



International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People: Palestinian Art as an Expression of Existence and Resistance

More than a year after the beginning of the war in Gaza, art in the Palestinian diaspora remains a cornerstone for preserving identity and resisting oppression. This November 29, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, highlights how art becomes a means of resistance, cultural connection, and an expression of perseverance. On the same day in 1947, UN General Assembly Resolution 181, also known as the "Partition Resolution," was adopted. It called for the creation of two states in Palestine, one Jewish and one Arab. To date, only one has been created: Israel. This day seeks to underscore that the Palestinian issue remains unresolved. This ongoing lack leaves Palestinians without inalienable rights such as self-determination, sovereignty, and the right of return with restitution for those who were displaced. Moreover, it aims to remind governments and civil society of the urgency of resolving this situation, especially as, more than a year into the war in Gaza, the death toll approaches

45,000 (Al Jazeera, 2024). Art has historically been a fundamental part of the Palestinian cause, acting as a tool to preserve and transmit its identity.

A recurring symbol in all artistic forms of resistance is the watermelon. This fruit carries a history that began when Israeli forces occupied the West Bank in the 1980s and prohibited the hoisting and painting of the Palestinian flag and its colors. For paintings to be displayed, they needed approval from Israeli military authorities, a clear demonstration of cultural oppression against Palestinians. In a conversation between Palestinian artists and senior Israeli officials about these restrictions, it was mentioned that even if they painted a watermelon, the artwork would be confiscated. This sparked a wave of artistic inspiration, and the watermelon became the most recognized symbol of the Palestinian cause. As a symbol, the watermelon remains relevant in contemporary art, both within and outside Palestine; it appears on protest posters, paintings, and even as appliqués and pins that activists often wear as part

of their clothing or accessories.



"Watermelon Resistance" (2017), a work by Sarah Hatahet that uses the watermelon as a symbol of Palestinian identity and resistance.

Artists are and have always been essential parts of social movements, as their platforms have the power to bring social and political issues to light. Artists from all over the world, including Palestine, have launched an initiative, "Artists United Against Apartheid," a reimagining of a similar movement from the 1980s. The original had a significant impact and contributed to the end of apartheid in South Africa. This initiative shows that artists also play a role in resistance beyond their own art. The group has issued a statement opposing the Israeli occupation of Palestine and organizes monthly meetings, demonstrations, joint exhibitions, and benefit concerts.

Colors That Narrate the Palestinian Struggle

Palestinian art is another way to understand what is happening to the Palestinian people. In fact, much of the walls in occupied Palestinian territories feature murals and graffiti expressing resistance. The wall is "a physical and symbolic division between Palestinians and Israelis and the land they claim," and the fact that Palestinians choose this wall as the canvas for their art is significant in itself. The main relevant themes include pleas for peace, resistance against the military, flags, and watermelons that express the Palestinian identity, which refuses to be erased. To explain the meaning of this graffiti, the Arabic term *sumud* (in Arabic: صمود), meaning "steadfastness" or "constant perseverance," is often used. This is a Palestinian cultural and political value expressing the resilience of the Palestinian people in the face of adversity. The resistance art on the wall speaks to the Palestinian cause in general as well as challenging the very existence of the wall itself.



Murals on the Separation Wall surrounding the city of Bethlehem.

After the Nakba, a great tragedy that marked Palestine following 1948, artists devoted themselves to creating art that expressed their ancestral roots, their connection to the land, their cultural heritage, their Palestinian identity, and, above all, their resistance to occupation. As Mitwasi (2015) points out, "Art is a form of understanding. It visualizes what often cannot be expressed in words." The contemporary Palestinian art movement encompasses a variety of styles and themes, united by their representation of Palestinian experiences. One of its founders was Nabil Anani, known for painting landscapes of his homeland. Curiously, he represents them as peaceful, without interruptions or interventions. In his vision, Israeli occupation has no place, demonstrating that there exists a space that they will never invade or colonize: his imagination. He uses his art to dream

of a peaceful and whole future for Palestinians—this is his form of protest. Anani was a co-founder of the International Academy of Fine Arts in Palestine, a pioneering institution dedicated to promoting contemporary visual arts through innovative programs, capacity development, and resource networks. This demonstrates his commitment to his community and the use of art as an expression of existence and resistance.



"Ein Karem" (2024) by Nabil Anani: An evocative depiction of the Palestinian village of Ein Karem, where memory, landscape, and cultural identity intertwine in art.

For Sliman Mansour, another pioneer of the movement, his purpose is to combat the dehumanization of

Palestinians. Art is a valuable possession for Palestinian communities, not for its aesthetic value but for its patriotic value.



Sliman Mansour, Flight to Egypt (1984): For the artist, female figures symbolize the homeland and revolution, always strong, proud, and dressed in Palestinian attire, reflecting the identity and resilience of his people.

The story of Laila Ajjawi, a Palestinian muralist, graffiti artist, and activist, is inspiring to her followers. Born in a refugee camp in Jordan, Laila found her way to communicate with the world through walls at an early age. She feels a responsibility to use her talent—and the art she creates with it—as a form of resistance. Her medium of choice is graffiti, which she considers a "cultural weapon" in itself. She describes a process she calls "energy transfer," where art has the power to draw attention to important issues. Her

messages include exposing discrimination against Palestinian refugees and addressing gender issues, including the right to education for girls and child marriage. She draws inspiration from personal experiences and the social environment surrounding her.

Music as the Voice of the Palestinian People

Music has been an integral part of the Palestinian cause since its beginnings; when Palestinians are silenced, they raise their voices even louder and add melody to accompany them. The soundtrack of the Palestinian movement has been characterized by including themes of resistance and social experiences of the people. Popular songs are often reinvented and used in demonstrations and social networks, uniting participants in the same cause. Contemporary singers, both from Palestine and the diaspora, also raise their voices and convey their ideas through music.

Mohammed Assaf is the artist behind the famous song "Dammi Falastini" (دمي فلسطيني), which means "My Blood is Palestinian." Assaf was born in a refugee camp in Gaza and made the leap from singing at community weddings to winning the international competition

Arab Idol. His hit is an act of resistance in itself, emphasizing how Palestinian heritage cannot be erased. Assaf explains that he cannot differentiate between his art and his patriotic attitude. Living under occupation, creating art without political undertones is almost impossible. Through his simple phrases, he conveys the Palestinians' love for their homeland and Arab identity.



Mohammed Assaf raising the Palestinian flag during his performance on Arab Idol.

Furthermore, international collaboration also plays an important role. The band Coldplay released one of its most recent singles, WE PRAY, in collaboration with singer Elyanna, who fuses traditional Arabic sounds with a modern and profound vocal interpretation. In her Instagram biography, Elyanna describes herself as “Palestinian Chilean” and uses her platform to promote cultural representation, opting to perform her songs in Arabic.

She seeks to express the truth of her

culture, which resides in its beauty. Elyanna explains that, at the end of her performances, she always carries the keffiyeh, a garment with roots in the Ottoman Empire that has become a significant emblem of resistance against Israeli occupation and a symbol of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Palestinian art, in all its forms and variations, has been and will continue to be a fundamental pillar for reflecting and conveying the experiences of an entire people. It has solidified itself as one of the most transformative tools of resistance against occupation and oppression. Contemporary Palestinian art, with its direct and unequivocal messages, seeks to empower its people and serve their cause. Despite the persistence of the war in Gaza and the continuous expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Palestinian artists will continue to raise their voices, as they find in their art a powerful medium to express their identity, their struggle, and their hope.

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Published by



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