

# Establishing a Palestinian presence at the 2022 Venice Biennale

April 28, 2022 at 1:42 pm | Published in: Asia & Americas, Europe & Russia, Israel, Italy, Middle East, Palestine, Review - Events & Articles, Reviews, US



Nameer Qassim, "Enough", 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 100x100 cm [Courtesy of The Palestinian Museum US]

Naima Morelli [@naimamorelli](#)

April 28, 2022 at 1:42 pm



At the very centre of Palazzo Mora, an old Venetian building, I stepped across the front yard and then through rooms where workers were still setting up artworks from parallel shows, in preparation for the 2022 Venice Art Biennale running from 23 April to 27 November 2022. Finally, I found what I was looking for. A little taste of Palestine in the heart of this iconic Italian city.

Curated by Nancy Nesvet, head curator at the Palestine Museum in the US, the exhibition "From Palestine With Art" features 19 Palestinian artists from Palestine and across the diaspora.

Visitors are welcomed by artfully-stained curtains realised by Samar Hussaini. This is a strong first impression alongside the music; traditional Palestinian tunes ease visitors into the space and work at a subconscious level.

Looking around the room, you see an olive tree and several paintings that hit you with their joyous colours, intense photographic pieces, sculptures and installations hanging from the walls. It's all a heartfelt puzzle reflecting the country itself.

As I stepped carefully on a historic map of Palestine covering the gallery floor, a man dressed in red sitting on a bench in the centre of the room told me, "You can walk on it, you know!" That's how I met Faisal Saleh, a former businessman and now director of the Palestinian Museum in the US. He organised the show.

*Palestinian portraits, 2022, by Jacqueline Bejani.*  
Acrylic on canvas  
[Courtesy of The Palestinian Museum US]

## Long road to ruin in a burning world: the work of Syrian American artist Diana Al-Hadid

The floor piece, he explained, is an 1877 map produced by cartographer and historian Salman Abu-Sitta, who has mapped his country. "The significance of this map is that it shows Palestine before Zionism. There is not a single settlement on it; it's the land as pure as it was. It's the Palestine that Palestinians belong to, from the river to the sea. This is a very strong statement that the Palestinians are not willing to give up their land."

### TRENDING THIS WEEK

- 01** **News**  
Turkey facing its worst property crisis in history, Central...
- 02** **News**  
Report: Iran sent Israel images, maps of Israeli nuclear...
- 03** **News**  
Jordan criminalises suicide, threatens prison terms and fines
- 04** **News**  
Former US commander admits mistake in supporting Syria's Kurds
- 05** **News**  
Iran hacks Israel's Airports Authority site to avenge Soleimani...

### Stay Updated

Subscribe to receive our newsletters straight to your inbox.

First Name  Last Name

Email Address

**Subscribe**

### LATEST NEWS

- April 29, 2022 Settlers raze Palestinian land in Nablus
- April 29, 2022 Detained Palestinian transferred to hospital
- April 28, 2022 Saudi-led coalition says it will release 163 Houthi prisoners
- April 28, 2022 The US calls on Libya's leaders to immediately end the...
- April 28, 2022 Israel to station reserve battalions along the illegal Separation Wall
- April 28, 2022 Erdogan to meet with Saudi Crown Prince to revive ties
- April 28, 2022 Jordan 'pushing to restore Al-Aqsa Mosque status quo'
- April 28, 2022 China and Iran agree to boost military ties

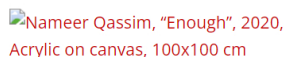
### LATEST VIDEOS



News  
**EX-TUNISIA PRESIDENT MARZOUKI**

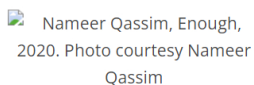
It doesn't take much to notice how political this show is. And it couldn't be anything else, given that the Venice Biennale, the biggest event in the art world, has never had a Palestinian pavilion in its entire 125-year history. Only in 2003 did Biennale curator Francesco Bonami foreshadow the possibility of a Palestinian Pavilion, but amidst sadly predictable accusations of "anti-Semitism", this didn't happen.

In 2009, though, the Biennale hosted an all-Palestinian collateral show called "Salwa Mikdadi's Palestine c/o Venice", addressing the Palestinian diaspora and the ongoing Nakba (Catastrophe). Later on, occasional Palestinian participation was seen in Venice, but never cohesively, and always

Nameer Qassim, "Enough", 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 100x100 cm

"This is the strongest Palestinian presentation ever," said Saleh. "In the past, there were individual projects up to seven artists, but this one, in terms of the size, and the boldness of its pieces, is a very significant, strong presentation. I think this is going to have a very big impact and get the Palestinian name out in a big way."

Along with the artworks, there are also traditional pieces, like two-hundred-year old dresses embroidered ever so finely. The artists are from different generations and are a mix of the established and emerging. This, said Faisal Saleh, is deliberate. "We wanted to give the young and rising Palestinian artists the chance to participate and be inspired because participating in the biggest art event is very inspiring. It changes their life in a way."

Nameer Qassim, Enough, 2020. Photo courtesy Nameer Qassim

*Nameer Qassim, Enough, 2020. Photo courtesy Nameer Qassim*

Abstract and figurative work are displayed side by side. The warmth of the flames by leading Palestinian artist Samia Halaby in the abstract canvas "Venetian Red" is welcoming next to the canvas by young artist Jacqueline Bejani, who decided to celebrate leading Palestinian figures in literature and the arts by depicting their faces.

The show's mission is in line with the US Palestinian Museum's vision to tell the Palestinian story through art. Founded by Saleh only four years ago, it is located in Woodbridge, Connecticut. "There weren't any museums about Palestine in the Western hemisphere," he pointed out, "where the vacuum for Palestinian artists to show their work cohesively and consistently could be filled."

#### The body as an archive: interview with Farah Saleh

There are a number of captivating symbols in the show, some that are tied very straightforwardly to the shared Palestinian imagery, such as the olive tree, a symbol of the attachment of Palestinians to their land and their rights. The keys hanging from the branches of the olive tree in the centre of the room are actual keys kept by Palestinians when they locked their doors during the 1948 ethnic cleansing known as the Nakba. "They thought they were coming back in a couple of weeks, or one month, or two months, but as we know, no one was allowed to return. Here the keys represent the right to return for Palestinians."

Just above the olive tree, there is a large painting by renowned artist Nabil Anani, who painted a beautiful landscape devoid of any of the barriers that are ubiquitous in today's occupied Palestine. The devastated land is depicted in smaller paintings by other artists in the show, juxtaposing the ideal with the reality.

"That's what the Israelis do to the beauty of the Palestinian land," remarked Saleh. "They build settlements, they destroy the environment, they kick the people out and they create apartheid structures. The message here is that the beauty of Palestine needs to be preserved."

Nabil Anani, "In Pursuit of Utopia #7", 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 138x300 cm  
*Nabil Anani, "In Pursuit of Utopia #7", 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 138x300 cm  
[Courtesy of The Palestinian Museum US]*

Anani's painting signifies the strength of artists, who are able to rise beyond the confinement of reality to see liveliness beyond the struggle. That's the sensation that the exhibition wants to convey; a sensation of expansion rather than contraction, of liveliness and hope.

One of the most evocative works in the show is by a young artist, Ibrahim Alazza; it is a wrapped

**CALLS FOR TOPPLING SAIED'S REGIME**  
Tunisia could be saved if President Kais Saied was impeached, and presidential and parliamentary elections were held, former President...

**Identity and Palestine: MEMO** in conversation with Amira Al-Shanti

**News**  
Israel: Incitement convictions for 7 who mocked Dawabsheh murder

**News**  
4,500-year-old Canaanite statuette of warrior goddess found in Gaza



**Order now**

**Writing Palestine**  
Celebrating the tenth year of the Palestine Book Awards

**ENGAGING THE WORLD**  
**THE MAKING OF HAMAS'S FOREIGN POLICY**  
DAUD ABDOULLAH

It is a must read for anyone engaged with the Palestine issue and interested in an honest introduction to this important Palestinian movement.  
- Prof Ilan Pappé

**Order Now >**

keffiyeh hanging through barbed wire from the ceiling. Inside the wrapping are a number of transcripts of Palestinian oral histories about the Nakba. It's a strong reminder that memories are all that remain for people who lost everything.

"Art allows us to penetrate the obstacles that normally exist for Palestine to be heard," Faisal Saleh pointed out. "So the art can open these doors for us and allow us to communicate with people and tell them a little bit about our story."

He shows me a video on his phone of the reaction of some Palestinians coming in early to visit the exhibition, and being on the verge of tears when entering the room.

"There was an immediate recognition of belonging, and a sense of being really proud to be here, finally. We want to show the world that Palestinian art is just as good, if not better, than the best art in the Biennale. People have been very impressed so far."

I can understand why.

### Floating in tar: interview with Palestinian artist Hani Zurob

Categories [Asia & Americas](#) [Europe & Russia](#) [Israel](#) [Italy](#) [Middle East](#) [Palestine](#) [Review - Events & Articles](#)

[Reviews](#) [US](#)

1 Comment



Unless otherwise stated in the article above, this work by [Middle East Monitor](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#). If the image(s) bear our credit, this license also applies to them. [What does that mean?](#) For other permissions, please [contact us](#).

Spotted an error on this page? [Let us know](#)



### Related



Will the new Ad-Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale tackle the fundamental issues of this time?  
October 25, 2021



Entries open for 11th Palestine Book Awards  
January 24, 2022



Artists nominate Palestinian refugee camp for UNESCO world heritage status  
November 1, 2021



## Writing Palestine

Celebrating the tenth year of the Palestine Book Awards

**Order Now**

[SHOW COMMENTS](#)

### Latest Opinion Pieces [Read our blogs & in-depth articles](#)



**Blog**  
The international community must adopt the Palestinian narra...  
April 28, Ramona Wadi

**Article**  
Israel fears Al-Aqsa events will affect normalisation deals ...  
April 28, Dr Adnan Abu Amer

**Article**

### More Opinion [→](#)

**Article**  
Are Russia-Israel relations facing a temporary challenge or ...  
April 28, Dr Mohammad Makram Balawi

**Article**  
What is behind Libya's recent crackdown on human rights...  
April 28, Dr Mustafa Fetouri

**Article**



Africa

## Cost of the Ukraine war felt in Africa, Global South

April 29, 2022



From a democracy without Ennahda to a dictatorship without o...

April 28, Mehdi Mabrouk



Article  
Egyptian women's rights defender Rasha Azab found not g...

April 27, Amelia Smith



Article  
Mosul's forgotten crisis: Orphans of the war against Da...

April 27, Katarzyna Rybarczyk



Defending UK's counter-extremism strategy, David Camero...

April 27, Nasim Ahmed



Article  
'I am dreaming of the moment I hug him,' says Ahme...

April 27, Eman Abusidu



Article  
Tehran, Riyadh make fresh move to bury hatchet and restore t...

April 27, Anadolu Agency



**You've been served**  
Grab a taste from the Middle East...

ENGAGING THE WORLD





## THE MAKING OF HAMAS'S FOREIGN POLICY

DAUD ABDULLAH



**Order Now >**



**Follow us**

**Download MEMO App**

Latest Updates

[Africa](#) | [Asia & Americas](#) | [Middle East](#) | [Europe](#) | [Book Reviews](#) | [Event Reviews](#) | [Film Reviews](#)

Columnist

[Dr Daud Abdullah](#) | [Ramzy Baroud](#) | [Kamel Hawwash](#) | [Amelia Smith](#) | [Yvonne Ridley](#) | [Asa Winstanley](#) | [Guest Writers](#) | [Interviews](#)





Regular Contributors

[Anjuman Rahman](#) | [Nasim Ahmed](#) | [Omar Ahmed](#) | [Jehan Alfarra](#) | [Khalil Charles](#) | [Ibrahim Hewitt](#) | [Muhammad Hussein](#) | [Maha Salah](#) | [Ramona Wadi](#)

Reports & Resources

[Briefing Papers](#) | [Fact Sheets](#) | [Reports](#) | [Documents](#) | [Interviews](#)

Stay Informed

 [Facebook](#) |  [Twitter](#) |  [Youtube](#) |  [Instagram](#)

Middle East Monitor

[About Us](#) | [Palestine Book Awards](#) | [Editorial Guidelines](#) | [Legal Pages](#) | [Press Releases](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [All Stories Archive](#) | [Contact Us](#)

### Creating New Perspectives

Middle East Monitor is owned and operated by Ardi Associates Ltd  
© Ardi Associates Ltd 2009-2022. All Rights Reserved | [Legal Pages](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

**MEMO**  
MIDDLE EAST MONITOR