

Israeli Artists 'Apathetic' Over Palestinian Conflict as Inspiration for Works

Few see signs of hope after President Biden visits.

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL, July 18, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has had an indelible impact and influence on the works of artists on both sides. Erupting in the middle of the last century and periodically flaring, with deadly effects, it's the world's longest-running dispute and has left no lives in the fractious region untouched. It is, as an Israeli artist said for this article, a "cancer" that has spread throughout all of Israel and beyond.

But from the accounts of several leading Israeli artists, the protracted and intractable dispute has become so deadlocked that it no longer resonates on any level and has left people feeling despondent. No one, neither political nor religious leaders, seems capable of stepping up and agreeing and implementing what people the world over believe is the only answer: a two-state solution giving birth to an independent State of Palestine.

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Few expect US President Joe Biden's first visit to Israel as American leader, last week, to have any meaningful impact on restarting long-stalled talks between both sides. But in a sign of a possible thaw, Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid spoke by phone with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on July 8, the first such contact in five years.



A banner by activist group Peace Now shows the Palestinian and Israeli flags, welcoming US President Biden to Israel last week and urging a two-state solution to the protracted conflict, hangs on a building in Tel Aviv. (Photo: Peace Now)

Israel is home to a vibrant art scene, much of it centred around bustling Tel Aviv, where many art galleries are located, including the prestigious Tel Aviv Museum of Art supported by billionaire benefactors like [Beny Steinmetz](#) and home to the [most extensive collection of Israeli art in the world](#). Jerusalem is also an important cultural centre in the country, with its Israel Museum housing a large collection of works, as well as archaeological artefacts, and it runs the nearby Rockefeller Archeological Museum, with major donors including [Canadian philanthropist Samuel Bronfman](#).

“Israeli artists, much like the Israeli left, have become somewhat apathetic and hopeless regarding the conflict and the occupation,” laments Shai Yehezkelli, whose colourful, abstract paintings have been exhibited at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. “There are exceptions obviously, but they are few and overshadowed.”

While the painter, 43, who was born in Jerusalem, says there are no particular themes that resonate throughout Israeli art, because it has become globalised, like in other parts of the world, he points out that he has no particular interest in the art market anyway. But that doesn't mean that local artists are not touched by the sporadic outbreak of violence between Israelis and Palestinians.

“I feel that the apathy and hopelessness that are shared by most Israelis these days,” says Yehezkelli, who currently lives in Tel Aviv. “The injustices are overlooked by most people, because they feel powerless or simply because they don't care. However, art-making in the name of powerlessness is a gateway drug to one-liner pamphlet art. It can only get interesting when this gruesome reality is sneaking in the creative process and fueling the art with energy.”

'No Interest' in Resolving Conflict

For Amnon David Ar, a Tel Aviv-born artist who now lives in Berlin, Germany, and whose hyper-realistic paintings of nudes, landscapes and still lifes are in demand worldwide, resolving the stalemate lies in removing self-serving political and religious leaders from the floundering peace process.

“I think that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is like a cancer that affects, even if sometimes indirectly, every aspect of Israeli society. It is one of the major sources of instability and, alongside the international current populist wave, of the loss of moral values within Israeli society.

Ar, 49, who recently exhibited in Jerusalem and is not keen to return to his homeland to live, given the fractious, tinderbox situation, said ongoing “apathy is an excuse for not taking responsibility and is driven by the fear of being outcast” that means nothing meaningful is achieved in bringing about an end to the dispute.

"I am not hopeful at all at the moment about the possibility of reaching better times regarding the conflict, but if it was not for political and religious interests, and constant incitement, I don't think it would be a very complicated conflict to solve.

"One of the main reasons for having left my homeland was the sad understanding that with our current leadership, there is no national interest in finding such a solution, and this leads to moral and political corruption," he said.

Living with 'Humiliation', Expressing It in Art

Prominent Palestinian artist Sliman Mansour, whose paintings are infused with the Palestinian struggle and sense of identity, agrees with his Israeli counterparts that there currently is little reason for hope, but he believes that one day it might change, for the better.

"I feel the situation at this stage is hopeless, like with the Israeli artists. But in the long run, [I am] optimistic. There are many changes in the world that are slow but [something] might have an effect on the outcome. Nobody can live the way we are living forever, both occupier and occupied, so I believe change must come in the end."

The 75-year-old painter said there was no denying the impact the conflict has had on his and others' works.

"It has had a very important influence and impact on my art and many Palestinian artists. Also on many poets and literature people, cinema, songs and many others. First the Nakba (Palestinian Catastrophe) and displacement of half of the Palestinian people, then the occupation in 1967 until today, with all the humiliation it brings with it are things that affect all our lives and nobody can just ignore these things, especially people who deal with artistic expression," he said.

"I cannot say that we like this influence, and many of us wish that we could develop our art in a normal way. But we cannot ignore the influence of the political situation."

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