



Al-Wasiti Art Centre

U L U

Al- Wasiti* Art Centre " A Place in Arab Jerusalem for Art and Artists"

Despite its rich history, art in Palestine today faces a situation of neglect and stagnation. Twenty seven years of Israeli military occupation has left Palestinian artists faced with a forbidding array of political economic and cultural problems.

Practically all forms of cultural communication and interchange between Palestinians inside the Occupied Territories and those in the diaspora have been severed. Cultural links with the outside, including those with the Arab world, have also been affected, whereby Palestinians under occupation have little opportunity to learn from or interact with the dynamic art movements in the world. In fact Palestinians today in the towns, villages and refugee camps of Gaza and the West Bank have little access to the artistic heritage of their principal city, Jerusalem.

These and other difficulties have led to the neglect of the arts in Palestine. Although Palestinian artists have struggled to develop their skills and communicate their private and public visions, these artistic achievements have been largely unrecorded and undocumented leaving little material accessible for research or the historical record.

The role which art normally plays in shaping an individual or a nation has not been developed within Palestine. Art education is almost non-existent and several generations of Palestinian youth have been denied creative expression and left in general aesthetic ignorance. Also, as there is no form of comprehensive art training in any of the academic or vocational institutions in the Occupied Territories, the general level of artistic expression and skill is markedly inferior to art elsewhere. Art books, specially in Arabic, are largely inaccessible and there are no specialized art publications or journals. Furthermore, the absence of specialized exhibition halls makes it almost impossible to hold professional exhibitions in Palestine.

* "Al-Wasiti" Centre refers to Yehya Al-Wasiti one of the pioneers of 13th century Arab painting.

The lack of these basic prerequisites has made exposure to art a luxury for the very few rather than an essential right for the community. It is hoped that the establishment of "Al-Wasiti", an art centre founded by leading artists, will address some of these obstacles paving new and dynamic openings in the development and preservation of art in Palestine. "Al-Wasiti" will address the artistic needs of artists, amateurs and the general public alike.

Objectives

"Al-Wasiti" Centre aims to accomplish the following:

1. To form a bridge between Palestine and the outside world in matters pertaining to art.
2. To foster creative expression and professionalism in the arts.
3. To provide published material and practical facilities for those seeking to develop their artistic knowledge and experience.
4. To provide specialized training in art education emphasizing through practical and theoretical channels the role of art in developing public aesthetic awareness.
5. To establish a museum of contemporary art in Palestine.
6. To raise the general level of artistic taste and appreciation.

The components of "Al-Wasiti" Centre

Gallery

Within its premises, "Al-Wasiti" has allocated a spacious hall for a gallery space where exhibitions of Palestinian, Arab and international artists will be held. A permanent collection of art works will be on display all year round providing a venue in which artists can show their work in optimal conditions to large audiences.

Library

The paucity of public libraries within the Palestinian community has triggered "Al-Wasiti" to establish an art reference library which will serve artists, researchers and art lovers of all ages. The library will include books, specialized research material, and publications covering various art disciplines. In addition "Al-Wasiti" Centre's library will also include an audio-visual unit (slides, photographs, video films and posters) and an archive of Palestinian art.

Art Education Unit

One of the priorities of "Al-Wasiti" is to organize art education programmes for the local community. "Al-Wasiti" Centre plans to run courses and workshops for art teachers to keep them current with the latest development in teaching methods. It also seeks to discover new talents and to encourage young aspiring artists to further their specialization and academic training. Courses in handicrafts aiming to revive an interest in local crafts will be conducted. A variety of workshops will also be initiated for established artists, focusing on developing skills and aesthetic sensitivity as a

way of forming a distinctive Palestinian art style. A lecture series is also planned for a variety of subjects ranging from art appreciation to useology. A number of Arab and international experts in the arts will be featured in this series which will explore the place and integration of Palestinian art in the international scene.

Research Unit

To compliment "Al-Wasiti" library, the centre plans to conduct research into art in Palestine. The centre aims to publish papers on various aspects of the fine and applied arts and at a later date begin the publication of a fine arts magazine.

Museum

As one of its long term objectives "Al-Wasiti" hopes to generate support to open the first museum of contemporary art in Palestine. The museum will exhibit works of art by prominent Palestinian, Arab and international artists. The museum will act as a catalyst bridging cultural and aesthetic movements between Palestine and the rest of the world.

Sculpture Garden

Surrounding "Al-Wasiti" Centre centre will be a sculpture garden and outdoor cafe providing a unique meeting place for artists and art lovers. The sculpture garden will be the site of many outdoor exhibitions and activities.



"Al-Wasiti" Centre's Premises

"Al-Wasiti" Centre Art Centre is situated in Sheikh Jarrah, one of the oldest Jerusalem neighborhoods outside the city walls. This quiet residential quarter is characterized by its beautiful houses typical of Jerusalem with their neat masonry, wrought-iron window grilles and balustrades, red-bricked roofs and spacious gardens. Built in 1923 by members of a renowned Jerusalem family, "Al-Wasiti" Centre Centre is surrounded by a spacious pine-tree garden containing old Byzantine ruins.

Founding members

Vera Tamari

Tayseer Barakat

Sliman Mansour

Nabil Anani

Al-Wasiti Art Centre, 13 Saman Assidiq St., Sheikh Jarrah, Jerusalem, Tel 972 2 822859, Fax 972 2 817853