



EXHIBITION REVIEW

Shadow of the Shadow

Paintings by Bashar Khalaf
Gallery One
Ramallah, Palestine



Bashar Khalaf
The Shadow of the Shadow: Creative Person
Oil and acrylic on canvas
200 x 175 cm, 2015

Bashar Khalaf's new paintings for the series "Shadow of the Shadow" can be seen as an homage to the renowned Palestinian artist Sliman Mansour. They are in large part an admiring tribute to Sliman's massive influence on contemporary Palestinian art. But Bashar's paintings must also be considered as a declaration of independence from the work of that iconic master and his influential generation of visual artists.

Bashar and Sliman's paintings reflect on themes of occupation, loss, and political responsibilities from distinctly different vantage points. The unique perspectives presented by each of the two artists

have been shaped by the political and cultural experiences of their respective generations. Bashar Khalaf (born 1991) studied under Sliman Mansour (born 1947) at Al Quds University. He is a great admirer of his mentor's technical sophistication, his nuanced narrative structures, his compositional arrangements, his penetrating cultural critiques, and his lifelong commitment to the struggle of the Palestinians against an extremely divisive occupation. Like the paintings of Sliman Mansour, those of Bashar Khalaf are thoughtfully composed, sensitively painted, and imbued with political metaphors. But Bashar's paintings are deliberately parsimonious in their compositional structures when compared to the work of Sliman. They also address the viewer with less overt symbolism.

Through their austere representation of forms and space, Bashar's paintings present an intelligent cultural critique of his generation's relationships to the experiences of occupation and resistance. What makes the cultural critique presented in his new paintings unique and germane is the fact that Bashar posits his critique of the Palestinian condition by directly referencing and commenting on Sliman Mansour's visual meditations on those same themes. By developing an original visual vocabulary that references leitmotifs of occupation and resistance in a few of Sliman's



Sliman Mansour
Lena Nabulsi
Oil on canvas
70 x 100 cm, 1978



Bashar Khalaf
The Shadow of the Shadow: Lena Nabulsi
Oil on canvas
149.5 x 129.5 cm, 2015

iconic images, Bashar is not only remarking on the present realities of Palestinian politics but also underscoring the evolution as well as the deterioration, over a span of 45 years, of the political realities of the Palestinians under occupation.

Bashar's themes are identical to those of Sliman Mansour; all of his new paintings reflect on the experience of life under occupation as well as on the personal and collective responsibilities of the occupied. Without directly appropriating any of his mentor's compositions, he consciously positions his assessment from the perspective of a young Palestinian artist living in an increasingly

vanishing homeland. He is well aware of the weight of history that has been placed on the shoulders of his generation, but he is also cognizant of the increasingly insurmountable limitations to change the course of that history. The tension between the sense of national responsibilities and the experiences of overwhelming limitations is a deliberate by-product of the grinding frustration created by the ongoing military occupation on generations of Palestinians. Several of Bashar's paintings identify the uncomfortable realities of his generation. They suggest, at least to this viewer, the realization that within the tension between the desire for resistance and the ostensible futility of direct action lies the paralyzing seduction of acceptance. A seduction amplified by the relative comfort of materialism and the involuntary personal and cultural adjustments to the now seemingly routine diet of enclosures, land appropriations, violence, and humiliation provided by the occupation.

Bashar Khalaf's paintings raise numerous questions about the viewers' and the artist's relationships to the settler-colonial military occupation. They offer real-time warnings to generations that have known nothing but the restraints of that occupation. The paintings identify in subtle, seductive, yet uncomfortable ways, the dangers of confusing inertia for action, passivity for resistance, and division for strength.

The exhibition will be on view from February 22 to March 31. Opening hours are 11:00 to 19:00 daily, except on Fridays. For more information, please contact info@galleryone.ps or call 02-298-9181.

John Halaka is a visual artist and professor of visual arts at the University of San Diego. He is a long-time observer of Palestinian art.