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24 ISRAELI & PALESTINIAN ARTISTS UNITE FOR PEACE

It's Possible

24 Israeli & Palestinian Artists Unite For Peace

An exhibition of works on paper
organized by
The New York Ad Hoc Committee of Artists & Writers
for Israeli-Palestinian Peace

Wednesday, October 12 – Sunday, November 20, 1988

The Great Hall Gallery
The Cooper Union
for the Advancement of Science & Art
7 East 7th. Street at 3rd. Avenue
New York

The New York Ad Hoc Committee of Artists and Writers For Israeli-Palestinian Peace.

Dore Ashton

*Art Critic and Professor of Art History,
Cooper Union*

Kamal Boullata

Painter and writer

Yona Fischer

Senior Curator, Israel Museum

Nitza Gidish

Painter and writer

Shulamith Koenig

Sculptor, exhibition administrator

Suleiman Mansour

*Painter, Chairman of the Palestinian Painters
Association, Jerusalem*

Matti Megged

*Associate Professor at the Graduate Faculty of
The New York School*

Jerry Ordover

Lawyer

Grace Paley

Writer

Irving Petlin

Painter, Adjunct Professor, Cooper Union

Sam Wiener

Sculptor

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*O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life,
but exhaust the limits of the possible.*

Pindar (5th. Century B.C.)

Curators:

Kamal Boullata
Painter, writer

Yona Fischer
Senior Curator, Israel Museum

Exhibition Administrator:

Shulamith Koenig
Sculptor

It would be disingenuous to pretend that this is just an exhibition of works by a dozen Israeli and a dozen Palestinian artists. Inevitably, this exhibition is in the nature of a manifesto. It says clearly what artists have so often said: that the free exchange of the fruits of individual spirits must never be permitted to be impeded, and that artists are well equipped to surmount the obstacles so ruthlessly thrown in the path of civilized exchange.

It would also be disingenuous to pretend that art is a lingua franca that transcends all boundaries--an argument that has served as a comfortable alibi in the so-called Western world for all too long. On the contrary, the coming together of these artists represents a specific and political symbolic gesture that entailed considerable inner struggle and personal risk. Moreover, it frankly acknowledges and calls attention to the obstacles and boundaries that inhabit us all.

I speak now of the cultural biases that linger in each of us and that have permitted us to remain obdurately ignorant of the spiritual lives of two-thirds of the world, the so-called "third world." In this great metropolis, it is quite possible to be a connoisseur of visual art without ever having seen the works of artists highly regarded in their own countries. I, for instance, when I looked over the preliminary list of this exhibition, was ashamed to note that the only artists I was familiar with were Israelis, and the reasons for that are all too obvious. Not only was I unfamiliar with the lives and works

Sari
KHOURY



White Bird, 1988

Born in 1941 in Jerusalem, Khoury emigrated with his family to the United States a decade after the family home was lost in the 1948 war. He studied art at Ohio Wesleyan University from 1959 to 1965 and the Cranbrook Academy of Art from 1963 to 1965.

His first one-person exhibitions include those held in 1966 at Berea College Art Gallery, Berea, Kentucky; in 1967 at Western College Art Gallery, Oxford, Ohio; in 1968 at Wayne State University, Detroit; in 1975 at Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant; in 1979 at Hope College, Holland, Michigan; in 1981 at Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio; in 1982 at Midland Center for the Arts, Midland, Michigan; and in 1985 at the Alif Gallery, Washington, D.C.

Khoury's work has been shown in the Detroit Institute of Art, the Dayton Art Institute, Cranbrook Academy, the Grand Rapids Museum, the Flint Institute of Art, the Saginaw Museum, the Yiyagi Art Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Tokyo. At present, Khoury is a professor at Central Michigan University, where he has taught painting, drawing, and graphic design since 1967.

of the Palestinian artists, but I was also unfamiliar with their cultural references. When Abed Abedi shows a drawing for Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, I must ruefully admit that I have never read it; that I don't know if it is even translated into English, and that its cultural context is foreign to me. Clearly there is something wrong here, and I must not let myself off the hook. I, and my culture, are guilty of cultural bias, something far more insidious than simple ignorance.

If one reads the cursory biographical notices in this catalogue there are many invisible and infinitely sad stories between the lines. On both sides. There are reminders everywhere of the scandalous tragedies of our century—what Joyce would have called the “heartscalding” facts. So many displacements, so many dispersions, so many family tragedies implicit here. One artist born in a refugee camp, another the son of survivors, another left with the vivid memories of a home and erector set abandoned in flight, and others with the indelible memories of final solutions. Shared agonies. And on both sides, the struggle to expunge bitterness in the name of basic humanity. The struggle to find common ground (which, force majeure, exists, if only geographically) is not simple. Yet, perhaps Sari Khoury, an accomplished Palestinian abstract painter, sums it up in speaking of his own work:

“The primary thrust of the work symbolizes fragmentation and unity, bondage and freedom, darkness and light; contradictions akin to the mystical and poetic nature of Middle Eastern

people.” I can think of a few Israeli artists who could say the same, such as Joshua Neustein or Gabi Klasmer.

All of these artists are painfully aware of what Graham Greene called “the terrorism of our time” which he regarded as the legacy of Hitler. In describing why the focus of so many of his novels was outside of Europe, Greene said, “It was difficult for me to return to that new, clean and well cared for Europe which, after recovering from its wounds, had lost its memory.” These artists refuse to forget and remind us that oppression from any quarter must be resisted. When, so many years ago, Jean-Paul Sartre condemned prejudice, he wrote: “Not one Frenchman will be free so long as the Jews do not enjoy the fullness of their rights. Not one Frenchman will be secure so long as a single Jew—in France or in the world at large—can fear for his life.” Now, by a terrible irony, he would have to say that not one Jew will be free so long as a single Palestinian fears for his life. There are the kinds of thoughts that hover in the psyches of the artists in this exhibition. Some address the issue directly, some obliquely, but all are intent to express their refusal to accept the terrible injustice that reigns in their homeland.

Dore Ashton