



ARTIST OF THE MONTH



Ayed Arafah

By Vivien Sansour

"I like to be surrounded by many varied elements from which I can create different things and use different mediums—basically I like to play." Born and raised in Deheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem, Ayed Arafah's family comes from the village of Qastina near Gaza. Though Ayed has never seen Qastina, his first studio, which he opened in the camp, was named after his original village. As a young boy, Ayed expressed himself by drawing. One of his teachers collected his drawings and exhibited them in the schoolyard. This was the moment when Ayed realized that perhaps he had a gift. "I started as a painter. I explored colors on the walls of the camp and by drawing murals on the blank concrete. People would come and watch me paint. It was more like a performance art experience."

After finishing his education in social work at Al Quds University, Ayed went on to study at the International Art Academy in Ramallah where he widened the range of elements and mediums with which he "played."

As a young graduate of contemporary art, Ayed became the recipient of the A.M Qattan Young Artist Award in 2010 for his work "Bog-jet Bahar" (Sea Package). That same year he showed his work "Horizon" in the Mosaic Room Gallery in London. Both works comment on the longing for the sea. He attempted to bring the sea to Ramallah by collecting hundreds of bottles of water from different places in the world in one large plastic bag, representing the unreachable sea.

Ayed's work has been shown across Europe and the Middle East, including Oslo's Khio University, Hydrarcy in

Cairo, Art Wave Ramallah, Brighton University, and the Truth is Concrete program in Graz, Austria. As an artist in residence at Cittadellarte in Italy, Ayed concentrated on making an interactive social piece, "Baskets Ball," in which he built an enormous ball made from plastic wastebaskets that he rolled around the small town of Biella, provoking communal connection and interaction.

Ayed is the winner of the Christ in the Palestinian Context competition for his version of Michelangelo's "Pieta," in which he portrays the Virgin Mary as a Palestinian woman carrying Jesus on the cross as a martyr.

Committed to challenging social limitations and the present-day way of life, Ayed is choosing to live life *al-barakah*, or day-by-day. While he struggles to stay afloat without an eight-to-five job, he is creating beautiful pieces from broken materials. Most recently, he has been working with salvaged wood, making high quality furniture that is both colorful and earthy. Currently, he is working on a collection of pieces made from recycled materials, such as tables, stools, and couches. While he loves working with his hands, Ayed continues to create images and video art pieces, such as his most recent one, "Tales of the Intifada," which was shown at the 2014 Qalandia International public exhibition in Ramallah.

