (20)

Her style smoothly shifts among the first, second and third persons or just narrative as in the following "theatrical" description:

An abundance of lighting falls upon the old images, disturbing underneath them the dormant music and scene... Air-raids and the shrapnel assassinate the will of the land, rapes the grass and the olives... What could a boy of four do after a shell fell on his home, making him run with his pregnant mother and his brother who is not yet a winter and a half, and who was paralysed as a result of the raid? (p51)

These old images were shared intimately with Khouja through her intellectual and passionate love. Her penetration into the deepest depths of her lover is a privilege that only a few people can enjoy. She even feels that she knew him from the moment she was inside her mother's womb:

I will tell you what those waters whispered to me, where I firmly lay inside the lit narrow membrane containing my dark embryo... My organs were

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not yet complete... My fingers were widening to hold the turbulent murmur surrounding me... Through this murmur I saw you— a daffodil of writing picking from my blood every colourless thing... (50)

Her love for her hero is only as firm as her love for her children:

Nothing is constant except my pulse blossoming inside the ribs of Issam, Salam and Sandy. I had unearthed my grave... nothing was stuck to my bones except irregularity and my decomposed consciousness and remains, the features of my two children, and a love that had disturbed the creation... (124)

There is hardly any page without some powerful images or expressions. Khouja devotes her tools passionately and firmly not only to take us to the environment she is describing, but also to make us enjoy this habitat and emotionally live it. Scenes from cafés that were the base of her meetings with her hero keep coming to provide us with further information, tales, events and images:

So far, the street that goes parallel to our silence and madness flowing out the café has not calmed... The rays of the trees' eavesdropping befall us. From the colours of their clatter coming from the melancholy of the passers-by, from the joy of the teenagers and the squabbles of children over the swings in the park on the other side of the street, shapes with no features or landscapes appear and vanish. Then the movement of their ebb and flow dissolve in a hollow space, as if it were a wax painting that has absorbed the whispers of the noon sparrows, and the jasmine bracelets making love along the paths of distant moments— the jasmine that was arranged together by the first lover to his beloved who killed herself when her father saw them kissing... She threw her body, pure with its redness and passion, into the river... He forgot his lips on the necklace that became their shroud between the blueness of the sky and the blueness of the water... The shroud for which the rivers mastered the instant of flood! (49)

...We chose a spot where words do not wither when confronted with a fountain that does not evaporate, but drift by the load of questions... as my memory blossoms in the gleaming mischievous vase of quiver, passion and roses, on the warm part of a table envious of its cover, because it is going to touch the intentions of our breath, emotions, and the flutter of a heart alight with music, poetry and discussions. (p73)

...And as he lays the books, journals and newspapers on one corner of the

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table, his hand touches my memory which dared touch his inner secrets like a rose flying to the call of a butterfly, starting the bleeding of a language that made the blood of spikes mature with funerals... (p74)

Many of these café discussions reveal the plight of the Palestinian refugee camps:

... Between a family and the other, there was only a drape that does not veil the body from its shadow. Two square metres for a family of nine. No income, except for a father peeling poplar trees, memories, burdens and the instance that burned his exploited life... (p75)

And with her typical sarcasm, Khouja tells about the need of hungry refugee children to obtain food, and about an incident where the boy uses his schoolbag to steal some vegetables for his family:

Satan was a heretic when he revolted against his myth, and the first son of Olympus was a heretic, and more so than the two is the hunger breeding in a small stomach, nestled in the vestiges of childhood as much as money is nestled inside the pockets of others. In order for things to return to the righteous path that is not dedicated to itself, the schoolbag changed at night to a vegetable basket trapping eggplants and turnips, achieving the ultimate righteousness over error...

Throughout the text and at considerable intervals, more information is provided about the progress of Tarshahani: his marriage, his relationships, his studies, his teaching career, his freedom-fighting training, his political imprisonment, participation in theatrical productions and his entry into the world of poetry.

It is in a café that he introduces himself to three established poets who are initially doubtful of his capabilities, but eventually accept him and encourage him. His journey as a leading poet starts.

It is interesting that on page 179 of the 250-page book, we start to see a tendency towards prosaic style. This is when Khouja starts seriously talking about Tarshahani's entry into the world of poetry. She starts sarcastically criticizing those who think themselves writers:

Perhaps, The Sultan Café in Aleppo sheltered a few creative minds, but it also received many pretentious ones... This is history's way. The mutations of greatness are the supernovas of creativity... It might be sufficient for you to carry a pen and stretch your muscles, cross your hair like a fishing net which stayed a few days in the waves but never gave birth to anything... carry several old newspapers which you might read

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upside down... sit at a table with your pipe and glasses... occupying yourself and the others with general chats that execute culture and literature by their whispers and conspiracies. (pp179-180)

Every now and then and after a long text, Khouja presents some text that is arranged in the form of poetry in bold font. Sometimes, these are quotations from Tarshahani's poems. In one of her "poem-like" texts she summarises their relationship:

The beginning is poetry,
the end is poetry,
and between the two beginnings, two ends,
I am still that mythical potential who
when saw God, incarnated in Him...
There was nothing between himself and I
except what was between myself and me
Thus how we began,
to end in poetry...
amidst this eternity
and after words submersed everything. (p69)

We have mentioned this tendency in invoking Sufi and spiritual images in her poetry, and the above piece is another example of the many in the *Isthmus of Flames*. Not only does she feel that she is incarnated in the supernatural, but also the supernatural is sometimes incarnated in her. For example, on page 63 she mentions that 'The sun is a butterfly going around me three times...' and later she says: '...and God appears in my changing features...' On another occasion she says:

The night fell on a star, and the star on my shadow... and the fountains of language burst into holy verse, filling the universe and my branches with the wine of piety. The palms of my spirit are abundant with contrasting flood.

But there are also many psychological dimensions associated with both her spirituality and materialism:

I committed suicide before my father and mother were created... I am the witness, the present, the absent. These are my remains: the beginning of a deity, the end of a poem, and the virginity of the nation fermented in the anvil of the martyred water...

Praise be upon it...
Poetry be upon me... (p125)

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Khouja is particularly fond of wheat spikes. Perhaps the image of the vast wheat fields with the golden spikes shimmering under the sun is a good combination of the material and the spiritual, because the extended horizon above these fields is an indication of the connection to beyond this earth. The symbolism of wheat as a source of plenty and nourishment is also a connection between The Creator and the created.

I plant my intention in the spikes so that prayers rise like the sun. (p63)

Aren't the most beautiful spikes of the wound those that vie to become mirrors for poets? (p146)

I waited for you a million light deaths, I searched for you in my poems glittering on the lips of spikes and rain, in the scents of the dream burning between the hurricane and the lovers... (p162)

Khouja is also concerned about her city, Aleppo. This comes about on several occasions throughout the text, and here is one example:

Poor Aleppo! And as desperate as its poet... as a creator who mistakenly existed before a time that was sorry for her... (239)

Her patriotism is evident in many places in the text, particularly her support for the Arab and Palestinian cause as we have seen, but one of my favourites is:

My eyes are a Phoenician sail where the letters that dissolved in The Tigris lost their way when the Tatar, the Moguls and the Berbers threw in it the neighing of our culture... (153)

Khouja who refuses to be trapped in any style of writing, refuses also to be trapped by time. She is a timeless writer. I beg your pardon, she is a timeless person.

The poem did not betray the poet, but it is the pit submersed with epochs... Despite that I had stepped down into my father's grave before his corpse, softened for him the soil to be a text and a peace upon him... and despite the darkness of the shroud from which I tried to unweave death, and its whiteness from which I tried to unweave the memories of the dead and the shore of hemorrhage... The last shadow of the distance insisted on delving into the maze... (171)

She ends her book with one of her timeless expressions (similar to the expression with which she starts the book). As usual, it carries with it a lot of power, but somehow it conveys some of Khouja's pessimism.

What...
if the wind
did not interfere in
the dreams of the fire?

AHMAD FADL SHABLOUL

Translated by Noel Abdulahad

Two Roses of the Soul

I

You are the rose in a wintry summer's heart
All the world's roses withered, except you
So how can I resist the charm of a woman,
 glistening on your petals?
Are the trees advancing towards me or is it the wave?
The night is dense by the sea and I delve
 into the darkness of this moon
Phantoms dance on the sand
Lovers have departed to stony jungles
 leaving behind a trembling hand
 a gouged eye
 a stiffened heart
Leaving behind the rose of my soul to wilt
 in a pottery vase.

II

Black rain broke forth,
the pleasant sea-shores lost their lips
and vanished in the heart of the rose.
Of which spring does my death creep towards me?
Of which autumn, time's phantoms peep?
The serenity of this night is unlike that of the night before...
Would your eyes be affable to me now?

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Strip off... of your clay
 of your thorns
 of your passion
My coffin is my wave
My bier is what has been left by lovers on the sand...
Come on, oh rose of my heart,
 and sleep in the button-hole of my soul!
Dissolve and yield your fragrance
Dissolve... yield your fragrance...
I am ascending...
 ascending...
 ascending.



أحمد فضل شبلول

Ahmad Fadi Shabloul is a member of the board of the Egyptian Union of Writers. The above poem was first published in its original Arabic in *Kalimat* 16, December 2003.

نويل عبد الأحد

Noel Abdulahad is a writer, critic and translator, living in USA. He is renowned for his translation of Gibran's *The Prophet*, considered the best. He is an adviser to *Kalimat*.

YAHIA AS-SAMAWI

Three Poems

Translated by Raghd Nabhas

Despair

And what is the use?
I have the sail... the ship...
but the sea...
There is no water in the sea...
no wind...
no incoming wave,
so what is the use?
Our coming days are
like our yesterdays
Our wishes become the kohl
smearing our sleepless eyes
We lost the way to the threshing floors
The fields are stamped with the autumn,
but there is no caravan promising with
the bread of certainty and the wandering cloud,
so what is the use?
I threw my sword into a canal on my way
and said: peace be upon the river
and the palms

and the corpse that stood witness...¹

And I said peace be upon the one nation
that unceasingly breeds division...
where only the glasses of the renegades
go around the table...
So what is the use
of a sword for a corpse?

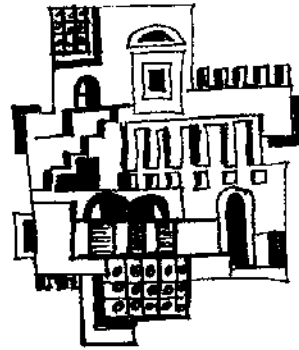
¹ Usually, "peace be upon..." is a greeting or a praising expression, but it is often mordantly used to express the feeling of loss about something.

Once Upon a Dream

I once had a dream I was a wing,
and when I woke up
the sky was a horseback
the wind its saddle...
A hangman's rope stretched
between me and my helpless homeland
from the night's curtains to
the morning's window

I once had a dream I became "Abul Nawwas"²
and when drowsiness departed my eyes
I saw my eyelid a bottle of sorrow
and my wound a glass:
between me and my injured homeland
there was puss and
blood flowing from the morning minaret and
a garden with slain plants

I once had a dream I was Iraq,
and when I rubbed my eyes
my eyebrows clotted on the eyelids
and between God and I in the mihrab,
I found the new "Abraha"³ at "Karakh"
and I found wolves at "Rasafa".⁴



² A renowned Arab poet of the Abbasid era, famous for his love of wine.

³ The Ethiopian king of Yemen who attempted to destroy the Holy Ka'ba in the year 570, using elephants.

⁴ Karkh and Rasafa are two towns in Iraq.

Ruins

Wearing my fear like a turban, I wander
around the towns of rocky trees.
From the drought in my eyes,
I hide the rain pouring in my heart.
I sneak away from under my ruins
with my muddy moon in my briefcase
and a blind walking-stick in my hand...
searching in the jungle of exile for a city
where the light does not dwindle
and the star does not flee afraid of darkness.



Wearing my heart like a turban, I wander
through fear...
I hide all I saved from the desert's noble deeds
I blow in the ashes of my past hoping that
an ember would bring back to the stove
the steam of warmth long smothered by parting
from my tent...
and my she-camel...
and my coffee pots...
and the dance of the cup in the eyeball's playgrounds
in a homeland—
once called heaven on earth
or
Iraq?

يحيى السماوي

Yahia as-Samawi is a poet from Iraq who made Australia his home. He lives in Adelaide, the capital of South Australia. He has so far published twelve poetry collections in Arabic. His poetry has also been published in various media in Australia and around the world.

The original Arabic versions of the above poems were published as follows:
Despair, el-Telegraph (Arabic newspaper), Sydney, 26/01/04.
Once Upon a Dream and *Ruins*, from the poet's collection "The Horizon is my Window", self-published, Australia 2003.

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THOMAS SHAPCOTT

The American War Cemetery

Outside the suburban Pizza Hut is where that terrible road accident happened back in 1962. Ruth was only twenty-three. Miles remembers Ruth perfectly. How long is always?

Every time Miles drives past, there is a frisson. A ghost turns over in its grave. He can understand how the original inhabitants felt about all sorts of places here. It was not the living... it was their dead who owned the associations that bind things together. "Always" is as long as there is someone to remember.

Some things, even though they are gone, still make a claim. A location is changed because of that. It is ourselves, and the burden of what we carry with us, the 'always' that we have to hold on to.

Ruth lived next door. Two years older, she had been there always. He first remembers her, with any sort of particular clarity, when he must have been four years old. She gave him a bath.

No doubt she was full of curiosity about little boy's parts, she had no brothers, but Miles was delighted to be washed and soaped and have her gentle fingers tickle him all over. He felt special. She was his first real love.

The other particular memory he has - it is almost as vivid - is much later, Miles must have been ten. It was very solemn, and he had to polish his black shoes. Spit and polish, dad said, and he showed Miles how. It was because there was to be a ceremony at the American War Cemetery.

Ruth's older sister, Maureen, had a boyfriend who was a U.S. airman out at Amberley Airforce Base and he was being buried there. Why take a ten-year-old? And why did Miles's parents allow it? Those puzzles have faded, but the fact remains. Big Maureen was in black, with a black veil but he does remember her crimson lipstick and her fingernails. Ruth held his hand tightly so that he had to ask her to let go.

They stood in the hot sun and the American War Cemetery was just a piece of paddock with spiky grass and sandy coloured clay and nothing at all but a big white flagpole with the Stars and Stripes - no doubt at half-mast. The boyfriend had died of influenza, but he was a serviceman and, for him, it was Overseas. The small cemetery was full of dead people like him. But when they played the Last Post or Reveille, Miles had the tears, too, like Ruth and all the others. It gave the place meaning. It became, not just a paddock, but Maureen's death place, and in a way Ruth's also. Perhaps even Miles's as well.

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It was the War years. Kids at school still kept away for a day, or a week, when one of their older brothers, or even their dad, was reported missing, or killed in action. Death was not so much naked, in that time, as near at hand. It wasn't muffled up. It wasn't protected.

Maureen was a flirt, even he had been dimly aware, and she had nothing of Ruth's gentle nature or her capacity for open affection. Could it have been that his own devotion for Ruth somehow tipped the balance? No one else from his family went. They said there was a Wake, after. The O'Briens sent over a plate of lamingtons.

The American War Cemetery was in a part of town he seldom cycled past. At some stage after the War there was a ceremony where all the graves were opened and the remains of those U.S. Servicemen scooped up and put in bodybags and airmailed back to their hometowns, or to some official war cemetery there. Miles does remember one Minneapolis family visiting to see their son's grave. The local paper had pictures.

Afterwards, the place sank back into the paddocks, though the small hedge that had surrounded it remained. It was no longer "hallowed ground", and at some stage Miles drove past (he had graduated to a car by then) and saw children's slides and swings where there had been small rows of white headstones.

The curious thing, Miles realizes, is that, once a site or a place has been imbedded with human death associations, it is never desanctified.

The American War Cemetery did hold a further link for him, though, out of those childhood years in the shabby town after the glamour and the danger of night time aeroplanes overhead going up to the war zones had faded and the groups of U.S. troops no longer surged, with their girls, into the Hobby Horse Races at the Wintergarden Theatre or clanked out of the bat-winged doors of the seventeen pubs in town, arms around each other and boisterously happy in a way no local would dare to be.

Grandfather died.

Miles does remember him. And he remembers being shown, sometime later, where he was buried in the Ipswich General Cemetery, quarter of a mile up from the American War Cemetery but not dissimilar. There were a lot more old gravestones. But the sweep of Rhodes-grass or Natal-grass was much the same and there were only empty paddocks between the two sites.

Graves become forgotten, widows and sons and daughters are buried themselves, there is something wonderfully slipshod about cemeteries, in the open air they become rooms and cellars and hidden spaces that refuse to be destroyed. They are echo chambers. They hoard things and the fact that we do not know, quite, what those things are contributes to their menace and their power.

Miles's own sister, Anne, lost a little daughter at birth. The burial ceremony was one of true anguish and that tiny grave was right by the roadside in the Cemetery, quite a way from their grandfather's site. There was no headstone. But every time Miles drives past that side of the Cemetery he knows where it is.

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The whole area began to become populated.

One day, shortly after, he had been trekking with a group of friends up to Mount Flinders. It is the volcanic core that rises out of the flatlands of the Fassifern Valley and stands as a monument halfway between Ipswich and the Great Dividing Range at Cunningham's Gap. 'It is my heart's country', as Judith Wright once said. Miles always thinks, *Yes*.

Those paddocks which sweep from the Ipswich General Cemetery and the defiled remains of the American War Cemetery cross over to the foothills of Mount Flinders. It is a sort of totality, and the rows of fibro and timber houses that have slowly moved out from the town across those flats, crowding around both cemeteries and closing them in, do not entirely destroy the sense of the sweep that the land encompasses, nor the almost defiant darkness and solidity of Flinders Peak. It can be seen from miles away – from parts of Brisbane, or the ranges behind the Gold Coast. It is monumental.

Climbing in that area, they had struggled right to the top of the peak. They discovered a Trig Station with a notebook in a tin box. They added their names, and felt they had also claimed something of it for themselves, some sort of memorial.

Later, clambering over the small rises and gulleys, trying to negotiate by compass where their cars had been stranded, along one of the dirt tracks, they were suddenly pulled up by one of the party. Miles wishes it had been him, but it wasn't. He had been looking at the ground in front, and thinking of the view from the heights.

'Look! Can't you see it? It's an Aboriginal burial tree,' the leader said. Above, fairly high in a thick old ironbark, sure enough, were the bones and clearly observable skull of a compressed skeleton. They had all been shown, in the old Brisbane Museum, samples of the burial practices of the natives of this area, bodies bound head to knee and placed high in hollow parts of trees. Some recent storm must have broken the lateral base branch of this ironbark and the hidden remains had become exposed.

After a bit they trudged on, eventually to come out not too far from where they had been aiming. Miles doesn't think anyone even thought to notify the authorities, but that is not to say they had not been affected, or that their sense of ownership had not been eroded. Death makes its claims, and though they were strangers there - doubly strangers - what they all felt was a sense of trespass. These were not their ghosts.

The American War Cemetery was such a transitory thing it is now utterly forgotten by the children - and the adults - who live as neighbours in that area and who shuffle under the hot sun as their toddlers pretend to try out the rusty swings and slides. But Miles still senses a flavour of Maureen O'Brien in her wide black straw hat and the dramatic veil and her full dark lips and he can almost hear her sob, and Ruth clutches his hands tighter and gives Miles a hug that he will never forget, and the flagpole stretches up with its white declaration. Like his grandfather's grave up the road, these things do not have to be there to be there.

Perhaps it is only in death that we join the others, Miles concedes. Not join them,

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but grow into their company. It is they who accept us, not the other way round.

The bitumen road outside the Pizza Hut is a strange place to feel a sense of reconciliation, especially a reconciliation with those for whom bitumen and imitation-Neapolitan pastry would have held no conceivable significance. Was Ruth herself on that hike up to Mount Flinders? Miles finds he is adding her to the company and in her wise, soft voice she is saying not to get excited, it was a practical Aboriginal ritual, to save the bones from being scattered by dingoes. Everyone knew there were dingoes in this area. In Miles's imagined recall Ruth is not holding his hand, they have both grown too old for that.

So soon after, Ruth was to encounter death.

It is through death, Miles realizes, we start to know that we, too, are part of the changing land and in changing it adds to its permanence. Ruth not only gave him some real part of his own childhood, she gave him insights and the practical fact of the American War Cemetery. The American War Cemetery gave him a way of approaching the grave of his own grandfather and the unmarked place of his stillborn niece. Through them Miles is travelling backward as well as onward. An ancient skeleton in a blackened ironbark tree is something he knows he can at last acknowledge. It is not finally separate. Ruth would smile at that – but it would be an understanding smile.

When he thinks to himself he will carry the image of Ruth with him always, Miles is making something like an act of translation. The best that translation can do is make an effort at understanding. The Miles that he is now is so many translations away from the kid that Ruth knew. Everything changes. He shrugs. But Ruth is still there, somewhere, climbing up the rough trunk of that ironbark tree as if it were a possum's nest she were after. It is her sudden silence he can hear. You can hear silence. And when she clammers down, sweeping the bark and black ash from her calf-length skirt and rubbing her hands, she takes Miles aside and whispers: 'They are looking after the tree – this whole place – waiting for the right time.'

'When is the right time?'

'Oh,' and Ruth races ahead, waving for him to come after, 'Yesterday perhaps. Or maybe tomorrow.'

'How will we know?'

'We'll know alright. When it happens.'

توماس شاپکوت

Professor **Thomas Shapcott** is with the University of Adelaide, Australia.

SOPHIE MASSON

Gold, Frankincense and Seven-Star Hotels Impressions of the United Arab Emirates and Oman

I used to love reading the Arabian Nights as a child. Our copy of it was near the Arthurian legends, another great love, and both of them spoke to me in similar if also strikingly different ways. It wasn't just their fabulous panoply of otherworldly creatures, fairies, ghosts, demons, wizards, monsters which as a magic-believing, miracle-loving child thrilled me almost beyond bearing; not just the treasures, the glorious depiction of riches and power beyond all imagining, the love stories, the deeds of knightly valour, the tales of terror and the fight against evil which moved me; not just the funny, wise side-stories of the pettier or less glorious human emotions and situations which made me understand, even if inarticulately at that age, a great many things about human nature. But it was also because each of these great cycles of stories had their own unique voice, or rather, voices. They both, the Arabian/Persian and the French/British/German, came out of that world we call the medieval, a strange, savage, beautiful, God-centred yet generally not pharisaically or fanatically pious, individualistic yet not self-obsessed, sardonic, magical world of tragedy, humour, love and death. These stories were not myths, they were both more and less than that. Medieval people, whether of East or West, knew they were not immortals. They had a certain humility in the face of life because they knew they could not control events, the world, history. And strangely, that seemed to liberate their dreams, dreams which became embodied in stories that have survived for centuries, because every year, every month, every day, some new reader will come to them and be thrilled, changed, plunged into pure, deep, all-enveloping story. They wrote down both what they saw, and what they dreamed; what they knew, and what they imagined. They lived, in short, in a pre-ideological world. Though they analysed and philosophised a great deal, they did not seem as desperate for answers as later, post-ideological generations, whether that is in the West or the East. And so their stories and thought are full of complexities and ambiguities, and escape full analysis of the modern kind. Temperamentally, for me, that is the greatest thing of all, the greatest aspect of true, deep storytelling. Not giving answers, not blocking off meanings. Just presenting that wonderful pageant of life and the world, and taking from it what we each need and can bear.

This is what I mean to do, in a small way, with this piece. No analysis, no answers. Impressions, the full flow of what I saw, and maybe a little of what I dreamt, in that small corner of the Arabian peninsula which gave me my first taste both of what the world of the Arabian Nights had become—as knowing France and Britain have given me a deep understanding of what the world of King Arthur has become—and also my first coming to grips with the sensuous reality of the faraway, deep Abrahamic origins of the Semitic religion I was brought up with: Christianity. Everyone who was brought up with the Book, whether that is Christian, Muslim or Jew, and all the myriads of sects and philosophies clustering within those three baggy

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descriptors, carries around with them rich, powerful images which in many ways both reinforce and militate against the images carried from such stories as the Arabian Nights and the legends of King Arthur. Many of us carry both within us, quite comfortably. It is only the fanatics, whether religious maniacs or the aggressively atheistic, who cannot bear the complexity of such a mixture.

We arrive in Dubai very early in the morning, to a grey sky full of a hazy glare. That was the first surprise. I'd imagined a clear, fiercely blue desert sky. But we'd have to wait for that. Dubai is on the Gulf; its humours are as tied to the sea as to the desert. Later still, we'd learn it could be as humid as Indonesia on a Dubai evening...

War had broken out a few days before we left Australia, and many of our friends and relatives had rung us to tell us we shouldn't go. But my brother and his family have lived in the Emirates for quite some time, and Saudi Arabia before that, and they were cool and relaxed about it. London, where we'd go next, was more dangerous, said my brother, with a shrug, and though for the first few hours, fresh from the hysterical atmosphere of Australia just before the Iraq war, we were wary, looking at people in the street as though they might take sudden offence at our being there at all, within an afternoon we were, if not cool, relaxed. Not cool, because of course (no surprise in theory, but always a surprise to my cool-loving self!) it was very hot in the Emirates. Not just dry heat either. As I said earlier, sometimes a crushing, sticky humidity, yet no rain...

My brother lives not in Dubai but in Sharjah, the smaller, poorer, more Islamic emirate next door to the big flashy flagship city. Dubai's too expensive, too pretentious, too many Westerners, he says with another shrug, maneuvering his huge 4WD. He and his family had to live trapped in a Western compound in xenophobic Saudi. Why the hell would they want to do that here? His neighbours, in the middleclass district where he lives, are Lebanese and Indians, Iraqis, Palestinians, Emiratis, as well as a few French, Russians, British, Americans and Australians, for one of the Emirates' greatest distinguishing feature is its amazing cosmopolitanism. My eldest nephew's best friend Hassan, who lives next door, has an Iraqi father and an American mother: the Emirates was one of the few places in the world where they could both have a good standard of living (they own a very nice fish and ship shop), be left in peace, yet also feel a part of the region. There's an Afghan baker up the road, with piercing green eyes, who makes flat bread in front of you. Indian and Pakistani and Lebanese restaurants serve cheerful, but not always cheap, tucker. There's the animal and bird market, where the kids squeal over pink and blue and green dyed day-old chicks, little, coloured, doomed balls of living fluff... There's the wonderful Blue Souk, where we spend hours and many dirhams bargaining with shopkeepers from India, Pakistan, Lebanon and Iran. The Emiratis rarely seem to work behind the counters, though no doubt they own many of the shops; splendid in pure white thobes and gutras, the men stroll about disdainfully, or

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watch indulgently as their black-clad wives argue volubly over the rivers of gold they are tussling for with businessmen who claim that they are trying to beggar them...

But though Sharjah is not as developed as Dubai, it's fast catching up; there are building sites all over the place, housing and shopping developments mushrooming like genie's gifts in white and pink and pale blue and gold and glass and steel all over the emirate's pale sands. We go for an entertaining walk one early evening through a new housing development not far from the Sharjah beach, such as it is (Sharjah has yet to learn to welcome Western-style ocean fun): and are showed over one amazing property by a sardonic Lebanese guy who knows full well we are just stickybeaks, and not customers at all. The place is amazing not because it's opulent, which it is: marble everywhere, gilded taps and other such details, mosaics and interior courtyard with fountain, swimming pool and spa, but because it's an *ordinary* property. It's not like the one up the road from my brother's, which belongs to a brother or cousin of the Sheikh of Sharjah—a palace of a place, a walled white compound that occupies several blocks, with birds of paradise and peacocks and chained leopards in its massive gardens... No, this house is certainly not for a 'roi du petrole' as the French saying has it of immense wealth. No, not even a baron or a knight or gentleman of oil—it's just for an ordinary Emirati, just a common or garden guy with his mobile phone glued to his ear, his snazzy sunglasses and shiny new car.

It's one of the things that makes you understand what wealth really is. My brother tells me that the Gulf Arabs are often disliked and patronised by other Arabs, called Gulfies and other much more insulting terms, not only out of envy or annoyance but because it seems ridiculous. Ridiculous, because it shouldn't have happened in reality. It's a story right out of the Arabian Nights. Poor as dirt, hard-scrabble camel-herder/fisherman/date farmer rubs the oil lamp, the genie appears, and hey presto, entire cities spring up, everything that said camel herder etc touches turns to gold, rivers of it, floods of it, oceans of it... For an outsider like me, it IS sort of ridiculous, sort of thrilling, sort of marvelous, sort of frightening. Along with the joy of seeing people enjoying themselves, reveling in their good fortune, come other, sterner admonitory inner voices, like the idea of castles built on sand and the like. And images of the slaves of the lamp, needed to maintain the marvelous wealth... In some lights, you might think so of the huge numbers of people from dirt poor hardscrabble other parts of the world, whose sweat and silence is the grease that keeps this whole contented machine running for the greater good of the deepest pockets. But that's a false light, too; everyone's here because they want to be. Because, Westerner or Easterner, from whatever nation they've exiled themselves, they can earn heaps more here than they ever could in their own country, and thus get for their families, if not themselves, a much better standard of living. Doesn't stop people whingeing, of course. A young Filipino checkout girl told me in a whisper aside as she packed up our groceries in a sleek supermarket that she 'couldn't stand those Emiratis. They think they're better than everyone else. They're

stupid...' But when I asked her if she was leaving, she shrugged. 'Course not. Stupid people, but they pay.' A taxi driver from Peshawar told us with a curl of the lip, as he took a corner too fast, verse from the Koran swinging merrily at his rear-vision mirror, that the Emiratis were 'bad Muslims, very bad.' He missed his family, his green garden, his house, the sense of struggle in the world. But he stayed here, because, he said, with an engaging grin, the money, the money's good. Bad Muslims, good money. You might think happily that Osama's cocking a snook at all those rich Gulfies and those Yanks, but you knew which side your bread was buttered on, nevertheless. You don't really want Osama's goons here, not really. Those extra rooms in the house in Peshawar, that new plough, the silks you could bring back for your wife: it counted for something. The siren call of nihilistic, millenarian fanaticism only really reaches the ears of those who are too rich to have anything to lose, who think they have the answers, and those whose aspirations have been disappointed and confounded... Trying to stir up crowds here falls on deaf ears. Everyone aspires, Emirati or foreigner. It's still fun, still worthwhile, both being rich, AND scooping up the golden crumbs from the rich man's table. Little sign of existential angst here...

Besides, the Emiratis, not hamstrung like the poor old rich boys of Saudis by the burden and blessing of being the guardians of the holy places, don't have to care what people like Mr. Peshawar thinks of their Islam. Being a newish federation too helps—you don't just have one family controlling everything. You can also work subtly and carefully, keeping your people happy, putting money into public works as well as the grandest and splashiest of all Arabian Nights fairytales. So you have both good education, free for all your natives, and seven-star hotels where laws of physics are apparently broken: fountains of fire and water, underwater restaurants... You have fantastic roads with enormous roundabouts where fleets of great gas—guzzling monsters driven by descendants of Bedouin warriors, veiled women, Lebanese and Indian businessmen, and Western expatriates charge at terrifying speed, with flimsy Pakistani taxis nipping recklessly in and out of their great shadows. You keep a discreet eye on all that goes on, and keep in well with great powers whilst not being averse to playing off various parties. You make yourself indispensable to the rest of the Arab, and maybe even Muslim, world by being a combination of Singapore and Switzerland—after all, even terrorists and radicals need bankers, and will respect the neutrality of such places...

Here, you are in a country where you can go down to a modest little Lebanese cafe called Popeye's on the Dubai waterfront, sit at plastic-covered tables and eat Iranian and Russian caviar slathered thickly on toasted Turkish bread. You are in a country where a woman will wear full abaya and veil and yet drive, drink milkshakes at McDonalds and shop openly for lingerie that would not be out of place in a Moulin Rouge lineup. You are in a country where Pakistani muezzins are often not allowed to issue the call to prayer, because their South Asian accent in Arabic makes people laugh,

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not reflect on their prayerful duties, and thus inadvertently blaspheme. You are in a country where the religious ministry issues sermons to the mosques for Friday use, you can buy solid gold statues of the baby Jesus in his crib, and diamond crosses, and golden mandalas, and T-shirts featuring the doe eyes and beret of Che Guevara. About the only religious symbol you can't buy is a Star of David...

My brother takes us on a walk at Sharjah harbour. Here, blue and green and yellow painted dhows and sambuks jostle each other, bumping in the littered water. This is not where the rich people's goods come in. A crew of dark, shirtless Indian labourers is humping huge bags of salt from a ship onto the quay. Further on, a crew of Iranians resting on a square of carpet, call out to us. A crowd of men covered in soot stacks bags of what looks like charcoal by the side of the road. A little further on, old fridges, bikes, washing machines, furniture, are being loaded onto another ship. There is a sailor having a bath in a little wooden tub on another ship; he is singing to himself, soaping his armpits, apparently oblivious to his surroundings. These are ships that for centuries have been going up and down the Gulf, and some on to India; despite the UAE's newfound oil wealth, trade and 're-export commerce' as it's put, still is a good part of the Emirates' wealth, and this is the more modest, yet essential, end of it.

As we go along the quay, we are hailed by a man in a long grey robe, a big smile and a glossy beard: 'hey, friends, friends, you come here!' His name's Ismail, he comes from Iran, he's from that ship over there... see? 'Come, you come,' he insists, so we climb over the rail and onto the deck, where the rest of the young men in the crew, and the rather older captain shake our hands, we take off our shoes and stand on the carpet, and little glasses of mint tea are handed around, while we all smile in unison and try to have conversations in a mixture of broken English and Arabic. It's amazing how many subjects you can actually at least touch on! Ismail, inquiring as to where we're from (both France and Australia), smiles widely. 'France, Australia, very good, yes? Iran, very good friends with Australia and France!' He then looks sideways at his captain. 'We from Iran, but he from Iraq.' He grins, the others grin too, but not the Captain, who's a fine-looking, small slim man with a hawk face, a splendid set of grey moustaches, and a resigned expression. He knows a joke is coming; he's patient about it, but... 'Iraq, boom-boom!' says Ismail, with a big, gusting laugh, and his friends all giggle, except for the Captain, who looks sad and patient and not in the least annoyed. We say nothing, though we smile, hard to know what to say. But fortunately Ismail and the others are intrigued and impressed by the fact I'm the only woman in an all-male party, especially when told this party consists of my husband, my brother, my sons and my nephews. What a fortunate woman I am, surrounded by such male splendour!

One afternoon, we go with the children to the Wafi Centre in Dubai, an amazing palace of consumerism, modeling itself on the splendours of Egypt. Massive columns, Sphinxes, rooms called after Cleopatra and Caesar, combined with flashing lights, crystal chandeliers, fast food joints, a huge electronics games area (along with

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discreetly-positioned prayer rooms) give you a feeling not so much of Arabian Nights, but of Las Vegas. While the children plunge into the entertainment arcade of computer games, simulator battle jets and racing cars, and indoor skateboarding park, we go to gawk at “Goodies”, a truly splendid deli cum café, whose opulent elegance reminds me of certain food shops in Paris. It is full of Emirati men. (We saw very few Westerners shopping at Wafi City; it’s not exactly cheap there.) We wander in under the eyes of eagle-eyed, immaculately-attired staff, who with impeccable courtesy never ask you that annoying question shop assistants in Western luxury stores too often patronise you with, ‘Can I help you?’ (with the unspoken ending being, ‘help you out of our exclusive store, you peasant, how dare you even darken our door!’) We waft as discreetly as possible past tables of gossiping men with plates of baklava and dates and cups of coffee in gilt cups in front of them; I stare with sensuous delight at the multicoloured goods on display—sacks of the finest lentils, chick peas, spices, beautiful presentation cases of figs, dates, nuts, glazed fruit, glass cases of all kinds of Middle Eastern food, from the freshness of Lebanese to the richness of Turkish... It’s like being in a dream of plenty, a cornucopia worthy of a pasha or a sultan but accessible even by humble ex-nomads with gold credit cards...

Talking of gold... well, doesn’t everyone talk of gold in Dubai? I am flabbergasted, amazed, every adjective of befuddled gasping google-eyed amazement, in the Gold Souk, the great bazaar of the yellow metal so beloved by mankind over the ages. Australian and even European jewellery shops look pretty flimsy and mangy by comparison with this amazing flaunting of Bedouin good fortune. Though many of the pieces are made in India and Pakistan from gold mines in Australia and South Africa, among other places, they are made for Gulf tastes, and Gulf purses. There is the odd thin little chain and discreet bit of jewellery for those killjoys of Western sophisticates, but mostly it’s big, big, big, and encrusted with precious stones. No more need for the old Bedouin silver wedding jewellery, passed down carefully; today it’s massive gold necklaces and belt pieces of World Wrestling Federation size. A loyal servant will sometimes be retired with a massive gold piece as a wedding gift. There are massive sculptures in gold and crystal, as well as those accoutrements for rich pious Christians I mentioned earlier— gold holy statues, and crucifixes, and things for the children too, Disney-faced cute deer and birds and such in bright gold. Pressing your nose against the window of one of these shops is like looking in at the cave of Ali Baba; going in, and trying on various things under the polite disbelief of the assistants, who know full well it’s more than likely you’re just a looker, not a buyer, is like dressing up and dreaming childhood dreams, all at once (though there’s so much, it makes me feel a little sick, and a little like laughing, just because of the sheer AMOUNT!) But there is not one shop of that kind, but ten, twenty, forty! So much money flows through the Gold Souk it’s easy to see why it’s been fingered as a place not only for ordinary criminal money-laundering, but also for washing whiter than white the blood money of terrorists...

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But even in this place, there's the little guys trying to make a living in the niches of great wealth, especially from Western tourists who are too tightfisted or too poor to buy the gold on display. They sidle up to you with a glancing smile, whip the sleeve up their arm to show you a panoply of watches twinkling there on the thin flesh: 'Rolex, Rolex, sir, madam? Good Rolex...' They speak softly, humbly, as if expecting to be batted away, and don't complain when you don't even look at them, or the not-so-cheap imitations they bear on their arms.

At the Karama Centre, in Sharjah, which is not at all like the Gold Souk but a collection of cheap shops, like a kind of Paddy's Market, we eat mini shawarmas, made on the spot, and drink Fanta, and the boys buy dozens of imitation big name brand T shirts, little daggers, and all kinds of other bits and pieces. A little guy accosts us here too, targeting the boys this time, 'DVDs, DVDs, new DVDs,' He leads them and us over to a stairwell where another guy is sitting with a big sack into which, like Santa, he dips his hand, pulling out more and more goodies... The films haven't even come out yet on the screens— yet here they are, pirated and for sale in Karama...

My brother and my husband are restless with all this shopping; we're going up country, to the desert, and to the great city of the oases, Al Ain, in Abu Dhabi, the city where the present paramount ruler of the Emirates, Sheikh Zayed, was born. We go briskly up the smooth desert highway in the 4WD, jaunty Arabic and Western pop doof-doofing from the car radio. The desert, in its original form, appears very quickly after the genie's magic cities trickle to an end; and suddenly my brother turns the wheel and goes off the road. 'You've got to at least put your feet on it,' he says with a broad smile; the desert's one of his favourite places and he has no fear of it at all. But I do. I'm temperamentally a creature of green forests and little streams and sunny walled gardens and stone villages. The desert is like the sea to me, magnificent but feared. I respect the fortitude and courage of sailors and nomads, but I have no desire to follow in their footsteps. A thousand silly stories and imaginings of dying of thirst and losing our way fill my all-too-imaginative mind as I follow the men reluctantly into the desert by the side of the road.

It is hot. So hot. Why should that surprise me, it's absurd to be surprised! But there you are; it does. Hot sand, hot enough it seems to me to melt glass, fills my shoes, and I can hardly walk. It's difficult to walk in too, not just because of the heat, because of the way it keeps sliding and slipping. There's one tree on the skyline, a twisted thorny-looking thing. My brother says we'll walk there. He sees my face and laughs. 'We've got lots of water, it'll take five minutes and from there we won't see the road... You'll think you're really out in the desert.' Heck, I WANT to see the road. The more I'm here in this sand, the more I'm frightened. My estimation of the Bedouins of old goes up even more. They were tough. They were mad. Well, both maybe. Their descendants still go out in it, but many like to see it these days from behind the tinted windows of their 4WD. Well, at least the sky's neither grey nor hazy here. It's a bright, glorious, gilded

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blue, and the dunes of sand, the hillocks are a bright bright gold. Light. It's all about light here. Light. But oh, how it scorches and burns, in the utter silence. You can't even hear the road anymore, only a few metres away from it. A hawk swoops and plunges in the gold and blue air... what can he see to eat here? It's beautiful but I long for the cool shadows of forest, the swishing of a rushing stream, the perfumed beauty of a rose garden... I'm a softie, that's what I am, not one for the hot clarity of the desert from which our father Abraham derived his first visions...

Or maybe it's a male thing, because my male family, brother, husbands, sons, nephews, seems to be enjoying it, rushing up to the top of a dune, laughing... My sister in law opted to stay behind at home, ostensibly to study, but maybe because she doesn't like it here... I am relieved when we come out of there and head off to the oasis city.

Al-Ain is announced by big broad flowery avenues, a spick-and-span restored fort, the long walls of one of Zayed's palaces, and large portraits of the Sheikh in his younger days, his handsome, black bearded face bearing a direct, yet pensive expression. We stop at an old oasis near the fort; it has rustling shadows under the palms, swishes under leaves which might be snakes or might not, and an irrigation system that the Iranians claim they invented and the Arabs claim they invented. Who knows who, but it's pretty nifty nevertheless. We eat at a big Lebanese restaurant where a succession of green and blue-eyed young waiters, brothers and cousins from the Bekaa Valley, bring us a succession of plates, each decorated with greens and tomatoes and cucumbers. I'd be quite happy to go and sit in a rose garden now, but no, my brother wants to take us to another desert! A stone one, he says, conciliatory, when I look aghast; they're different!

So we drive into Oman, to a wadi my brother knows. And guess what: a stone desert might be different but it's still hot as blazes, and every bit as scary. It looks rather like a smaller version of the hills of Afghanistan here, or like a spoil heap after a huge mining operation. My brother lures us with rhapsodies of the beautiful waterhole down the bottom, but doesn't exactly explain that to get there you have to crawl and teeter on the edge of an irrigation channel that snakes down from the date plantation above to the wadi down below. Sometimes you can walk on the side of the irrigation channel that's nearest the hill, sometimes you have to walk on its outer edge, near the drop. I hate every minute of it, though I also see, like a disease or a glory in my constantly-observing, always-marveling mind, that the stones are of different colours, that there's wild pink flowers on sparse bushes in impossible crannies here and there, that there's a mirror (a mirror??) lying face up on the other side of the wadi. It's grand, savage, cruel, beautiful country. The waterhole is as lovely as my brother's claimed; but it's also slippery, deep, full of rocks and I'm afraid who-knows-who might come around the corner and shout at us for being infidel bathers. So I stay huddled on a rock, watching my men splash and shriek...

I'd taken all my worldly goods with me from the car, being of a nasty, suspicious or

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maybe just imaginative turn of mind. My brother had laughed at me for that, saying it was so remote so deserted here and that anyway people were honest as there was sharia law and so on... I don't say I told you so when we return to the car and a side window's been forced open, and his wallet, phone, and camera vaporised...With him fuming at the wheel, we head off out again, to the little Omani market town of Al-Burami, and go straight to the souk, to buy the frankincense my brother says you can find here. It's certainly there; it's weird to pick up the box one seller hands me and smell church inside. This is the stuff the Three Wise Men brought to the baby Jesus; it makes my head spin. There's some other thing some people are smoking. The man selling that looks rather stoned, but I have no idea what it is. People laugh when we ask. It looks much less rich in Oman than the UAE (and is), much slower, quieter, more traditional. But there's a relaxed feeling here too. A nice young guy, finding out we're from Australia, rushes over to us with a watermelon. 'Welcome to our country,' he says, and won't accept any payment, though he wants a photo with our boys...

We spend some time in the little covered souk near the open market, especially in the weapons shop where a very kind Omani with a beautiful moustache and a tailed white turban shows us his wares: magnificent Omani and Yemeni silver daggers, more modest ones in metal, with camel-leather scabbards, beaded and embroidered gun belts and all kinds of guns and rifles. 'Everything for the modern bandit,' my brother murmurs. We get asked to take more photos, and pose in amongst the guns and daggers and belts, with the shop owner...

It's back to Al Ain to the police station where we spend a couple of hours as my brother fills in forms for his insurance, the car is dusted over for the miscreants' fingerprints by the plain clothes squad (in thobe and gutra, naturally) while uniformed branch, in smart green uniforms, stands watching... Apparently the wadi is a bad place for thieves, the police tell my brother; but alas, sir, as it's in Oman, we can do little, unless you really want to press charges.

No, no, it's just for the insurance, my brother hastens to say. He's still imprinted by his experiences in Saudi, where it was bad news indeed to become involved, whether innocently or guiltily, in anything like this and where most people kept thefts quiet, and tried to deal with it themselves... Though things are different here, he's still cautious.

We cross into Oman again another day, to Wadi Bih, in the mountains in the north of the Emirates, where the border between the two countries snakes in and out. This is even grander than that other wadi, very Biblical in feel, to me: massive loose-rocked hills, not a blade of grass, black and white goats running around, and the ruins of medieval stone villages everywhere. We have a picnic of chicken and dates and tabouleh under a large thorny tree in the middle of an archaeological site, surrounded on all sides by swooping sky and wild hills; the sight catches at my heart, and my nerves. 'I will lift up mine eyes to the hills', I murmur to myself, 'the goats scramble down the slopes of Gilead...' I understand in my body, deeply, the fear of God, and the wild

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glory, in this harsh, harsh place. There are jinns, too, I'm sure, hiding near that rock—that snake there, that came so suddenly, it suddenly appeared, didn't it? Leaving behind that place, I feel a sense of relief but also regret, much more than in the sandy desert, and going into the narrow defiles down out of the mountains, places where you could expect anything: an ambush, an angel... makes the hair on the back of my neck rise again. That, and the glorious swim we have in the Arabian Sea, just beyond, a sea of the most beautiful turquoise blue, filled with strange jellyfish, some like little eyes in clear bodies, others like big pale brown clear doughnuts. And as we sit on the deserted sands of the beach near the little town of Diba, my family around me, looking over the sea towards Pakistan, far away, I feel an odd, thrilling happiness that I can't quite pin down, cannot properly articulate. Maybe one day I will. But for the moment, it's enough just to be sitting here, feeling like this, under this sky, facing this sea.

صوفي ماسون

Sophie Masson's latest novel is *The Tempestuous Voyage of Hopewell Shakespeare* (Hodder 2003).



JENI ALLENBY

'...an act of courage': Contemporary Palestinian Art

'Since [its establishment] Israel has carried out not only confiscation of Palestinian land... but confiscation of our culture... Culture is our roots, a vital and essential part of the integrity of every people. Without it we are deprived of our common identity as a national community.'

Awad Abdel Fattah 19801

'This occupation is not like other occupations. The Israelis say that ... they came to a land without a people. Fine arts, literature and culture as a whole shows them that these are lies, that there is a people and that this people has a productive culture.'

Suleiman Mansour 19812

'Being an artist for Palestine is an act of courage.'

Made in Palestine exhibition³

Exile. Dispossession. *Diaspora*. Loss. Resistance. Politics. Nationalism. Identity. Return. Hope. These experiences, beliefs and emotions form the foundation of contemporary Palestinian cultural and artistic expression, transformed into thematic narratives infused with metaphoric meaning that document and define the Palestinian experience in both the Palestinian region and the scattered communities of the Palestinian *diaspora*.

As with other forms of Palestinian cultural heritage, very little has been written or published on the history and development of Palestinian art. Only in the last decade has the subject begun to be seriously explored, documented, analysed and exhibited. This article looks briefly at how Palestinian visual art evolved during the 20th century, what

¹ Awad Abdel Fattah *Al-Fajr* Nov 23-29 1980 p5

² Suliman Mansour quoted in Wilhelm Geist "The growing pains of an art movement under occupation" *Al Fajr* Sept 6-12 1981:p 13

³ *Made in Palestine* exhibition – curatorial statement 2003

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new forms of cultural expression have developed and how Palestinian art has become more than *fan al muqawama* - an art of resistance.

A common mistake is to mark the development of Palestinian fine art from 1948. Traditionally, Palestinian collective memory has been evoked through oral rather than visual means of cultural expression, a legacy of the importance of Arab culture and language in traditional Palestinian culture. European style painting and sculpture were introduced into Palestine by Jewish painters, with young Palestinian artists (such as Jamal Badran and Khalil Halaby) beginning their experimentation during the late 1930s and 40s. Their early subjects were simple portraits and landscapes. They never had the opportunity to develop further because when the events of 1948 occurred, and, as artist (and former student of Khalil Halaby) Kamal Boullata has written, 'an embryonic art movement under Palestinian skies based on the assimilation of Western models died at birth.'⁴ It was to take many years for Palestinian art to recover: 'The thunder made the Palestinian artist close his eyes; he failed to see the lightning in the darkness.' Boullata wrote in 1981.⁵

In the wake of this catastrophe the predominant theme of Palestinian cultural expression was to become Palestine itself. During the 1960s and 1970s, literature and fine art were to become vehicles to express the tragedy and aspirations of the Palestinian people. This was a deliberate and conscious resolve, a need to develop forms of cultural expression 'capable of supporting the struggle of our people, revealing the actual facts of our situation and describing the stages of our... struggle to liberate our homeland.'⁶ The PLO also offered support to artists, providing grants and exhibition opportunities as well as forming the General Union of Palestinian Artists in 1969. The Palestinian resistance had now begun, and was to play a major role in the development of Palestinian art.

As Hanan Ashrawi has pointed out, this need to 'record and immortalise the Palestinian case and to speak on behalf of the people's refusal to be defeated or broken' was to become both the strength and weakness of Palestinian cultural output,⁷ which has been often criticised for its inconsistent quality. Perhaps Kamal Boullata explains this best when he wrote in 1970 that 'the young talented Palestinian was overwhelmed by the destitution of his people. The necessity of self expression, not the impulse for

⁴ Kamal Boullata "Israeli and Palestinian artists: facing the forest" *24 Israeli and Palestinian artists unite for Peace* 1988 Washington DC: unpaginated.

⁵ Kamal Boullata "Politics of resistance: Mahmoud Darwish" *Arab Perspectives* Vol 2 May 1981: p37.

⁶ *Charter of the Association of Palestinian Cinema* 1972 quoted in Guy Hennebelle "Arab cinema" *MERIP Reports*, No 52, November 1976: p8.

⁷ Hanan Ashrawi "The Contemporary Palestinian Poetry of Occupation" *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol 7 No 3 Spring 1978: p 90.

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aesthetic creation, encouraged his art.⁸

Yet soon a distinctive, evocative Palestinian visual art movement was to emerge, built on the powerful foundations of nostalgic painterly narratives and resistance “Liberation Art” style graphics, reflecting via new media and modern styles contemporary events and issues of developing Palestinian nationalism and identity. In the Palestinian region fine art developed despite Israeli censorship, the Israelis being under no illusions as to the political power of artistic expression. ‘They [the Israelis] say that every painting shown in public is like a leaflet, and that a leaflet needs the permission of the military government’ Suleiman Mansour protested, after his paintings fell victim to Israeli censorship during a display at Gallery 79, the first Palestinian art gallery opened under occupation, which was closed by Israeli authorities less than a year after it opened in 1979.⁹

Today, in the 21st century, study of contemporary Palestinian art reveals a strong visual art movement featuring a multiplicity of styles, techniques and mediums. Slowly Palestinian art is being recognised by the international art community, with rare international exhibitions such as the *Williamsberg Bridges Palestine 2002* exhibition in New York, *Made in Palestine* in 2003 in Houston, and *I Remember 1948* in Sydney.

Palestinian artists have drawn inspiration from a myriad of sources, including historical Palestinian/Arab or Islamic themes and media. Abdel Rahman al-Muzayyeh’s research of ancient visual history inspired his *Jenin* series featuring Anat, the ancient Canaanite goddess who now symbolises the strength and soul of Palestine and who also appears in the sculptures of Mona Saudi. Ancient scripts provided inspiration for Jumana el Husseini, while Kamal Boullata utilised fragments of Arabic from the Bible and the Koran texts transforming into ‘colourful laceworks... partly to evoke the primordial element of visible language and partly to articulate the interplay between language and art.’¹⁰

Oral traditions have provided an important inspiration source, with the spoken word playing a role in the art of Tayseer Barakat, where ‘objects in their two dimensional perspective find their place in relation to each other in a structure not unlike that of speech.’¹¹ The Arabic genre of *sira* and popular story telling inspired young Australian Palestinian/Arab artists to curate *I Remember 1948* at the Performance Space in Sydney in 2003. Using community and personal stories as a departure point, these young artists produced a series of works depicting loss of homeland, the experience of exile and life under occupation. The project recalls Arab American poet Nathalie Handal’s personal

⁸ Kamal Boullata “Towards a revolutionary Arab art” *The Arab World* vol 16 no 2 February 1970: p 5.

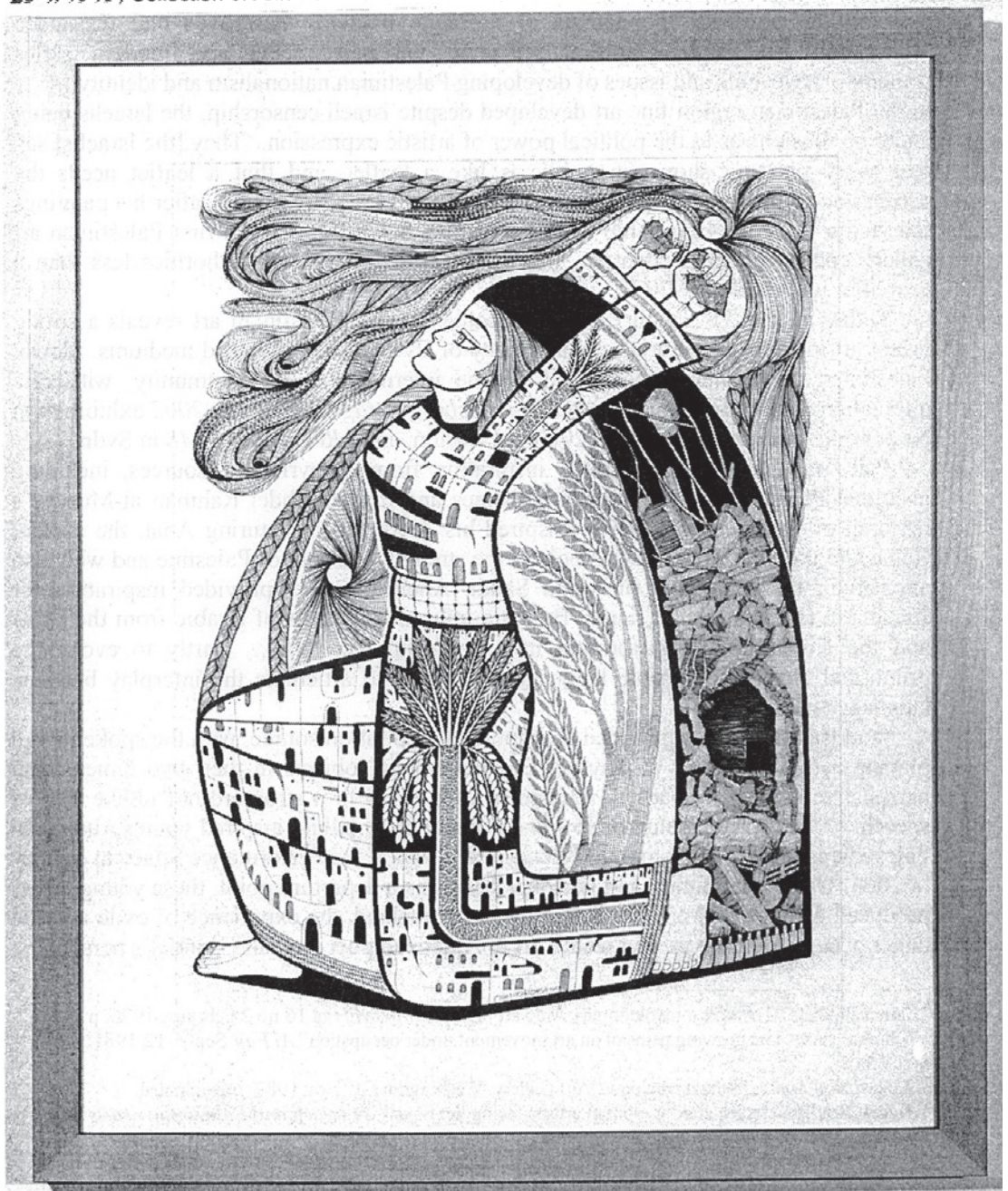
⁹ Wilhelm Geist “The growing pains of an art movement under occupation” *Al Fajr* Sept 6-12 1981: p 13 note 25.

¹⁰ *Kamal Boullata* exhibition catalogue, Alif Gallery, Washington DC Nov 1983: unpaginated.

¹¹ Kamal Boullata “Israeli and Palestinian artists: facing the forest” *24 Israeli and Palestinian artists unite for Peace* 1988 Washington DC: unpaginated.

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Abdel Rahmen Al Muzayen, from the series: *Jenin*, 2002, ink on paper, 25" x 19 1/2", Collection of Ann Harithas



reflections of the Palestinian *diaspora* experience:

'I grew up in a house where Palestine was in every corner of our heart. Palestine was [always] present in my memory, or rather in the memories of others that I borrowed... those stories became real images and experiences in my mind, and I found my place inside them.'¹²

Nowhere is the power of the storyteller more evident in the exhibition than in Soraya Asmar's *Before Began* (2003), an installation of black light, wire, glowing paint, organic material and soundscape that creates a world of memory, of belonging, of possibilities. In the darkened space, the Palestinian landscape is recalled via the physicality of decomposing olive branches and oranges and a single glowing wire manipulated into symbolic imagery such as the prickly pear cactus and figures from village life (see back-cover of the present issue). The accompanying soundscape features family celebrations and reminiscences, radio news in Arabic and English, Arabic music and an Australian childhood musical icon (the music played by an ice cream van) to bind together past and present Palestinian and *diaspora* realities. 'This work is about the wide eyes of the storyteller, the child and the listener. Memories can render landscapes exaggerated, romanticised and luminous,' Asmar writes, 'anticipated lives hover here.'¹³

Asmar's installation, with its evocation of Palestinian collective and cultural memory, reminds us how far Palestinian art has come in the last half century. The subject is still Palestine, but a Palestine almost unrecognisable in parts, hauntingly familiar in others.

Palestinian artists have recreated Palestine and the tragedy of the Palestinian people in a myriad of ways. Some, such as Ismail Shammout and Suleiman Mansour, have preferred to use representational imagery to recreate early 20th century regional Palestine. Some portray specific historical events (such as Abdel Tamam and Adnan Yahya's realist images of massacres), while others portray the reality of the refugee experience. Tayseer Barakat's works depict his childhood in a refugee camp and his family's journey in exile. His sculpture *Father* (1997), displayed in the *Made in Palestine* exhibition curated by the Artcar Museum in Houston, features an ex Israeli military wooden filing cabinet with scenes from his father's journey into exile burned into the bottom of each drawer.

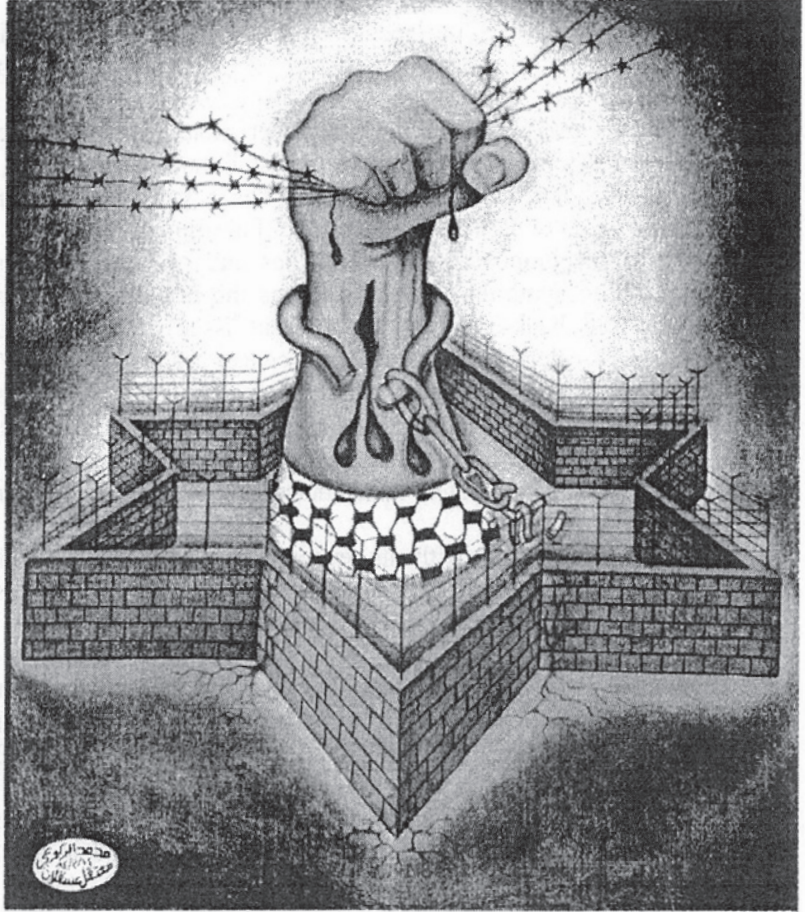
The reality of prison life is another popular subject. Prisoners themselves (such as Abdel Taman, Hani Zurub, Muhammad al-Rakoui and Zuhdie al Adawi) also produce narratives of torture, confinement, resistance and freedom. The materials utilised by these artists often reflect the circumstances of their creation, such as Al-Rakoui's *On the Occasion of the Day of the Palestinian Prisoner* (1984) made of crayon on cloth

¹² Nathalie Handal *Poetry as Homeland*

¹³ Soraya Asmar, Artist's Statement, *I Remember 1948* exhibition checklist 2002

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from cut up pillowcases.



Muhammad al-Rakoui *On the Occasion of the Day of the Palestinian Prisoner*
October 14 (1984) crayon on cloth (Courtesy: Artcar Museum, Houston)

Contemporary Palestinian art is found in all media, from political graphics to photography, mixed media, collage, digital art, film and animation. Painting itself has moved far beyond the conventional canvas, with political murals becoming a popular art form inspired by the Mexican mural movement, combining scenes and symbols to create narratives. These murals have become familiar sights in Gaza and the West Bank, with a variation being large political murals painted on canvas that can be displayed at

political events, then stored in a rolled up form.

Installation is another popular media, used to excellent effect by artists such as Nasser Soumi, Mona Hattoum and Emily Jacir, whose *Memorial to 418 Palestinian villages which were destroyed, depopulated and occupied by Israel in 1948* (2001) (displayed in the *Made in Palestine* exhibition in Houston) utilises the medium of embroidery in its construction of a canvas refugee tent hand embroidered with the names of Palestine's lost villages. The artist's usage of embroidery to document the loss of over half of Palestine's villages recalls the traditional 19th and early 20th century role of embroidery as a social record of Palestinian village life.

Mary Tuma's installations reveal her concern with Palestinian issues from her perspective as an American of Palestinian heritage. *Homes for the Disembodied* features 'a large-scale suspended sculpture made from 50 yards of black chiffon folded to create five connected dresses in the form of the long black dresses worn by the women of Palestine... That the dresses are actually one piece is significant and speaks to the link that binds the Palestinian people through a shared misfortune.'¹⁴ Textile artist Laurie Paine describes the imagery of her woven textiles inspired by Palestinian embroidery as 'illusionary and mobile echoing the conflict of a culture without a country',¹⁵ thus revealing her own quest for cultural identity as an Australian Palestinian.

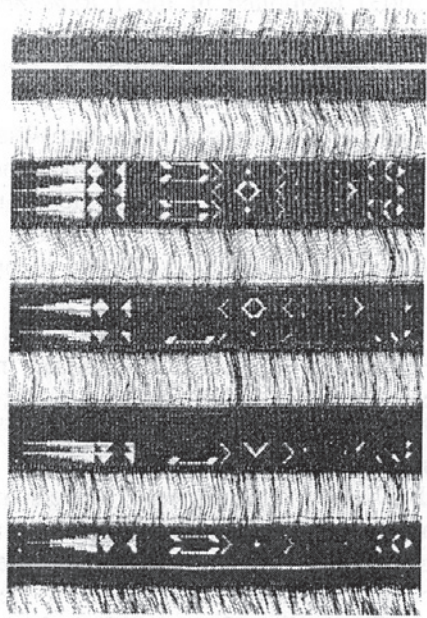


Illustration: Laurie Paine *Untitled* 1980s (detail) woven silk panels
(Courtesy: Laurie Paine)

The inspiration for one of Palestinian art's most innovative movements occurred in the 1980s when the "New Vision" artists group pioneered the use of local and natural materials such as straw, clay, henna, leather, natural tar and natural dyes. Originating within the Palestinian region, Samia Halaby believes this movement developed in reaction 'to the economic oppression applied by Israel during the occupation of the

¹⁴ Mary Tuma, Artist's Notes

¹⁵ Laurie Paine Artist's Statement, *Many Voices: 13th Tamworth Fibre Textile Biennial* exhibition catalogue Tamworth City Gallery 1996: p35.

West Bank and Gaza. The artists wanted to join the general boycott against Israeli products and did not want to buy their art supplies.¹⁶ However, artists were quick to realise the symbolic potential of those local media.

Nabil Anani made use of leather, natural dyes and straw while Suleiman Mansour began using traditional village adobe pastes, henna and later mud (because he said it is the very soil Palestinians and Israelis were both claiming). Rana Bishara conceived conceptual art works combining standard painting materials with media evoking the Palestinian environment (incorporated scented materials such as spices). Spices also feature in the work of Nicole Barakat whose installation *I was here, now I am there* (2003) (exhibited in the *I Remember 1948* exhibition) features a circle of found children's shoes filled with soil and zaatar seedlings, which 'looks at the displacement of children, everyday, because of colonisation.'¹⁷ Zaatar, a common food in Palestinian households, has become a symbol of survival and resistance, and the resilience of these tiny plants surprised even the artist. Several were still alive at the close of the exhibition, the artist's cultural metaphor thus evolving during the installation period.

Bishara's work is a classic example of the dense symbolic meanings found in contemporary Palestinian art, which has become a repository of cultural memory and identity and almost impossible to appreciate if its context and background are not understood.

This applies to Palestinian artists as much as viewers of their work. At a forum on Palestinian political art organised in Sydney to accompany the *I Remember 1948* exhibition, the exhibition's young artists spoke emotionally of Palestinian symbols and their own personal links with them ('our ancestors planted the trees' stated one artist) seemingly unaware that the majority of *diaspora* Palestinians come from urban rather than village backgrounds. 'These symbols stay... they haven't changed,' stated another artist. Unfortunately this is not actually the case, as many Palestinian symbols have been specifically chosen and promoted towards exactly the function they now fulfill as cultural signifiers and symbols of Palestinian nationalism and identity.

The *kaffiyya*, for example, only appeared in Palestinian history in the 1950s (after being adopted by Palestinian freedom fighters), while the prickly pear cactus (despite being claimed by both Israelis and Palestinians as a symbol of indigenous rights) was actually imported from Mexico in the 1600.¹⁸ While the majority of symbols appear straight forward – related to rural life (such as the village home, traditional costume and embroidery, maps, the key to the house (now known as the key of return) or evolved from more recent events (such as the dove of peace, the *kaffiyya*, the stone, etc) - it is

¹⁶ Samia Halaby *Liberation art of Palestine: Palestinian painting and sculpture in the second half of the 20th century* 2003 HTTB Publications

¹⁷ Nicole Barakat, Artist's Statement, *I Remember 1948* exhibition checklist 2002

¹⁸ Carol Bardenstein "Of Trees, Oranges and the Prickly Pear Cactus – reading landscapes of Palestinian and Israeli collective memory and identity" *Notes* Fall 2000: unpaginated.

worth taking some time to examine the construction of these symbolic iconographies that appear so frequently in Palestinian popular discourses.

The original symbols of Palestinian nationalism were the word Palestine and the Palestinian flag. As Israel Shail pointed out in his 1981 article on Israeli censorship 'the very word Palestine... can be a criminal offence' while 'to have the Palestinian flag in one's possession... is of course a serious crime. To exhibit it in public is an even greater one.'¹⁹ Any art work featuring even the colours of the Palestinian flag was of course banned until 1980, Suleiman Mansour being told by the military governor responsible for the closure of Gallery 79, 'If you paint a flower with the colours of white, green, black and red, we'll confiscate it.'²⁰ This led Israel Shail to title his article on Israeli censorship *The Four "Terrible" Colours*.²¹

Depictions and interpretations of the Palestinian flag and its colours in Palestinian art are almost too numerous to mention. Perhaps the most innovative and courageous use of these banned colours occurred during the *intifada* when women in the Occupied Territories designed and wore embroidered dresses featuring nationalist symbols such as the map and flag of Palestine, the Dome of the Rock, the patterns of the *kaffiya*, etc, all embroidered in the colours of the banned flag.

Embroidery has not only provided a medium for cultural and artistic expression but has become an important nationalist signifier in its own right. Traditional costume and embroidery appear in the work of countless Palestinian artists, as do women themselves, who have become identified as embodying the legacy of traditional society, the 'guardian of sustenance and life, keeper of our people's perennial flame.'²² The *kaffiya* is another popular symbol, although few artists appear aware of its actual origin. Mohamad Khaled is one of the few who has a deeper understanding than most, the artist's statement accompanying his digital artwork on canvas *Koufieh* (2003) in *I Remember 1948* specifically explaining '*koufieh* means a head covering widely used for centuries in the Arab world. Today it symbolises Palestinian resistance... a symbol [that] is part of the global peace movement.'²³

The majority of Palestinian symbols are derived from the land, one of the most interesting being the prickly pear cactus. Prior to 1948, Palestinian villagers defined the borders of village and family land by visually assessing the position of the enduring cactus. Today, the borders of these lost villages may still be visually traced via the position of the cactus plant, a Palestinian "memory map" that continues to defy modern Israeli maps.²⁴

¹⁹ Israel Shail "The four terrible colours" *Palestine/Israel Bulletin* March 1981: p4

²⁰ Nidal Samed "The politics of art: military close West Bank gallery" *Al-Fajr* Sept Mar 29 - April 4 1981

²¹ Israel Shail "The four terrible colours" *Palestine/Israel Bulletin* March 1981: p4

²² *Declaration of Palestinian Independence* 1988

²³ Mohamad Khaled, Artist's Statement *I Remember 1948* exhibition 2003

²⁴ Carol Bartenstein "Of Trees, Oranges and the Prickly Pear Cactus - reading landscapes of Palestinian

The cactus was especially important in the iconography of the late Assem Abu Shaqra. Israeli reviewers of Abu Shakra's work invariably interpreted the artist's prominent use of the motif simply as representing the cancer from which the artist was suffering or as the artist's variation on the Israeli *sabra* ethos. This ignorance of Palestinian iconography and symbolism may well have been genuine, Israeli Dore Ashton acknowledging in the preface of the catalogue for the exhibition *24 Israeli and Palestinian artists unite for peace* held in Washington DC in 1989: 'Not only was I unfamiliar with the lives and works of the Palestinian artists [on the preliminary list for the exhibition], but I was also unfamiliar with their cultural references... I and my culture are guilty of cultural bias, something far more insidious than simple ignorance.'²⁵

The cactus is one of several powerful symbols of cultural memory shared by Israelis and Palestinians, including the Jaffa orange (El Al hostesses at one time wore orange coloured and shaped garments designed by Yves St Laurent²⁶ - at another, they wore embroidered dresses appropriated from Palestinian traditional styles) and the tree.

A photograph of an Israeli model wearing a Palestinian style embroidered dress being considered for El Al hostesses, as illustrated in the *Jerusalem Post*, 7 February 1980 and reproduced in the PLO's book *Palestinian National Art* (Courtesy: Palestine Costume Archive collection)



Israel has long undertaken major tree planting programmes in their efforts to 'make the desert bloom' while using tree uprooting as a punitive measure or prelude to

and Israeli collective memory and identity" *Notes Fall 2000*: unpaginated.
²⁵ Dore Ashton, Preface, *24 Israeli and Palestinian artists unite for Peace*, 1988 Washington DC: unpaginated.

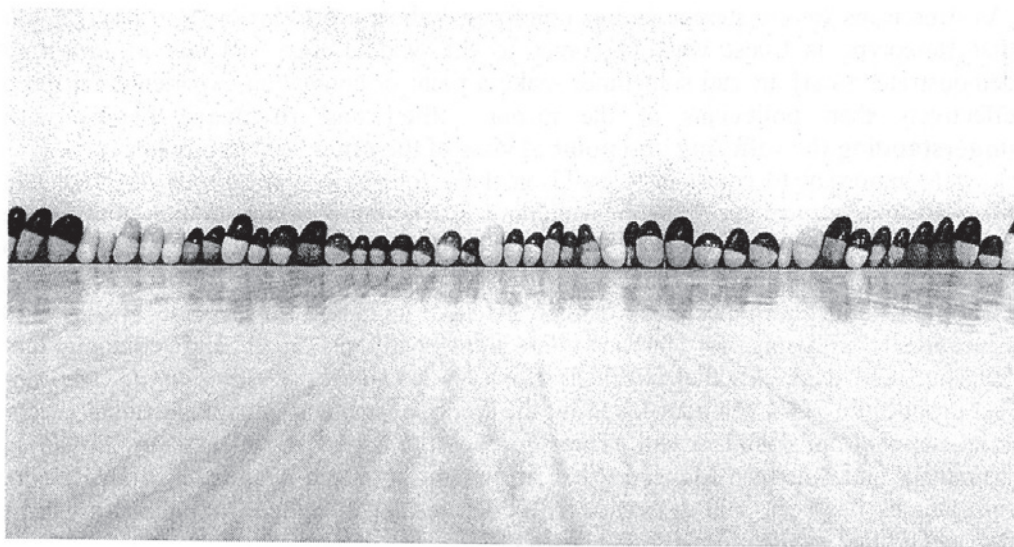
²⁶ Carol Bardenstein "Of Trees, Oranges and the Prickly Pear Cactus – reading landscapes of Palestinian and Israeli collective memory and identity" *Notes Fall 2000*: unpaginated.

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confiscation of Palestinian land.²⁷ Concerned at the destruction of olive trees, Vera Tamari began to reconstruct them in clay in her ongoing installation *Tale of a tree* (1999-). ‘Olive trees are part of the rhythm of life in Palestine, but since the occupation they have been cut down to punish the people, to break our attachment to the land,’ Tamari writes.²⁸ In recreating them she wished to show that hope is not lost.

A similar concern motivated Patrick Abboud to create *Zaitouna 03 48* (2003) featuring in part a map of Palestine constructed of olives, with tiny lights marking the major towns of Palestine.

Stones are another symbolic media which have become popular since the *intifada*. Nida Sinnokrot’s *Rubber coated rocks* (2002) (displayed in *Made in Palestine*) features a series of stones hand dipped in rubber. The rubber alludes to Israeli rubber bullets, the stones to those thrown by Palestinian children against Israeli tanks. One reviewer wrote of the ‘sinister undertones’ of this work: ‘Lined up along the baseboards of the galleries they appear as a weapons stockpile.’²⁹



**Nida Sinnokrot “Rubber coated rocks” 2002 rocks and rubber
(Courtesy: Artcar Museum, Houston)**

²⁷ Carol Bardenstein “Of Trees, Oranges and the Prickly Pear Cactus – reading landscapes of Palestinian and Israeli collective memory and identity” *Notes* Fall 2000: unpaginated.

²⁸ Vera Tamari, Artist’s Statement, *Made in Palestine* exhibition notes 2003

²⁹ Kelly Klaasmeyer “Peace through art: Made in Palestine humanises the Middle East conflict” *Houston Press* July 31 -Aug 6 2003: p40.

Salwa El-Shaik utilises stones as part of *Untitled 1* (2003) (displayed in *I Remember 1948*) featuring a stone/rubble filled earthenware clay cooking pot, while Mary Tuma's *Resurfacing Palestine* (2000) consists of two parts: 'The first is a stitched map that serves as an abstraction of "place" and the second is a bed of stones that are wrapped in a tangle of threads that extend down from the map, connecting the physical stones with the abstract surface of the map. The stones, found in Jerusalem, refer to the first *Intifada* (uprising), but they are softened with the threads—a sort of laying down of "arms" that can instead be used to build.'³⁰

There can be no doubt that *Resurfacing Palestine* and the many other extraordinary art works mentioned in this article impact powerfully on the viewer, their creators exhibiting a rare courage in challenging established views and demanding that the viewer seriously question the Palestinian situation. A reviewer of *Made in Palestine*, the first exhibition of contemporary Palestinian art curated by an American museum, wrote: 'As Americans we are stereotyped as uninformed about world history and politics, but that stereotype is truest when it comes to the Middle East... *Made in Palestine* demonstrates [that] art can sometimes make a point or convey an experience far more effectively than politicians or the media... **the road to peace begins with understanding the suffering and point of view of the other. Art can help.**'³¹

It is important to continue to build on these foundations to raise awareness, and there are many excellent Palestinian cultural institutions working to this aim. In the *diaspora* projects such as *Al-PHAN* (Palestinian Humanities and Arts Now) in Chicago (whose projects include the *Mind, Body, and Soul of Palestine Photo Journal* travelling exhibition) and the Palestine Costume Archive continue to provide spaces and educational programs for public interactions with historical and contemporary Palestinian heritage. Another excellent project is *Resistance Art in Canada*, who has just produced a 2004 calendar featuring the works of contemporary Palestinian artists. With input from Nabil Anani (Director of the League of Palestinian Artists in Ramallah) and Suleiman Mansour (the Director of Al-Wasiti Art Center in Jerusalem), the calendar has been sold in over 16 countries and a percentage from all sales will be donated to the League of Palestinian Artists.

Despite all Israeli attempts to erase Palestine, Palestinian culture has endured. The development of Palestinian art has been a journey of impossible hardship and impossible courage. It documents erasure and defies it: an art of pure resistance. Yet contemporary Palestinian art has become more than this. Scattered worldwide,

³⁰ Mary Tuma, *Artist's Notes*

³¹ Kelly Klaasmeyer "Peace through art: Made in Palestine humanises the Middle East conflict" *Houston Press* July 31 -Aug 6 2003: p40.

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Palestinian artists have become repositories of their culture's collective memory. Distance itself has taken on metaphoric meaning. Palestinian visual art has extended the horizon of the Palestinian narrative, has woven visual codes derived from traditions of language, of poetry and song, inspired by history, ancient landscapes and modern identity, and has been visually realised via a powerful and unique symbolic iconography that encodes the heart of a nation.

That first, long ago generation of Palestinian painters – calligraphers and Islamic arts teachers Jamal Badran, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Ghassan Kanafani, and icon maker Khalil Halaby – whose careers were irretrievably altered or lost by the events of the 1948, would be extraordinarily proud of the artists their descendants have become.

Acknowledgments

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Jeni Allenby is the Director of the Palestine Costume Archives. She is formally a curator at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Jeni Allenby is an internationally acknowledged expert of Palestinian and Middle Eastern cultural heritage. She recently presented papers at the First World Congress of Middle Eastern Studies (Mainz, Germany), the 8th Symposium of the Textile Society of America and MESA 2003 (Middle East Studies Association of North America, USA). Her forthcoming publications include *Palestinian Embroidery* (Interlink Books, USA), *Palestinian Costume and Embroidery since 1948* (Brill Academic Publications, The Netherlands) and *Symbolic Defiance: Palestinian Cultural Heritage in the 20th Century* (Syracuse University Press, USA), with forthcoming articles in *Khilat: Dress and Textiles in the Islamic World* (Peeters, Leeuven: The Netherlands) and *Embroidery* (London).

MARGARET BRADSTOCK

For a Marriage

*'Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair;
thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as
a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead.'*

The Song of Solomon 4:1

1. Making

At the Bundanoon Guesthouse
the dogs wore collars of flowers,
chasing each other and the chickens
across the daisied lawns.
We wrote your epithalamium,
sure this one would last,
and Dick made a silly speech
about breaking the mould
the day that you were born.
You gave us a model
for our own untidy lives,
the Krups coffec machine,
film festivals and hammocks,
your heritage cottagc, Clifford.
You found Byron for us
and before that Raccourse Beach,
the incandescent mornings
knuckled with stranded shells,
familiar, returning tides.

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2. **Breaking**

Mike's Café on a Sunday,
focaccia you could hardly eat
as you poured out your tale of woe
like the coffee we drank, cup after cup.
Trying to get you to hang on,
telling you passion has a shelf life
of four or five years, if you're lucky.
You refused to believe
that's something we have to settle for,
that life can dwindle
to the size of a suburban garden.

3. **Weeping**

You're this side of the statistic now.
Is it for you I weep
or for myself,
for what could not endure,
the end built into the beginning
like King Arthur's fated dream
or a boy just out of childhood,
discarding it,
a bag of outgrown clothes,
leaving it all behind
so fast.

4. **Surviving**

*'I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on?
I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?'*

How to get back to the dream,
no myth to couch it in?
Don't try, you say,
move on.

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In summer it's easy to forget,
to hit the beach
or walk in pools of sunlight.
Soon it will be midwinter,
silent July, the stock-taking time.

The first coffee of the morning
is the best, the only one
where you taste the full flavour,
percolated on the stove now
in an old-fashioned metal pot.

O my daughter,
what can I tell you?



مارغريت برادستوك

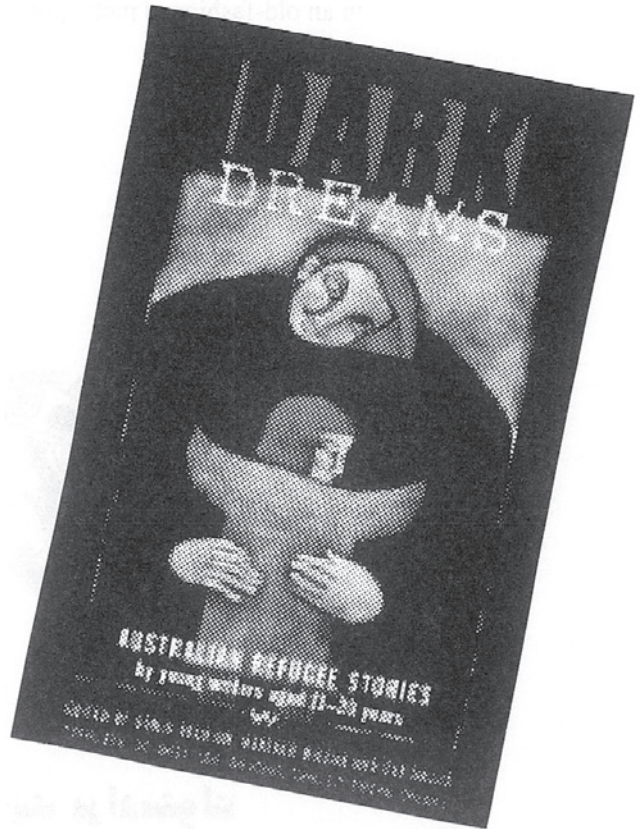
Dr. **Margaret Bradstock** was recently writer-in-residence at Peking University, having been awarded an Asialink Literature Residency in Beijing in 2003, supported by the NSW Ministry for the Arts and the Australia Council.

DARK DREAMS

AUSTRALIAN REFUGEE STORIES by young writers aged 11-20 years

Eva Sallis wrote:

'Dark Dreams... is beautiful. Wakefield Press have made a glorious book, with a sombre yet warm cover in rich colours, lovingly produced in every detail. The 37 stories were the hardest selection to make, as so many more of the stories from AIR! could have been in it. The main thing I can say is that when I read these stories, even the most grim, I have hope. Art, writing, expression and transformation do that somehow. And these writers are SO GOOD. The pressure of their subject matter made for a collection that does not read like a collection of school projects at all. They are stunning.'



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Email: sales@wakefieldpress.com.au

LOUISE WAKELING

Three Poems

The National Library, Baghdad, 2003

*Yesterday, the black ashes of thousands of ancient documents
filled the skies of Iraq.*

Robert Fisk, Independent (London)

you don't think about libraries, as a rule -
rows of old books, gold-painted manuscripts,
 wooden catalogues -
how they'll fare in war

In the beginning was the word

 it never crossed your mind
in the rhetoric of liberation
in the silences chattering
between the lines of official dispatches,
 how easily a people's place
in history might be erased

Genghis Khan's grandson Hulegu
 burnt Baghdad, and they say
 the Tigris River
ran black with the ink of books.
now, in the Library, looters clatter
down a concrete stairway cracked with heat;
agents of amnesia, their oily rags
 splutter into flames.

in the Islamic Library, ancient Korans
have fallen into shrouds of ash,
and US Marines stare
from their armoured vehicles.
words are not their jurisdiction,

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the marks of slaves genuflecting on the page.
the House of Wisdom's a lower priority
 to these new Mongols
than pipelines or the Ministry of Oil
children scamper from the ruins
clutching books, handwritten letters
 swirl and eddy, delicate script
of Sharif Hussein of Mecca
to the Ottoman rulers of Baghdad –
embers blowing in the filthy courtyard.
rolls of microfilm uncoil like snakes,
and from the windows of the upper floors
flames leap two hundred feet into the sky.

it's not till you read
 of airborne manuscripts,
buildings gutted by flames,
that a void opens in the heart.
 what is it about words?
will they bear witness, dumb orators,
like ID cards unearthed from graves?

Here, and there

Here, and the speechless horror of *there*.

3.00 a.m., and early-morning cockatoos
throw down their gauntlet of branches,
screech from every tree-top.
Half-asleep, you hear the antique rumble
of a Hercules lumbering east
 from Richmond Airbase.

You always know when something's brewing,
like the Queen airborne at night above our heads,
 or medical supplies destined
for the latest conflict.

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That drone overhead is reliable,
 somehow,
old engines kept in cotton-wool
 for just such occasions,
wheezing through your dreams
like a superannuated general

Meanwhile, refugee children
 hover behind razor-wire
 in detention centres.
They have stopped talking,
turn away from the world,
swaddled like mummies in sand.

On the streets of Auburn, Iraqi men
celebrate the fall of Baghdad,
 wave shirts, cry.
Women, unveiled, rock between tears
and elation, worry about the void
that opens like a gallows trap-door,
 sit by silent telephones,
watch as screens flicker
 across rubble-strewn streets.

Governments are vindicated
 by short, sharp, victorious wars.
Gone the strange civility
of hand-to-hand combat, capture
and re-capture of bunkers, exchange
of cigarettes and handshakes.

These pathetic offerings, too late,
airlifted to children without limbs,
 craters called 'home',
superfluous now to bundles dragged
in hessian bags from shallow graves.

It was, as they say, a 'clean' war.

morning vigil

It is in vain for a poor scholar like me, to feel so anxious for a better world; yet what can we do about all the wars? No clear solution can I find, though my hair has turned so grey.

Chen Yu-yi, "Night Vigil", (Song Dynasty, 1090-1138)

Welded to metal benches
in a soccer-field in Auburn,
we close ranks against the cold, keep watch,
listening to the scrape of wind on leaves,
the thud of goals into corners
of the earth not ours

This winter's morning is woven green
against a wall of sky.
Beyond straggling trees, the mosque lifts
minarets above a mud-brown dome,
towers that soar like rockets above fibro houses,
backyards abutting on the railway

The Afghani boy stitches himself
to us as we ponder losses
of an altogether smaller kind.
He might be a relative come to watch
the game, barrack for the opposition.
Farsi, Dari, Pashtun, Arabic, English –
his tongue slides over syllables soft
and blurred like the colours of a tribal carpet.

He talks for over an hour,
and we don't even watch the game –
our sons' sagging shoulders,
desperate cries of the defeated.
He knows names I know, studies at a school
I taught in, this refugee of seventeen
fresh from a camp in Pakistan.

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“The Koran does not permit people
to kill, even an ant on the ground.”
His eyes close on memory,
voices he left behind
re-surface, joggers caked with earth -
the mother telling him to study hard,
respect his teachers.

His visa lasts three years,
enough to finish high school,
and after that...?

He's met families
descended from cameleers,
gave a talk to Parliament.
“The people were crying when I finished.
Afghanistan is still dangerous.
Outside Kabul, warlords control the countryside,
thieves shoot people, take their cars,
their money -”

The boy walks away across the quiet field.
He still clutches his hope
for a better world,
while the Taliban, God's students,
shoulder Kalashnikovs,
gather in their village strongholds,
a returning tide

لويز ويكلينغ

Dr. **Louise Wakeling** is a Sydney poet, teacher and biographer whose second collection of poetry, *Medium Security*, was published by Ginninderra Press in 2002.

NICHOLAS GRASPIAS

Three Poems

Sto Rookwood

for Antonios Manolis

A few old Greek ladies are here, black and bent –
to the cemetery taps, they slowly limp,
carrying sponges and “Attiki” buckets,
arranging flowers in old jars
of “Turkish Style” coffee,
they cross themselves, over and over

with their tri-pod fingers, whispering
as they scrub and scrub the mud veins
from the white marble, lighting the *kandilaki* –
the Greeks, they groom their dead well.

I stare into the grey techni-coloured photographs,
their ages – “62”, “47”, “55”,
a growing horizon of my people,
the Broken Greeks of the Diaspora,
like ancient statues smashed and strewed –
short life in “the lucky country”...

The deafening mash of their incomplete whispers,
the beat of unfinished hearts –
Southern Strangers,
 here,
 lost
 in the foreign darkness.

The Easter Man

for Kosta Bagou

Uncle Kosta sits on a log,
he turns the lamb on the spit.

*...shirtless and coughing,
hose in the side of his chest,
red fluids dribbling though...*

He'd always let me rotate it
on those crisp *Paska* mornings.

*...purple surgeon lines,
blood bag beside his bed,
he was our Easter man...*

He pinches out *Drum* tobacco,
rolling it in a piece of *Tally Ho*,

*...he sat silent in a wheelchair,
hospital blanket over his legs,
we didn't have lamb 'that year'...*

the scent of lemon blossoms,
wind gently messing his hair.

*...I remember carrying him
up the stairs of his new home,
lighter than a cat...*

Sometimes he'd tear crackling off
and hand the golden skin to me –

*...I remember him trembling,
ripping the oxygen mask off,
lifting a palm, to say goodbye...*

'*Nice ei Niko?*' he'd smile,
sipping his home made wine,

*...his nails, blue like sea clouds –
I close his crooked eyelids,
I kiss his forehead...*

he was our Easter man.

The Randal House

I remember him lying in his own sweat,
a blanket of his own knitted nerves,
relatives surround him – I was 4.

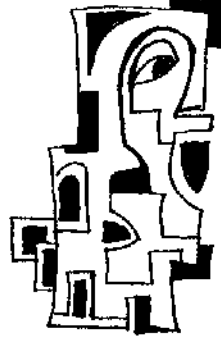
I remember him moaning
as they tried to stick
the *leggo* of his spine back together,
children giggling around him,

I didn't

as I stood back in a diagonal shadow,
“the menthol ghost” introducing herself –
*‘I am the stench of sickness
that you will always remember,
that will greet you everyday after school
in the dark hallway of The Randal House,
to nest in your play clothes
and fragrance your tears...’*

I remember looking at him,
a face crushed like an egg carton, he whispers –
‘the house... I lost the ...’
as my cousins skip, singing nursery rhymes.

I remember my father looking at me,
frozen in my watch – he looks away
as the golden serums of the afternoon sun
spill down the aisle towards him.



نیکولاس غرابسیاس

Nicholas Grapsias is a student of Creative Writing at the University of Western Sydney, Bankstown Campus.

REBECCA SUTTON

Foreign Bodies

In the half-light she sees the hills; they are retreating like mothers letting go. The brittle chirping of the night creatures is a requiem for her final reflections in this place; the silver basin of the dam is the offering upon which they feed. She feels the hinge of everything she has known bending, breaking. Her knees give way.

The foreigners begin to shuffle and scratch their way inside, and she cradles her head in her hands. She sees herself as though through the eye of a microscope—a slick bag of fluid and jacketed organs, a parasite swimming the surface of a glass slide. She sees others like her, other translucent spawn, morphing, multiplying like a virus. She is one of a legion, and they are taking over. They slide into her like water beads converging on a window. But they do not follow the nature of fluid to mingle, but lodge themselves in pockets of her skin, black ticks chewing, perforating the membranous fineries of her brain.

They were not always like this...

She visualises her brother's face as it is in the old photos—plump and made beautiful by soft eyes. She attaches his body and places them both in a day many years ago. He is in the grass behind her, treading in her footsteps. She plucks a stem and chews it like Huckleberry Finn. He does the same.

'Why do you always have to copy me?' she asks.

'Why do you always have to copy me?' he says.

She plows on. She wants to offer the grass on the hill to the birds for their nests. She imagines them swooping from the sky to snatch it from her raised hands.

Her brother isn't in the picture.

She stops, cocks her head.

'What's wrong?' he says.

'Listen!'

He is quiet; the wind tufts his nestling hair. She scans the horizon.

'Can't you hear them?' she says.

'What?' He follows her gaze.

'They're coming—towards us, over the hills.'

'What're you talking about?' he says. His smile pricks dimples in his cheeks.

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‘It’s not funny, Grant—I can hear them coming.’

The wind sighs through the tawny grasses; the hillside is a host of bowed, whispering heads.

His dimples disappear. ‘You’re just trying to scare me... I’ll tell Mum.’

The wind begins to hiss; the grass undulates.

‘Can’t you hear them? They’re getting closer—they’re coming!’

He glances about, arms spread wide, face stricken. His lips tremble and tears thicken his eyes.

‘Run,’ she says, taking a few steps towards him and glancing behind, ‘hurry before they get you!’

He takes off towards the distant house, his shriek unraveling on the wind.

Her treacle of satisfaction heats to scald her with guilt. Fear has been written in the grass by his fleeing feet. But she has what she wanted—she is alone. She is very alone. The granite hills ascend around her, their crevices hinting at places unknown. The clouds balloon above, so textured that she can almost see Pegasus galloping over the surface. It is too grand a display of the beauty of chaos for the eyes of a child; it makes her chest hurt.

There is a woman on the hill singing the birds down from the sky. They thrash above her, fighting the wind, plucking grass for their nests from her raised hands.

She is dreaming. She finds herself falling through space. The abyss is as black as night turned inside out; the stars are kindergarten cutouts of cardboard and foil. She is not too frightened; there is nothing else here but the soft voice of a man. She thinks that it is God. As in all of the Bible stories, he says, ‘Do not be afraid’. She falls further until two islands appear before her. Both are mere patches of earth floating between the stars. The one on her left is little more than a pile of mud. Crooked roots hang from its base like useless legs; standing on top is her father—he is wearing his singlet and gumboots. His skin is as brown as the dirt beneath his feet. He has a shovel and is digging, digging, throwing the mud over his left shoulder.

Her mother is on the other island. She is chained to a kitchen sink and is washing one dish after the next; as she finishes, more appear to topple into the soapy water.

The voice says, ‘You must choose between them.’

She begins to feel afraid. ‘I can’t,’ she says.

God is angry. She continues to fall...

Her father is stranded in the middle of the room like a captain on his sinking ship; her mother is slumped in the chair nearby, animated by little more than an indrawn breath.

He moves to a seat, covers his face with his hands; the girl glances at her brother and they smile, idiots indulging in the tickling sensation of the tide drawing inwards before the tsunami swallows them.

Their mother’s eyes rise from her swampy face to focus on their father. ‘Tell them,’

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she says, her voice a whisper on the edge of a broken blade.

He runs his hands through his hair.

Her face lifts, gathers shape. 'Look at your children and tell them!'

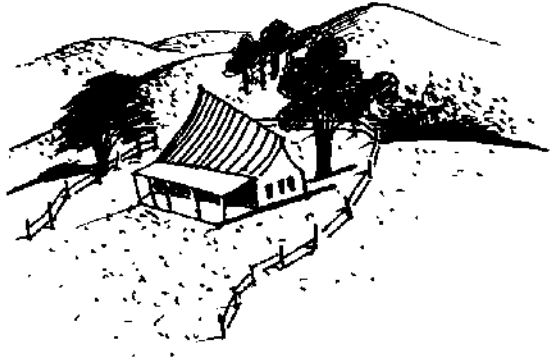
The bird-woman on the hill watches as the girl runs out into the night, her tears spilling a silver trail across the grass.

She watches as the girl stops, drops to her knees.

There are no birds tonight; they are all sleeping in the trees, and she will not wake them until the night is over. When the morning comes they will sing. Until then, the insects of the night will have to do. She calls, draws them close around her like a shimmering veil, and makes her way down the hill towards the girl.

ريكا سطن

Rebecca Sutton lives and writes in central Victoria (Australia) where she is co-editor of *Spectrum*, a street press magazine. She is currently completing her first collection of short stories.



JANE DOWNING

Khans of Prune Street

Khans was not just any store. *Khans* was like a Pandora's Box to the town. They went in looking for the secret it implied, and left only with goods, curiosity unsatisfied by even a quick glimpse up the staircase.

Khans was established after the war, the first of the world wars, the one always referred to by the Khan family as The War. The establishment was moved to Prune Street sometime before the Depression, and has been there ever since, on the corner opposite the Police Station, itself a johnny-come-lately from the time of the other war. *Khans* stayed open through each national crisis; the family grew older, but the serious clientele was, and always had been, predominantly of the more mature variety. Every grandchild knew where Granny got her corsets and Pa his big square handkerchief, one for each day of the week. Everyone knew *where Khans* was; everyone knew less than they wanted to know.

I was not immune to the curiosity of the town. On that first morning, I stood on the doorstep, early to make a good impression, with time to shiver in the cold as I waited for Mr. Will to come and open up. What *was* it like inside?

My employer arrived in black. Suit, waistcoat, bowler hat, relief only from the whiteness of white, starched collar with its whalebone supports, the crimson handkerchief nudging a corner into the world from his breast pocket, and the tiny peek of less than white longjohns inadvertently revealing their presence to a world that knew they must be under there. *Khans* was never heated—or air-conditioned. Inside the shop I shivered as I had on the doorstep. Dread and cold.

A cavern of dim corners lurking behind solid wooden counters, cliffs of boxes climbing to the ceiling, a dark forbidding and forbidden staircase, and my future, were all unveiled to me with one sharp yank on a switch. Naked bulbs illuminated a scene that hadn't changed in sixty years.

Mr. Will lifted his bowler from his frowning dome, mused for a moment with his moustache, then deposited me with the corsets. Before his black suit merged into shadowy aisles, he murmured that Mona would be along.

I imagined the black was to honour Mr. John. Mr. John was dead, of nothing more than old age, the youngest son dying first, to be buried in the cemetery beside parents who *went away* when their children were far too young. Maybe Said and Mother Khan died of hard work, or simply could last no longer in the new soil, transplanted roots being less nourishing.

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Mr. John was said to have been the best looking of the boys. The football player, the council alderman, the face the town saw, at times, outside the shop. I was never introduced. It was his death which brought me to *Khans*, an extra pair of hands that could never replace a beloved brother.

I was told to wear black on that first day. Not trousers though, never trousers. They may have become acceptable outside, were even sold in the Ladies' Department, the best quality linen and wool, but they would never be acceptable for staff. I knew not to ask about miniskirts, even black. Auntie Ethel set me straight on my romantic notions about mourning though. It was black and only black she'd worn the entire thirty years of *her* employment there, back in the days when Australia was white, blacks had no vote, and *Khans* became indispensable to the community.

There were many traditions at *Khans*, Ethel told me. The world was neatly ordered and classified, everything had its place, everyone knew the expectations of them. People came from miles, then kilometres around, because they knew they could get what they wanted at *Khans*, including courteous service. And the hint of something exotic.

Duty it seemed was never stated. But the three spinster children—Mr. Will, Mr. John (bachelor never seemed an appropriate word) and Mona—stayed and did their duty.

Ethel was sixteen when she began work at *Khans* in 1935. The same age I was when I started. The same age as Mona back then. Ethel and Mona were never really friends. I couldn't imagine Mona ever having a friend. Mona was a shadow. Mona was the backbone of *Khans*. Mona could easily be dismissed as the typical spinster, a thorn in the rose garden of womanhood. Mona had the most beautiful eyelashes this side of a mascara advertisement. Mona wore black. With a rosella red shirt on Fridays. Not a word was ever said against Mona. The shirt was stock that hadn't sold.

There were generations of women who would let no-one but Mona fit their foundation garments. Towards the end of my time at *Khans*, I had to crank up the phone to get through to the house down the road and call her back in to look to the customer's corsetry. Only Mona would do.

A bar heater was kept behind the curtain for the comfort of the matrons during fittings of Liberty undergarments, as extra Lady Ruth corset lace was threaded and adjusted, as bodies were coerced back into respectable, ladylike shape. Our clientele were not of the bra burning brigade, if there ever was one beyond the media circus. At sixteen both Mona and Ethel had started behind the counter and discreetly handled those bodies from which all vanity had gone. The well-worn tools of mothering, the stretched, the swollen, the sucked dry, a few with the proportions of Venus readying for their wedding day, too many lost to the battle with cancer, a scar where self-image was once appended, all begged for magic to be wrought—Trés-Secréte, inflatable bras, padded bras. Twilfit (it will fit) corsetry. And it always did in Mona's hands.

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At sixteen she must have seen what her body would become. Ethel left to have babies, came back, left again. At eighty, the march of time was something Mona was left to understand.

Each morning for the coming years my first duty was the displays: five windows down two sides of the corner, Prune and Fleet streets. Five windows of utilitarian arrangement. The family were not of creative character—their mystery and allure were intrinsic, not of some marketeer's imagination. In one window I got to handle the Kelvin dairy boots, the Sutex swimwear, guardedly to the waist, the Gillett blades, Dresswell collar studs, the whalebone collar supports and all the paraphernalia of men's attire. My only contact with them: Mr. Will lorded over them in his dominion department.

There were then the tablecloths, the vast array of aprons, the upper garments (never undergarments in the window), and last, the hat display to be dusted and returned to the exact angle of coquetry or authority (depending on gender). Some town folk mocked that the window never changed, as I too believed on first introduction—about everything. My friends would ask, laugh, who wore hats these days? Not as many as in the good-old-days, but they'd have been surprised. These old-fashioned hats were regularly new stock. Between race meetings and funerals not too much dust gathered on the merchandise.

There'd been quite a turnover of hats for Mr. John's interment. At the wake—after church, graveyard in the rain, muddy shoes where Kelvin boots would have been handy—the discussion about the stocktake must have begun.

Huge red stocktake sale signs appear in the windows of other shops on, at least, an annual basis. 'Sorry, closed for stocktake' inconvenienced shoppers for an afternoon. At *Khans* it took a week. Ethel could not recall any such assessment of assets during her tenure. Only the family knew what was up those forbidding and forbidden stairs. But not all the family. I started work one week, the stocktake sale started the next as a third brother intruded his interest.

There's always a black sheep in a family. My sister went to Melbourne, did drugs, lived in something less savoury than the streets, became a rare panicked phone call in the night, usual story. In the Khan family they were all pretty much black sheep by our terms, with their obvious darkness of skin and hair, the keeping to themselves, their different religious observances (Christian, but...), and on top of it, their failure to marry, procreate, live in the suburbs, do the right thing. Mr. Gordon was their black sheep by virtue of doing all that. Mr. Gordon had a shop for electrical goods two blocks away, but there was a real sense of desertion. His bedroom at the house in Fleet street was empty, his place in the empire abdicated. Fifty years before he'd been tempted away. He'd walked up the aisle and out of their lives.

It wasn't just Ethel telling me this. Anyone over fifty knew the story. Or thought they did.

Now Mr. Gordon and Margaret came back, three walking sticks between the two of them. He propped the door open for her with one rubber-footed cane, she levered her bulk in, edged across the wooden floorboards and came to rest on a chair, one of the three provided for customers only. (As assistant I had to ask permission to go to the toilet out the back and I would never have been given permission to rest on one of the chairs.)

Margaret, with her blue rimse and well-upholstered frame, of Queen Victoria proportions but paisley disposition, saw everything in the world with her bright, inquisitive eyes. 'Ah, nothing has changed,' she sighed, with immense satisfaction.

'That's Margaret.' Ethel pointed her out in the Debutante photograph at the front of her wedding album. Not the album of her wedding: the album devoted to photographs from all her friends' weddings. Ethel was bridesmaid many times, but this did not, quite contrary to superstition, jeopardise her chances of becoming a bride.

Golden corners held the black and white photographs fast to the page. Golden moments, she told me, held them fast to her memory. Ethel sometimes forgot I was her great-grand niece (I would never have been given the position at *Khans* without such a connection) but she forgot nothing of her youth. My names were legion, or I could receive a blank stare, yet Ethel proceeded to name all seventeen girls in the photograph, Christian, maiden and married names. The seventeen debutantes in their virginal white posed in two straight lines, confident that the person at their side in the next photograph would be mate for life.

Young Margaret stood tall beside her equally tall best friend. Margaret's eyes sparkled, caught within a chemical reaction to light upon a lasting square of card. Mona's eyes were downcast.

After the stocktake, the family was not again together until Mr. Will died so unexpectedly. Ninety years old and never missed a day of work.

Not that I ever complained, but in his time I'd never got to touch the cash register: his machinery of control. Should I sell a crisp lincn tablecloth, disengage it from the wall and wrap it in brown paper and string, should it be a length of bleached calico for the wife to make the family's sheets and underwear, or a hat, a corset, should it be simply a hatpin, a hairnet, or one of a dozen thimbles, I was not trusted with the monetary transaction. 'Change,' I would shout and the customer would look at me with shared embarrassment, or more embarrassingly, pity, as we waited for Mr. Will to appear. I'm sure I could have learnt to use the National Register, still in pounds, shillings and pence—Mona had after Mr. John died. We bought an electric one after Mr. Will's death. No more converting the price to imperial, the change back to decimal. No more satisfying ring and closing bang of a transaction complete.

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The National Register went up the stairs to join the museum to the past that the stocktake had half-uncovered, and then left in peace.

The stocktake was never completed. Cobwebs left to grow over the past had put off close examination for all the initial flurry of boxes disinterred, itemised, categorised, closed and returned to the roof high stacks. I did not understand the fights, neither the things said, nor the things left unsaid. The family spoke English without an accent, they were all born in the hospital on the hill that is now a charming, and expensive, hotel, but an old language was muttered in corners. Mona said nothing. Her bony hands kept busy, counting, counting, counting, tongue clicking as buttons swept into even piles, back into tiny drawers. Her back was bent over hosiery, sutex nylons that 'make lovely legs lovelier,' pure silk hose, seamless or seamed, seemly stockings. Mona could never have been described as voluble; now it was as if she was following my mother's advice. *If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all.*

When Mr. Will, the oldest, the head of the tribe, died, the family had their own maxim to pronounce. They said, and we all agreed: *when an old person dies, a library closes.*

The remaining Khans acted like it was not some municipal branch faltering to a close but another great fire and earthquake destroying the ancient and incomparable Library of Alexandria. Mr. Gordon wept openly at the funeral, propped up by two sons with the looks of Omar Sherif. Mona and Margaret stood side-by-side at the grave, as always unspeaking, in uniform black, as they had in white in their Debutante photograph. The town turned up to watch the spectacle of an era passing. They could see only a shop, albeit a fascinating shop, heading for a closing down sale. But for Mona it was the end of the world. For those who could see it, that edge of despair, so tightly controlled, was frightening to watch.

She tried to keep *Khans* open. Mona pretended to ignore the inevitable and received the travelling salesmen with renewed orders. She even considered vinyl aprons for the first time, ignoring the cotton which was the mainstay for all those customers who did not feel dressed for the day without their apron. Admiration' aprons had been the favourite: 'good enough to wear to the door' ran the ad. I tried to make a joke about all the women appearing at the door in *only* their aprons. Mona didn't laugh. She just might have once.

And there was no more bursting unexpectedly into song. Mona had a fine voice, rarely used, precious when echoing off counters as she snipped and snapped with those foot long scissors. Her joints creaking in the cold was now the only song her old age could sing.

She continued to do her Duty, and I continued in my duties. If the customer was not known, I followed, watching over their shoulders, as Mr. Will had instructed me on my first day. There was no help yourself at *Khans*, and no shoplifting. One day the stranger was from a film company wanting to buy the elegant display models with their kiss-curl

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hair. Mona sent him packing. Stock was for sale, not fittings. No concession was made to an end.

The less Mona said, the more I wanted to know. There was no pleasure left in her work—why would she not let go?

Ethel was letting go. Letting go of the present, retreating further into those golden, silver, ruby memories of better days. She was the proud mother of a newborn, she was crying at her husband's funeral after the (second) war, she was kissing some beau, heating up a casserole in her first electric oven, riding a tram, walking, running, dancing without a frame, without pain.

'Tell me about *Khans*,' I'd say. And she would tell. 'Tell me about Mona.' What could she tell? Spinster Mona selling pretty young things lavender oil and satin undergarments, childless Mona staring at her sister-in-law Margaret suckle her first son, staring, jealous, jealous. Young Mona. Tall, dark, straight, handsome Mona. Laughing.

Laughing upstairs, up the staircase with its carved banister, up above the shop, laughing as they used the storeroom as workroom to finish the dresses for the Debutante ball. They would be coming out together, Mona, Margaret, Ethel, they would be presented to the State Governor in the Mechanics Hall. They would dance longer than Cinderella.

Ethel dashed down to a call for assistance from Mr. John, good looking Mr. John. Maybe he would dance with her on Saturday night. She came back up the stairs, quietly, in her dream, stood on the threshold, saw Mona and Margaret, two angels in white standing close. Did not enter. Did not avert her eyes. Margaret cupped Mona's left hand in her own, brought it to her lips, and kissed. Kissed, each finger in turn, butterfly kisses, a sucking for sweet nectar, a gentle moment, a murmur, a sigh. She returned her friend's hand to the curve, exposed by a plunging neckline, between her breasts.

Ethel sighed then, and she sighed in the present, here with me. They looked beautiful she said: Margaret as always, Mona with a blush to her usually sallow cheeks. Mona was composed, the future contained by force of will, like a rose bud, layers and layers of petals folded in on themselves, tight, loosening, about to bloom in the wakening sun. The sunshine of Margaret's smile fell into every corner of the room before she returned a line of pins to her mouth and busied herself with the hem of Mona's dress. Ethel pushed her way through the electricity in the room.

But of course, I cannot have remembered that, Ethel murmured deep in her chair. Oh no, that never happened. Silly, silly me. Margaret married Gordon. He kissed her overlong in the church and the congregation tittered.

Ethel continued on without pause, with more stories, many stories, but the memory is selective in its workings and I could only remember that one.

I looked again at the photograph from the Debutante ball. Mona's dress had no plunging neckline. An insert of heavy lace veiled her skin and choked about her neck. She could not look the camera in the eye.

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Khans now opens two days a week, until the stock is gone. The fittings are also for sale.

Mona's health declined in stages, from coming in late in the mornings, to skipped days, to bedridden inactivity. She talked in the end. Endless talk of empires and caravans, and silk routes and riches, and princesses, beautiful princesses locked in stately citadels. The fairytales of her youth, the stories at her mother's knee, recapturing her.

She was still my employer, whether in the shop or at her bedside with simple nursing. I divided my time between *Khans* and the house on Fleet street, number 93, the one hidden behind dense foliage. For this family there were no immaculate lawns and tortured camellias, edged and pruned through many a long spare hour. In the dim past a garden was planted, all the more foreign for it being of natives: gums and bottlebrush and wattle. It grew to conceal the home from passing, prying eyes.

I had to pry. I had to ask many things, answers to be taken back to *Khans*. Like the meaning of the strange Arabian looking symbols on the price tags. They were a code to record cost price, but were they a link also to the past, a reminder of the old world? How could I interpret them? She taught me the code. But it did not tell me what I really wanted to know.

In the end she said only, 'Thank you.' Her head lay on a white cotton pillowcase, skeletal, grey hair bound up, dark eyelashes resting on her cheeks forever. She was a withered rose bud, preserved without ever having bloomed.

I like to think she was thanking me for not asking what she couldn't answer.

Ethel died the same week. My libraries closed. History is left to legend.

On the two days a week, at opening time, the faithful arrive to buy the hopelessly old-fashioned and unmarketable corsetry, and the other odds and ends of an era gone. They despair at where the supply will now come from, as they play with the scissors tied securely to the counter top, spin the roll of brown paper, touch all the things they'd never dared under the eyes of Mr. Will, Mr. John and Mona.

They ask, what will happen now? They ask, why does it have to end? They don't really believe it will as they peer up the staircase and ask, what's up there, can't we see, just this once?

They poke about collecting information about *Khans*, this memorial to Duty. Where temptation was cast out there has grown something so tempting. They try to pin it down with facts, to better mourn its passing. But we will never know.

جائين داوونينغ

Jane Downing has had short fiction and poetry published in journals over the last ten years. A short story collection *Searching for the Volcano* was published by four W press in 1999 and her first novel, *The Trickster* was published by Pandanus Books (ANU) in 2003.

G R E G B O G A E R T S

*Two Stories***Le Moulin de la Galette**

It is near the end of winter and the windmill turns slowly because ice forms on the cogs and wheels of its machinery. It groans like an old man in pain, its wood and stone construction shivers like a child lost in snow. Grinding of grain is an effort for the windmill at Galette, it has stood longer than any of the villagers can remember. Shadows cast by its sails have always turned across the houses and cottages of the town.

As the sails turn down the snow slides from them because the sails revolve so slowly and the snow is so heavily falling, the arms collect a light blanket of white with every tortured revolution. The soft clump of the snow falling on snow is perpetual. It is the last thing the villagers hear before they sink into slumber at night.

Children play a game of dare, standing beneath the windmill sails waiting for the next fall of snow and running at the last second. Usually they manage to avoid the slip of snow as it slides from the arm coming down towards them. But sometimes a child is too slow, gets caught in the heavy drifts of snow and the snow from the windmill catches them, soaks them, freezes them to the bone.

Other children laugh but it is no laughing matter because the snow is so cold it is as though the suffering child is being burned by flame and more than one child has perished from fever caused by the snow dropped from the windmill on them. Some mothers pass the windmill when they go out to shop and these women cross themselves, shiver with fear as the shadows of the windmill slash their faces to white and black as they remember the death of one of their children.

Madame Vert stands near the wine shop on one corner of the main square of the town. She averts her eyes from the windmill, which stands across the square at the back of the wine shop. Madame Vert is waiting for the shop to open so she can fill a small metal bucket with the cheap red wine she buys for a few francs from the wine merchant.

Her neighbours grin at her when they pass her standing out the front of the shop. They think she is drinking early in the morning, a respectable, church going woman anxious to fill her pail with wine and down a glass as soon as possible. Only some of her tattle tale neighbours know that the wine is for her husband who has consumption. A heavy draught of red wine is the only way he can warm himself. Even when he sits closely to the open fire in the grate, Pierre Vert cannot get warm.

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He coughs from morning to night and sometimes through the night. The red wine is a temporary fire that meanders through his veins, stops him coughing for a little while giving his wife some peace as she goes about cleaning the cottage, making sure her children are fed and scrubbed and sent on their way to school.

She takes the girl and boy part of the way to school when she goes out to purchase the wine for her husband. Annie and Frank dart away from her, disappear across the town square to avoid the embarrassment of being seen with their mother out the front of the wine merchant's so early in the day.

Their mother watches them dash across the cobblestones of the square and she sees the shadows of the windmill pass over their thin forms. She sees her son and daughter emerge from the sea of moving shadows, cast by the windmill, onto the far pavement and disappear down an ally that leads to the school playground.



Le Moulin de la Galette. Vincent van Gogh 1886.

Behind her, sitting on a wooden seat, three or four people wait with her for the shop to open. They are ragged men and women who come briefly from alleys and lanes to buy some wine. They do not dally in the daylight but disappear as soon as they've

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purchased their cheap wine. It is rare to see them during the day. Shame and pride keep them hidden in holes in the walls of the serpentine alleys and lanes of Galette.

Madame Vert shivers when she looks at them because she knows just how close she is to becoming one of them, just how close the wolf has come to her door howling in the night keeping her awake for hours with worry.

Her husband had to give up his job at the windmill helping with the bagging of the grain when he became sick and since then the francs have been few and far between in the Vert household. Only Madame's grim determination has kept body and soul together and the roof of the cottage still above their heads.

She takes in washing from anyone in the town who will give it to her and her reputation has spread, a reputation for clean and well-ironed clothes and underthings. Madame spends most of her life washing and sponging the stains and dirt of the well to do from their clothes. And with the job goes the particular smell when her parlour is full of the steam from the black metal iron she heats on a steel plate placed on the grate above the fire. It is a smell that arises from the clothes and underthings even though Madame has scrubbed and pounded them clean. It is the smell of those stains and dirt still in the fabrics, an odour that hangs permanently in the air of the parlour, the rest of the house.

Madame can smell it in bed as her husband tosses and turns and coughs. It is as though that quiet stench makes the condition of her husband worse, as though the odour gets into his lungs and plays havoc there worse than the cold of winter. Pierre Vert wakes many times during the night and tells her of the same nightmare he always has. The dream of the mill owner he used to work for coming with a cane basket full of soiled clothing and Madame washing it clean then ironing it but the fumes so thick Pierre chokes to death where he stands in the parlour in the dream.

Indeed, in waking reality, the mill owner is Madame Vert's best customer. He has a spoiled wife who wears two or three dresses each day and changes her undergarments regularly and he has three noisy daughters, who are slavishly devoted to their mother in everything, especially in habits of dress and fashion.

The mill owner sends some of his maids with baskets full of soiled clothing and linen. There is so much Madame Vert's parlour looks as though it has been buried under tainted snow. It takes her days to wash, dry and iron all of these garments. Below the floor of the parlour she slaves over a copper fuelled by a wood fire, the clothes and linen turn over and over in the boiling water. Like planets turning in a dirty sky thinks Madame sometimes and viciously pushes a load down into the hot water with a wooden paddle.

The wine merchant, brother of the windmill owner, opens his door and Madame is the first in the door and the first at the counter. She presents him with the metal pail and the francs she places on the counter. He grins a set of black teeth at her; his breath is garlic and death. Madame watches as he turns the tap and the red wine froths up the

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sides of the container. He turns off the tap and Madame places her hand over the francs on the counter and looks him in the eye. He smirks at her, turns back on the tap and fills the pail to the place where it should be filled for the money Madame now releases from under her hand to him.

Madame leaves and walks quickly back to her cottage where her husband is waiting for her. She can hear his coughing before she enters the dwelling, a cough as sharp as a darning needle the way it cuts into the mind of the woman. Going to him by the fire, she pours the wine into a glass and hands it to him; no words, just the small sound of the man sipping the young and vinegary red wine.

Silence reigns, the woman slumps into the lumpy parlour chair and closes her eyes. Around her is a snow dump of clothes and linen waiting to be attended to. High in the sky, above the cottage, the arms of the windmill squeal like a child being tortured.

Montmartre

It is freezing. Jean-Louis sits hunched over a bench trying to keep warm but the snow falls on Montmartre without respite. It makes a blue and white blanket on the heights of Montmartre. Any sound is eaten by the dense covering. As Jean-Louis sits he tries to fathom what some of the other people are saying as they walk along the narrow avenue their shoes and boots causing the snow squeal and squeak. But their words are lost in the fall of snow and it's as though Jean-Louis is in another city in another country, not Paris, France, not Montmartre where he was born and grew up in one of the white stone houses shackled into the side of the steep hill.

Glancing sideways, Jean-Louis sees the railing and between the metal posts he can see the trellises built to take the vines that will run through the wooden latticework in spring. He sees the tight buds like hard steel ball bearings and Jean-Louis cannot imagine the pink and yellow flowers unfolding from them. It seems impossible to him that anything will ever live again in the sombre landscape of Montmartre.

He looks out over the city but there is little there he can discern because the winter fires have spun a thick blanket of brown that hides the houses and buildings from view. Here and there a church spire pricks the smoke, an occasional tall building struggles through the smoky muck. Voices that would normally rise from the flat lands of the city to the heights of Montmartre are hushed as though something has happened to embarrass the whole population of Paris, to keep them indoors because they are too ashamed to show their faces in public.

But that's not true, it's what Jean-Louis likes to imagine, it's something he'd like to

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see, the population of Paris with their heads bowed walking along the cobblestones not one of them daring to raise his or her head to look him in the eye. But the man at the bench knows it is as much him to blame for the situation as it is his fellow citizens, he cannot hold them solely responsible even though he would like to.

Placing his hands in front of him he looks at the gnarled knots of tissue and the bone, like a warped ghost beneath the flesh. His hands are speckled with different coloured paint and he laughs because he thinks the paint on his hands is a better work of art than the canvas he left behind in his studio when he couldn't take any more and dismissed the woman modelling for him for the day. He stalked off into the snowdrifts cluttering Rachael Avenue.

He went into the graveyard at the end of the avenue and laughed because he felt he belonged there and no where else in the city.

'The place of the dead,' thinks Jean-Louis now as a man and a woman pass him sitting at the bench and look at him with some idle curiosity.

'Piss off!' he tells them.

They scurry away leaving shallow tracks like mouse tracks in the snow. The painter has no time for the idly curious, the tourists looking for freaks to witness and take the tales back with them across the English Channel to their musty parlours and rank drawing rooms filled with musty vicars and rank acquaintances.



Montmartre. Vincent van Gogh 1886.

It took him a long time to leave the graveyard of Montmartre, indeed, he lay on one of the slabs of stone for a long time with the snow falling on him freezing him slowly, numbing the pain of these recent months of futile work. Higher the line of snow grew on him covering him, obliterating his features, with only his open eyes burning through the white shroud.

Only the street urchins, sharp of claw and tooth, rampaging through the cemetery, roused the painter and he took to his heels because he knew what his fate would be if they caught him alone. He'd seen men and women stripped bare of clothing and possessions and a knife slid in between two ribs, the body left like refuse on a street with the Parisians stepping around it as if it did not exist.

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He kept running and did not stop until he reached the heights of Montmartre, his spare frame quivering with excitement and despair. The man wondering whether it would have been better to give himself up to the rabble of street urchins rather than raise himself every morning to go to work on the canvas. Trying to commit the naked female body in paint and failing day after day; a pile of ruined works in one corner of the studio next to his bed.

Jean-Louis is in dire straits because not only has his ability to paint deserted him, but he is also penniless. It is three days since he has eaten and he wonders where he can find a meal today. He has exhausted all friends and acquaintances. There isn't a bowl of soup or a crust of bread to be had from anyone he knows in Monmartre. They're all sick of the sight of him and keep their doors locked when he comes knocking. It disgusts him and he holds every Parisian responsible, he tars them all with the same brush he uses to tar his friends who will not feed him or give him a franc for food.

He is at the end of his tether. There seems no point in trying to paint when he's lost his muse or whatever it is that sometimes, a long time ago it seems now, creates a form on canvas that seems worth beholding. And he's too weak from hunger to keep on trying.

But, on impulse, half-mad with hunger, he leaps up and begins to build a snowman, a final gesture from childhood before he lies down in the snowdrifts to become one of the many Parisians who perish every winter. Higher the figure rises and it isn't a snowman but a beautiful and cold woman, the breasts, the hips, the thighs seductive even to the creator. Jean-Louis finishes the woman and he knows she is as perfect as he can manage, imperfect in her coldness but she will stand there until spring comes and she melts.

Behind him, Jean-Louis hears a small commotion and the words 'bravo' and 'well done' cutting the cold air like burning arrows. He turns to see the small throng admiring his snow woman, hands dig into purses and pockets and francs are placed in his paint-spattered hands.

غريغ بوغارتس

Greg Bogaerts is a writer from Newcastle, Australia. He has had many short stories published in journals, magazines and anthologies in Australia and America. Many of his stories have been read on radio, and some translated into Arabic. The above two stories are inspired by paintings by Vincent van Gogh.

L. E. SCOTT

**Black Family Letters
from Boston**

**Black Woman White Woman –
some women swallow and
some women don't**

It's me

I have told you this before and I am telling you again – 'cause some folks just don't get it on the first go-round. I have been Black all my natural life. The food I eat, the dreams I dream, the hurts I hurt, the clothes I wear come from all of that, the way I comb my hair comes from all of that, and the people I open my legs for come from all of that. I have never sexually moaned for any man who didn't look like my father – and don't play the fool and take that out of context.

You were married to a woman who didn't look like your Mama. I'm not playing the fool with that either – she was outside the context of what made you. You left the neighbourhood and made your bed elsewhere. So when your house caught fire, I'm not sure what kind of escape plan you and M had for that human fire. The old folks will tell you these kinds of fires usually start in the bedroom or the kitchen. I don't know where to start with you and M, 'cause I don't know where the fire started for you and her.

There was something I wanted to tell you in my last letter but with one thing and another I forgot. A friend of mine, Betty – I've worked with her for years on the night shift but we have never been to each other's house (ain't that something to note about human behaviour). Well, she told me about her brother who lost his wife to cancer. For years – even to now – he has read all the love letters and notes she wrote to him every night until the wee hours of the morning. I understand it, but that's a long time to stay in the graveyard after the funeral. At some point you just have to close the lid to the coffin and let people go.

I wanted to tell you that because the older I get the more I trust my first mind, and it told me you needed to be told that. That's an aside, as they say, to the main reason for my letter.

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When you married M (Let me say this and get it out of the way: your ex now, no matter how much you still feel married to her. But if it makes you breathe better I will call her your wife. Need I say this ain't no healthy shit!) I worked through in my own way that she was a white woman. Maybe not United States of America-made white but she didn't favour your Mama, nor your sisters, nor any other women in this family. So she didn't look like us, didn't talk like us, didn't walk like us, didn't smell like us, didn't pain like us, didn't squat like us – and all the other things that go with being Ebony. Sometimes people baptise hurt with hurt, but I didn't want to go there. At the end I thought, if this woman is what he wants, makes him happy, I have enough love for him to want him to be that... happy? No. This ain't no altruism, this is about you and me, Mister. Bathe in it as you wish...

I know that you have known women of different shades and different behaviours. I've been a woman too long to say bad women and good women, because what shapes a woman and what she be depend on what happens to her after she leaves her mother's womb. I don't know what M's mother's womb was like or what happened to her after she left her mother's womb. You have told me things, but I have known you long enough now to know you don't know so much about a woman's womb, let alone what shapes her. You can play the fool with that too if you want – but I hope you don't. So much spins around with you it's hard sometimes to tell which face you're living in. I worry that you may leave this world and never have known love. Family love is one thing. If I was a witch-doctor I would shake your bones before death rots you.

And speaking of rotting flesh, and my habit of collecting graffiti, check this out:

blood is blood
and each man's skin
will rot in its own fashion
saturday and sunday come dressed
in the same clothes
and people loving god
ain't got a whole lot to do
for whom they take their clothes off

So what does graffiti have to do with M leaving you? Nothing! Other than that life sometimes comes down to what's written on a wall somewhere by somebody who didn't even know you were in the world.

But Dear One, what it does have something to do with is that you asked me to write to your 'wife' – M – and plead your case for forgiveness and to be taken back. Take all my blood, why don't you. You put yourself in my court and with that go some other things about you and me... Just so that you know. 'Cause you have a way of slipping into dead memory when it suits you. I've never been a subscriber to participating in

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other people's self-conspiracy delusions. I refuse to ride that horse.

So Sweet One, when you asked me to write to M I hope you knew what you asked, because I didn't and won't skip over any of your shadows.

This is what I wrote to her:

Dear M

Before he came here, J had explained to me that there was a rift between you and him. Now I have the letter from you confirming it. I hadn't expected any contact or explanation from you. I'm grateful that you reached out to me.

I'm responding woman to woman from both my head and my heart. I understand your anguish and your consternation and I applaud your courage.

If you are living with a partner who only views your life together through cataracts and hears your pleas through a tin ear, then out of desperation drastic means are needed – short of murder and maiming. He must see the light! He must hear the wake-up call! If he doesn't, then he is obtuse and hopeless. I've used the 'o' word more than once to his face in describing his level of development in human affairs.

I think you've kicked him upstairs and he may be just about ready to graduate. You've decided to remove yourself from J. I'm sure it must have been one of the most difficult decisions you've had to find a way through. If you're like me and other women in similar circumstances, you've probably washed your face with tears more times than the hours that live in a clock.

I feel certain that you love him as much as he loves you, but I understand that the price of love (or convenience for that matter) can be too high if it has an adverse effect on your being – body/mind/soul. I view love as a double-edged sword. It can be exhilarating and fulfilling and it can be devastating and depressing almost in the same touch. Only the individual can decide which element is kissing them at any given time – and the price to be paid.

M, I've been 'momna/sis' to J for more years than I can remember. First met him when he was around 10 or 12. I forget which at the moment. I've been a loyal friend and a staunch ally. We've adopted each other. Sometimes even I don't understand him, or what it is that has been between us all these years. He has a certain element in his core that is unfathomable. When I delve in there I can't identify it. What I think I see is not what I get. Sometimes we relate quite well, think alike, agree, have fun. Other times we clash, bounce apart for a while, then magnetize back.

Although the old would say 'I wouldn't take nothing' for my journey, I want to give you a summary of my take on "the nature of the beast" – fondly spoken, of course.

He is complex. Owns and has earned positive and negative qualities. Oddly enough, some of the positives work against him and some of the negatives work for him.

He is the consummate, ultimate survivalist. Somewhat a rogue, somewhat a con artist. Charming, witty, good company – and at the same time he has the need to be a bit

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of an imp. He is very capable of being a Jack the Ripper with other people's emotions.

Yet the opposite is also true of him in many ways and he frequently exhibits more acceptable patterns. Loyal, sensitive, caring, gentle, expressive. Quite astute. Also industrious, focussed and persistent. Genuinely amiable. J has no lack of admirable traits and I'm sure you've discovered these during your brief marriage to him.

As for you, I see an attractive, literate, compassionate, thoroughly modern, assertive young woman. You can soar on your own with or without J's wings. I quietly hope that both of you can resolve this dilemma to the advantage of each and rekindle whatever love is left there waiting for you.

I think you'll laugh at this. I needed to talk to J via our usual confidential chats to find out what was in his head concerning this situation with you. No simple task. Breathe deeply. Count to ten. 'Come on J, level with me.' Bite my tongue. Endure the sarcasms. 'Hey J, it's me - I'm not the enemy.' I'm thinking, 'Hey fella, my marriage ain't at stake. Yours sure is. I'm at the funeral but it ain't me in the coffin.'

You may visualise the dialogue. He has told me what he thinks you think and I've read your letter more than once. Trying to put myself in your shoes. I feel sorry for both of you. More so you than him. I'm sure neither of you wants that. But that's the way I am. Of course, neither of you had to tell me anything. Believe me, I realize that.

M, it's difficult to be brief with all of this because I'm unloading plenty and heaping it on you. Please bear with me. There are several truths that J is now admitting verbally and consciously. Before you dropped the bombshell on him he mostly kept all that on a subterranean level so his comfort zone was undisturbed.

Because you have left him, he has come to grips with his own need for counselling. A giant leap forward on his part. He is also recognizing that he has never made you feel that you are the main priority in his life. That even his love seemed rather abstract to you on a daily, real basis.

J now admits that he can be and has been a very selfish person. He tells me that you don't believe he can change the core of his personality, which is totally wrapped around his own needs. (I call it self-infused.) He wants to convince me, and more importantly you, that it took the fear of losing you to bring about an honest assessment of his personal approach to life.

He wants to change for several reasons, some of which are:

- 1) He has failed you and has not been there for spontaneous moments celebrating your love.
- 2) Knowing he has hurt the person who is always in his corner, guarding his back, watching his perimeters and just trying to love him in spite of his blindness.
- 3) The overwhelming fear of losing you as his partner.
- 4) You've referred to him as "the dinosaur" and all that it implies.

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He has some apprehensions, which are:

- 1) You may not believe he has the ability to change.
- 2) These unbearable circumstances may have gone too far for too long.
- 3) Since he has fostered hurt and mistrust, you may not be able to move beyond that.

So M, if there is a tiny scrap of love left, you will find it yourself. If there is a bridge leading back then both of you will find it and use it.

Don't feel that you have to respond to this. I'm content to let it lie where it is. I, more than most people, understand the need for occasional distance and space. They help to heal the soul until we gain another perspective. Sometimes I too guard them with tenacity.

In closing, M, I say to you, the Morning Sun does come...

J, that is the letter I wrote your 'wife'. I'm not sure if I said enough or too much, or if I should have said anything at all. But it is done now. I won't swim in this water for you again. I have always told you the truth as I know it and I tell you now, it is hard to sleep in a dream when daylight comes. I could tell you that love learns to live with pain and memory will find a way to sleep with it. Sometimes people baptise hurt with hurt, and every new day is a funeral. Like the graffiti said:

so many dreams
so many winter nights
and folks walking around
like silent movies

In closing, J, I say to you, the Morning Sun does come.

لويس إي. سكوت

Lewis E. Scott is an African-American writer, poet and editor who made New Zealand his home. He is *Kalimat's* adviser for New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

This is another one of a new series of "Black Family Letters From Boston". The stories in the series cover a wide range of subjects that may be loosely grouped under the heading "the Black American experience" and explore the relationships between family members and the way in which their lives are affected by their struggle in and with white America.

L. E. SCOTT

The Inaugural Wellington International Poetry Festival

In October 2003 the first Wellington International Poetry Festival launched itself on the world with an array of poets from 30 countries. The seeds for the birth of this festival were many and its “mission statement” proclaimed that its aims were:

- To create an annual international literary forum with the emphasis on poetry in the city of Wellington.
- To present an event that celebrates individual, ethnic and cultural diversity through the fostering of poetic-philosophic appreciation and sensibility.
- To raise the profile, readership and appreciation of poetry in the New Zealand, Pacific Rim and international communities.

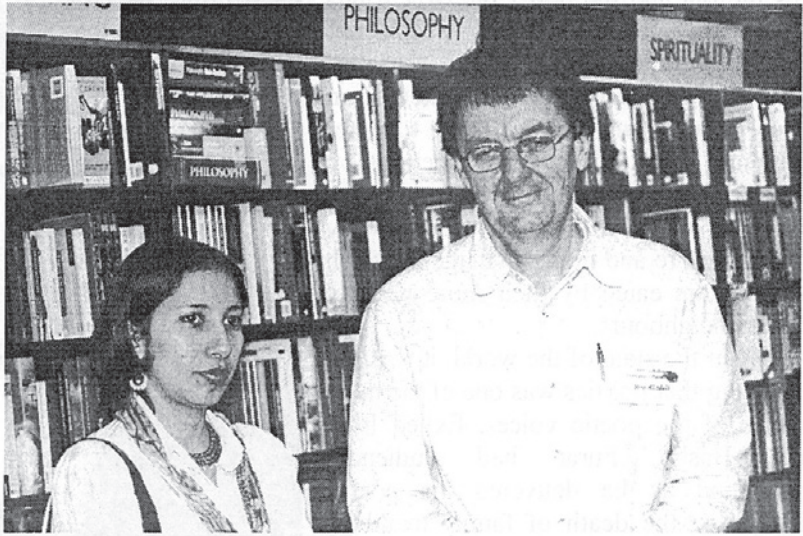
Threatening to undermine the success of those aims somewhat is the reality that Aotearoa/New Zealand is like other places when it comes to the games that are played in the literary community. Those games play out according to the following “rules”: one or two poets are seen as the gatekeepers and one or two magazines are seen as the magazines to be published in. And the “chosen” poets and magazines have a great deal of influence over which “other” poets get in “the circle”. Couple the Festival’s aims with the above and you have the backdrop against which the inaugural Wellington International Poetry Festival introduced poets from Spain, Ethiopia, Turkey, Peru, Chile, USA, China, Iraq, Cook Islands, and Cyprus, to name just a few of the 30 countries represented.

The Festival was the brainchild of New Zealand poet Ron Riddell and his wife, Colombian poet Saray Torres. Their inspiration for the event came from their association with the world’s biggest poetry festival, the International Festival of Poetry held annually in Medellin, Colombia, which draws audiences of up to 150,000. Speaking of the brainchild Ron says, ‘The poetry festival of Wellington similarly can become a treasure of the city and shine its light nationally and internationally in the way Medellin festival does. This will attract media attention from many sources and further enhance Wellington’s standing as Aotearoa/New Zealand’s cultural capital. It will also expose Wellington audiences to a wide range of poets from all over the world, providing in-depth insights into countries and cultures not commonly heard of in

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Aotearoa/New Zealand.’ Saray adds, ‘In short, the fundamental aim is to extend the boundaries of poetry; to push them into new and challenging areas. There is no large-scale international poetry festival in the English speaking world (apart from the Montreal Festival, which occurs in a bi-lingual context). There is a “window of opportunity” for Wellington to fill this gap and fill it handsomely.’

Saray Torres
and
Ron Riddell



Pushing the boundaries was indeed what the first Wellington International Poetry Festival was about. Turkish poet Trkay Ilicak not only read powerful political poems about humankind’s struggle against injustice; as an additional element he played a traditional stringed instrument and talked about the role of traditional music in his culture.

Alison Wong, a Wellington-based Chinese poet/writer and recently a Robert Burns Fellow at Otago University, read poems about and talked about the experiences of Chinese people from their arrival in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the 1800’s to the present. Traditionally the Chinese community has been reluctant to speak or write about the daily racism they had to endure. Alison Wong represents a growing number of Chinese New Zealanders who are speaking out for the generations who lived in silence.

Dean Hapeta/D Word/Te Kupu brought the indigenous voice of Aotearoa/New Zealand to the Festival. Te Kupu is a well-known and respected young Maori poet/rapper/musician/film maker. He recently travelled to Cuba, Mexico, USA, and other countries in Latin America making a documentary about hip-hop rappers and learning about the struggle people of colour in that part of the world are waging for justice and freedom. Te Kupu says it was the music of people like Bob Marley and Gil Scott Heron that led him to the words of Malcolm X and the Black Panthers – and from

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that point on he has sought ways to make his art work to liberate those who are suffering at the hand of oppressors.

From Spain came the poet Puri Alvarez, who read her poems in Spanish and English and shared with her listeners how the old and the new ('the twin winds of change') in her country shape her poetry. She also spoke of the sense of fellowship gained when poets/writers from different lands and cultures come together and share in art form their reflections on humankind's struggle to shape its world – a world that with each passing day becomes more and more a village in which the poor are eaten by their more wealthy western neighbours.

Given the state of the world, it was not surprising that politics was one of the main themes of the poetic voices. Exiled Iraqi poet Basim Furat had audiences spellbound as he delivered his poems about loss, the death of family members and friends and living in a land he was not born in. He spoke of his longing to return home and his hope that he may soon be able to fulfil that dream.



Puri Alvarez

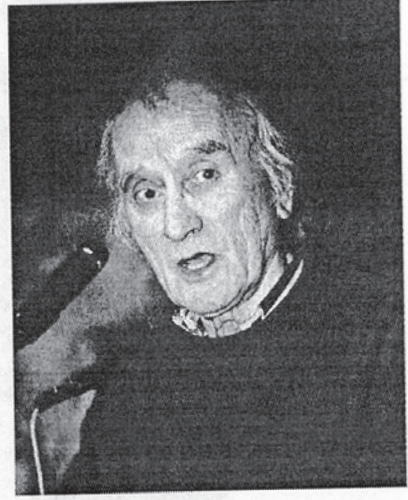
Another exiled poet, Rolando Olmedo from Chile, used words and music to express the loss his people felt when the hand of the CIA backed the coup that overthrew the democratically elected President, Salvador Allende, and the death and devastation that gripped his country for years under the dictator General Augusto Pinochet. Rolando made it clear that he believes the poet has a duty not to let the world sleep in the face of evil acts by evil men.

Ron and Saray wanted the Festival to showcase some of Aotearoa/New Zealand's new and emerging poets and one of those was Mark Pirie. Mark is a young New Zealand poet, not yet 30 years old, but already he has published more than six poetry collections and is the co-founder of JAAM magazine, a publication that presents the work of both established and emerging poets, which he started while still at university. And if that is not enough, he has also established HeadworX Publishers, a small but

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significant voice in the literary landscape.

The Patron-Poet of the Festival was the award winning poet Alistair Campbell, who hails from the Cook Islands. In his remarks at the Festival's opening ceremony, he praised Ron and Saray for their achievement in gathering together poets from 30 countries and making their vision a reality. He underlined their belief in the power of words to both reflect and change the human condition – and he charged that the duty and the role of the poet is to make his/her words powerful and true.



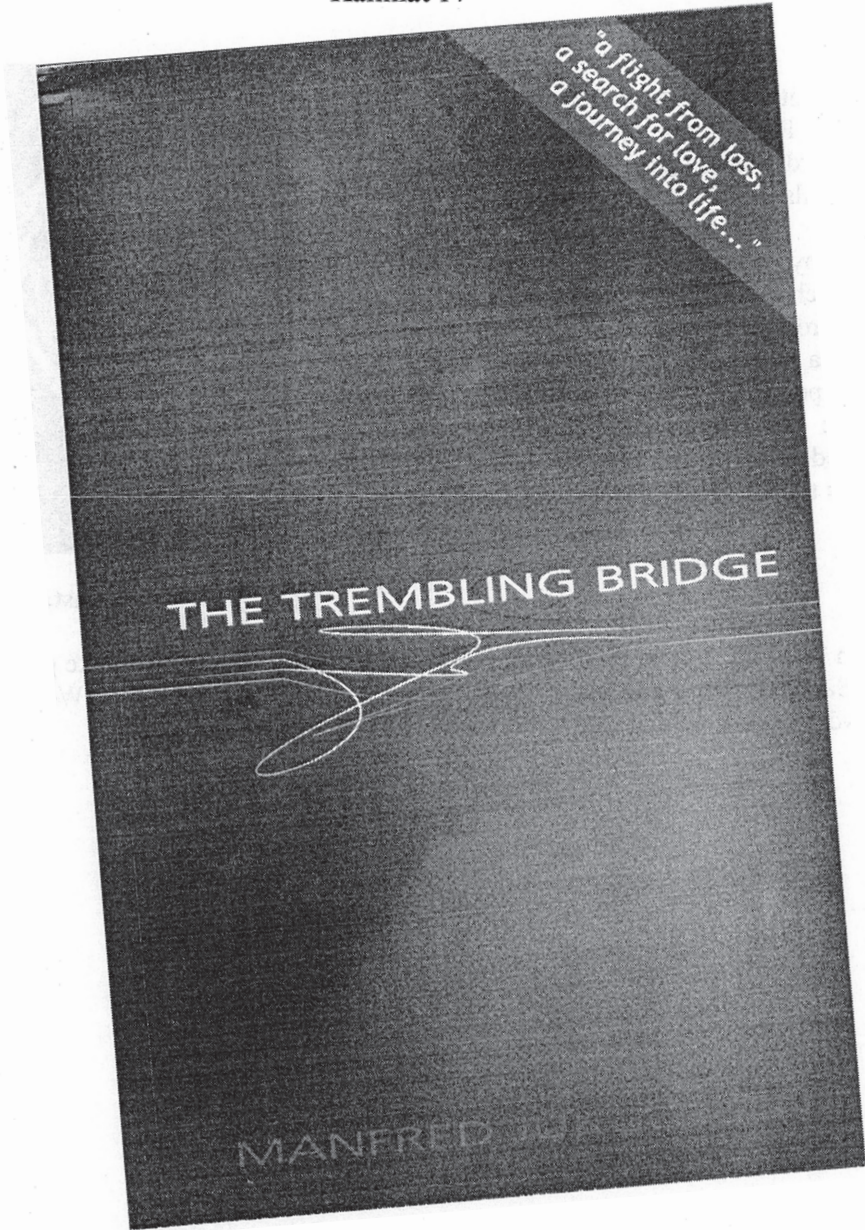
Alistair Campbell

In 2004 the second Wellington International Poetry Festival will take place and Ron and Saray are hoping to make it even bigger and better than the first. We, the poets of the world, celebrate that wonderful vision.

لويس إي. سكوت

Lewis E. Scott is an African-American writer, poet and editor who made New Zealand his home. He is *Kalimat's* adviser for New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

B A L S A M I C



This 'novel deals with the turmoils of adolescence in post-war Europe and a young man's coming of age in Melbourne. Offering an "outside" look at Australia in the sixties, it tells, above all, a moving story of self-discovery and love.'

كلمات

Kalimat

تهدف كَلِمَات إلى الاحتفاء بالإبداع وتعزيز النواصل الثقافية بين الناطقين بالإنكليزية والناطقين بالعربية، وهي مجلة ذات نفع عام، ولا تسعى إلى الربح. يصدر منها عددان باللغة الإنكليزية كل عام (مارس/أذار وسبتمبر/أيلول)، وعدنان بالعربية (يونيو/حزيران وديسمبر/كانون الأول).

ترحب كَلِمَات بكل المساهمات الخلاقة، وترجو المساهمين إرسال أعمالهم قبل أربعة أشهر على الأقل من موعد صدور العدد الذي يمكن لموادهم أن تنشر فيه، مع إرفاقها بالعناوين ووسائل الاتصال كاملة، بما في ذلك أرقام الهواتف، ونسخة عن السيرة الذاتية للمؤلف/المؤلفة، أو بضعه أسطر تلخص منجزاته/منجزاتها.

تنشر كَلِمَات النثر والشعر والدراسات والقصة والفنون باللغة العربية أو الإنكليزية وفق طريقتين أساسين:
أولاً - المواد الأصلية التي لم يسبق نشرها مطلقاً بأية لغة.

ثانياً - المواد المترجمة، أو التي يتقدم بها المؤلف لتقوم كَلِمَات بترجمتها. وهذه يجب أن تكون منشورة سابقاً بلغتها الأصلية، ولم تسبق ترجمتها. وتقدم كَلِمَات خدمة الترجمة مجاناً للنين تقبل أعمالهم. (الأعمال التي تأتي مترجمة سلفاً قد يتوفر لها حظ أكبر بالنشر نظراً لضغط العمل لدينا.) يجب تزويدنا بالمرجع الذي تم النشر فيه، بما في ذلك اسم الناشر، والسنة، ورقم المجلد، والعدد في حال الدوريات. جميع المواد المقدمة للنشر تخضع لتقييم قبل قبولها.

يحصل المتقدمون بأعمالهم الأصلية إلى كَلِمَات على الأفضلية في إمكانية ترجمة أعمالهم لاحقاً ونشرها في كَلِمَات أو مشاريع أخرى يبنهاها الناشر. كما يتلقى من نشر في كَلِمَات نسخة مجانية من العدد الذي تنشر فيه مادته. وتحتنر كَلِمَات عن تقييم أية تعويضات أخرى.

الأسعار والاشتراك للأفراد (باندولار الأسترالي)

سعر العدد \$20 ضمن أستراليا ونيوزيلندا، أو \$40 بالبريد الجوي إلى أي مكان
الاشتراك السنوي (4 أعداد) \$60 ضمن أستراليا ونيوزيلندا، أو \$120 بالبريد الجوي إلى أي مكان.
(نصف القيمة للاشتراك بإحدى اللغتين فقط.)

للمنظمات والمؤسسات والمصالح التجارية ضعف القيم أعلاه في كل حالة

الإعلانات: نصف صفحة \$100، صفحة كاملة \$200

ترسل كافة الدفعات من خارج أستراليا بحوالة مصرفية بالعملة الأسترالية ويحضر الشك باسم Kalimat

الموازرة (الرعاية المادية)

مفتوحة للمنظمات والأفراد الذين يؤمنون بأهمية الرسالة الحضارية والجمالية للمجلة، مع العلم أنها لا تتحول من يقدمها وضع أية شروط على كَلِمَات، أو الحصول على أية حقوق أو مزايا، بما في ذلك أفضلية النشر.

تبدأ الموازرة للأفراد بمبلغ \$400 سنوياً، وللمنظمات والأعمال بمبلغ \$2000 سنوياً. ويحصل مقدم الرعاية على اشتراك مجاني لسنة الرعاية، كما يحق له الإعلان مجاناً مرة واحدة في السنة.

المراسلات والاشتراكات إلى العنوان التالي: P.O. Box 242, Cherrybrook, NSW 2126, Australia.

An image from an installation from

Before Began, 2003

Soraya Asmar

(See page 69)

