

Reconsidering the Value of Palstinian Art & Its Journey Into the Art Market Part II

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Figure 1. Hani Zurob, Flying Lesson #06, Acrylic on Canvas, 200x160cm, 2010

There is a distinctive shift in the style of Zurob's art since he left Palestine to Paris in 2006. This thesis was submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Master's Degree in Art Business

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Abstract

This study is the second installment of a two-part study into the 'value' of Palestinian art. The first three sections of part one (see Contemporary Practices VII) explored the fragmentation of Palestine, the changing characteristics of Palestinian Art and the mechanisms that have been conferring value upon it. In brief, the Israeli occupation and the absence of political stability have enticed Palestinian artists to look beyond Palestine to seek critical and economic recognition. In the early 1990s, Palestinian art that was created in the occupied Palestinian land shifted from collective symbolic, illustrative, figurative and narrative expression to more individual or personal expression. The adoption of Western references to relate to local experiences has extended the geographical area in which Palestinian artists showcase their work. Traditional value mechanisms do not apply to art created in Palestinian land. Accordingly, there has been a need to find other centres for Palestinian art to flourish both critically and economically.

Part two will explore the idea of a mobile art centre or the nomadic Palestinian artist remains the most viable option. Yet, for Palestinian artists who choose to stay in Palestine, they need to get connected with cultural institutions and influential curators who assume similar roles to those of a primary market. Curators became the mediators and the connecting link between the artists and the outside world. This 'primary market' does not survive on art sales, rather on foreign donor money. Personal interests of the players and the donor's political agenda have not allowed for the organic development of Palestinian art. This reality has created four circles of recognition that Palestinian artists need to go through on their way towards international recognition and art market success: institutional acclaim, curatorial and prize acclaim, foreign public acclaim and patronage by dealers and collectors. This path contributes to the long journey artists from occupied Palestine travel until they reach their economic target.

The local auctions and private sales match in fiscal value and they do not exceed the 4700 USD margin. In Palestine, auction results eclipse

the value of Palestinian art. But when this art is traded or auctioned internationally, paradoxically, it achieves prices that far exceed the local value. The success of Palestinian artists living in occupied Palestine has started to align itself with the success of other Palestinians living in Israel or the Diaspora Palestinians who live mainly in Western countries. Artists living in the Gaza Strip have the lowest international ratings. Furthermore, artists who have been in the West for more than 15 years have constantly enjoyed better rating (including artists from the Gaza Strip) when compared to Palestinian artists from occupied Palestine.

The graphical data indicates that after living long enough in countries with well-established art systems, artists would achieve higher ratings and their critical success translates into an economic value.

POSITIONING PALESTINIAN ART

Before locating this centre, it might be necessary to understand the reality in Palestine and the view of the key players regarding the idea of the centre locally and regionally. From an historic perspective, Jerusalem should be the natural centre of Palestinian art as is evident in the study of Boullata.¹ It is interesting to learn that historically the development of Palestine and its art was connected with 'competing foreign powers'.² This case is still true today and more light will be shed on this in the next section. However, the Jerusalem centre Boullata writes about could no longer function after the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine in 1948. As he explains, 'The cosmopolitan cultural centre and seat of the art movement that Jerusalem proffered was demolished when that fateful year the city was sundered as the rest of the country was between the two new born states

1- Boullata also writes: 'In Palestine, Jerusalem, which emerged as a major administrative and political centre during the Ottoman period ... Having maintained a special status as a holy city to the world's Jews, Christians and Muslims, Jerusalem which was important to Arabs and Ottomans, became the focus of interest to rivaling Christian missionaries and competing foreign powers, each of which installed their religious, educational and diplomatic institutions in the city.... Naturally, it was Jerusalem that the art of painting thrived and the leading pioneers of Palestinian art all happened to be natives and residents of Jerusalem.' *Palestinian Art*, 42.

2- Kamal Boullata thoroughly discusses the influence of foreign power in his seminal study on Palestinian Art in *Palestinian Art From 1850 to the Present*. London, New York, Beirut, Saqi Books, 2009.

of Israel and Jordan...’³ In 1980, Israel annexed East Jerusalem, and has ever since been declaring it its unified and eternal capital.⁴ These actions have been dispersing the Palestinian population and fragmenting its geographical continuity, the latest being the construction of an eight meter Separation Wall that not only encircles the Palestinian cities in the West Bank, but also dissects Jerusalem itself into isolated districts⁵

Even though the unification is only recognised by Israel (with the United States abstaining Resolution 480), Western powers have always been careful not to upset this unification indirectly. This may explain why Ramallah has been emerging as a cultural centre for Palestinian art and as a base for NGOs and cultural institutions. The share in foreign funding that Ramallah city receives exceeds the amount allocated to Jerusalem. The building of the six million dollar Ramallah Cultural Palace, which was funded by the government of Japan, and the opening of the multi-million dollar International Academy of Arts through a grant by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are two clear examples of Ramallah’s funding status.

Ramallah has been described as a place,⁶ institutional centre,⁷ a drug,⁸ and a bubble, among others. It functions as a centre and Tina Sherwell, director of the International Academy of Arts asserts that it has international dimensions, especially because Palestinian artists from the Diaspora engage with the institutional centre, city and world curators see

3- Ibid., 27.

4- The UN Security Council Resolution 478 declared soon after that the annexation was ‘null and void’ and ‘must be rescinded’. It also called upon member states to withdraw their diplomatic missions from Jerusalem. The resolution ‘Affirms that the enactment of the ‘basic law’ by Israel constitutes a violation of international law and does not affect the continued application of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, in the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since June 1967, including Jerusalem.’ United Nations, “Security Council Resolutions – 1980,” <http://www.un.org/documents/sc/res/1980/scres80.htm>, accessed Sept. 27, 2009.

5- The Wall’s total length will be 723 kilometers, of which 409 have already been erected. Jerusalem’s share stands so far at 78.5 Kilometers. B’TSELEM, “Separation Barrier,”

http://www.btselem.org/english/Separation_Barrier/Statistics.asp, accessed Sept. 27, 2009.

6- Khalil Rabah, Personal Interview, August 28, 2009.

7- Hafez Omar, Personal Interview.

8- Monther Jawabreh, Personal Interview.

Ramallah as an address. ‘Ramallah is diverse, many people can identify with it and they feel comfortable in it’.⁹ Opposing the idea of Ramallah as a cultural centre, poet and cultural critic Najwan Darwish, disqualifies it completely: ‘Ramallah does not have the components of a centre which are freedom of internal and external movement, access, and plurality of thought. In brief, a ghetto can never be a centre.’¹⁰ Rawan Sharaf, director of the Palestinian Art Court gallery in Jerusalem adds, ‘I cannot say Ramallah is a centre, I have many reservations regarding the art seen in Ramallah.... Those who present themselves as artists and intellectuals live isolated from their society... It is a bubble. We need to go down on earth.’¹¹ And earth is an occupied Palestine, a fragmented land into hundreds of cantons, checkpoints and restrictions of movement in and out.¹²

Given that Palestine is fragmented, can a centre exist on its land? Perhaps it is necessary to highlight briefly other regional centres that embraced Arab and Palestinian art. As Kamal Boullata explains, Cairo served for 150 years as a cultural centre for the Arab World until the Egyptian Revolution.¹³ However, after the revolution in 1952 Arabs needed a new refuge and it seems they found it in ‘Beirut’s brand of openness ... the ideal environment for becoming a microcosm of the Arab World, embracing all its distinctions and contradictions.’¹⁴ Beirut, whose political system sought to represent seventeen religious denominations, had commercial art galleries and an art market. With the establishment in 1952 of the first museum of contemporary art, the Nicolas Ibrahim Sursock Museum, galleries ‘sprang

9- Tina Sherwell, Personal Interview.

10- Najwan Darwish comments, ‘A village that has huge density population does not it make a city!’

11- Rawan Sharaf, Personal Interview, August 22, 2009.

12- The younger generation of artists is led to believe in this central system as is evident in the case when the young artist Shuruq Harb was asked where she thought the Palestinian art centre was, she answered ‘Ramallah’, and when asked about the city that assumes the second place, she also answered, ‘Ramallah’. Shuruq Harb, Personal Interview.

13- ‘For a century and a half preceding the Egyptian Revolution, Cairo had been the cultural capital of the Arab World. There, Western concepts of modernity were eclectically borrowed, refashioned and diffused to fit a nationalized framework. In what was called the renaissance (al-Nahda) of Arab Cultural identity by contrast with its European counterpart. The rebirth of the national Self was reinforced by the negation of the Western Other.’ Kamal Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, p.125

14- Kamal Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, p.125

up around the capital to display the freshest work of the city's artists as well work from all over the Arab world and even Europe and the United States.' Artists included Henry Moore, Pablo Picasso, Georges Mathieu and John Ferren. Foreign cultural missions or commercial galleries sponsored the exhibitions.¹⁵ It was the capital of Arab modernity from 1952 till 1982 when Israel occupied it and naturally put an end to the thriving art economy and culture.

Furthermore, due to the civil war in Lebanon (1975 – 1990) and the subsequent wars with Israel, Beirut lost its centrality. As Boullata asserts, this led to the dispersal of the Palestinian artists who once found refuge there, and he continues to write, 'The cultural centre that nourished the first generation of Palestinian refugee artists was no more. Without any cultural centre to bring artists together, Palestinian art developed along different paths. Palestinian art had to grub its survival under new and different skies.'¹⁶ The period that Boullata refers to was 1982, a time from which Palestinian artists continued to create wherever they were based in the world. Is it possible that in 2005, the UAE with its economic power and openness to the world started to become the new 'sky' for Palestinian art? At the beginning of the millennium the UAE was hardly on the art map, yet in just a few years it managed to prove itself as an art centre and an emerging art market that is capable of attracting substantive art investors.¹⁷ Furthermore, the UAE is necessary to this research because it is replacing the traditional Arab art centres, Cairo and Beirut, which Arab artists flocked to for critical recognition and economic success. Hence, all those interviewed were asked whether they could find in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) a centre for Palestinian art that could bring together Palestinians globally.

Accordingly, the UAE centre has been described as a phase that will wind down¹⁸ as just another mall¹⁹

15- *Ibid.*, 124 – 127.

16- *Ibid.*, 158.

17- These investors no more consider art that is created in the Middle East to be 'junk', but rather have started to give it the label of being cutting edge. The art in question might not have changed in the last decade, but there are factors that allowed for this alteration in the perception of 'value' as discussed in the beginning of this chapter.

and also as a universal centre.²⁰ The UAE is quite geographically close to Palestine and, ironically, it is easier for Palestinian artists from the West Bank and Gaza Strip to reach the Emirates than to reach Jerusalem!²¹ However, even though the UAE seems geographically closer, many people note that it lacks the unique intellectual scene, pluralism and culture that Beirut thrived on. The Gulf has developed, according to the opinion of many, an artificial culture in which the oldest building might be only forty years old.²² This is a striking contrast to Beirut, which has a long and rich cultural history. But, do we need this kind of mental connection for art to prosper from an economic perspective?²³ People do not, as yet, attribute much culture to the UAE; it remains a sudden thing and only time will tell if the system has been constructed with a long-term sustainable vision. Furthermore, the UAE has the art infrastructure but has it developed the human resources to crown the art Renaissance? Not many artists choose to live there in comparison to Beirut where artists and intellectuals flock from all over the Arab World.²⁴

Many wanted to believe that Jerusalem is the centre, but agreed that under the political conditions 'it is impossible'²⁵ or that a 'miracle is needed'²⁶ to make it as such. As for the Ramallah centre, it is in fact suffering from the same political situation as Jerusalem and cannot be viable. It is a centre for

18- Vera Tamari, Personal Interview.

19- Rawan Sharaf, Personal Interview.

20 - Sliman Mansour, Personal Interview.

21- Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip require special permissions to enter Jerusalem. There is no geographical continuity between Jerusalem and the West Bank. Israel controls all entrances to the city by militarized checkpoints.

22- This remark on the oldest building in Dubai was made by Samar Martha in a personal interview, August 19, 2009

23- When asked whether the UAE could be the centre for Palestinian art, Persekian replied: 'This is what I am trying to achieve. I am trying to convince the UAE to adopt this project. I try to find resources, create interest there with those concerned, to grant to Palestinians special privileges and initiate fully funded projects and curatorial shows....' As Khalil Rabah puts it, 'The UAE will play an important role. The way it is going, it appears so, but whether I like it or not, that is a different story.' Just like artists who seek the international centres of New York and London for recognition, Arab artists could find in the UAE opportunities of success, especially because the art scene in the UAE requires Arab art to thrive on. However, a major difference between these opposite geographic centres is that the value granting mechanisms in New York and London have been functioning and proven for a long time.

24- Najwan Darwish, Personal Interview.

25- Rana Bishara, Personal Interview, August 22, 2009.

26 - Jumana Aboud, Personal Interview, August 21, 2009.

a select few and it is geographically isolated. The emerging centre in the Gulf has increased demand for Palestinian art. Some are viewing the UAE as a good thing. It is an economic power, open to the world and is ruled by influential leaders. It seems that having, as Sherwell puts it, mechanisms of representation in the UAE, would best serve the Palestinian artists from the occupied Palestinian land. However, what happens if the centre dissolves? 27 In this case the theory of Kamal Boullata seems to offer the decisive answer to where to establish the centre of Palestinian Art.

A MOBILE CENTRE ?

Kamal Boullata writes and talks about the idea of the nomadic Palestinian artist. That is, Palestinians should integrate into the societies and systems in which they reside. This way they effectively promote Palestinian culture and art. 28 It seems that the influence of Boullata's idea of the nomadic Palestinian artist is far reaching as the centre takes its centrality through the artists who live everywhere. The Museum of Contemporary Art (CAMP) involves the biennial 'nomadic' movement of its cumulative art collection and 'portable' structure. Every year CAMP will find a temporary 'home' under the auspices of a 'host museum'. This approach has helped construct a unique hybrid identity for Palestinian art. 29 Many Palestinian artists have understood that the artist is the centre, and it seems those who have left the virtual centre in Palestine found in the world a real centre where they can create in its space and more rapidly advance their careers. Hani Zurob, one of the most significant painters of the new generation of Palestinian artists to emerge in the last decade, expresses, 'the best thing that happened to my art was the moment when I arrived in Paris because what I learnt in the last four years might have taken me a lifetime back in Palestine. 30 As Darwish

27- Viable centres need to depend on their own resources—people. It is feared that once the international demand falters, or the approach of the ruling authorities shifts, the whole emerging art scene would falter as well. As Darwish articulates it, 'A centre is bigger than the will of the individuals.... That is with or without them the centre does not cease to exist.'

28- Kamal Boullata, Personal Interview, April 27, 2009.

29- Boullata writes, 'Palestinian visual art which has been characterized by hybrid components, proceeded to grow in a fluid space in which border crossings between different forms of expression has become an intrinsic characteristic.'

elucidates, one of the measures of success in anyone's life is how much a person manages to integrate into environments that are foreign to that person. If one wants to be part of the world one needs to have the ability to integrate into the world and put aside identity obstacles.³¹ This is what Palestinian artists who left Palestine or were forced to leave eventually understood. Those who stayed like Khalil Rabah had to build firm communication channels with art centres abroad. The question is how did they achieve this?

SECTION 4

THE RISE OF THE INSTITUTION

Galleries have played a crucial role since the nineteenth century in working together with artists and in developing their careers. From the inception of the modern art market, dealers have defined 'their own identity as disinterested promoters and patrons rather than merchants and marketers of art.' 32 They believe they distribute art for history and not for the market, and that they choose their artists solely according to artistic merit. From an art perspective, 'dealers are an active part of the support system of the art world'. 33 Without dealers it will be hard to have an art market and advance art altogether. The gallery is seen as the artist's home base, where the price of artworks enjoys stability and careful attention. It acts rationally with regard to supply and demand, and auction houses price fevers. 34 The gallery's approach towards the perception of value inevitably influences the life path of artists. Successful dealers tend to collect symbolic capital when they see their role more for the sake of art and not for the sake of money. Dealers were described as gatekeepers to the art world and in addition to representing established and new artists they also provide critics, curators, and art historians with a platform to execute their missions. 35 , 36 They are key for any country seeking

30- Hani Zurob, Personal Interview.

31- Najwan Darwish, Personal Interview.

32- Olav Velthuis, *Talking Prices : Symbolic Meanings of Prices on the Market for Contemporary Art* (Princeton University Press; Princeton, N.J. ; Woodstock, 2005), 20.

33- *Ibid.*, 86.

34- *Ibid.*, 90.

to have a healthy and viable art market and they do in fact eventually trigger sales in the secondary art market. 37

The way Palestinian art has been marketed qualifies to be labelled an art market in accordance with the operation of supply and demand. The question should focus more on the characteristics of this market. Curator Samar Martha, rightly differentiates between the 'solidarity market' and the 'real market' from a Western art perspective. The latter is art traded in commercial galleries, art fairs, art sold to museums and art collected for investment purposes. 38 As for the value mechanism for the solidarity market, this is based on politics. This became a deciding factor of what was considered art-worthy up until the early 1990s because people valued the work of artists when its theme was based on the national narrative.³⁹ Demand and supply was based on politics and it seems that when the supply changed its 'packing features' in the 1990s (conceptual change in the presentation or production, see section 2, Contemporary Practices Vol VII) demand decreased for this kind of 'traditional' art. Either, people got bored with this type of art or they got frustrated with the never changing political situation.

Today, a primary market in Palestine (in the Western understanding) still does not exist or is at its most basic stage. There are no galleries to nurture the careers of artists and advance them. Instead, and in order to fill the gap, a new form of primary market

35- Ibid., 2327-.

36- Furthermore, dealers are necessary because they understand that collectors affect the future biography of the artwork, in contrast to auction houses, where an artwork is sold to the highest bidder. There are collectors who buy for speculative reasons, something that dealers consider 'wrong' as they tend to harm the artist's reputation and affect his/her sales balance.

37- Velthuis remarks that the way art is marketed is the 'heart of what the art market is about', and dealers constitute a major part of it. Art dealers 'saw themselves and were seen as patrons, who thought it was their duty to assume responsibility for their artists and to provide them with support, recognition, and praise.' Dealers work with artists on a long-term basis, and develop a relationship with the artist. Good dealers are also concerned with stimulating critical attention for the artist's work by having critics write about their artists, and persuading curators to include them in future museum shows and other noncommercial institutions. Olav Velthuis, *Talking Prices*, 55.

38- The value mechanisms for the 'real market' have been outlined in chapter three.

39- Tamari, an artist who emerged in the 1970s says that this was the case in the 1970s and 1980s.

has been emerging, especially 'post-Oslo', that continues until today. The Palestinian cultural scene is highly dependant on foreign support and the new reality on the ground gave birth to a number of non-governmental institutions (NGOs) and other local cultural institutions that have become the mediator or the connecting link between the artist, the public and the outside world.

BIRTH OF THE POST-OSLO CULTURAL INSTITUTION

After the 1994 collective national cause stopped being the main factor in literary, artistic and cultural productions. Things moved more towards individuality. 40 Before, artists engaged in macroscopic inspection of the national aspirations of Palestinians (they painted what people wanted to see and what people easily understood), and gradually started going through microscopic self-reflection. This means when the method of political recognition dissolved, a new critical system of recognition needed to develop. Figure 2, even though the work was created in 2010, shows, in many ways, the inevitable transformation Palestinian artists were going through in that period. It is a work by Bashar Hroub who covers his head with mirrors and lies down alone in Palestinian wilderness.

A brief look at the birth of the modern cultural art institutions is also necessary to understand their importance and influential roles. Jack Persekian, one of the best-known curators in Palestine, sheds lights on the establishment of Anadiel, which was supposed to be a commercial gallery in 1992 in Jerusalem. This is how he describes the Anadiel Gallery venture and its transformation into an institution:

Anadiel failed... It started as a commercial gallery and it took one year for it to fail. There was no art market and this is true up to this day. There were no clients... I was fooled by the Peace Process; thinking that people [Palestinians from the Diaspora] who have money, would come back and would want to settle down. I thought they would like to engage with something authentic from Palestine... However something

40- Sliman Mansour, Personal Interview.



Figure 2. Bashar Hroub, Here & Now Series, c-print, ed of 3, 80 x 53 cm, 2010

happened which I did not account for later... The attention brought many people from abroad who wanted to see who the artists were, and Anadiel was the only place as a reference and an address.... So I was looking for an income, I started going to initiate projects through opening connections with the outside world; I went to diplomatic missions, suggesting projects where I would invite artists from abroad, who would come and engage with the people here. The first idea was to connect between Palestinians from inside and from outside. Given that several Palestinian artists have been nationalized, I contacted the foreign representative offices asking them for funding.... Accordingly, such initiatives would cover my running costs. Anadiel helped to advance Contemporary Palestinian Art.... and eventually led to the establishment of Al-Ma'mal Foundation in 1998.⁴¹

In the 1990s, the Al-Ma'mal Foundation, Al-Wasiti and Khalil Sakakini were also established. These institutions, among many others, have been

dependent on donor money and very often (it seems according to political environments) adopted different development strategies. A major part of the donor money has been spent without strategic planning and the support often lacked continuity or sustainability.⁴² This did not allow for the creation of a long-term⁴³ vision for arts promotion and forced institutions to adjust their cultural and art agendas accordingly. As Dr Sherwell confirms, agendas could be interested in women, theatre or education, 'so constantly projects have to be shifted and designed in order to meet the donor's need.' The institutions are left with no choice but to compete and comply to cover their running costs and ensure their survival.⁴⁴ All NGOs are competing for the same funds and this is part of the explanation as to why there is a lack of harmony and proper coordination between the few

⁴¹ Jack Persekian, Personal Interview. Translation from Arabic.

⁴² Vera Tamari, Personal Interview.

⁴³ The donor money is very short-term and often lasts for three, six or twelve months and in a best-case scenario for three years.

institutions that function in Palestine.’⁴⁵ The pot is small, it is ‘a dot in a sea’ as Persekian contends and ‘every one wants it’.⁴⁶ Sharaf also agrees and expresses how communication channels exist, but partnerships do not. ‘There is a sense of negative competition that is partly related, in my opinion, with the lack of financial sources, and the sense of competition to these financial resources.’⁴⁷

The donors want visibility, and clearly they need to report back. Persekian agrees that the donor’s approach of conditioning the money is somehow an obstacle in developing Palestinian art organically. Ford Foundation, according to him, does not restrict how the money is spent and leaves it to the institution’s discretion. In contrast, US AID insists on projects that involve democracy. For example, Persekian sums it up critically saying, ‘after years, the art centre becomes a social centre or is transformed into one.’⁴⁸ This has influenced the way artists create and Monzer Jawabreh, who had his last solo in 2005, gave a similar analogy. He explains how he gained nothing when he presented the new works. ‘If you do important art, no one would understand it or give it attention. Practically, this would cause frustration and, as a consequence, this transforms the artists role to a social one, or pushes artists into creating inferior decorative art for the satisfaction of those who buy—mainly the foreigners.’⁴⁹

In brief, the donors want a mediator and the institution looks for the supplier (the artist) to meet

their customer’s demand (the donor). The artist chooses whether to go along with the customer’s demands or not. It has nothing to do with the intrinsic value of the artwork.⁵⁰ It is more a question of matching the supply to the demand. What the donor chooses is indirectly aligned with what the West wishes to see. Clearly there are exceptions, but this perception was confirmed through several artists including, Mansour, Zurob, Malhi and others.

Najwan Darwish asks whether the creation of these institutions was the result of the society’s real need for the arts.⁵¹ He critiques the institutional core structure and connects their creations with the political agendas that resulted from the Oslo Peace Process.⁵² As artist Vera Tamari explains, ‘money flooded in alongside political interest, to fill the gap of not supporting political initiatives. By funding culture, they engaged in safe play.’⁵³ It is evident that donors do what the governments of their countries want. Money was paid to the Palestinian authority and to the NGOs to sustain a deformed status quo rather than helping to resolve the political stagnation on the ground. Furthermore, donations to cultural institutions which are based in Jerusalem, are insignificant in comparison to the amount of funding allocated to Ramallah. Consequently, as Darwish comments, a number of institutions immigrated to Ramallah to stay on the map.

INSTITUTIONS & THE PRIMARY MARKET

These institutions have become the address for any foreign interest in Palestinian art. Acting as consultancies, it is common that they promote artists who are part of their ‘stable’ of artists. Institutions, in one way or another, assumed similar functions to

41- Adila Laidi, the first and former director of one of the prominent cultural institutions, the Khalil Sakakini, writes, “Like other Palestinian cultural NGOs, we found ourselves in the paradoxical situation of having to rely on international funding for projects aimed at preserving the integrity of Palestinian culture... We had the luck to win support of several international donors, and it was they who enabled us to survive and serve our community.” Laïdi-Hanieh Adila, «Arts, Identity, and Survival: Building Cultural Practices In Palestine.» *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35, no. 4 (July 1, 2006), 31.

45- Tina Sherwell, Personal Interview.

46- Sliman Mansour expressed this using the pie concept ‘Money allocated to visual arts is scarce, the pie is too small, and many want to eat, leading to many fights, problems and plots...’

47- Rawan Sharaf, Personal Interview. Furthermore, Adila Laïdi, wrote about the necessity of turning the Khalil Sakakini from a Palestinian Authority funded institution to an NGO to be able to ask for foreign funds. She explains, ‘As an NGO, the Sakakini was now legally entitled to solicit support from private sources.’ She explains how they had to look to the major actors of international aid, and how the competition was stiff due to the proliferations of many other NGOs at the same time. Laïdi-Hanieh Adila, «Arts, Identity, and Survival,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35, no. 4 (July 1, 2006), 29.

<http://www.proquest.com.alumnilibrary.esc.edu/>

48- Jack Persekian, Personal Interview.

49- Monzer Jawabreh, Personal Interview.

50- Jawwad Malhi, Personal Interview, August 6, 2009.

51- Similarly, Sharaf remarks how the negative competition cannot make change in the society: ‘Even though we all have slogans that advocate that we are all there to serve the country, but on the ground, this will not work if we are all engaged in solo play. This should especially be the case for Jerusalem, as doing otherwise will be a waste of time.’ Rawan Sharaf, Personal Interview.

52- Darwish explains that ‘Oslo is a western manufacture and aimed at decentralizing Jerusalem and at the creation of Ramallah. Jerusalem’s closure, since the Oslo agreements isolated it, and the allocation of the foreign donor’s money to Ramallah has helped decentralize Jerusalem and create what many believe a vibrant Ramallah art scene.’ Najwan Darwish, Personal Interview.

53- Vera Tamari, Personal Interview.

those of the primary market in well-established art countries. All of them have some kind of exhibition space and they usually represent artists who align themselves with the institution. By placing them first on their list they give the impression that it is a closed circle. ⁵⁴ In contrast to a normal primary market, the institutions often lack the specialisation and the professionals who can lead the way. As Persekian asserts, ‘it is wrong to call me a curator here in Palestine... Here, you cannot afford the luxury of specialisation; it is not possible to divide the work and offer specialisations. For example, I carried the works of artist Tarek Ghousein across the [Jordan] bridge, to later hang them, to write about them and then to fill in the donor’s report. Here, a curator is not a curator.... as he should be called an activist whose job it is to move matters with any kind of budget.’⁵⁵ Artist, Shuruq Harb, expressed it differently saying that when you install your work ‘you start to look for a drill’. The institutions do not invest in developing the art scene and she finds their support marginal. ‘They all do the same work, and it would be more efficient if they divided the specialisation.’⁵⁶

In brief, the institutions do not have the knowledge or experience to understand what works of art are of artistic merit and what works are not. Their selection is not based on what may be considered art-worthy; rather the selection is tied to personal interests ⁵⁷ that mainly aim to sustain the management, rent, and accountants. ⁵⁸ More often, the interests of the institution supersede those of the artist or the society which the institution claims that it serves. The institutions always have to justify their budgets, often struggle to survive, and eventually, the people who run them want to guarantee, first and foremost, that their operations are still running. ⁵⁹ Given that a primary market does not exist in Palestine, a

secondary market clearly did not come to light. All artworks that are sold at local auctions are directly acquired through the artists.

THE RISE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CURATOR

Curatorial practices in Palestine are a fairly new practice. They gained importance and relevance when Palestinian art underwent a visual and form transition in the early 1990s. This created worldwide curiosity about Palestinian artists. Consequently, there needed to be a form of mediation to connect Palestinian artists with the outside world. This curatorial role is different to the role institutions have been performing in Palestine, the difference being that the institutions assumed the internal responsibility of artist management whereas the curators embraced the world. The institutions, as indicated earlier, became the address for foreign curators or for anyone interested in art. But, apparently by the late 1990s, it was time for Palestinian curators to assume the responsibility of showing the world what their art was about. In many ways it is as if the curators had virtual galleries, and empowered them by a predetermined stable of artists. It was also at this time that Palestinian artists from occupied Palestine started being included in art biennales.

PALESTINIAN ART IN CAPTIVITY

Whether in Jerusalem, Ramallah or anywhere in the occupied Palestinian land, it appears that Palestinians are held hostage by the donors. Palestine thrives on donor money and Palestinians are heavily dependent on foreign aid. In 2007, half of the Palestinian Authority’s three billion dollar budget came from abroad. ⁶⁰ ‘If they pull out the plug all at once, Palestine is destroyed.’ ⁶¹ According to a published study the author conducted on the role of galleries in the Middle East, he found signs that Arab artists are pushed into becoming ‘art logos’ in contrast to the ‘West’ where artists tend to develop into becoming ‘art brands’ — something that helps them to better sustain their art career. ‘Logos’ are easier to deal with

⁵⁴- Sherwell confirms that this approach is starting to break down because the artist is developing more, and the understanding of the art world structure is no more confined to certain individuals. More opportunities are opening up to Palestinian artists. Tina Sherwell, Personal Interview.

⁵⁵- He also explains: ‘I became a curator by de-facto. In 1997 ... I did not understand what the role of the curator is about, rather I saw myself as a facilitator...’ Jack Persekian, Personal Interview.

⁵⁶- Shuruq Harb, Personal Interview.

⁵⁷- Najwan Darwish, Personal Interview.

⁵⁸- Sliman Mansour, Personal Interview.

⁵⁹- Tina Sherwell, Personal Interview.

as they can be easily changed, adjusted and dropped altogether. ⁶² To further assert this notion many artists in Palestine did not object to this notion when confronted with the question. Maybe this stems from the impression that donor money also deals with the institutions or the curators on a logo basis instead of a partnership basis. Maybe this would also explain why some artists are not included in the 'closed lists' as they understand that getting on it would mean that they need to change the way they create and that they would also have to abide by the ideology of the institution or the curator they belong to. ⁶³

Having understood the reality where Palestinian artists function, a brief look at the amount of sales in Palestine and how artists price their artworks is necessary. Are the prices achieved at local auctions matching institutional gallery sales? Graphs will show that Palestinian artists who live in Western art infrastructures are more privileged than those living in Palestine, and accordingly have been more successful. Is it possible to theorise the conditions of success that will allow the Palestinian artist to transcend the geography of Palestine and become an international artist?

SECTION 5 PRICING ART, THE AUCTION VALUE & THE CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS

It is common for artists anywhere to struggle to base their income on art sales. What is unique for Palestine is that there does not exist one artist who

60- Kevin Peraino, "Palestine's New Perspective," Newsweek Sep 04, 2009, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/214839/page/2>, accessed Oct. 13, 2009.

61- Jack Persekian, Personal Interview.

62- In contrast, in the gallery world, when it works with a branded artist it needs to adjust its strategies, often in accordance with what the brand stands for, or develop a working relationship based on trust, understanding and mutual interests with the artist. Steve Sabella, «Valued in the West, Sold in the East. The Need for a Virtual Code of Ethics?», *Contemporary Practices Visual Arts from the Middle East*, 136, V. 5, October 2009.

63- Persekian agrees 100% that the destiny of some Palestinian artists is tied with those few individuals who understand western value mechanisms and distribution channels. When asked whether the Palestinian artist is hostage to the curator, he replied that this is the case worldwide between artists and curators. On the other hand, when artist Nabil Anani was asked the same question, he answered, 'I am convinced 100% because these individuals who control the art scene have developed strongholds abroad.... They know the important galleries and museums.' This case is clearest when the veteran artist Vera Tamari was asked about the future of the Palestinian artist whose destiny is tied with the few individuals responsible for promoting Palestinian art. She answered, "This is where the tragedy is. I do not serve their interests. It worries me."

is able to claim that his or her income is based on art sales. All of them engage in other related jobs to secure their livelihood. As artist Nabil Anani says, 'It is impossible to live on your art in this country'.⁶⁴ There is no question that all artists, after a certain period of enthusiastic creation, are hit with the hard reality of the need to secure their livelihood through their arts. ⁶⁵ Those who manage to live on their art are Palestinian artists who are living outside of Palestine and who have developed connections with the international art market. In Palestine, prices remain low and buyers of art find artworks of 2000 USD or 3000 USD very expensive even for established artists. ⁶⁶ Sales of 1000 USD for established artists are common and sometimes the average is no more than 500 USD. ⁶⁷ However, it is important to know that no matter how much critical success the artists achieve globally, in Palestine this success does not translate to an economic value. This also means that artists need gallery representation outside of Palestine and, as often is the case, this representation is channeled through the institutional curator.

THE PRICING DILEMMA

Artists understand that galleries would be best to consult with but, due to the lack of gallery representation, artists resort to other artists, curators and institutions for pricing. ⁶⁸ The International Academy of Arts in Ramallah, for instance, finds it difficult to help artists price works, and Sherwell even uses the term 'you are lost'. Clearly this happens because there is no system that establishes value in the traditional sense. For example, artists Anani and

64- Artists enjoyed better sales when they exhibited abroad. The motives for buying were often out of solidarity with the Palestinian cause (but this notion is starting to change). Anani sold in Foil Library in London over 40,000 USD in 2007. Many hoped that artist Khalil Rabah would be the exception, but many were confused since he earns his living from his job at Riwaq. When he was asked directly, he answered that he loves what he does and certifies that he could live 100% on his art should he decide to leave his job.

65- Perhaps, artist Monzer Jawabreh has summed it honestly by saying, 'In the past I thought that artists should not sell. I now find out that in lack of sales, I could get destroyed, however if I manage to sell during an exhibition one artwork, I am saved from a psychological and financial perspective'.

66- Al-Mahatta Gallery, Khalil Sakakini centre, Al-Hoash Gallery and artist Anani quoted the same figures.

67- Al-Mahatta Gallery confirmed these figures. It is the only gallery in Palestine with commercial aims.

Mansour helped one another to price their work. Their criteria were based on formal elements: size, concept, and materials used. Artists also ask curators, 69 but how do artists and institutions alike decide on a price in lack of value granting mechanisms?

Lacking a price database and valuation experts, Samar Martha from ArtSchool Palestine, for example, often consults with people abroad. By giving the relevant information about the artist she tries to find similar ones living in Europe to estimate the price of an artwork. Martha remarks that she often needs to start from scratch. Sharaf, director of the Palestinian Art Court AlHoash in Jerusalem, comments that when it comes to pricing the works of established Palestinian artists who live abroad, the artists and the galleries who represent them should consider Palestine an exception and lower the prices. 'We will not be able to establish a market with Western Prices.... Nobody would pay these prices.' When asked about the percentage of sales at her gallery Sharaf preferred to quote a figure with the number of sales, finding difficulty in calculating the percentage figure. She answered, 'I started to work in 2006 and up until 2009 we have sold three artworks', This response made it clear why she found difficulty in calculating a percentage! Sharaf explained that they do four or five exhibitions a year, but one should take into consideration that some of the exhibitions were installations (and consequently hard to sell). Al-Mahatta Gallery, which many artists see as the new gallery to sell art, confirmed that they manage to sell one or two paintings from exhibitions of forty paintings. Some of these are sold through the inner circle of the artist, family and friends. 70

THE AUCTION VALUE

Recently, prices achieved at local auctions have been giving an indication of value. The question remains whether this value mirrors the real market value of Palestinian art in Palestine. Auctions houses did not conduct these auctions. The United Nations

68- As Anani explains, 'Suleiman and I used to help price for each other, and our criteria was based on colors, shapes, content, idea, size, and medium.'

69- Several artists note that they consult with curators like Jack Persekian, Samar Martha and Salwa Mekdadi concerning prices.

Development Program (UNDP) has executed a yearly auction since 2003. People who lack the minimum art expertise organise them. There is no ground research done to decide the value of artworks, reserves are never applied and the auctions start from zero dollars and go up. The highest price sold at auction since 2003 was 4300 USD for a painting by Suleiman Mansour. The percentage of foreign buyers decreased from 60% in 2003, to 55% in 2004, to 52% in 2005, to 43% in 2006, rose to 48% in 2007 and dropped to a noticeable 10% in 2008. 71 In 2008, Al-Hoash Gallery found it necessary to conduct a new yearly auction. The main motive for the first auction was to raise money to help the institution financially. This should not be unusual, as auction houses do seek profit. However, Al-Hoash is not an auction house and it is a non-profit public institution with a clear cultural vision.72 Nevertheless, some of the UNDP auction mistakes were avoided as they had a general reserve of 500 USD for emerging artists, 800 USD for established artists, 500 USD for smaller works and 800 USD for larger works. For the record, Suleiman Mansour's painting fetched in 2009 the highest price with 3600 USD, followed by Anani's with 3200 USD. Also, a unique outcome that year was the percentage of foreign buyers that stood at 10%, which is similar to the ratio at the UNDP auction in 2008.

Of importance to this study is the influence these auctions have on the public as the achieved results become a value reference. If the sold price is not high or the artwork is not sold Anani remarks that it is 'a humiliation for the artist'. This would be the case for any artist auctioned in an auction house, but in Palestine, where the perception of value is not developed, the consequences are more harmful for artists seeking to establish an art career. Hani

70- Al-Mahatta claims is working on the idea of marketing Palestinian art regionally and internationally to increase sales. 'Nothing is clear yet, every time we visit a country we try to learn how the art market is there in order to measure how to market Palestinian Art.... It is about marketing and advertising and this requires doing extensive research.'

71- Following is the total sum of auctioned artists who usually number 20. In 2003 US\$ 11,670, in 2004 US\$ 16,750, in 2005 US\$ 21,700, in 2006 US\$ 26,150, in 2007 -US\$ 17,700, and in 2008 US\$ 20,400. Figures were provided by UNDP.

72- Sharaf even states that the auction is a social event which is attended by people who know nothing about the arts.

Zurob expresses how, without doubt, the auction records helped him set his prices, especially because the results enjoyed media exposure. 'I was happy, without doubt, that among 40 artists my painting sold with the highest price, this gives you in the art surroundings recognition. Even though deep inside you know that the auction is not professional, it grants you points.'⁷³ Just before he moved to France, in 2005, his painting recorded the highest bid of 3100 USD (UNDP auction), surpassing Suleiman's painting which fetched 2000 USD. Khalaf, director of one of the most important cultural institutions, sees a direct connection between the quality of Zurob's art and the prices he achieved at auction. But, what if it was the other way round, i.e. if Zurob did not perform well, would the justification be the low quality of Zurob's art? In this case, what opinion should one develop for the other unfortunate artists whose work did not sell or sold for symbolic prices? Is the value in the work or in the system that grants it value? Sliman Mansour observed that artists started copying Zurob's painting style because they believed that this style is what sells in the market.⁷⁴ Furthermore, two institutions confirmed that artists in Zurob's age conditioned their agreement to enter the Al-Hosh auction with a price set in their minds which was similar to the ones Zurob achieved.⁷⁵

These auctions are highly criticised by other institutions and artists alike, including those artists whose work was auctioned.⁷⁶ They were labelled as cheap art bazaars,⁷⁷ social events and even the younger generation of artists perceive these auctions negatively: 'I do not take these auctions very seriously.... They are not real art auctions, they are more of non profit auctions; a naïve way of solidarity and of selling art.'⁷⁸ However, apparently many artists aspire to be in these auctions, especially those who lack foreign presence. Trying to understand why, artists Nabil Anani expressed; 'For someone like me,

painting for forty years in such a bad economy where sales are very little and income from the arts is very limited, I am forced to sell. You also cannot afford to stack your art. To remain on the map you are forced to continue painting. Accordingly, you are forced to participate in such initiatives.'⁷⁹

If the auction results are considered from an economic, rather than artistic perspective, then they do mirror the real market value of Palestinian art in Palestine. Given that the auction results are very similar to the private sales the institutions conduct in their galleries, it is safe to assume that the local value of Palestinian art does not exceed the 4300 USD. To sum up, in the major international auction houses prices often exceed value. In Palestine the reverse is true as the achieved prices eclipse value. The international critical recognition artists receive does not translate into an increased economic value in Palestine. Paradoxically, the low prices achieved at local auctions in Palestine do not influence sales at major auction houses where, for some Palestinian artists, prices are barely comparable. For example, while Mansour's auction record in Palestine is 4300 USD (approximately £2600), at Sotheby's London he has a record of £25,000.⁸⁰

CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS

Alan Bowness, former director of the Tate Gallery, described four circles of recognition before artists enter the hall of fame: peer recognition, critical recognition, patronage by dealers and collectors and finally public acclaim. Does the career of the Palestinian artist assume the same path if we take into consideration what was explained in the last five sections?

73- Hani Zurob, Personal Interview.

74- When Zurob was asked about his opinion concerning Mansour's observation, he said that after his success in auctions, he was careful not to show new works to his fellow artists.

75- The institutions are Sharaf from Al-Hoash Gallery and Samar Martha from ArtSchool Palestine.

76- It is one form of recognition when art is sold. Do Palestinian artists need auctions, especially because auction houses should play a role in the art market economy once many other steps have been established? The director of the Khalil Sakakini centre remarks that 'Palestinians did not have a normal development like other nations. We were forced to jump, and these jumps are dangerous, because one might fall on the face, and because the world is moving forward quickly, we had to execute such jumps.' So the question remains was this auction jump a necessary one to contribute to the construction of value.

77- Jack Persekian, Personal Interview.

78- Shuruq Harb, Personal Interview.

79- Nabil Anani, Personal Interview, August 25, 2009.

1 - PEER RECOGNITION

It is natural that every artist cares about peer recognition. It affects artists psychologically and eventually economically. According to the research, the peer was often described as vague and also non-existing. A brief historical look might help to explain why. In the 1970s and the 1980s the Palestinian League of Artists granted recognition for emerging Palestinian artists. The criteria, according to Persekian, were based on political merit. If the league had 100 artists and only forty were from the Fatah 81 political party then this party would do its best to bring into the league Fatah artists. Recognition was tainted with political and personal interests. This conforms to what Anani says when he confirms that the peer controlled the direction of Palestinian art and that they were especially successful with the younger generation. This league started breaking apart just before the first Intifada in 1987 and continued to crumble after the infighting in Lebanon, which led to the PLO receiving less money. Accordingly, the money allocated to the league gradually diminished. Some of the artists regrouped and established a new institution in Jerusalem—the Al-Wasiti. It received recognition and aid from foreign donors until it closed its doors in 2003 due to lack of financial resources and, allegedly, bad management. However, for a period of time, the group appeared to be in control of Palestinian art. Artists belonging to it received invitations to exhibit abroad. However, quickly, this peer group started dissolving with the emergence of several cultural institutions and curators who assumed control of the art scene in Palestine. The peer has been replaced by the institution which started to decide what is of artistic merit and eventually opened its doors to artists to exhibit locally and internationally. As Dr Sherwell remarks: ‘The institutions are the ones who are giving the opportunities.... Hence, they are like the gatekeepers’. 82 Therefore, peer recognition became institutional recognition.

80- This was sale of Modern and Contemporary Arab and Iranian Art. Sothebys London: Thursday, October 23, 2008 [Lot 00165]. 15,000 - 20,000 BP (27,855 - 37,140 US\$).

81- Fatah is a major Palestinian political party and the largest faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

CRITICAL RECOGNITION

The occasions on which Palestinian artists get solo show invitations outside Palestine have been few in number. When it does happen, the exhibitions are rarely mainstream or in leading galleries. In order to seek visibility this has led Palestinian artists to focus on entering major biennales and curatorial shows. As explained in section two, when Palestinian artists from occupied Palestine take higher education the gap of critical recognition between them and Palestinians in the Diaspora and Israel decreases. This means that after artists gain institutional recognition, they start receiving invitations to exhibit in curatorial shows. Critical recognition means curatorial success. Artists aspire to be included in exhibitions. Furthermore, according to my research, many express that the prizes artists receive influence the public perception. As Dr Sherwell contends, prizes have become the ultimate form of recognition.

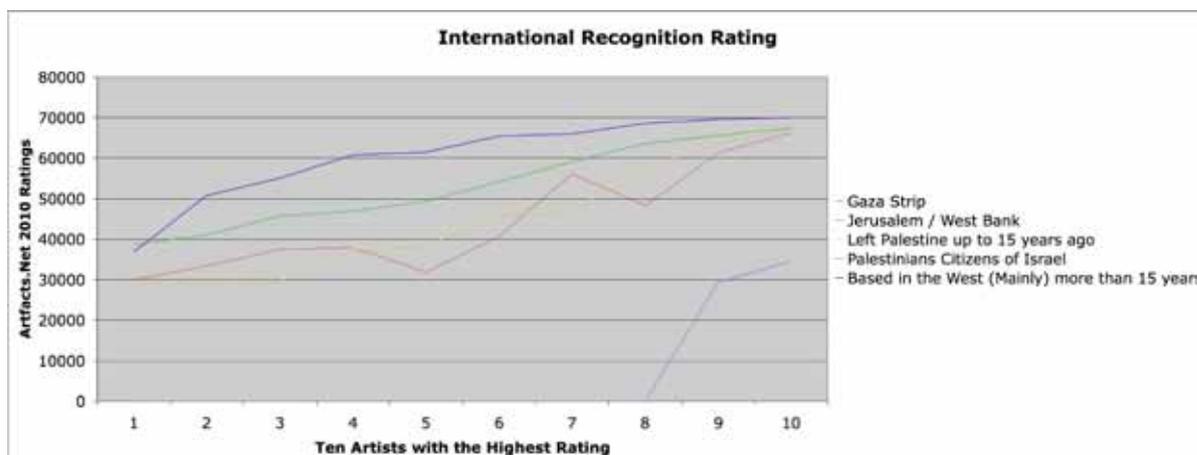
PATRONAGE BY DEALERS AND COLLECTORS

As noted in previous sections, there are no commercial galleries in Palestine; hence, local dealer recognition is not applicable. Collectors are a key factor in the art economy and in Palestine they are numbered. One needs to make a distinction in Palestine between the two words ‘buyers’ and ‘collectors’. Foreigners, according to the opinion of many, are not collecting for the love of art but mainly for solidarity and social purposes. This might also be the case for the occasional family or friendship purchase. Accordingly, there has not been much importance attributed to this kind of recognition. In the last few years, however, and given that the level of awareness has increased for Palestinian artists, it has been noticed that patronage by dealers and collectors is starting to influence the career of the Palestinian artist. This happens only after the artist gains public acclaim.

PUBLIC ACCLAIM

Reaching the fourth circle of recognition, one artist remarks, ‘I believe that art is for the people, and the

82- Tina Sherwell, Personal Interview.



Graph A. Line graph showing the rating of Palestinian artists divided into five geographical groups. Data updated from Artfacts.Net on August 9, 2010.

question is how to make my art reach the people so that the audience and I can grow together.’⁸³ As understood in section two, the local audience is very limited and not influential. However, it is noticed that when Palestinian artists gain enough exposure outside of Palestine and start enjoying foreign public acclaim, this recognition influences the local audience. Hence, they start to appreciate the artist’s work more.⁸⁴ What follows is a summary of the four circles of recognition a Palestinian artist may need to go through on his or her way to fame and economical success:

- 1 - Institutional Acclaim
- 2 - Curatorial & Prize Acclaim
- 3 - Foreign Public Acclaim (that will create local public acclaim)
- 4 - Patronage by Dealers and Collectors

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION RATINGS

Having understood the circles of recognition, the question is how successful have they been in granting artists from occupied Palestine international recognition in comparison to other Palestinian artists in the world? In order to get a clear picture, artists had to be divided into the following categories.

- Artists working in the West mainly for more than 15 years

⁸³- Jawwad Malhi, Personal Interview.

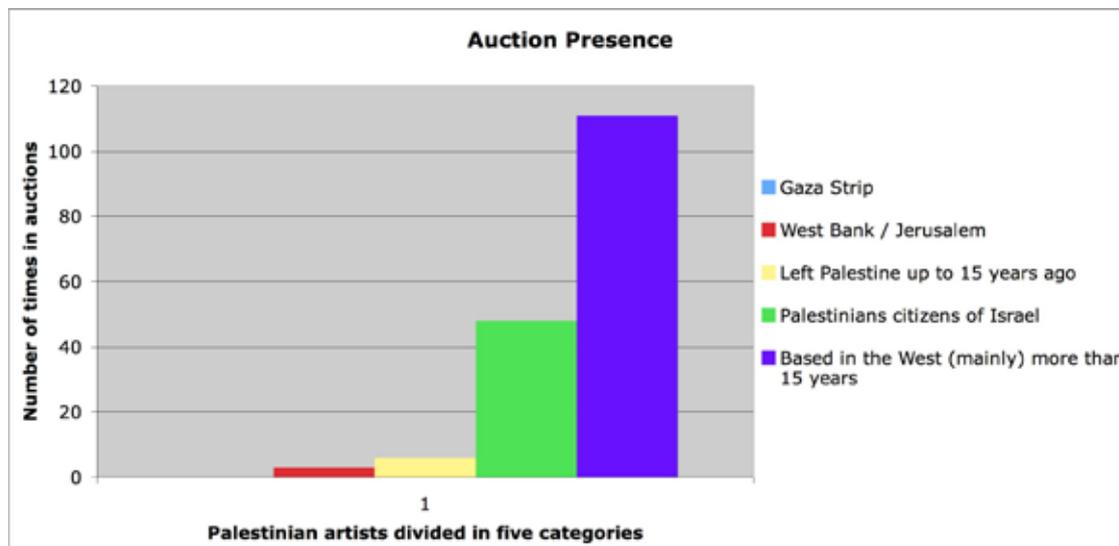
⁸⁴- This notion was certified by all interviewees.

- Artists who are citizens of Israel
- Artists who left Palestine less than fifteen years ago
- Artists living in Jerusalem & the West Bank
- Artists living in the Gaza Strip

For each category fifteen artists were chosen. To test their international recognition their rating was obtained from Artfacts.Net. Exhibitions listed on Artfacts.Net rate the different artists with a points system which indicates the amount of attention each particular artist has received from art institutions (primary market data and activity). These points help to determine the artist’s future auction and gallery sales.⁸⁵ The chosen artists are the best-known Palestinian artists in each category. From the fifteen, only the highest ten ranking artists were chosen in order to obtain comparable data.⁸⁶

It can clearly be seen in graph A that artists living in the Gaza Strip have the lowest ratings, and the majority have no rating at all. Furthermore, artists who have been in the West for more than 15 years have constantly enjoyed better ratings by a noticeable margin when compared to the rest of the categories. Palestinian artists who are citizens of Israel, who have benefited from the developed Israeli art infrastructures, connections with the Palestinian art scene and from no restriction on mobility, have enjoyed excellent rating.

It is interesting to note that artists who left Palestine have been performing well (the majority left no



Graph B. Bar Graph clearly indicating the advantage of Western art distribution systems in adding economical value to art. Auction data acquired from ArtPrice on August 10, 2010.

more than five years ago). Now they are aligning themselves with Palestinians from Israel and, in some cases, are even managing to surpass. Jerusalem and the West Bank artists have been gaining a clear momentum, but it should be clear that reaching a top score rating similar to Palestinian artists based in the West would require extensive work.

The bar graph (graph B) clearly indicates the rate of success and that living long enough in countries with well-established art systems helps artists achieve higher ratings. For the record, the artist who enjoys the highest rating among those who left Palestine is originally from the Gaza Strip (Tayseer Batniji, b. 1961). In that category there are five other artists from the Gaza Strip. If these artists had stayed put in the Gaza Strip, would their rating be similar to their peers in the Gaza Strip category? This is a clear

85- A limitation to Artfacts.Net is the fact that they mainly list recognised galleries, institutions and museums in their system, disregarding exhibitions in many non-western countries. However, the rating does give a trustworthy indication of the level of international recognition.

86- To make the graph the following needed to be done. Artfacts.Net has ratings where the lower the number the better the rating is (for example, Andy Warhol has a rating of 1). In contrast, a rating of 50,000 is a low one. Also, artists who have a listing of one exhibition do not get a rating but they do enjoy presence on Artfacts.Net. For these artists, a rating of 60,000 was assumed. If artists in the chosen categories are not listed at all, a rating of 70,000 was assumed. To make sense of the graphical data and have an upward graph from a low numerical figure to a high numerical figure (so that the highest number indicates a better achievement) 70,000 was subtracted from all numbers.

sign that the conventional distribution systems play a major role in adding value.

The same trend is clear when it comes to the number of auctions. Palestinians artists who are mainly based in the West enjoy a much higher presence than all of the other categories. Artists from the Gaza Strip have

CONCLUSION

The Israeli occupation and the absence of political stability have enticed Palestinian artists to look beyond Palestine to seek critical recognition and financial stability. In the early 1990s Palestinian art that was created in the occupied Palestinian land shifted from collective symbolic, illustrative, figurative and narrative expression to more individual or personal expression. Engaging with art that finds contentment and complexity in thought, and the adoption of Western references to relate to local experiences, the geographical area where Palestinian artists showcase their work was extended. Traditional value mechanisms do not apply to art created in Palestinian land. Accordingly, there has been a need to find other centres for Palestinian art to flourish critically and economically. Neither Jerusalem nor Ramallah has developed a well-functioning art infrastructure. In contrast, Palestinian art can benefit from having mechanisms of representation

in the UAE. However, the idea of a mobile centre or the nomadic Palestinian artist remains the most viable option. This is what Palestinian artists who left Palestine (or who were forced to leave) eventually understood. For Palestinian artists who choose to stay in Palestine they needed to connect with cultural institutions and the influential curator who assumed similar roles to those of a primary market. They became the mediators and the connecting link between the artists and the outside world. This 'primary market' does not survive on art sales but rather on foreign donor money. The personal interests of the players and the donor's political agenda have not allowed for an organic development or promotion of Palestinian art. However, this reality has created four circles of recognition that Palestinian artists need to go through on their way to international recognition and art market success: Institutional Acclaim, Curatorial & Prize Acclaim, Foreign Public Acclaim and Patronage by Dealers and Collectors. Because the artists reach the art market after public acclaim this contributes to the long journey artists from occupied Palestine travel until they reach their economic target.

As for the local value of Palestinian art, it does not exceed the 4300 USD margin. This is true because the local auctions and private sales match. In Palestine auction results eclipse the value of Palestinian art. But when this art is traded or auctioned internationally, paradoxically, it achieves prices that far exceed the local value. Finally, the success of Palestinian artists living in occupied Palestine has started to align itself with the success of other Palestinians living in Israel or the Diaspora Palestinians who live mainly in Western countries. Artists living in the Gaza Strip have the lowest international ratings. Furthermore, artists who have been in the West for more than 15 years have constantly enjoyed better ratings by a noticeable margin when compared to the rest of the categories. The graphical data indicates that after living long enough in countries with well-established art systems artists would achieve higher ratings and their critical success translates into an economic value.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Having explained the theoretical background, the next step would be to test, through a business-oriented approach, the viability of increasing the local demand consumption through the economic sector i.e. to trigger corporate and institutional collections. This could be material for anyone interested in continuing this research. What follows are brief suggestions for an organic development of Palestinian art.

ORGANIC DEVELOPMENT

Cultural institutions should have a constant outreach program that brings school children into galleries. Given the lack of real governmental plans, this process of cultural cultivation is necessary for the creation of an audience able to relate to contemporary Palestinian art. There is a clear rise in the number of educated artists. To accompany this there is a need to raise, through institutional scholarships, the number of curators, art historians, critics and art professionals who can assume the role of agents and eventually start up their own private galleries when the ground is set in Palestine or, anywhere in the world, to do so.

It is necessary to increase curatorial shows on Palestinian art regardless of the artist's nationality. This in turn will create more interaction and limit the referral of Palestinian art as militant. Similar to the conceptual change Palestinian art went through, there is a need for a real conceptual change when curating exhibitions on Palestinian art. That is, the connecting theme should not necessarily be that all participating artists are of Palestinian origin.

There is a need for comprehensive and updated objective resource centres. In this way, when there is foreign interest in Palestinian art, the role of the influential institution can be minimised. Even though some do exist the arduous task of updating is not conducted. A more viable approach would be to create a scheme to launch art websites for artists and have them linked to the resource center. In this way the responsibility of updating lies with

the artist. Furthermore, such websites would enable artists from the Gaza Strip to get connected with the outside world and enjoy more visibility.

References are absent in Palestinian libraries. For example, in the 'centre' of the art happening, Ramallah, key books on Palestinian art are simply not found, not even the three key books mentioned in the methodology. There is a need to comprehensively invest in creating art libraries and subscribe to art journals so that the Palestinian artists and the audience stay updated with contemporary art.

A more sustainable approach in spending the donor's budget is to trigger what may become a key factor in adding critical and eventually economical value to Palestinian art. It is essential to publish top quality art books on Palestinian artists. There are artists who have been working for over forty years and there is not one single book on their work. Such books, through the help of institutions and curators, should reach leading galleries, collectors and museums worldwide.

Most institutions have not revised their mission values, goals and statements since their founding. When asked about them, several did not even recall them and instructed me to look for them on their websites. These institutions should be very clear about who they are, what they want to achieve, who their audience is and how they want to achieve their goals.

Finally, to increase the supply of art for local art consumption, there is a need to increase the demand that stems from the society. This would require increasing the general level of public education. Given that such a mission would require years until tangible result was seen, a more viable approach would be to increase demand through the economic sector. Corporate and institutional art collections should be encouraged. If these groups would recognise the benefit they would get from building art collections they would most likely embark on such ventures. 87

If only fifteen corporations/companies or institutions buy ten artworks a year, the one hundred and fifty artworks would advance the art economy organically and create income for many artists. Once demand increases so does the supply of art production. However, for this to function, media exposure is necessary to grant the collectors positive light and gain symbolic capital and promotion. The art market needs a close collaboration with the media in order to work effectively. 88 There is no use in acquiring art for corporations if nobody knows about it. This would tempt other corporations to follow track and expand their collections to be in the spotlight.

Recently, a new generation of artists and art professionals is emerging. Change is foreseeable in the next decade as this generation is seeking higher education in art practice, history, critique, and curating. Having gained tangible success in the West it might be time for Palestinian artists to translate this critical value into an economic one and make a living from it. For Rawan, 89 to succeed from an economic perspective, she needs to develop an awareness of the characteristics of the local art distribution system in Palestine and have her eyes wide open to other systems in the world.

85- The general public would bestow much appreciation for such a scheme, which requires being systematic, constant and solidified with a long-term vision. Furthermore, it is inevitable that Palestinian art will gain more monetary value by time, making the collection a valuable and alternative asset class. The growing collections and their display on the empty white walls will influence the perception and the visual awareness of people.

86- Judith Benhamou-Huet, *The Worth of Art : Pricing the Priceless* (Assouline ; London : Thames & Hudson; New York, 2001), 11.

Steve Sabella, born in Jerusalem in 1975, is a London / Berlin based artist. He is the holder of the Ellen Auerbach Award (2008) granted by the Akademie der Künste (Academy of the Arts) in Berlin. Sabella is also one of the commissioned artists for the inaugural exhibition of MATHAF: Arab Museum of Modern Art. Steve Sabella studied art photography at the Jerusalem School of Photography and New Media in 1994, and holds a BA in Visual Arts from the State University of New York (2007). Sabella received his first MA with a Caparo Award of Distinction in Photographic Studies (2008) from the University of Westminster and his second MA in Art Business (2009) at Sotheby's Institute of Art in London. Steve Sabella's artworks have recently entered in the art collection of the Barjeel Art Foundation in the UAE and the British Museum in London.