

## Landscape Representations in Palestinian Art and Israeli Art Discourse: The Case of Asim Abu Shaqra

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Someone had to move the cactus to a flowerpot. Someone had to shake us all up and tell us: It's over and done with; that there is no way back from here, not to the map nor to the land; that, instead, we are to stay on the windowsill, a foreground for the painted clouds that do not stir or vanish or rain; that only in this way is memory kept: you take the past and condense it into a brush stroke, you take the three-dimensional thorn and memorialize it in a painting, you take the homeland landscape and turn it into a practical image that is easy to carry around.

No one had thought of this before:

here's the homeland, hanging on the wall.

That it is possible to go on only like this.

That now it is possible to go on.

Anton Shammas<sup>1</sup>

In this article I survey the historical shift and ongoing transformation of the Israeli discourse on landscape representations in Palestinian art as illustrated by the case of Asim Abu Shaqra (1961–1990) and his artwork. Abu Shaqra is one of the very few Palestinian artists to have entered the canon of Israeli art. After graduating in 1986 from the Kalisher Art Academy in Tel Aviv, Abu Shaqra had his first solo exhibition in 1988, at the Rap Gallery in Tel Aviv. Over the two subsequent years—until his premature death from cancer in 1990 at the age of twenty-nine—he had three more solo exhibitions and participated in four group exhibitions. In 1994, four years after his death, a comprehensive

retrospective exhibition of his work was presented at Tel Aviv Museum's Helena Rubinstein Pavilion.

At the center of his artistic oeuvre is the image of the potted sabra, which became his signature as an Arab Palestinian artist with a distinctive aesthetic grammar. Alongside his potted-sabra works, Abu Shaqra painted a completely different series of works: large-scale canvases featuring sabra hedges. To the image of muted nature—the potted sabra, tamed, domesticated, confined—Abu Shaqra juxtaposed the image of the verdant, proliferating, menacing, and boundless Palestinian thicket.

Discourse on Abu Shaqra's oeuvre, from the very beginning of his activity in the 1980s to this day, reflects the historical transformations that the field of art production in Israel has undergone in relation to the work of Arab Palestinian artists who graduated from Israeli art schools. Abu Shaqra's 1994 retrospective exhibition—which took place in the wake of the dramatic period that began with the outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987 and ended with the Oslo Accords in the early 1990s—marked a historical turning point in the discourse on Palestinian art created in Israel. The rise of a public debate over the nature of Palestinian identity, made possible by the peace process and the Oslo Accords, included a process (still unfolding today) of growing recognition of the Palestinian culture created in Israel. This recognition has generated a significant shift in the interpretive templates governing the reception of landscape representations in the work of these Palestinian artists.

To help place Asim Abu Shaqra's landscape representations in the context of this broader framework of Palestinian art, his work will be juxtaposed with that of Asad Azi (b. 1955) and Ibrahim Nubani (b. 1962). All three artists won recognition in the 1980s and were active in the framework of major museums and galleries at the very heart of Israel's art scene. In his seminal discussion of landscape representations in the artwork of Palestinian citizens of Israel, Palestinian art scholar Kamal Boullata contends that the land has come to occupy center stage in the artwork of the avant-garde of Arab artists in Israel, their oeuvre engaging natural elements of the locality and indicating the significance of the Palestinians' intimate connection to their land.<sup>2</sup> In the same vein the landscape paintings of Azi, Nubani, and Abu Shaqra—created in the 1980s against the backdrop of the 1987 outbreak of the first Intifada—manifest a deep affinity to the country's landscapes and to the historical and cultural heritage of the Palestinian minority in Israel.

In this article I examine four milestones in the work of these three artists. The first, the exhibition "Territories of Color," presented the work of Azi and Nubani

and was displayed at the sixth Venice Biennale (1986). The second was Abu Shaqra's first solo exhibition, which was held in the Rap Gallery in 1988 (curated by Eitan Hillel). The third, Abu Shaqra's 1994 retrospective exhibition, took place at the Tel Aviv Museum. The fourth was the 2009 exhibition "Men in the Sun" at the Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art (curated by Tal Ben Zvi and Hanna Farah-Kufer Biri'm), which presented Abu Shaqra's work as part of the artistic oeuvre of thirteen Palestinian artists, citizens of Israel, with a view to tracing the characteristics of and influences upon the Palestinian visual culture created in Israel.

My analysis of landscape representations is underpinned by an understanding of landscape paintings as a "medium" rather than a genre. I concur with W. J. T. Mitchell's unequivocal statement that

landscape is not a genre of art but . . . a medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other. . . . Landscape is a social hieroglyph . . . a natural scene mediated by culture . . . both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package. . . . Landscape is a medium found in all cultures.<sup>3</sup>

In the context of a cultural space such as Palestinian culture in Israel, Mitchell's insight that landscape functions as more than a mere noun acquires special significance. Landscape is not a mere object to be observed or a text to be read but is an active participant in the process by which social and individual identities are formed. The gaze cast upon these real or imagined landscapes plays an active role (whether consciously or unconsciously) in giving, producing, and converting meanings within the social relations of a society.<sup>4</sup> In this sense real landscapes are no different from those represented in works of art, film, literature, or music. Their import derives from the way they shape the self-understanding of people and the system of social relations that construct their individual lives.<sup>5</sup> This identity crystallizes through an ongoing process of construction, becoming, and reconstruction in which one's identity and that of one's group are defined as "natural," "normal," and "correct," while those of the other are defined as unnatural, perverted, and erroneous.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the naturalization of landscape paintings renders the unmediated experience of looking at the painting parallel to the experience of looking at the landscape itself. Enjoyment of landscape is associated with what is perceived as its beauty, power, and picturesqueness, and the adjective "picturesque" already indicates an overlap between the landscape and its painting. Hence the naturalization process often renders the loading of meanings onto the landscape so imperceptible as to make it difficult to discern its great impact on our lives and worldview.<sup>7</sup>

In the context of intergroup relations, landscape conveys messages that not only reflect but also produce the power relations between identities.<sup>8</sup> The act of creating, altering, or shaping real and imagined landscapes is a political act created by a certain mode and angle of vision and by the framing and highlighting (or elision) of certain elements in the landscape. In this way the naturalization of landscape representations and the claim that they are immutable are harnessed in the service of essentializing identities.<sup>9</sup> Hence, in the context of Palestinian or (Eretz-)Israeli landscape and its representation in the framework of visual art created in Israel/Palestine, the production and politicization of landscape is of great import. These images are situated at the intersection of several cultural-political fields that display interactions and complex (and often problematic) power relations. On the one hand, the Palestinian artists discussed in this article are graduates of Israeli art schools; on the other hand, landscape depictions are also found in the work of Eretz-Israeli and Israeli artists. In both cases it is the same landscape, that of the country lying between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

Tina Sherwell, a scholar of Palestinian culture, points to the central place occupied (unsurprisingly) by landscape in the work of both Palestinian and Israeli/Eretz-Israeli artists, and the important role played by literature, the performing arts, film, and the visual arts in mobilizing landscape for nationalist purposes and in consolidating and expressing national identity in both societies.<sup>10</sup> Gannit Ankori also addresses the clear affinities between landscape representations in contemporary Palestinian painting and in early Israeli/Eretz-Israeli painting. In her view these representations embody (in both cases) a combination of the artists' personal impulse to portray their environment and the ideological pressure to cement the connection to the soil of the homeland. Since in both cases the same tract of land is depicted, the characteristic vegetation is identical—above all, the strongly expressive olive tree.<sup>11</sup> Given that these two sets of artworks were created within the framework of two competing narratives serving the respective national agendas of each side, it is particularly interesting to examine the way in which Israel's (mostly Jewish) art criticism reads these landscape representations by Palestinian artists.

The focus of these Palestinian artists on landscape representations bestows on their work the status of what Pierre Nora has called *lieux de mémoire* and inducts it into the "symbolic repertoire" of their community.<sup>12</sup> Based on this assumption, I argue that these landscape paintings may be interpreted as articulating a connection to the Palestine that was lost and hence, directly or obliquely, to the Palestinian Nakba of 1948. This interpretation broadens the range of discursive possibilities in relation to these paintings within the framework of Israel's art field. It also deepens

our understanding of the transformation in this discourse from the 1980s to the present, suggesting that the transformation is not just about Palestinian landscape representation as a signifier of national identity but also about the way in which this landscape represents a formative historical event in the construction of Palestinian nationality.

#### Turning Point

As an artist of the 1980s, Abu Shaqra's period of activity came in between those of two groups of Palestinian artists, citizens of Israel, who began working during two completely different periods in the history of Israel's Palestinian minority. The first, older generation comprises about twenty painters and sculptors who were born into the period of military rule over the Palestinian minority (1948–1966) and who studied art in Israel and abroad in the 1970s and 1980s. The second, younger generation began its activity in the mid-1990s, following the Oslo Accords, and today includes more than two hundred graduates of Israeli art schools.

Because of the stifling conditions that prevailed after 1948, it was only later that the field of Palestinian plastic art began to emerge. The above-mentioned older generation of artists, active since the 1970s, exemplifies the mode of activity of Palestinians working simultaneously in the Israeli and Palestinian art fields. Owing to the absence of Israeli recognition of Palestinian identity, these artists were defined—until as recently as the 1990s—as “Arab-Israeli” artists, and it is under this category that some of the latter were included, both domestically and abroad, in group exhibitions of Israeli art. This is how Ibrahim Nubani and Asad Azi, for example, exhibited their work in the Israeli pavilion at the sixth Venice Biennale.

Yet the outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987 and the onset of the peace process in 1993 marked a turning point. The discourse on Abu Shaqra's work epitomizes this transformation, for his work has won widespread recognition by the major Israeli art critics. Consider the following historical development: in a number of reviews of the work he exhibited in the Rap Gallery in 1988, Abu Shaqra is dubbed an “Arab” or “Arab-Israeli” artist, and the same label appears in a 1990 article about his work by Sarit Shapira; but in a catalog published by the Tel Aviv Museum in 1994 on the occasion of Abu Shaqra's posthumous solo exhibition, we find the appellations “Arab-Israeli Muslim” and “Arab-Palestinian-Israeli.”<sup>13</sup>

This transformation—stemming in part from the changing awareness of these artists regarding the complexity of their identity—was gradual, reaching its climax after the Oslo Accords and especially after the fiftieth anniversary of the Nakba in

1998.<sup>14</sup> The 1990s witnessed a considerable rise in the number of Arab students in Israeli art academies, universities, and art colleges. This growing presence has generated increased representation of Palestinian artists in the Israeli art field and consolidated a distinctive art field of the Palestinian minority in Israel comprising exhibition spaces in Arab towns and villages in Israel.<sup>15</sup>

At this time the signing of the Oslo Accords and the political process that aimed to establish a Palestinian nation-state on the basis of the Palestinian Authority were highly charged events for the Palestinian minority in Israel. The discussion involved possible solutions for two major Palestinian groups—the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and the Palestinians of the diaspora—yet the future status of the Palestinian citizens of Israel was utterly absent from the discussion. Similarly, in the framework of the events marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Nakba, the refugee question and the right of return occupied center stage, but the concept of the Nakba as it is understood by the Palestinian minority in Israel was still largely absent from the various documentation and commemoration projects as well as from Palestinian public discourse.

Following the October 2000 outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada and the bloody events that occurred during demonstrations in northern Israel in which thirteen Palestinian citizens of Israel were killed, the issues on the agenda of the Palestinians living in Israel became more sharply focused. On the one hand, there was a civil struggle for equal rights and status as citizens of Israel and for recognition of their distinctive identity within Israel; on the other hand, there was a demand for recognition by the Palestinian people to which they belong. The internalization of this two-pronged system of civil belonging on the one hand and national identity on the other led them to abandon their assigned identification as *Arab-Israeli* and replace it with the category of *Palestinian citizens of Israel*.

In the years 2006–2007, four “visionary” documents were published regarding the future of these citizens.<sup>16</sup> In each of these documents, we find a recurrence of the claim that the Palestinian public space within the 1948 borders has been robbed of its history: hence the demand for recognition of the Nakba—that is, of the historical narrative and catastrophe of the Palestinian people. The debate about their distinctive historical narrative in Israel reached its apex in the 2008 events marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Nakba and brought about a radical transformation in Palestinian, Israeli, and international art discourse with respect to contemporary Palestinian art created in Israel.

Territories of Color: Asad Azi and Ibrahim Nubani

Abu Shaqra's artistic activity began while he was studying at the Kalisher Art Academy from 1982 to 1986. During this period only two Arab artists—Asad Azi and Ibrahim Nubani—were active in the mainstream of Israeli art. The prominence of these two artists culminated in their selection for the exhibition "Territories of Color," curated by Yona Fischer, in the Israeli Pavilion at the 1986 Venice Biennale.<sup>17</sup> In a contemporary press announcement, it was stated that the exhibition would deal with the topic of "color in the Orient" and that Fischer consented to curate it on condition that it include "non-Jewish Israeli" artists.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, many reactions to the selection of artists for the Israeli pavilion addressed the fact that Azi, as he stated in an interview, was "the first non-Jewish artist to represent the State of Israel at the Venice Biennale."<sup>19</sup>

In this exhibition Azi presented, for the first time, his series of fisherman paintings: seascapes with the figure of a lone fisherman at their center. Ibrahim Nubani presented abstract landscape paintings of a village with buildings marked by geometrical shapes and crosses. The understanding that these are "landscape paintings" is crucial for the interpretation and analysis of Asim Abu Shaqra's works, which present the image of the sabra in a pot and as a thicket. (These images will be discussed in detail below, in the section dealing with Abu Shaqra).

Asad Azi (born in Shefa-ʿAmr in 1955) completed a bachelor's degree in art at Haifa University in 1976 and a master's degree at Tel Aviv University in 1981. He teaches at the Beit Berl School of Art and has been living and working in Jaffa for the past thirty years.<sup>20</sup> As already noted, in the exhibition "Territories of Color" he presented his landscape paintings for the first time: the series of fishermen as local landscape.

In the exhibition text Yona Fischer notes that the Mediterranean light is known for its distinct intensity; it has posed many difficulties for painters such as Delacroix and Cézanne with respect to capturing not only colors but also form. With respect to Azi's work, Fischer observes that

the dependence of color upon form is fundamentally emotional in Asad Azi's paintings, and may be defined in terms of an instinctive distinction between two basic elements in his work. The first is rooted in the popular-Oriental culture which is his culture. The second is constructed through the experience of Western culture.<sup>21</sup>

Fischer's mid-1980s interpretation entails a clear depoliticization of Azi's work, dissolving the Arab Palestinian culture in which Azi works into the vagueness of "popular-Oriental" culture. Moreover, the focus on color as the basis of locality



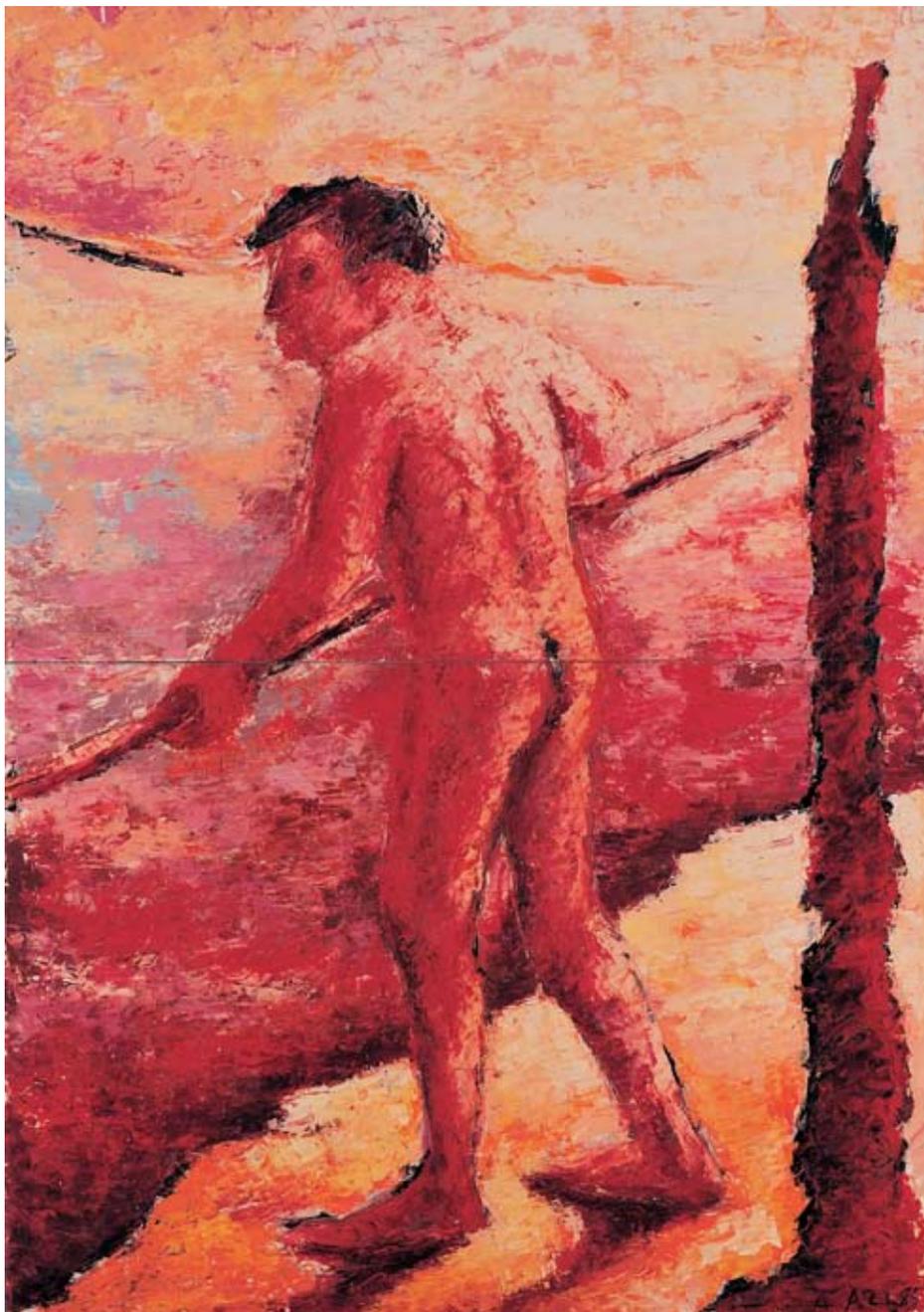
**Figure 1.** Asad Azi, Purple Fisherman, 1985, oil on paper, 100/140 cm.

distances the discussion from the fisherman motif and, more generally, from the sea and harbor landscapes in Azi's work.

The fisherman series was created between 1981 and 1985 when Azi was already living in Jaffa. The image of the fisherman has been widespread in Palestinian art from its very inception.<sup>22</sup> The major Arab cities—Acre, Haifa, and Jaffa—were fishing centers, and this image, much like that of the sabra, expresses patience and endurance, symbolizing the continuity of Palestinian everyday life in the coastal cities after the Nakba. The metaphor of the fisherman not only expresses continuity but is also a testimony to and a reminder of the fishing boats that carried thousands of destitute Palestinians from these port cities to refugee camps in Saida and Beirut. In one of our conversations, Azi told me that embedding himself among the fishermen of Jaffa afforded him, inter alia, an Arabic-speaking environment of a kind he had trouble finding since leaving his hometown of Shefa-ʿAmr. The Jaffa landscape, laden as it is with Palestinian history, in this sense constitutes a haven of Arabic-speaking culture.

“Purple Fisherman” (fig. 1), painted in 1985, presents a lone fisherman surrounded by waves in shades of dark gray and purple. The earth drops from under

© Asad Azi



**Figure 2.** Asad Azi, *Fisherman in Profile*, 1985, oil on paper, 100/140 cm.

his feet, and he looks as if he is standing on the water. In Azi's 1985 "Fisherman in Profile" (fig. 2), a solitary, naked, and vulnerable fisherman stands on the pier. The sea is rendered in bold red, which gives it the semblance of a river of blood. In his hands the fisherman holds a fishing rod that looks like a tightrope walker's pole, as if he is trying to maintain his balance in the turbulent water. The sense of vulnerability is intensified in the 1985 work "Fisherman" (fig. 3), where the fisherman stands on a *hasake* (a kind of surfboard used, inter alia, by fishermen), old-looking, white-haired, and naked. The fishing rod figures in this work as a very short pole held in both his hands, very close to the end of the pole, to prevent him from falling into the water.

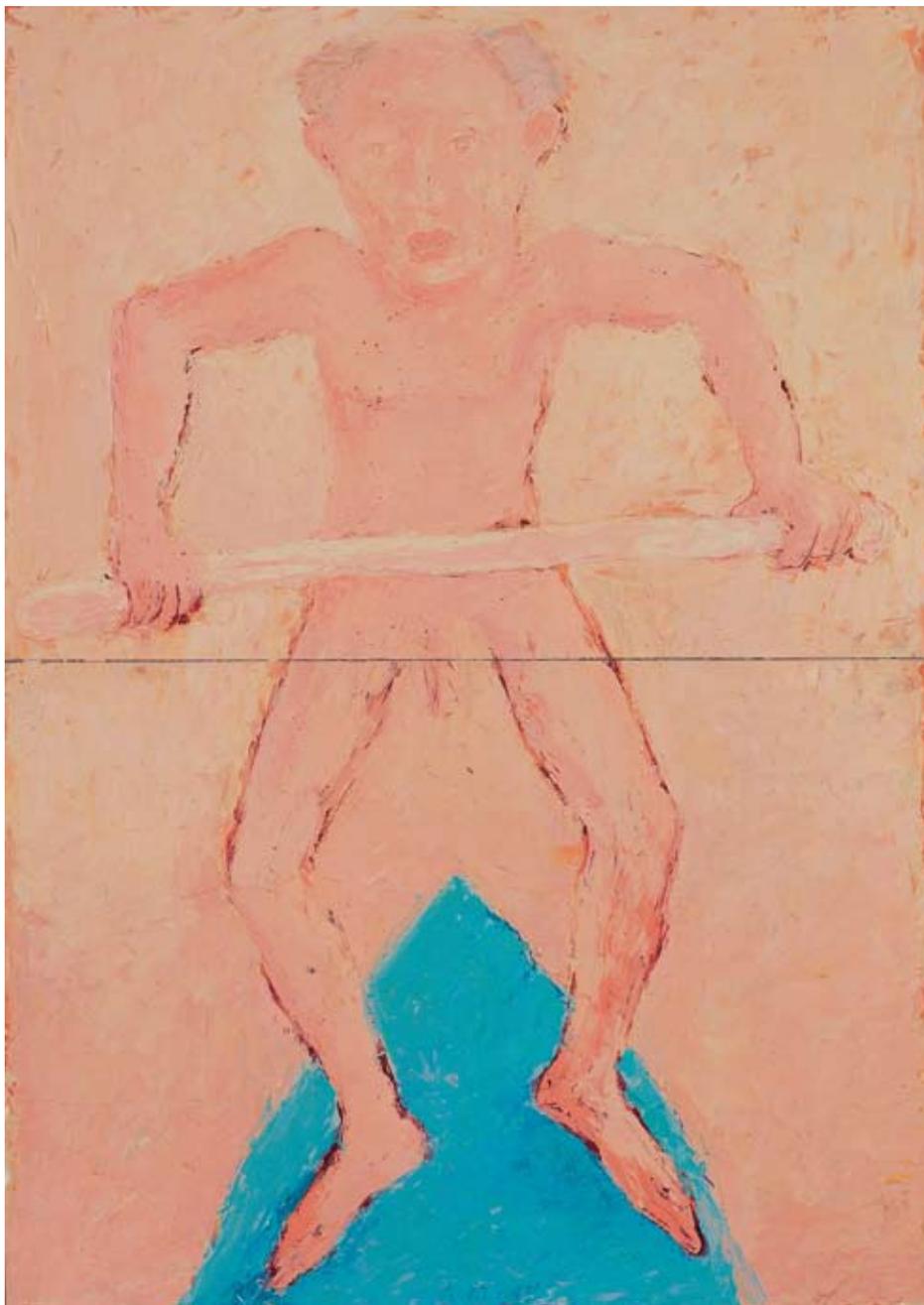
In Azi's fisherman paintings the sea is not a secure space but rather an expressive one threatening to swallow the solitary, naked, fragile human figure. Tension is created in the paintings between the image of fishing as a tranquil activity—a source of livelihood and an arena signifying Arab identity and a yearning for days gone by—and the sense of almost falling into the water and the ensuing helplessness. The fact that these works were painted during a period of political tension, following the first Lebanon War of 1982 and before the first Intifada, sharpens the tension between the illusory semblance of tranquility and the sense of falling; it seems that the masculinity marked in the fisherman's nakedness does not translate itself to some form of power or control capable of altering his fate. The figure ends up being fixed in a composition of frozen violence.

Critical discussion of Azi's work has focused on the tension between East and West and on the influence of Azi's Arab Druze identity on the themes and colors of his oeuvre. The connection to the Orient figured prominently in the endeavors of the Rega group in which Azi was active during the 1980s. In 1987 Azi displayed the fisherman paintings in a Rega group exhibition at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (the participants were Avishay Eyal, Asad Azi, David Wakstein, and Yoram Kupermintz), curated by Yigal Tzalmona. A review of the exhibition in *Ha'aretz* maintains that

the dominant feature common to all four seems to be a yearning for the Orient, which stems from deep roots in the land and the locality, as well as a deployment of certain elements of Oriental aesthetics and motifs emanating from a primal and mythological mode of being.<sup>23</sup>

With respect to his artistic influences, Azi recounted the following in an interview with Haim Maor:

Ever since the fisherman painting series, I have been inventing my own definitions for my paintings. I don't need to take into account a tradition of "what has been

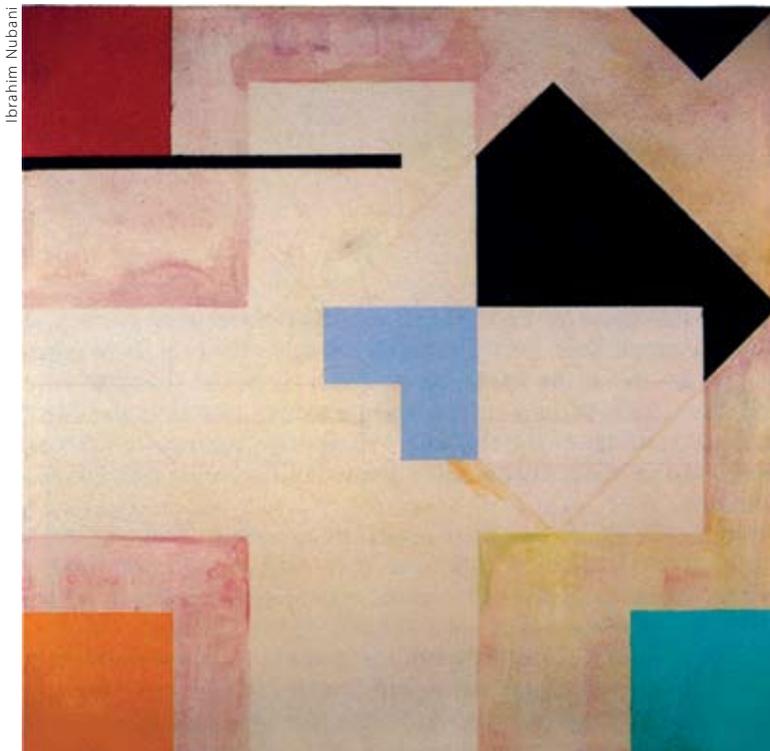


**Figure 3.** Asad Azi, Fisherman, 1985, oil on paper, 100/140cm.

done” and “what mustn’t be done.” It is not a freedom of my own choice, but within the context of a given situation. I act outside the framework of the tradition of Israeli culture. I feel as if I am in no-man’s-land. On the one hand, “New Horizons” [an Israeli artists’ group] doesn’t mean much to me; and on the other hand, classical Muslim painting doesn’t interest me. So I pitched my tent in no-man’s-land.<sup>24</sup>

In this no-man’s-land, Azi situates himself as a refugee in a tent, far removed from the terrain of Israeli art. The traumatic landscape in Azi’s work is partly abstract, lacking clear local markers; it is a background engaged in dialogue with the human figure situated within it, reflecting the latter’s emotional tumult.

Abstract landscape as posttraumatic space also appears in the works Ibrahim Nubani displayed in the “Territories of Color” exhibition. Nubani was born to a displaced Palestinian family in Acre in 1961 and grew up in the village of Makr. In 1984 he graduated from the art department at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem, and two years later he participated in the “Territories of Color”



**Figure 4.** Ibrahim Nubani, Untitled, 1984 oil on canvas, 80/80cm.

Ibrahim Nubani



**Figure 5.** Ibrahim Nubani, *The Cemetery*, 1988, oil on canvas, 200/150 cm.

exhibition. He too was treated by Yona Fischer in the exhibition text in terms of a binary system composed of two fundamentally separate pillars of East and West:

The organization of shapes belongs to the tradition of Western painting—that which is learned in the Academy—whereas the colors are related to the East. . . . Painting no. 25 [fig. 4] displays at its center an intersection of white, black, and purple; we have already pointed out these colors’ uniqueness in the Oriental conception of color. In the corners of the painting, squares in red, yellow-orange, turquoise-green and nearly-black blue represent a deviation from the pure spectrum colors; and it seems that this deviation, too, is rooted in the Oriental conception of color.<sup>25</sup>

Whereas Fischer associates the essence of the Orient with a “deviation from pure spectrum colors,” it seems that Nubani’s conception of locality is based on a tension between different painting languages, which intensifies the sense of structural impermanence emanating from the works. This tension between colorful, geometrical shapes, painted in solid colors, and the more expressively, monochromatically painted pictorial space recurs in all of his works from the 1980s.

Consider, for example, “The Cemetery” (fig. 5), painted in 1988, about a year after the outbreak of the first Intifada. The brown-framed painting looks like a gaping hole at which we are gazing from above. The surface of the painting eliminates the skyline, and sky-blue and earth-brown are inverted. At the center of the painting, a cypress tree of sorts floats in space, apparently marking the cemetery’s boundaries, its branches symbolizing eternal life, mourning, and lamentation. On the muddy surface three geometrical elements signifying gravestones are demarcated in shiny oil colors: an orange square bounded by a black contour, a yellow square, and a red circle—signifiers floating, like the cypress tree, in a muddy, expressive, pictorial cul-de-sac.

The sense of entrapment and enclosure conveyed by the composition is exacerbated in works painted after the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada. Efrat Livni pinpoints this turning point in Nubani’s work:

The events of October 2000 and the al-Aqsa Intifada caught Nubani in his village studio, immersed in his artistic world, and they immediately and abruptly barged into his life and work. . . . The ensuing events of the fledgling Intifada in the Territories, coupled with the grim outcome of the fighting in Jenin [between Palestinian and Israeli forces], transported Nubani from a feeling of disappointment and despair to a feeling of rage looking for an expressive outlet.<sup>26</sup>

These feelings, Livni claims, were translated in Nubani’s work to an expressionist abstraction embodying stormy states of smashing and total chaos, into which the spectrum of colors and the unique symbolist lexicon of shapes were assimilated.

During these same years, Nubani experienced a severe mental crisis to which he referred in several interviews he gave to Israeli newspapers, linking this crisis to his Palestinian identity. Concrete references to the Intifada, to Palestinian identity, and to the tension between the Arab village and his life in Tel Aviv are repeated in a number of his interviews spanning more than fifteen years: in advance of exhibitions at the Rap and Dvir Galleries (1988), the Chelouche Gallery (1991), and his 2004 retrospective solo exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum (curator: Efrat Livni).

In an interview with Dalia Karpel for *Ha’aretz*, Nubani explains his detachment from Israeli culture and his return to the village of Makr and the years he spent there following his mental collapse:

Only today do I understand, with all the pain it involves, that Israeli culture does not cultivate Palestinian artists, it only cultivates its own artists; I realized that I don’t belong and that I am a provisional guest. . . . When I collapsed, the whole of Tel Aviv knew that Nubani was finished, but no one knew what I was going through

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**Figure 6.** Asim Abu Shaqra, Sabra 1, 1988.

inside. I was defined by the doctors as having suffered an attack of schizophrenia. I didn't fit in with reality. The illusion that I was born in Israel as a member of a minority but also as an equal citizen who can achieve anything was shattered. Instead of looking for myself as an artist, I was forced to look for myself as a Palestinian Arab.<sup>27</sup>

The above-mentioned works by Asad Azi and Ibrahim Nubani won exposure and critical attention in the Israeli art world in the mid-1980s. Interpretations of these works stressed their conception of the Orient against the backdrop of Nubani's Arab identity and Azi's Druze identity, with Palestinian culture receiving hardly any attention. Similarly, most of the interviews that Hezi Laskali, Dalia Karpel, and others held with the artists during this period dealt with the tension between the Arab village and the artistic activity taking place in the city of Tel Aviv.

#### The Potted Sabra

Abu Shaqra's work was exhibited for the first time in 1988 against the backdrop of this art discourse. Approximately two years after the exhibition "Territories of Color," Abu Shaqra had a solo exhibition at the Rap Gallery in Tel Aviv. The exhibition combined the potted-sabra series with works on large canvases featuring sabra hedges. In the more than ten potted-sabra paintings presented in this exhibition, the same composition is repeated in oil on paper and in uniform size: 80 x 120 cm. At the center of the paper we find a sabra plant growing in a pot set against different backgrounds. The 1988 painting "Sabra 1" (fig. 6) features fleshy, mustard brown sabra leaves emerging out of a dark pot against the background of what looks like the frame of a window or a door. In "Sabra 2," also painted in 1988 (fig. 7), the sabra is planted in a white pot next to a wall; the painting is monochromatic, except for the pot and the radiant red flower blooming on one of the leaves. In "Sabra, City in Background" (fig. 8), painted the same year, the dark, mostly monochromatic coloring repeats itself, but here the brightly lit windows of one of the city's multistory buildings stand out in the background.

The sabra cactus is one of the major symbols of the Palestinian Nakba, marking the borders of the ruined Palestinian villages to this very day;<sup>28</sup> the sabra, which survives under almost any circumstances, is conceived as a plant that refuses to die.<sup>29</sup> During the British Mandate, sabra cactuses dominated the Palestinian landscape and popular culture. After 1948, and especially during the 1960s and 1970s, the sabra is mentioned in Palestinian poetry as one of the markers of the homeland's landscape, alongside the olive, oak, and almond trees, among others.<sup>30</sup> But the sabra image

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**Figure 7.** Asim Abu Shaqra, Sabra 2, 1988.

was to stand out more prominently and more politically within Palestinian culture after the Oslo Accords (1993), with the reawakening of the debate surrounding the right of return and the emergence of a body of literature documenting the ruined villages.<sup>31</sup>

Proprietorship over the sabra image is also claimed by the Zionist ethos, which regards the native Jew as replete with positive ethical and aesthetic attributes, as opposed to the diasporic immigrant and the native Arab.<sup>32</sup> Viewed against this backdrop it is perhaps precisely Abu Shaqra's focus on the image of the sabra that created the conditions for his acceptance into the Israeli artistic milieu. In any case, due to his exceptional status (at least during the period discussed in this study), it is particularly interesting to examine the discourse that developed around his work in the publications of Israeli writers.

In a review of Abu Shaqra's first solo exhibition at the Rap Gallery, critic Kobi Harel writes the following in an article titled "Asim Abu Shaqra: Israeli Sabra":

Asim presents pictorial variations on the sabra bush. His consistent preoccupation with the sabra puts into relief a problem of ambivalent identity. On the one hand, the sabra is *tavnit nof moladeto* ("cast in the mold of the landscape of his homeland") and as such is in every respect qualified to represent it. On the other hand, Abu Shaqra does not belong to the group of "our sweet and prickly sabras" of *Davar la-yeladim*, of *Hasamba*, and of *Ha'aretz shelanu* [classic Zionist children's publications]; hence, he is dealing with a borrowed identity. In the exhibition at the Ramat Gan Museum, Asad Azi grappled with a formal, bureaucratic aspect of this problem, painting self-portraits on a page taken from an Israeli ID card. Ibrahim Nubani tries to combine geometrical shapes patently belonging to Western painting with Arabesque motifs. Who, then, is the Arab sabra?<sup>33</sup>

Since the late 1980s the question as to the origin of the sabra image has recurred in much of the discourse about Abu Shaqra's work, but at this early stage the discourse focused on a discussion of Arabness, with the word "Palestinian" remaining practically unmentioned in articles and reviews about the exhibition. In June 1989, about a year after his first solo exhibition, another solo exhibition of Abu Shaqra's work opened at the Rap Gallery as the artist was undergoing treatment for cancer. In an interview that took place with Ronit Matalon prior to the opening, he recounts:

After the [onset of the] illness everything changed. Everything I believed in became marginalized. . . . I've always been interested in this bush, the sabra. First of all, it came with me from the village, I can mark out a place using this bush. . . . It has a very pretty blossom. The tenderness of the flower and the harshness of the leaves

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**Figure 8.** Asim Abu Shaqra, Sabra, City in Background, 1988.

themselves. It's got survival strength, this plant, it can live for many years even though it can be very easily injured: all of its fluids can be taken out of it with one long scratch on its leaf. There is also a social contradiction related to it, a double identity. It belongs to me, the village boy, and it also belongs to the Jew who was born here. I'm not a "sabra," this sabra growing in the yard is not me.<sup>34</sup>

The sabra, in its Israeli sense of the native endowed with rights, is not me, claims Abu Shaqra. About half a year later, the Rap Gallery closed. In the closing exhibition of November 1989, Ibrahim Nubani and Asim Abu Shaqra exhibited together. At the time of the gallery's closing, Abu Shaqra was hospitalized for medical treatment. In April 1990 Abu Shaqra died of cancer; he was twenty-nine years old.

#### The Shadow of Foreignness

Abu Shaqra's work stirred up a debate over the image of the sabra in Israeli culture and over questions of cultural appropriation and ownership of this image. In 1994, four years after his death, Tel Aviv Museum's Helena Rubinstein Pavilion hosted a comprehensive retrospective exhibition of Abu Shaqra's work. The exhibition catalog included two extensive articles on his oeuvre. In "The Passion of Asim Abu Shaqra,"<sup>35</sup> by exhibition curator Ellen Ginton, Abu Shaqra is presented as an "Arab-Israeli Muslim" artist. At the center of Ginton's interpretation is the relation to death and the use of Christian motifs of crucifixion and thorns in contexts of resurrection. Abu Shaqra's uniqueness, Ginton maintains, is his ability

to substitute the sabra plant for the charged symbol of the cross. . . . What is the tragic topic that found its expression in the image of death injected by Abu Shaqra into the sabra plant? Is it the national-Palestinian issue? Is it his life as a stranger within Israeli society? Or is it his own death, so painfully premature? Is the image directed simultaneously at all of the above?<sup>36</sup>

Whereas in Ginton's article the issue of the relation to Palestinian identity remains open, Tali Tamir's "The Shadow of Foreignness: On the Paintings of Asim Abu Shaqra" points out for the first time the robust connection of the artist's work to Palestinian identity and to Palestinian painting: "Any discussion of Abu Shaqra's painting," she writes, "must take into account his complex identity as Arab-Palestinian-Israeli."<sup>37</sup> Tamir, citing Kamal Boullata regarding the Palestinian ethos associated with the sabra as a symbol of tolerance and perseverance, and juxtaposing it with the ethos associated with the sabra in Israeli Zionist culture, argues that these Palestinian meanings endow Abu Shaqra's image of the sabra with a more

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**Figure 9.** Asim Abu-Shaqra, Untitled, 1988, oil on paper, 210/900cm.

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**Figure 10.** Asim Abu-Shaqra, Sabra, 1988, oil on paper, 334/190cm.

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**Figure 11.** Asim Abu-Shaqra, Sabra, 1988, oil on paper, 300/140cm.

political significance than is usually attributed to it. Tamir argues, furthermore, that the prioritization of Israeli proprietorship over the image of the sabra on the basis of claims to “originality”—as proposed by Sarit Shapira in yet another article on Abu Shaqra’s work—turns out to be erroneous when the origins of the image in Palestinian culture are examined.

The question as to the origin of the sabra image became a principled one following the Tel Aviv Museum’s decision to host, parallel to Abu Shaqra’s exhibition, a group exhibition displayed at the lower level of the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion under the title “Sabras in Israeli Art, 1910–1990”—an exhibition from museum and private collections, accompanying Asim Abu Shaqra’s exhibition. This unusual decision drew much criticism in the printed press:

Parallel to Abu Shaqra’s exhibition, an exhibition of Jewish Israeli artists also dealing with the sabra is on display in the basement (the subconscious) of the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion. Participating in the exhibition are Naftali Bezem, Nahum Gutman, Yohanan Simon, Reuven Rubin, David Wakstein, David Tartakover, David Reeb, Larry Abramson, Tzvika Kantor and others, some of whom have indeed referred to the sabra in their work, but without it ever becoming a central issue for them as in Abu Shaqra’s work. . . . It is difficult to avoid the feeling that there was an intention here to strike a balance, to present the Zionist point of view on the myth of the sabra as well, because, with all due respect to [Abu Shaqra] and his paintings, the myth of the sabra is ours, and he will never be able to rob us of it.<sup>38</sup>

Alongside this critique of the act of exhibiting Jewish Israeli artists in parallel with Abu Shaqra’s work, another debate was taking place over the very claim, advanced by Kamal Boullata, that the image of the sabra had been in use in Palestinian culture prior to its Zionist appropriation. In a review of the exhibition catalog in the *Ha’aretz* Book Supplement, Uzi Agassi asks:

Do we really need Kamal Boullata’s seal of approval in order to better understand Abu Shaqra’s work. . . . Does bowing to these high authorities make Asim Abu Shaqra’s sabra more Palestinian than Israeli? Tamir’s claim that “the prioritization of Israeli proprietorship over the image of the sabra . . . turns out to be erroneous when the origins of the image in Palestinian culture are examined” is invalid without sufficient proof that this precedence is indeed erroneous, and such proof as to the origins of the image in Palestinian culture is missing.<sup>39</sup>

Several weeks later, a response by Tali Tamir was published in the *Ha’aretz* Book Supplement:

Agassi's main argument against my article is that the over-attribution, as he puts it, of a political dimension to Abu Shaqra's paintings does him wrong. . . . Abu Shaqra, Agassi claims, is a good artist; and referring to his Arab identity "detracts from the beauty" of his paintings. . . . Really, why bother to recall that Asim Abu Shaqra is an Arab painter? Why not just enjoy the beauty of his paintings? Why not refer to the sabra—the national symbol of the new Israeli—as if it were a geranium, a cactus like any other, or alternatively a bouquet of roses? . . . I think one needs a great deal of obtuseness and blindness, even of real moral impudence, to vehemently deny the existence of a Palestinian sense of estrangement in post-Intifada Israeli society. To see only "universal beauty" in these sabras, to neutralize them from the conflict of their estrangement in the flowerpot and their loneliness in space, requires an eye that is completely full of itself . . . that looks at art through a formalistic, evasive lens. . . . Abu Shaqra did not want to decorate the walls of houses and museums, he gave expression to his personal voice, which was also the voice of the Arab Palestinian individual.<sup>40</sup>

This public debate over Palestinian identity and its relation to Israeli culture was extraordinary and the first of its kind. Such a debate had not taken place around the works exhibited by Azi and Nubani in the 1980s. One might add that this debate was deeply influenced by the peace process and the Oslo Accords, which made possible a public discussion of Palestinian identity.

Conclusion: Men in the Sun

Almost two decades have passed since Abu Shaqra's retrospective exhibition and the debate over the origin of the sabra image. The exhibition "Men in the Sun" (2009) included extraordinary works by Abu Shaqra that had not been on display in the 1994 Tel Aviv Museum retrospective, which had focused on the image of the potted sabra while completely ignoring a significant body of work on sabra hedges. As opposed to the potted sabra—the sabra as mute, tamed, domesticated, and confined nature—"Men in the Sun" displayed paintings of a sprawling, menacing, boundless Palestinian thicket two decades after they had been painted.

In a video artwork displayed at the exhibition, Abu Shaqra is shown painting the sabra-hedge works prior to his 1988 solo exhibition at the Rap Gallery and saying to the interviewer:

You know, there was this period . . . a long period, when I didn't paint at all, as I told you. And each time I tried to paint again I always tried to go back to what I had done before, and once again to feel the color, the paintbrush. And all the time I felt that I'm not feeling it in the little artworks, the works I had done before. And

suddenly in the last work, really here, I can start painting again. . . . Maybe this is where I should have started. I mean, this work closes the series for the exhibition, but actually it's the beginning of my return to painting.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, this new beginning marked a completely different approach by Abu Shaqra. In contrast to the potted sabra, the sabra thicket is not like a tree signifying structure and genealogy in a stable, hierarchical constellation of relations in space. In Abu Shaqra's sabra thicket there is no central controlling point or perspective; the thicket is a marker of multiplicity, of perpetual deterritorialization, and of ongoing violence, embedded in the soil by and within culture.

Thus, for example, in the 1988 work "Untitled" (fig. 9), we see numerous circles that create a thicket of sabra bushes; the bushes take over the entire canvas and appear to be on the verge of exploding the frame of the painting. Among the leaves at the bottom of the painting we find color patches in black, orange, and red, evoking sparks, conflagration, and charred soil. The sabra in this context is testimony to the violence inscribed into the ground by the occupier. In the 1988 painting "Sabra (1)" (fig. 10), the sabra hedges are cordoned off by a spiky, thorny frame, and the dotted lines painted between them look like sharp fragments of broken glass. In another work from the same year, "Sabra (2)" (fig. 11), the red sabra flowers resemble bloodstains. In these works the sabra hedges become a fortified wall, an impenetrable thicket that offers no refuge.

"Men in the Sun" presented Abu Shaqra's works as part of the oeuvre of thirteen Palestinian citizens of Israel, with a view to exploring the characteristics and influences of Palestinian visual culture created in Israel. This exhibition afforded an opportunity to reexamine a key image used by Asim Abu Shaqra, Ibrahim Nubani, and Asad Azi in the works surveyed in this article. It also opened up a space for confronting the interpretive templates of the 1980s and 1990s with new discursive possibilities, in tandem with the contemporary political discourse of younger Palestinians who graduated from Israeli art schools over the last decade, whose work was also presented.

The exhibition's title is borrowed from a short story of the same name written by Ghassan Kanafani. The story, published in 1963, recounts the journey of three Palestinians seeking employment in the Persian Gulf states.<sup>42</sup> Lacking the required transit permits, the three are forced, before reaching the border crossing between Iraq and Kuwait, to hide in an empty water tank carried by the truck transporting them. At the crossing the guards delay the truck driver with idle conversation, and the three Palestinians die in the scorching desert heat on the outskirts of an

unidentified city. The story ends with the truck driver's desperate cry, "Why didn't you bang on the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why?"

The story of the three refugees exemplifies the vulnerability and fragility of Palestinian life. Kanafani highlights the precarious temporal dimension of their existence, in which (among other things), due to time lost or suspended, they are doomed to die such a cruel death.

In an article in the exhibition catalog, Amal Jamal notes that Kanafani's story reflects a deep-seated temporal consciousness that refuses to put up with the reality created in the wake of the 1948 Nakba.<sup>43</sup> This temporality—that is, the Palestinians' conception of time—is based on their extrusion from history, on the emptying out and suspension of their time. Jamal writes:

Palestinians living in their homeland also experience daily a sense of exile and estrangement from time and locality. This issue refers to the quality of the experience common to all Palestinians in the wake of the Nakba: suspended time, an attenuated existence over which there is no control, and the lack of normal continuity. All Palestinian communities, wherever located and irrespective of the quality of their lives, confront the same crisis. They share a festering sense of temporariness, of the suspension and emptying of time, of waiting.<sup>44</sup>

This temporality, he claims, is mirrored in the works of Palestinian authors and artists who—wherever they may be located—deal with loss, estrangement, alienation, and the challenges of transience.

The interpretation of the artworks presented in "Men in the Sun" and discussed in this article is based on two axes of meaning whose irreversible point of reference is the Palestinian Nakba of 1948. One axis, which in the exhibition was called "the shadow of silence," continues the tragic, fatal silence of the three refugees inside the water tank in the scorching desert heat. This ongoing silence, which began in 1948, resonates in the works by Asim Abu Shaqra, Asad Azi, and Ibrahim Nubani presented in the exhibition. Silence, in this context, constitutes a faithful expression of the intolerable everyday tension imbuing the life and work circumstances of Palestinian artists and the discursive possibilities relating to their work. The flip side of the coin of silence is a symbolic, encoded allegorical matrix that distances itself from artistic realism. Even though this allegorical matrix does respond in part to concrete historical events, it is mostly latent and does not appear in the overt interpretation of and discourse on the artworks.

The other interpretive axis underlying the exhibition, "temporariness as a sphere for Palestinian awareness," centers on temporal thinking about space.<sup>45</sup> The time-

space relation is present in the artworks, both in the images of emptiness or the absence of people from residential spaces and in the images of the thicket.

In the landscape paintings of Asad Azi, Ibrahim Nubani, and Asim Abu Shaqra, this “temporariness as a sphere for Palestinian awareness,” as Jamal puts it, is present with full force. Thus, Asad Azi’s naked fisherman paintings embody an allegorical conception that preserves the transience of the figure facing titanic natural, cultural, and historical forces that leave him stark naked, shaky, and exposed. In Nubani’s abstract-geometrical landscape paintings of the Palestinian village, the emptiness (that is, the absence of people from their living environment) creates an expectation of their return. And in Asim Abu Shaqra’s sabra thicket paintings, the movement through the thicket obstructs the possibility of advancement and involves disorientation and the disruption of the sense of time.

The claim that the Palestinian public sphere within the 1948 borders is a space deprived of history is rearticulated by these interpretive axes; this in turn gives rise to an urgent need to expand the interpretive discourse and to draw connections between the artworks, their place within Israeli art, and the historical narrative regarding the catastrophe of Israel’s Palestinian minority. The debate over the unique historical narrative of this minority reached its apex in 2008, around the events marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Nakba, generating a significant shift in Palestinian discourse on Palestinian art created in Israel. The present article is itself part of this sea change, illustrating the impact of this profound historical transformation on the creative, interpretive, and art-critical templates underlying contemporary Palestinian art in Israel.

#### Notes

- 1 Anton Shammas, “Preface,” in *Asim Abu Shaqra*, ed. Nira Itzhaki (Milan: Charta, 2013).
- 2 Kamal Boullata, *Istihdar al-makan: Dinasat fi al-fan al-tashkili al-Filastini al-muasir* [The recovery of place: A study of Palestinian contemporary painting] (Tunis: ALECSO, 2000), 189.
- 3 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.
- 4 Catherine Brace, “Landscape and Identity,” in *Studying Cultural Landscape*, ed. Iain Robertson and Penny Richards (London: Arnold, 2003), 121. On this issue, see also Rose Gillian, “Afterword: Gazes, Glances and Shadows,” in Robertson and Richards, *Studying Cultural Landscape*, 165–169.
- 5 Brace, “Landscape and Identity.”
- 6 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 7 Simon Schama reminds us that “once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more

- real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery.” Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 61.
- 8 Brace, “Landscape and Identity,” 124.
  - 9 *Ibid.*, 138.
  - 10 Tina Sherwell, “Imaging Palestine as the Motherland,” in *Self Portrait: Palestinian Women’s Art*, ed. Tal Ben Zvi and Yael Lerer (Tel Aviv: Andalus, 2001), 165.
  - 11 Gannit Ankori, “Me-ever la-homa, al nekudot hashaka ahadot ben omanut Falastinit ve-tziur erez-Yisraeli mukdam” [Beyond the wall: On some tangential points between Palestinian art and pre-state Israeli painting], *Kav* 10 (July 1990): 164.
  - 12 “A lieu de mémoire,” as Nora defines it, “is any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community.” Pierre Nora, “From *Lieux de mémoire* to *Realms of Memory*,” in *Conflicts and Divisions*, vol. 1 of *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xvii.
  - 13 Sarit Shapira, “Tzabar be-atzitz, Asim Abu Shaqra” [Potted Sabra: Asim Abu Shaqra], *Kav* 10 (July 1990): 39; Ellen Ginton, “The Asim Abu Shakra Passion,” in *Asim Abu-Shakra*, exhibition catalog (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 1994), 9; Tali Tamir, “The Shadow of Foreignness: On the Paintings of Asim Abu Shakra,” in *Asim Abu-Shakra*, 12.
  - 14 The Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority had an enormous impact on Palestinian art. A certain sense of sovereignty led to the founding of cultural centers and art galleries such as Anadil Gallery (est. 1992), al-Wasiti Art Center (1994), and al-Ma’mal Cultural Center (1997), all three in east Jerusalem; Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center (1996), Ziryab Gallery (1998), and al-Qattan Center (1998) in Ramallah; and al-Kahf Gallery at the International Center of Bethlehem (1995). The founding of art and cultural institutions continues to this day. In 2005 an additional gallery, al-Hoash Gallery, was established in east Jerusalem, and the first Biennale for Contemporary Art was held in Ramallah.
  - 15 In 2007, the IbdAA Association (est. 1994 in the village of Julis) opened a gallery in Kufr Yasif (see <http://www.ibdaa-art.com>); in 1996, Hannah Kopley launched artistic activity at Beit Hagefen in Haifa, including annual projects such as the exhibitions “Arab Culture Week” and “Holiday of Holidays”; in 1996, the Umm el-Fahem Art Gallery (directed by Said Abu Shaqra) was established (see <http://www.umelfahemgallery.org>); in 2000, the Hagar Gallery for Contemporary Art was established in Jaffa (curator: Tal Ben Zvi; see [www.hagar-gallery.com](http://www.hagar-gallery.com)); in 2005, an art gallery was founded in Tamra (curator: Ahmad Canaan); and in 2006, the Municipal Gallery in Ramle and the Gallery in Rahat were established. For further details on these exhibition spaces, see Tal Ben Zvi, “Shonut mi-toch ahdut: Omanut Falastinit achshavit” [United in diversity: Contemporary Palestinian art], *Jamaa: Interdisciplinary Journal for Middle Eastern Studies* 17 (2009): 157–167;

- and Tal Ben Zvi, *Hagar: Contemporary Palestinian Art* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Hagar Association, 2006).
- 16 National Committee of Heads of the Arab Local Authorities in Israel, "The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel," (published 2006) Adalah, accessed October 5, 2013, <http://www.adalah.org/newsletter/eng/dec06/tasawor-mostaqbali.pdf>; Yousef T. Jabareen, "An Equal Constitution for All? On a Constitution and Collective Rights for Arab Citizens in Israel," position paper (Haifa: Mossawa Center, 2007), [http://www.mossawacenter.org/my\\_documents/publication2/2007%20An%20Equal%20Constitution%20For%20All.pdf](http://www.mossawacenter.org/my_documents/publication2/2007%20An%20Equal%20Constitution%20For%20All.pdf), accessed October 5, 2013; Adalah: Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, "The Democratic Constitution," draft paper, last posted March 20, 2007, [http://adalah.org/Public/files/democratic\\_constitution-english.pdf](http://adalah.org/Public/files/democratic_constitution-english.pdf), accessed October 5, 2013; Mada el-Carmel: the Arab Center for Applied Social Research, "The Haifa Declaration," 2007, <http://mada-research.org/en/files/2007/09/haifaenglish.pdf>, accessed October 5, 2013. See also Sammy Smooha, "The Israeli Palestinian-Arab Vision of Transforming Israel into a Binational Democracy," *Constellations* 16, no. 3 (2009): 509–522.
  - 17 Yona Fischer, *Teritoriot shel tzeva* [Territories of color], exhibition catalog (1986). The following is a list of the participants: Ludvig Blum, Yosef Zaritzky, Yehiel Kriza, Aviva Uri, Moshe Kupferman, Larry Abramson, Ibrahim Nubani, Joshua Borkovsky, Asaf Azi, and Gabi Klezmer.
  - 18 See, for example, Hezi Laskali, "Reshimat Fischer: Ha-biennale be-Venetzia 1986" [The Fischer list: The 1986 Venice Biennale], *Ha'ir*, March 7, 1986.
  - 19 See, for example, Emmanuel Bar-Kadma, "Asad mi-Shefar'am le-Venetzia: Re'ayon im Asad Azi likrat nesi'ato la-biennale be-Venetzia" [Asad from Shefar'am to Venice: Interview with Asad Azi], *Yedioth Abaronoth*, March 17, 1986 (translation by Asaf Kedar).
  - 20 On Asad Azi's work, see Tal Ben Zvi, "Ha-zikaron ha-tzilumi shel Asad Azi" [Asad Azi's photographic memory], in *Asad Azi, aba sheli hayal* [Asad Azi: My father is a soldier], exhibition catalog (Ramat Gan: Ramat Gan Museum, 2009).
  - 21 Yona Fischer, *Teritoriot shel tzeva* (translation by Asaf Kedar). 11.
  - 22 Palestinian art has a long tradition of preoccupation with fishing. Fishing boats, for example, are portrayed in the works of the Jerusalem-born artist Daoud Zalatio (1906–2001). Fishing boats also appear in the paintings of Palestinian artists living in Gaza—as, for instance, in the works of Asim Bader and Rouad Abu-Rouamna. The artist Tamam al-Akhal represents pre-1948 Jaffa through fishing-related images. Al-Akhal (born in Jaffa, 1935) left her hometown in 1948 on a fishing boat. In the historical painting series "The Exodus and the Odyssey" (1997–2000), co-created with her husband, one of the paintings (Pic. 25) portrays the Jaffa port's work life in great detail, including its fishing boats and fishing nets. For further detail, see Kamal Boullata, *Istihdar al-makan*.
  - 23 Nitza Melinek, "Ha-nehiya el ha-Mizrah: Ta'aruchat rega be-Muzeon Yisrael" [Yearning for the Orient: The Rega exhibition at the Israel Museum], *Ha'aretz*, January 23, 1987 (my translation).
  - 24 Haim Maor and Tuli Bauman, "Perah adom im alim yerukim" [Red flower with green leaves], an

- interview with Artists Sulayman Mansur, Nabil Anani, Taysir Barakat, and Ibrahim Muzzayen, *Studio: Ktav-et le-omanut* [Studio Art Magazine] 11 (May 1990): 6–13 (my translation).
- 25 Yona Fischer, *Teritoriot shel tzeva*, 9 (my translation).
- 26 Efrat Livni, *Ibrahim Nubani: Merhav beynaim* [Ibrahim Nubani: In-between], exhibition catalog (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2004), 23 (my translation).
- 27 Dalia Karpel, “Ha-oman she-hazar me-ha-kfar: Re’ayon im Ibrahim Nubani” [The artist who came back from the village: An interview with Ibrahim Nubani], *Ha’aretz*, August 20, 2004 (my translation).
- 28 Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).
- 29 Nasser Abufarha, “Land of Symbols: Cactus, Poppies, Orange and Olive Trees in Palestine,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 15, no. 3 (2008): 362. According to Kamal Boullata:
- The sabra used to be the natural and practical means for [the Palestinian peasant] to mark the borders of his fields and villages, as his forefathers had done. Since the founding of the Jewish state on the ruins of the Arab villages, the sabra bush has taken on a symbolic dimension among the Palestinian inhabitants of the land. After their villages had been destroyed, their names erased from the maps, and all their trees uprooted, the sabra bush proved to be the staunchest enemy of the bulldozer. The sabra bushes came to flower once again despite the recurring uprootings. The peasant’s son will today have no difficulty tracing the borders of the ruined villages with the help of the sabra bushes planted by his ancestors. . . . In the sabra image one can read the word *sabr* [patience], the name of the sabra in spoken Palestinian Arabic . . . which has been uttered again and again by those clinging to their land. Kamal Boullata, *Istihdar al-makan*, 205 (translation by Asaf Kedar).
- 30 For further detail on these images in Palestinian poetry and literature, see Sulaiman Jubran, “Ha-kfar be-yetzivotav shel Mohamed Nafa” [The countryside in the works of Mohamed Nafa], in “Sifrutam shel ha-Aravim be-Yisrael” [Literature of the Arabs in Israel], ed. Jacob M. Landau, Ami Elad-Buskila, special issue, *Hamizrah Hehadash* 35 (1993): 182–192; George Kanazi, “Ha-adama be-sifrutam shel Arviye Yisrael” [The issue of land as reflected in the literature of the Arabs in Israel], *Hamizrah Hehadash* 35 (1993): 165–181; Mahmud Ghanayim, *The Quest for a Lost Identity: Palestinian Fiction in Israel* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008); Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); and Ami Elad-Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature and Culture* (London: Frank Cass, 1999).
- 31 Abufarha, “Land of Symbols,” 362.
- 32 See, for example, Oz Almog, “The Sabra as a Cultural Archetype,” in *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 5–13.
- 33 Kobi Harel, “Asim Abu Shaqra: Tzabar Yisraeli” [Asim Abu Shaqra: Israeli sabra], *Ma’ariv*,

- September 9, 1988 (my translation).
- 34 Ronit Matalon, “Re’ayon im Asim Abu Shaqra” [An interview with Asim Abu Shaqra], *Ha’aretz*, October 6, 1989 (my translation).
- 35 Editor’s note: Abu Shakra, an alternate spelling of Abu Shaqra, has been changed here and elsewhere to conform to the surrounding text. The original spelling has been retained in the notes.
- 36 Ginton, “The Asim Abu Shakra Passion.”
- 37 Tamir, “The Shadow of Foreignness.”
- 38 Baruch Blich, “Mabato shel zar: Asim Abu Shaqra, ta’aruchat zikaron, bitan Helena Rubinstein” [The foreigner’s gaze: Asim Abu Shaqra, memorial exhibition, Helena Rubinstein Pavilion], *Ha’ir*, December 16, 1994 (my translation).
- 39 Uzi Agassi, “Asim Abu Shaqra, bitan Helena Rubinstein Pavilion” [Asim Abu Shaqra, Helena Rubinstein Pavilion], *Ha’aretz*, Book Supplement, March 22, 1995 (my translation).
- 40 Tali Tamir, “Tzayar Falastini” [Palestinian artist], *Ha’aretz*, Book Supplement, May 2, 1995 (my translation).
- 41 “Asim Abu Shaqra: Likrat ta’aruchat yahid be-Galeria Rap” [Asim Abu Shaqra: Preparations for solo exhibition in the Rap Gallery], video, 7 min, (1988), director and ed., Yair Elazar; camera, Vered Shapira (my translation). This video was screened for the first time in the framework of the “Men in the Sun” exhibition, 2009.
- 42 Ghassan Kanafani, “Men in the Sun,” in *Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories*, trans. Hilary Kilpatrick (London: Lynne Rienner, 1999).
- 43 Amal Jamal, “The Struggle for Time and the Power of Temporariness: Jews and Palestinians in the Labyrinth of History,” trans. Nina Reshef, in *Men in the Sun*, exhibition catalog (Herzliya: Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, 2009), E/08–E/23.
- 44 *Ibid.*, E/19–E/20.
- 45 *Ibid.*, E/17.