



## ARTIST AND EXHIBITION OF THE MONTH



**Ras Roos**

**Paintings by Amjad Ghannam**

**Gallery One, Ramallah**

Amjad Ghannam, a Palestinian artist who was born in Jerusalem in 1981, began to design Palestinian posters at age twenty. His breakthrough came in 2010, while detained in an Israeli political prison, when he painted a greeting card as a response to the "Picasso in Palestine" exhibition and sent it to its organizer, Khaled Hourani. Subsequently, the card was printed and circulated widely as part of the "Picasso in Palestine" project. Ghannam's work has been shown in many group exhibitions, among them DOCUMENTA 13, Kassel, Germany, 2012; Qalandiya International Biennial - *Gestures in Time*, Jerusalem, Palestine, 2012; Times Museum, Guangzhou, China, 2013; Qalandiya International Biennial - "Manam," Haifa, Palestine, 2014; The 2nd CAFE Biennial, Cafe Museum, Beijing, China, 2014; Picasso in Contemporary Art, Hamburg, Germany, 2015; and a solo exhibition, *Portrait of Absence* - Zawyeh Gallery, Ramallah, Palestine, 2014.

The following is a summary of Khaled Hourani's introduction to the exhibition.

Once again, Amjad Ghannam presents paintings and works of art loaded with the themes of captivity, prevention, and detention. So what are the odds this time? Is the artist going to take us on a journey to live the reality and cruelty of a confiscated and violated life? Or will he present us with a human experience, as he is being haunted by memories?

Will he present a human crisis in jail or of the jail inside a human being? Amjad has not emerged from his experience of detention in Israeli jails. He remains troubled by the suffering of his fellow political detainees and their frustrated hopes and dreams. Thus, in these works the source of his inspiration is not the abstract entity of a prison, the reality of which is firmly associated with the political conflicts and revolutions in our Eastern Mediterranean region. Rather, his inspiration is the human being and its continuing suffering, the oppressed man whose freedom has been confiscated, the person trapped in a situation that prevents him from living with dignity. By testifying to the plight of prisoners and to the subject of captivity, Amjad's work brings about growth instead of decay and disappearance. These paintings seem to invite us to extend our hands in order to remove the hoods that cover faces and the bands that blindfold eyes. He wants us to see – or perhaps to feel for – the cover or mist on our own faces.

In this exhibition, the artist takes us also to the lesson *Ras Roos*, Head and Heads, a famous lesson in the early readers written by Khalil Sakakini. He attempts to use this lesson as the visual equivalent to a fresh look at the real meaning of reading, our reading of the suggestions that life offers us here and now. However, the head is presented not as an illustration of the lesson; it is covered and blindfolded instead.

Likewise, the body is present as an object of repression and oppression. So we see heads and statues that at times try to rebel and at others look with irony at their chains, while rebelling.

The head bag and resulting darkness represent acts of dissonance not only on a head but also on the canvas of the painting, as they are mostly made from the same raw material. Amjad wants us to approach this sensory experience without being involved in wailing and complaining, and without raising slogans. Thus, the artist leaves us on our own during a crisis characterized by occupation, tyranny, oppression, ignorance, and terrorism.

Amjad spreads relatively faint colors on a broad space. He strives to put down marks, lines, and blocks that evoke the presence of the violated human body in its entirety, from head to toe, engaged in a struggle that takes place within the frame. Thus he creates a space of grades of gray in careful harmony.

These are truly beautiful paintings that demonstrate the artist's skills and abilities in the conception and execution of his work. Amjad creates an aura of captivating magic and mystery that transforms them into works of love and human compassion.

*The exhibition is at Gallery One on Khalil Sakakini Street in Ramallah (next to Orjwan Restaurant). It opened on January 12 and will run until February 18, 2016. Opening hours are 11:00 to 19:00 daily, except on Fridays.*

