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Art & Theater



Canaan: Art breaks down barriers
Photo: Oz Maron

Palestinian gallery opens in Jaffa port

'We're breaking down barriers with art,' says curator of Israeli Arab, Palestinian art show, Ahmad Canaan

Amir Bogen | Published: 07.11.10 , 08:18

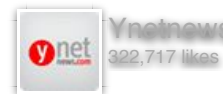
Those who have visited the Jaffa Port in recent weeks were surely surprised to find posters announcing the opening of the Jaffa Salon for Palestinian Art adorning the façade of Warehouse 2, a space reserved for art shows.

In the heart of [Israel](#), in the spot where Tel Aviv and Jaffa collide, Israeli Arab and Palestinian artists from both sides of the Green Line are presenting their creations.

Several Israeli entrepreneurs and the Arab artist Ahmad Canaan are responsible for the unique gallery, which vies to break down the cultural divide that is splitting Israel and to expose Palestinian creations to a varied audience. The artists hope to grab the interest of the Jewish public, including art collectors who can buy pieces and support their work.

"There are enough political and psychological barriers, and I'm striving to break them down and connect through art," said Canaan, the show's curator. "We are neighbors and partners. The politicians don't help to improve the situation, so we will do it ourselves."

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'The Refugee,' a painting by Canaan

'Conflict fuels art'

The Tel Aviv-Jaffa Municipality is hosting the initiative, which many fear will provoke outrage.

"The nature of the port is cosmopolitan, and it's important to us to keep in touch with the community, including the Arab one," said Ran Wolf, the port's managing director. "The criticism of this initiative is marginal. All in all we are getting encouragement from every direction."

About 30 artists from Arab towns across Israel and the West Bank will take part in the exhibition, including Canaan, the painter Fouad Agbaria and the sculptor Nihad Dabit. Despite the rare opportunity for exposure, these artists mostly avoid using the spotlight for political protest, and instead focus on personal creation that originates from their cultural roots. Inevitably, there are those considering this also a form of protest.

"I don't believe we should mix art with politics," said Agbaria, but did not deny the discriminatory treatment that Arabs get. "How much interest have you seen in the Arab sector of Umm al-Fahm, how often does the media cover artists, people and life there? But when there's a fire, stone-throwing, a protest or a strike, they're always there. The media is looking for fire and weapons and disorder."

But the conflict, Agbaria said, fuels the artistic creation. "It is important baggage that Palestinian artists can use to express a variety of feelings," he said. "It has to be brought to light."

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