

Article

Defying Ornaments

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Abstract: The article will discuss works of art produced by Palestinian artists, in which the ornament functions as an intermediary for conveying signs, symbols, messages, and identities. In Muslim tradition, the ornament represented, and visually participated in, establishing the social order, and was also a signifier of a distinct theological, social, dogmatic, and gendered identity. The works at the heart of this article present the ornament as part of an aesthetic and ethical inquiry, a means of reenacting individual and collective history as well as preserving and deconstructing conventions, a method that is both poisonous and a remedy for social hierarchies, fixed identities, and oppressive power relations. I argue that the ornament represented in contemporary Palestinian artworks reflects a destructive or constructive urge, which Mark Wigley describes as an: “elaborate mechanism for concealing and preserving, if not constructing, identity.”

Keywords: Palestinian art; ornament; reenactment; identity; gender

Palestinian women face male hegemonic power factors in both Israeli and Palestinian society, as well as dictates and institutions that seek to define their identity in a wide range of areas, such as religion, state, marriage and family, education, and employment.¹ The political conflict that has led to the undermining of the Palestinian man’s position in his environment created a crisis in Palestinian society, and has also had a direct impact on the status and activities of women. Palestinian women consequently operate within a set of discursive fields that define the relationships between men and women, and ensure men’s supremacy. According to Amalia Sa’ar and Taghreed Yahia-Younis:

[The] Israeli-Palestinian social field is informed by several meta-narratives, including modernity, national identity, cultural authenticity, Islamic morality, and liberal entitlement. All these are distinctly modern, and despite the various epistemological contradictions among them, in their institutional forms they all reinforce male domination. These narratives yield several models of masculinity, all of which claim hegemony, and which are then translated into scripts of conduct. (Sa’ar and Taghreed 2008, p. 310)

Palestinian women living within the borders of historical Palestine/Israel are affected by both the Nakba² and the conservative society in which they live. The Nakba ushered in a period in which Palestinian urbanization and modernization were frustrated by the occupation’s geographic and urban castration. It also sparked Palestinian nostalgia for village life as a form of decent and safe life in historical Palestine, prior to the catastrophe. Early village values had confined women to the home either as wives or daughters, limiting their freedom of choice and movement, as well as their existence (Hasan 2005, p. 205; Hasan 2017).

The following article focuses on three Palestinian female artists whose work incorporates ornamental images and reenactment into their artistic practice. Their art responds to Palestinian society’s conflicted national-political reality, as well as the gender challenges that Palestinian, Muslim, and Druze women face.³

Their art is forward-thinking and performative; they perform reenactments and associate them with a recovery-infused future, transporting them to that future through the past and present.



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1. Reenactment

Reenactment constitutes a reflexive art practice offering varying degrees of criticality, through which individuals and communities engage with events and experiences from both the past and the present, and rewrite these experiences in an artistic process. In the strictest sense, reenactment is simply the repetition of past events in literature, the media, the plastic arts, and theater (Czirak et al. 2019). It has generated a diverse terminology, such as “re-performance, remake, citation, the distributed body, alternative histories, acheiropoietics, restructuring touch, re-actualization, the derivative, cover”, etc. (Franko 2017). Reenactment art is occasionally focused on the literal or the figurative restaging of charged events and locations from the past within a contemporary artistic environment (Grant 2016). Rather than strictly recreating the subject however, this restaging creates a temporal, geographical, and emotional tension between the past and present. Hence, it is rare to find any Palestinian art created after 1948, or the Nakba, that does not adhere to the concept of reenactment art.

The three female artists who will be discussed here are part of a (modern) tradition that advocates the idea that significant works of art do not appear out of nowhere; rather, they are the result of the artists re-editing their existing reality while attempting to discern patterns and storylines that have not yet received sufficient attention. At the same time, none of these artists use reenactment as a means of “escapist simulation of historicity” (Lütticken 2022, p. 43). In the work of all three, the gap between what was and the observation of what was is marked. The viewer/creation/creator is not located in the original flow of events, in the past. The artists do not simply re-stage it.

According to Sven Lütticken: “A reenactment is a type of performance that combines public and private work.” (Holman 2020, p. 89). The personal, emotional, and psychological experiences reenacted in art by Fatima Abu-Rumi, Fatma Shanan, and Manal Mahamid, reflect and explore ethical and political issues in the gender and national fields. The three artists create reenactments that are specifically mediated by means of the traditional language of the ornament and, for all three, reenactment means experiencing and reactivating the artistic, historical, personal, and social past. As such, their work exists in a state of perpetual becoming (Baldacci et al. 2022, pp. 14–15), a site of renewal, critique, and creation illuminated by the personal, mental, gendered, historical, and political narratives.

The materiality of the ornament and its relation to sight, touch, and the senses in general, have made it a crucial medium in Islamic art. Among some commentators, the ornament is considered as anti-representational and even anti-discursive in downplaying the content of the forms in favor of their perceptual phenomenality (Gonzalez 2021, p. 12). The artists discussed here, however, use the ornament as a tool that conveys meaning, and they invest it in a narrative.

Repetition is at the heart of Muslim ornamentation, and the presence of ornament in contemporary Palestinian art demonstrates its strong ties to Islamic art. Reenactment is a repetitive practice on both an historical and a theoretical level, marking ornament as an important medium for reenactment, since seriality and repetition, and hence reenactment and ornament, have a particular relationship with one another. Repetition is a powerful creative force, but the reiteration it entails always also includes a difference. It is a stimulating force that stirs us to challenge our typical patterns of thinking and acting. Repetition as an artistic technique expresses the progression of change through multiplication, and occasionally duplication, of a model or shape; but it also occasionally doubles as an early reality image of a past event, expressing a subjective becoming (Sforzini 2022, p. 105).

The repetition of social standards, legal requirements, and customs, or conversely, the return to life before the Nakba, suggests the possibility of resistance in the works of the female artists under discussion. Thus, repetition makes it possible to envision alternative realities to those of the present, and the medium of reception for this is the ornament.

Gonzalez connects the ornament to the Muslim logocentric tradition, which offers its own interpretation of the visible and invisible, as well as to the Western philosophical binary of presence and absence. She contends that this binary is based on the words of

God in Muslim metaphysics, and is therefore regarded as pre-given ([Gonzalez 2021](#), p. 13). The artists Fatima Abu-Rumi and Fatma Shanan read this binary in a gender context: that is, they mark what is considered in research as the unthought, not in theological or phenomenological terms but in gender terms—the woman is the one who is concealed, or absent, or not present in the decision-making or active space. The artist Manal Mahamid identifies the Palestinians as the unthought Other of the Zionist ideology. The otherness that appears in these works is not theological, and is revealed in a distinct praxis of reenactment. For Abu-Rumi and Shanan, reenactment reveals the forces that affect the Palestinian woman in her daily social life, as well as the factors that control and govern her body in space. These forces are marked by the image of the ornament as an archetype that symbolizes order, the ruler, logos, and power. For Mahamid, however, reenactment and the ornament present a way in which to deal with Israeli colonialism, specifically by multiplying and disseminating the image of the gazelle within the context of a multi-media repetitive artistic production. She ornaments the gazelle in a way that represents both a return to the past and an opening to the future.

Abu-Rumi and Shanan question, challenge, discard, or unpick the ornament in order to produce a path to a different order, using reenactment as a critical gender practice; i.e., they delegitimize the normative reenactment in order to produce a subversive reenactment, by which to confront and undermine the patriarchal structures that govern women in Palestinian and Druze societies, respectively. Manal Mahamid approaches reenactment differently, as an anti-colonialist practice. Her ornamentation of the gazelle turns it into a module or a base unit for the ornament within which the gazelle survives, spreads, grows, multiplies, and seizes (artistic) reality, and exposes what the occupation is attempting to conceal. In the case of these three women artists, reenactment seeks to create new structures within the cultural, social, and artistic contexts in which they operate. Rather than an exclusive archival practice, their motivation is the creation of new avenues of existence. Following Judith Butler's discussion of performativity, which offers a theoretical explanation for clarifying the meaning of reenactment in the artworks that will be discussed in this article, reenactments reiterate rather than strictly repeat, i.e., they are "thinking with, but not within, the prescriptions of the past." ([Afterword: Notes after the Fact 2017](#)).

2. The Tale of a Gazelle

In the *Infinity* (Figure 1), etching is based on an image of a repeated and multiplied gazelle until it closes a circle and takes on the appearance of infinity, in a pattern typical to design in Islamic art. The repeated pattern found in many examples of arabesque or in Muslim calligraphy, for instance, occasionally reflects a theological significance. The compositional unity obtained in the work of multiplying a motif ties it to spiritual concepts beyond the apparently material world, to the transcendence of infinite unity. In religious contexts, the repeating pattern thus stands for Allah's Infinity and Complete Unity in complexity. The early and theological explanation of the ornament with the infinite pattern is that of "Allāh is a Unity in his multiplicity, infinite, and transcendent, and Islam is universal, unlimited, nonparochial, ahistorical and nondramatic in its orientation." ([Madden 1976](#), p. 5). The repeated pattern can be geometric, vegetal, floral, or even figurative, and it can appear in a wide range of methods and media. The repetition of the gazelle in *Infinity* could be interpreted in a religious context as a visual allusion to the concept of endless continuity, as the work's name suggests. In representations of infinity there is seemingly no emphasis on one specific element in the design pattern, and the parts are subject to a pattern that demonstrates unity and multiplicity as a theological principle, that transcends specific historical circumstances. This is not the case with Mahamid's *Infinity*, however, in which the gazelle serves as the work's primary source of narrative.



Figure 1. Manal Mahamid, *Infinity*, 2016 Etching & mixed media on archival paper 23 3/5 × 23 3/5 in 60 × 60 cm Edition 1/4 + 1AP.

The inability to identify the beginning or end of a Muslim ornamental pattern alludes to the infinite, a quality seen as proof of the decorative model's religious symbolism, as it expresses Allah's infinity and oneness in diversity, the notion of Al-Tawhid. Mahamid, in contrast, uses repetition and doubling as ornamental techniques to emphasize the national, local, and historical. Her model is based on an identifiable figurative image of the gazelle, which she links to Palestine.

The reenactment in Mahamid's works seeks new ways of understanding the past by preserving/creating/re-creating moments from the Palestinian archive, thereby generating resistance. It does not seek a nostalgic image of the past that focuses on personal experience while confirming the historical hegemonic narrative. Rather, she illuminates the overlooked aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within the aesthetic context of her work.

Mahamid has produced a comprehensive body of work that multiplies and protects the gazelle as a cultural symbol of Palestine through painting, print, sculpture, film, and installation. She ensures its existence, prominence, and identity through artistic creation. In other words, she makes the gazelle the focal point of a decorative, ornamental corpus of work in order to sustain the gazelle and the animal/human/political narrative associated with it. The gazelle's transformation into a fundamental image, at the core of a variety of multimedia works, ensures the enduring return of its image in the art world, and may even contribute to the efforts to halt its extinction.

Mahamid's reliance on personal content and motives, on her personal past and history, as the creator of the art object or art event, is an essential element in her reenactments. As a result, while her works have a high level of authenticity, they also enable an understanding that the image of the past presented in these works is an interpretation rather than a simple reflection of that past.

Mahamid has stated that the gazelle played a significant role in her upbringing: in her childhood home there was a photograph of her father standing next to a gazelle. When she took her children to visit a zoo in Israel, she learned that the Israelis refer to this animal as "the Israeli Gazelle".⁴ She adds:

It may be no coincidence that in this zoo most of the animals were infected with a disease that had led to the amputation of their part. An image that reflects the case

of distortion resulting from the game of role-exchange and names' crossbreeding. A case that engenders a cultural and civilized state with an identity confusion paving the way to erase historical memory. (Mahamid 2017)

Following her above description, I suggest perceiving her gazelle enterprise as an effort to hold onto the past's knowledge, presence, experience, and historical actuality, while sharply critiquing the colonial present.

It is important to recognize the variety of cultural contexts in which the gazelle has appeared over the years in Palestinian art and culture. In the following, I present just a few of the many examples. The gazelle appears frequently as a symbol in the poetry of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, not without reference to the Arab poetry tradition. For example, in his prison cell (Darwish was arrested several times for "entering" his homeland without a permit), he compares the gazelle to someone who will break the prison's boundaries for him: "The Galilee gazelle wants to break my prison today/I am the awakened land/plough my body." (Ghannam and El-Zein 2009, p. 6). Darwish compares his displaced mother to a gazelle, in another poem about his family's flight from Palestine to Lebanon. As a result, he writes: "Do you remember our migration route to Lebanon?/When you forgot me in a sack of bread (it was wheat bread)/I kept quiet so as not to wake the guards./The scent of morning dew lifted me onto your shoulders./O you gazelle that lost both house and mate." (Ghannam and El-Zein 2009, p. 6). The gazelle also represents the Palestinian in the poetry of Palestinian-Egyptian poet Tamim al-Barghouti, whose poem presents "images of Israeli soldiers in Palestinian territories, a Muslim nation portrayed as a young gazelle too scared to leave her hiding for fear of death", (Shahine 2007). In her collection, *19 Varieties of Gazelle*, published in 2002 by the Palestinian-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye, she writes: "For years the Arab poets used 'gazelle' /to signify grace,/but when faced with a meadow of leaping gazelles/there were no words", (Bloom Cohen 2022, p. 367). In terms of popular culture, Palestinian singer and musicologist, Reem Kelani, released her album *Sprinting Gazelle—Palestinian Songs from the Motherland and the Diaspora* in 2006, expressing a personal and collective yearning for Palestine's freedom. The gazelle appears too in Palestinian visual art, such as in Asad Azi's *Hunt*, (2019), which depicts wild dogs attacking a gazelle. According to Tina Sherwell, the work demonstrates disillusionment with a nostalgic or pictorial view of the landscape, with the attack on the gazelle suggesting hierarchies, violence, and a struggle for survival (Sherwell 2019; Sima 2020, p. 111).

In Sharif Waked's work, *Jericho First*, (2002), comprising an installation and video projection paintings, he appropriated the right side of an early mosaic in Hisham's Palace (Khirbat al-Mafjar) (724–43 CE), located in Jericho. The medieval mosaic presents three gazelles and plays a role in illustrating the strength and might of the Umayyad Dynasty (see Behrens-Abouseif 1997). Waked focuses on the hunting scene in which a lion attacks a gazelle, a theme he links to the Oslo Accord in the name he gives to the work. In Waked's artwork, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict symbolized by the lion and gazelle images, results in the mutual annihilation of both aggressor and victim or, in a different version, a transformation in which both turn into a third animal, a kind of imaginary insect in which their original identities become almost completely erased. Waked's representation can be seen as an allegorical representation of the relationship of power and violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the gazelle in his representation serving as a symbol of the Palestinian in the conflict. Mahamid continues along this line, not only in using the gazelle as a symbol of Palestine and Palestinianism in her work, but also because, as we have seen, the gazelle was a part of Palestinian life and culture that was destroyed during the Nakba.⁵

According to Mahamid, the "converted" gazelle, or the gazelle related to her memories and early life in Palestine, and which had undergone, in the Israeli zoo sign she saw, a process of Israelization, represents "civilized patrimony", and the Israeli erasure of its Palestinianness from "individual and collective memory ... aims to erase all differences between freedom and slavery, the killer and the victim, resistance and terrorism, the indigenous and the occupier, even between death and life", (Mahamid 2017). Hence, in her

art, the intricate act of reenactment enables engagement with the catastrophe, anxiety, and violence, while soberly examining a present, actual, but displaced reality.

In *Displacement 1*, (2015) (Figure 2), the gazelle is the perforated protagonist, and in *A Village*, (2016) (Figure 3), it carries in its body the Palestinian settlements or villages. The paintings, drawings, sculptures, and engravings of the gazelle in Mahamid's works to some extent recall the *Blue Rider* (Die Blaue Reiter) animal paintings (Harris 2017), although Mahamid's gazelle resembles more a relic or survivor that has returned from Franz Marc's *The Fate of the Animals* (Tierschicksale), a remnant of the Nakba (catastrophe) that has never ended for the Palestinians. In her work *Keep Running*, (2015) (Figure 4), the gazelle is portrayed as crippled. While art appears to allow its movement, dynamism, and life, the icon that crosses the surface of the painting is the cripple's crutch.

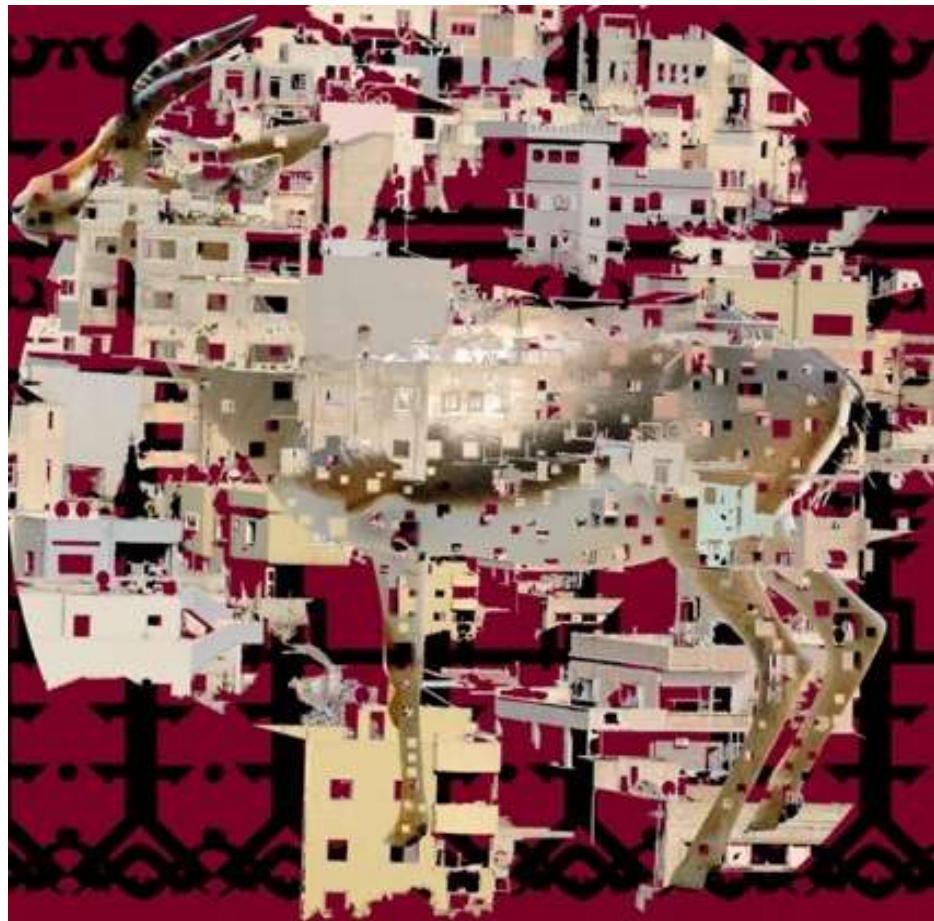


Figure 2. Manal Mahamid, *Displacement 1*, Photomontage on archival paper, 92 × 92 cm, 2015, Edition 1 of 4.



Figure 3. Manal Mahamid, *A Village*, Photo etching & pastel on archival paper, 35 × 26 cm, 2016, Edition 1 of 4.



Figure 4. Manal Mahamid, *Keep Running*, Photo etching & mixed media on archival paper, 38 × 26 cm, 2015, Edition 1 of 4.

The Image of the dilapidated Temple of Sheikh Shahada, the only building left standing in the village of Ain Al Gazelle, is at the heart of Mahamid's work *Ain Al Gazelle Village*, (2015) (Figure 5). This work is particularly significant because it courageously exposes her reenactment agenda. According to some estimates, 8000 residents of the Ain Al Gazelle village, and two other nearby villages, were deported during the 1948 war. Also, according to some accounts, the village saw the massacre of some of its residents. The Israeli settlement of Ofer (Hebrew for fawn or young deer) was established on the ruins of the village, as was apparently also the settlement of Ein Ayala (Hebrew for the doe, a female deer).⁶



Figure 5. Manal Mahamid, *Ain Al Ghazal Village*, Photo etching & mixed media on archival paper, 52 × 38 cm, 2015, Edition 1 of 4.

Mahamid's installation of gazelles at a Ramallah exhibition comprised dozens of small gazelles, fragile porcelain figurines that converged to create an impressive installation, representing "a whole real herd of gazelles begging for their return to their natural place" (Al-Khteeb Shehada 2017). In her work *Haifa Sea*, (2017) (Figure 6), a Palestinian gazelle is photographed on the beach in Haifa, as an expression of reclaiming the land that used to be her homeland.



Figure 6. Manal Mahamid, *Haifa Sea* (2017), mixed media, 60 × 82 cm.

In her video *Fine Dust*, (2017) (Figure 7), Mahamid goes on a jogging journey holding one of her Palestinian gazelle sculptures. Her running track alludes to the collective trauma: it is “a live image, in real space and time, but simultaneously displaced”, (Rod Dickinson quoted in [Blackston 2007](#), p. 33). Mahamid’s athletic journey simulates a sequence of landscape vistas of pre-conflictual, pre-Nakba Palestine, with the runner’s activity restoring freedom of movement, the freedom to retain Palestinian identity, in an era when Palestine had not yet become disputed land. She re-embodies Palestinian society in her body, in the symbolic crossing of the spaces as if she were the gazelle scattering its traces across various spaces.



Figure 7. Manal Mahamid, *Fine Dust*, 2017, Video art on loop, 08:02 min.

The reenactments in Mahamid’s work generate transformation by turning to memory, theory, and history to produce the results related to them. According to Sven Lütticken, reenactment “may lead to artistic acts that, while not instantly unleashing a ‘tremendous emancipatory potential,’ create a space—a stage—for possible and as yet unthinkable performances”, (cf. [Blackston 2007](#), p. 29). Indeed, as part of her exhibition in Ramallah, Mahamid compiled a long list of expressions, dialects, proverbs, and names that include the word gazelle in various contexts of plants, animals, and places in the Palestinian landscape. Her gazelle project thereby seeks to revitalize and reenact the culture, nature, and life of Palestine as a society and nation prior to the Nakba; prior to and post the spread of Israeli colonialism.

According to Mahamid’s work, there is no post-1948 Palestinian art for which the concept of reenactment is not pertinent, if not as a practice for the creation of art or culture, then as a crucial interpretive perspective for reading the aesthetic and cultural products produced after the Nakba as an historical, existential event, that continues to unfold and chart the path of the Palestinians’ lives and work in the various regions inside and outside Palestine. As Mahamid demonstrates, reenactment serves here as an alternative idea to the concept of “simple memory”—a one-time experience trapped in a capsule whose spatial or temporal boundaries are fixed and definitive. Reenactment is not only knowledge or memory of the Nakba, and the civilization that was. As Najat Rahman states:

Rather than simply preserving a memory of what was, before any displacement or loss, these artists present an artistic reenactment of the process of effacement of collective memory, all the while presenting an art that sutures the ruptures by its enactments and gathers the shards of lives. Loss is no longer of an event passed, but emerges as a continual experience of dispossession. ([Rahman 2015](#), p. 80)

3. “Washing Away the Stains of the Past”

In the art of Abu-Rumi, reenactment constitutes a critical reproduction of how gender is created or how a woman is “born”—as a bride, a wife, and a man’s property. Abu-Rumi, in a series of works that map the processes of socialization and the gendering of Palestinian-Arab women, demonstrates how what is ostensibly identified as female nature, the deep essence of women, is, in fact, a consequence of training, regularization, and power relations. As Judith Butler writes in her book:

... the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. (Butler 1999, p. 178)

According to Abu-Rumi, being a woman is an action performed within social constraints. In this context, she echoes Butler, who adopts Victor Turner’s concept of human life as a ritualistic social drama based on the repetition of social performances, rather than an individual expression of an inner essence. Thus, according to Abu-Rumi’s art, the woman is created through the repetition of corporeal actions and gestures. Covering women, defining the professions or education they “deserve”, and defining their path, are the result of mechanisms that have been repeated from childhood to adulthood.

The ornament is central to the work *Father*, (2005) (Figure 8). It is present in the form of a golden floral decoration that creates a sort of architectural arch that locates the father’s figure at the heart of the composition. The decoration is doubled in the lower half of the painting, where it descends from the father’s shoulders. This doubling creates an elliptical frame that borders the portrait of the father in the center, while also creating a material fusion between father and ornament. The same ornament also appears in gold on the veil covering his mouth and beard. This metonymic relationship between the father and the ornament is crucial to understanding their appearance in Abu-Rumi’s representational world.

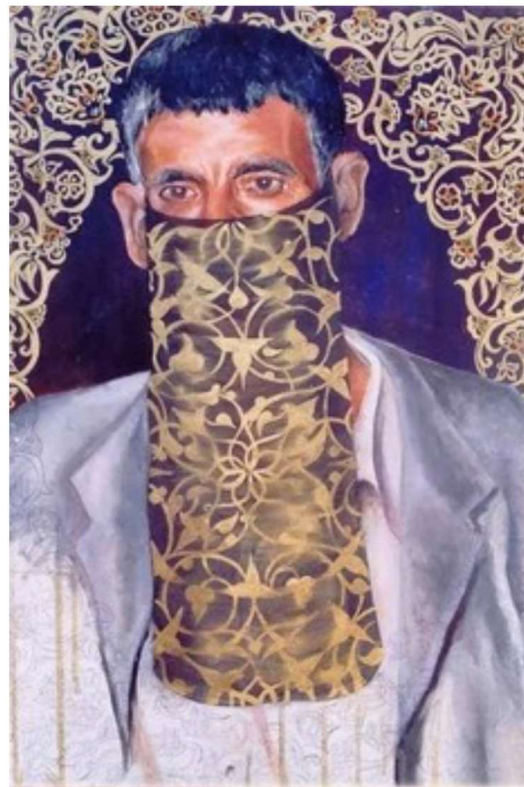


Figure 8. Fatima Abu Rumi, *Father*, 2005, oil on canvas, 50 on 70 cm.

The gilded ornament in the Arabesque floral style that covers the entire background in *Father*, (2007) (Figure 9), is inlaid with crystals and evolves from the background onto the father's clothing. The background represents a decorated industrial textile fabric resembling similar decorations from the Muslim world. The semi-transparent black female veil that covers the father's face is neutral in design, except for a gold stripe at the top. The ornament that covers the background serves as the painting's basic structure. The figurative representation of the father appears to have been added onto it without diminishing the presence of the ornament, which seems to be penetrating the layers of color that primarily define his neck. This decorative unity between the figure/father and background/textile invites reflection on the way that their individual meanings project onto each other; i.e., it raises the question of whether the ornament with its ordered configuration represents the father and/or the father represents the world of content related to the ornament. The link between the father, fatherhood and patriarchy, and the ornament, is significant. The ornament that outlines the painting's background (representing order) climbs and "takes over" the figure of the father (as seen on his neck). He is represented as a man whose veil dams his mouth and his gaze is downcast. If concealment and modesty practices are exercised on a daily basis as a means of "protecting" and regulating women's modesty, then it is the father in this image, the patron, the man, who becomes subject to the constraints of order; while it is the woman, the painter, who now arranges or polices the space, becoming the subject who regulates it and the objects in it, including her father, who in Muslim society is supposed to be the source of authority.



Figure 9. Fatma Abu-Rumi, *Father*, 2007, oil and crystal stones on canvas, 30 × 30 cm.

A sharp and direct conflict is drawn in the work *My Father and Me*, (2005) (Figure 10), between she who directs her gaze but is covered from head to toe and positioned partially in darkness, and the figure of the father adorned with a halo of stones. His bare feet are resting on a floor decorated with a geometric star pattern. The geometric ornament in the painting is a symbol of order; it is an expression of a centuries-old tradition of aniconic Muslim artwork that corresponds to a theological and social worldview in Muslim culture. The decorated geometric floor that maps the space marks the definition of roles, the division between forward and back, and the movement from the front plane to the back plane in the painting; but it also marks thousands of years of cultural, social, and gender traditions, in which it is the man who sets the tone, organizes the living space, and controls the economy of emotions and passion. The decorative array represents order, visual phenomenology, and the distribution and interpretation of power in society. In the depicted conflict between

the girl/woman and her father, that which is lying on the floor of the organizing social order is girlhood/childhood, as indicated by the abandoned figure of the toy bear on the geometric floor in the painting. The directed gazes of the figures in the painting are the inverse of the social hierarchy norms; the woman looks over the man's shoulder at the spectators, while the man lowers his gaze and turns it aside. The gaze of the woman-artist thereby challenges the patriarchal gaze of supervision and social management.



Figure 10. Fatma Abu Romi, “My Father and Me,” 2005, oil and zircons on canvas, 200 × 150 cm.

The gender conflict represented in this painting, among other things by the ornamental construction as a spatial tool that appears to frame and represent this generational-gender hierarchy, is a testimony to the processes, perceptions, and social reality that Fatma Abu-Rumi experiences: as a child, a teenager, and a woman. Her constant movement between the past, the present, and even the future, as well as her representational practices discussed here as reenactment, are her way by which to deal with the Arab woman's specific gender construction in Palestinian society. Abu-Rumi appears in the video work, *Recovery* (2012), washing her wedding gown with a black powder. *Recovery*, according to Said Abu Shakra, returns to the artist's own childhood memories in which she sits in her yard and washes the clothes of her younger brothers; a memory that he interprets as the key to her art, in which she returns “to the same place to wash the stains of the past, to clean the wound and forget the pain”, (Abu Shakra 2012, p. 61). She uses her art to deal with the demand directed at every Muslim girl, to follow the “right” rules so that the baby-girl will enter her role as a woman in Palestinian-Arab society; a demand to actually realize a routine reenactment by imitating and fulfilling what is recognized as “natural” or “logical” behavior in the society in which she lives.

One way to conceptualize reenactment is as a procedure that shapes the subject through the acquisition of behavioral norms, modes of speech and expression, social status,

and position in the social hierarchy. The artist weaves the father figure into the decorative, pictorial “order” in a series of works in which he appears as a source of order, power, and control; and in which it appears that he himself is bound to the (socially represented) order that he is allegedly responsible for enforcing. Hence, in Abu-Rumi’s series of works, the one caught in the net of power, the one whom the composition imprisons within the order that the ornament represents, is actually the father. As a result, these works enable the viewer to imagine a situation in which power is transferred between the two genders’ foci, and the woman, perceived as someone whose routine reenactment process turns her into an object in the hands of patriarchal power, a subject enslaved to power, becomes, through her gaze, her hands, her art, an agent who appears to hold the policing power in those very hands. And if reenactment is a defining element in the socialization process of girls/women, a process in which they become subjects under the auspices of patriarchal power, then Abu-Rumi disrupts this operation of power, when the socialization process she depicts reveals that the father is himself a captive in the arms of that same power that is ostensibly under his control, or in his service.

If reenactment, at least as it is understood in the term “historical reenactment”, is a return to the past in order to offer an historical approach, a folkloristic manifestation, or the reconstruction of an event with exceptional validity or historical status, then for Abu-Rumi, reenactment appears to be heading in a different direction. In her art, reenactment is used to understand material culture, power relations, customs, and the formation of the gendered identities that reenactment as a cultural mechanism has produced.

Abu-Rumi’s works offer a new discovery and discussion of the cultural history, material reality, and the corporeality of the Palestinian woman’s body in Palestine-Israel, as well as the mechanisms that seek to be involved in her identity formation. Her works are influenced by the idea that the body is never given in a neutral manner. “The body becomes a choice, a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh.” (Butler 1986, p. 48). Reenactment is a type of postulation in the “performative” concept; that is, reenactment is a common practice of imitation, identification, or melancholic subjection to social norms, through which corporeality or identity is actually shaped. The strength of Abu-Rumi’s works, similar to those of Fatma Shanan, lies in that Abu-Rumi disrupts this practice by exposing its flaws and calling its “naturalness” into question. Gender norms are imposed on women through reenactment, defining what is allowed and what is forbidden, what she is allowed to reveal or must conceal, and so on. Abu-Rumi’s work with textiles as objects and images should thus be considered from this perspective.

Textiles are used in the Muslim visual world as a distinct object in both folk art and high art, as a collection of models for works of art, and as a metaphor for the way that ornament operates in the Muslim visual culture. Lisa Golombek has discussed the “draped universe of Islam”, attributing to Muslim culture a unique sensitivity to textiles and decorative patterns that later migrated from cloth to other mediums of art, such as architecture (Golombek 1988; Blessing 2018, pp. 10–11; Taragan 2020). The decoration used in Islamic art resembles a textile that covers and wraps an object similar to how cloth wraps and hides the body (Baer 1998, p. 2). As such, the ornament has a transformative quality because it affects how the body or material mass is seen, and it incorporates the question of concealment and exposure, a question that carries distinct gender meanings in Abu-Rumi’s perception. Her *Bridal Headscarf* series features decorated textiles that represent the issues of discovery, visibility, and the blindness imposed on women in the process of becoming a “decent” or “proper” woman.

Abu-Rumi painted a plant ornament on *Bridal Handkerchief*, (Figure 11), that includes tendrils, cups, calyxes, and flowers abstracted into a decorative, multi-layered image in the form of a closed and circular composition in which all the various details are interwoven, producing the potential of continuity and infinite spread within the same image. The ornament as a form is concomitantly bounded as an image within the handkerchief’s borders. The shades of gold and embedded gems in the image give it a luxurious appearance.

Abu-Rumi appears to dismantle another *Bridal Handkerchief*, (Figure 12), in the series, creating a decoration but destroying it. The initial textile appears to have been deconstructed into pieces; the frame of the embroidery/square lace is separated from the fabric, and its white remains are folded into an irregular triangle and placed on top of the ornamental plant pattern painted on the wall. This time, the folded fabric handkerchief conceals part of the ornament, which detracts from the decoration's harmony and flattens the depth suggested by the two airy layers that comprise the decorative model. The ornamental design of this handkerchief sabotages the basic principles of the ornament, as the center of the composition from which the ornament emanates, and which links the division and reproduction of the ornament, remains blocked in an almost arbitrary manner. If the central point in the ornament is sometimes perceived in academic research as echoing eternity, divine creation, and even cosmic order (Critchlow 1983, p. 9), Abu-Rumi damages this model and its wholeness, undermining its status and validity by blocking a large portion of it.

The “bridal handkerchief” is traditionally used to assess the modesty and purity of the bride on her wedding night. The bloodstains on her handkerchief are meant to attest to her virginity and purity.⁷ Thus, the bridal handkerchief belongs to the same spectrum as the hijab, and other means by which a woman covers herself and hides.⁸ When Abu-Rumi shatters the ornament on the handkerchiefs, she calls into question the object's symbolic function, and the values that the handkerchief represents in everything related to the image of the woman.



Figure 11. Fatima Abu Rumi, From the *Bridal Kerchiefs* series, 2009–2010, kerchief, acrylic and zircons 23 × 23 cm, Hisham and Rawia Abu Hanna Collection.



Figure 12. Fatima Abu Rumi, From the *Bridal Kerchiefs* series, 2009–2010, kerchief, acrylic and zircons 23 × 23 cm.

The act of decorating, the creation of the ornament, and its relationship to the body, are central to the video work *Exit*⁹ (2012). In this work, Abu-Rumi draws a stylized plant pattern on half of her face, then decorates the model in this half with sparkling gems before turning to introduce herself. The viewer initially believes that only half of her face is decorated; however, when she later wears a black bridal veil with the other half of the decorative pattern on the veil, a complete ornamental model is obtained. The video work connects decoration, textiles, and the female body, and explores the meaning of decoration and ornament as a covering, revealing, hiding, wholeness, and partiality activity. The ornament appears to spread over the bride's body, with the part where it appears on the cloth representing the strategies for covering the woman's body. The ornament in the video actually deforms the face. Abu-Rumi splits, disassembles, and reassembles the ornamental demand for symmetry and pattern-integrity, while demonstrating how art, clothing, and religious rules not only “cover” or “reveal” the (im)modesty of the woman, but also intervene in her body. The ornament, the covering, the addition of the decoration to the black-clad bride's clothing/body, and the dark bridal veil surrounding/decorating the artist's own face, all point to a context of mourning rather than offering a focus on beauty as a purely perceptual experience.

Human hair, too, is used to decorate the bridal kerchiefs in Abu-Rumi's *Bridal Kerchief* series, which she created between 2015 and 2016. Personal, national, and gender factors all play a role in hair.¹⁰ The decorative pattern on the *Bridal Kerchief*, (2015–2016) (Figure 13), is doubled twice to create a kind of mirror image, with the lower part showing the pattern as embroidered using human hair and the upper part only showing the outline of the unfinished embroidery. The unfinished work unpicks the accepted or common meanings of the ornament as representing continuity, eternity, and other values through its perfect symmetry. Abu-Rumi dismantles the ornament through fragmentation and asymmetry, and even introduces disharmony at times into the decoration's appearance. Even when one moves away from specific “symbolic” readings of the ornamental model, such as in Kühnel's study, the ornament is usually perceived as embodying rhythm, repetition, and comprehensive coverage, preventing the viewer from focusing on one element and instead offering an anti-hierarchical image (Kühnel 1977, pp. 8–9). In contrast, Abu-Rumi disrupts the ornament by disassembling it. The use of human hair in the work's decorative context is an attempt to weave together the living, the temporary, and what should appear

to be hidden. Hair, which can express the dirty, the repulsive, and even death (Guilat 2012, p. 6) outside of its usual context, fits here into the ornamental context of Islamic art. The woman's hair, which is both appreciated and ordered to be hidden from public view, achieves radical visibility here. The gender context too, as well as the artistic practice, can be compared to that in Mona Hatum's *Keffieh*, which weaves human hair in the pattern commonly used to design men's headdresses.



Figure 13. Fatima Abu-Roomi, *Bridal Kerchief*, 2015–2016, hair, kerchief and lace, 22 × 40 cm.

The actual organicity of the hair is contrasted with the abstraction imposed on the world of objects by the ornamental system. The hair and the imperfect decorative model that Abu-Rumi purposefully creates, weave but also unpick some of the values and ornamental models. Indeed, it is used to resist the existing rules, to expand the possibilities of discourse and cultural creation in Palestinian society in general. Abu-Rumi states:

My message to the world of art, plastic art in particular, in Israel and elsewhere, is that I use hair to oppose being silenced. Even if a woman will not speak, she will produce art: she will paint, write, and direct films in order to express her resistance. I realize that it's a symbolic resistance. To me, however, it is the building of culture; it broadens the range of thinking into new fields in order to instigate a cultural discourse in society, a holistic one that addresses all aspects: social, cultural, multicultural, political, and visual. (Abu-Rumi 2017, p. 42)

If Grabar discusses ornament in the context of pleasure and beauty, and particularly the relationship of plant ornament to vividness/vitality (Grabar 1992, pp. 42, 228), Abu-Rumi distorts the integrity of beauty and seeks to focus not only on the relationship between art, liveliness, and vitality, but also on the ornament's relationship to sociological/gendered reality, through interfering with image integrity. The images of creation, blossoming, development, and symmetry are juxtaposed with the possibility of collapse; or of the image freezing.

If we accept Judith Butler's notion of gender as a performative practice, Abu-Rumi's artistic work creates a space that reflects gender as a reenactment of experiences, meanings, and social norms. The significance of Abu-Rumi's disruptions (dressing her father in a decorated veil, unpicking the bride's ornamental handkerchief, combining organic materials in the embroidered ornament, disrupting the decorative ornamental pattern, etc.) lies in the fact that she does not mimic or in any way re-present what these models symbolize. Rather, her reenactments reveal to the viewers the constructed and intersectional nature of gender. The distortions in her performances/artistic objects deliberately fail them in the act of reenactment or repetition, reflecting a gap between the rules and their repetition. The works' ornamental, social, and gendered manifestations can be seen as a critique that reveals gender conventions as an illusion, a product of political construction, as Stacy Holman Jones writes: "When performers fail to 'do' gender 'correctly' or do gender differently, we see the constructed nature of identity." (Holman 2020, p. 90).

Abu-Rumi's artistic work moves between three types of reenactment references: representations of heteronormative reenactments in works presenting the ways in which a female child/adolescent girl/woman "acquires" her identity as a woman (dresses, educates, behaves, respects, thinks, and looks according to gender dictates); representations of reversed or "wrong" reenactments by imposing the same "womanizing" practices on men; and representations of deconstructed or flawed reenactments through the material disruption of objects used or representing normative reenactment. The disorder or disruptions that Abu-Rumi creates between men and women, between those in power and their alleged objects, between fathers and daughters, and between material objects and their symbolic significance, are all part of the artist's queer practice that was characterized by Butler as: "That which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes." (Butler 2011, p. 385). The reenactments that Abu-Rumi performs turn to routine behaviors and hierarchies that appear natural, such as gender definitions, and reveal them instead to be accepted codes whose "naturalness" is merely a product of their recurrence. Abu-Rumi's disruptive performative reenactment, which refuses social rules and transforms relationships within the art world, creates a critical approach to social relationships and attitudes, as well as to historical events.

4. Dis-Enchanted Carpets

The carpet, migrating from the private to the public sphere, is the primary protagonist in Shanan's work demonstrating the power of ornament. As a decorated object, the carpet has many meanings, the most important of which are related to domesticity and family values, and their relationship to society.

Shana returns to her childhood in a series of works presented in the exhibition *Fatma Shanan Dery—A Single Continuum* (Um El Fahem Art Gallery, 2015). Her return to her childhood in her paintings is not a purely existentialist and/or psychoanalytic act (Ofra 2015, p. 15) but, rather, a way for her to recreate the birth of the Druze woman as a "proper" woman, according to a clear practice of reenactment. In the paintings there are two central figures—a girl and a carpet, which are often relocated from the "domestic" space to Outdoors.

For example, in *Carpet and Window*, (Figure 14), an ornamental carpet displays the lines of the hopscotch game; and in another example other graphic means appear to "erase" the carpet and eliminate its decoration. The game of hopscotch, like any game, is dependent on its rules, and forcing it upon the carpet manifests a refusal of the "law" of carpet maintenance. This clash between two rule systems suggests that the girl/artist in the painting is apparently "corrupting" the carpet, which is "not intended" to be used outside the house in the first place. The game's linear structure deviates from and contrasts with the ornamental abundance of the carpet; it is at odds with it.¹¹ In the painting *Manar 2*, (2010) (Figure 15), a girl is seen through a decorative lattice, kneeling on all fours on the carpet in a manner that brings to mind the act of cleaning and scrubbing the carpet. However, rather

than washing the carpet—a respectful maintenance that indicates its importance—she defaces it by drawing on it with white chalk.



Figure 14. Fatma Shanan, *A Carpet and A Window*, 2010, oil on canvas, 150 × 100, private collection, Givat Ella.



Figure 15. Fatma Shana, *Manar 2*, 2010, oil on canvas, 80 × 100, private collection, Julis.

An ornamental pattern spreads across the tights worn by the girl on the carpet in *Untitled*, (Figure 16), and the low/voyeuristic angle that defines the painting for the viewer exposes us to the way the girl and her body are regulated by the gaze. The ornament in this case is worn on the body, shaping it, resting on it, and simultaneously echoing the carpet's ornaments. The girl's playfulness appears to challenge the rules of the order embodied in the ornament. When her muddy feet soil the carpet, the purity of its ornament is jeopardized.



Figure 16. Fatma Shanan, *Untitled*, 2016, oil on canvas, 100 × 150 cm.

In the work *Lara*, (2017) (Figure 17), Shanan dissolves the borders of the carpet, which spreads as if woven into the space and incorporates the natural environment. The younger daughter's dirty feet step on the carpet on her way to climbing up, towards the figure standing before her. "In the Druze society where I grew up (painting on the carpet or defacing it) is a forbidden thing," Shanan explained. "The damage to the carpet can be perceived as a rebellion, a rebellion of a girl who is not allowed to 'play outside', which for me is a natural and basic thing in the development and needs of every child." (Simhon 2011). The physical performance of the girls in *Lara*, (2017) (Figure 17), i.e., their behavior, ostensibly reenacts the common practices that will eventually shape their identity through mimetic, repetitive practice, such as clothing norms, social and cultural behavioral rules, etc. In fact, however, they distort and deviate from "acceptable" behavior, appearing to tarnish the purity that the decorated object is meant to represent.



Figure 17. Fatma Shanan, *Lara*, 2017, Oil on canvas, 100 × 150, Ann and Dr. Ari Rosenblatt collection, USA.

Shanan tells in an early interview:

In the Druze society where I grew up... the carpet is a valuable item, the attitude towards it is often disproportionate, it is forbidden to step on it, it is forbidden to get dirty, the women take care of it obsessively, cleaning, shaking, brushing, and it became a kind of custom, where the women often take all the carpets outside to air them, so that they look good and shine. (Simhon 2011)

She explains that her work is about individual oppression, specifically the oppression of women in the Arab-Druze patriarchal society in which she lives. She claims that the main victim of preserving tradition is the woman (Simhon 2011).

Shanan's and Abu-Rumi's references to childhood constitute process of reenactment in which the artists return to the past and reenact the process by which the environment had enacted collective norms on the woman-subject's body and regulated her operation. The system of rules and laws is the mimetic foundation to which the subject is expected to return in a seemingly "natural" manner; but what these artists show is how the mimesis cracks, how the repetition and the principles it represents go wrong, or, in Shanan's words quoted above, "the damage to the carpet can be seen as a rebellion." (Simhon 2011). In Shanan's work, the disruption that the girl performs, seemingly as a creative prank, evolves into a critical artistic work that continues the girl's playfulness and her critical way of action and expands it in order to create another possibility for a Palestinian Muslim or Druze woman.

Self Portrait and a Carpet 1, (2017) (Figure 18), depicts a rug offered on Sotheby's auction site. It is the type of "fantasy rug" that was popular at auctions in the 1970s. The appearance of Shanan's self-portrait at the center of the painted carpet can be seen, according to Shanan, as a "symbolic intervention" in an object "that has already been marked as having a nominal exchange value, as an object that will provide cultural and material capital to its owner, as an appropriated orientalism." (Shanan in Lurie 2017, p. 99). Shanan investigated not only the methods of production and distribution of the carpets during her stay at the Metropolitan Museum's carpet department, but also the iconographic significance of the contents represented on them. She also sought to investigate the processes by which carpets that were familiar and valued objects in one culture, became of "museum value".



Figure 18. Fatma Shana, *Self-Portrait and a Carpet 1*, 2017, Oil on canvas, 200 × 140 cm.

One can see in the carpet paintings from the Sotheby's site or, as in another of Shanan's works based on a carpet from the Metropolitan's collection,¹² a dis-orientalism, an attempt to dismantle the Orientalist perception and reclaim the objects and their original meaning.¹³ Such carpets have been collected in the West over the years for capitalist and, certainly, colonial reasons; and their reappearance, as well as the new contextualization that Shanan offers them in her paintings, make us look anew at their migration process and the cultural appropriation associated with them. Colonialism significantly influenced museum collec-

tions, and their target audience was very specific. The carpets at Sotheby's, or those in the department where Shanan researched at the Metropolitan, are unmistakably part of the museum's broader "cultural colonialism" that has accompanied the institution since its inception. The reappearance or reenactment of tapestries in her work prompts a consideration of the history of museum collections, their acquisition, location, and status in the collection, as well as how they are related to ownership and power, collecting, globalism, universal judgments, values of different periods and places, and the purpose of the objects collected; and thus also an examination of the different attitudes and values, prejudices, racism, oppression, poverty and wealth, the status of the nation-state in modernity, and the formation of the museum in general (Simpson 2001, p. 25). The appearance of the tapestry invites further reflection on the process of musealization of Islamic arts as inextricably linked to colonial processes. Shanan reorients what was previously Oriental, and then acquired status and cultural capital in the West. She connects it to her own culture and to herself. In this sense, Shanan operates from a complex postcolonial position in making a reverse appropriation: not only is she re-appropriating such tapestry back to the East, but she is also placing herself at the heart of the composition in a way that corresponds to the figure of Venus in Botticelli's painting, "The Birth of Venus". The reference to Venus is a way of alluding to Western socialization processes for women, and interweaving them with the particular socialization processes that women undergo in the East, and specifically the Druze Palestinian woman. Shanan's reenactment can be understood as "re-appropriating cultural appropriation", meaning that she takes an object that expresses colonial appropriation and reenacts it in a painting. Such reenactment in a painting can be perceived as re-appropriation and postcolonial re-contextualization.

Self Portrait and a Carpet 1, (2017) (Figure 18), depicts the disintegration of a whole into its constituent parts, an "ornamentoclastic" destruction that seeks to disrupt the existing order through a radical intervention in the pattern or composition of the decorated carpet, which may also represents the house, interior, and the stability and perseverance of order. The female figure in the space is the artist herself, who appears to have chosen to act in the modernist tradition of destroying the existing order in the hope of creating conditions for the possibility of a new approach in the world—even if only for a brief moment. Shanan's actions, like those of Abu-Rumi and others, are aimed at an ethical deconstruction, with the goal of opening up a new present—and future—to others. This is creation through destruction. The ornament that remains in the work resembles the ruin that is left after the aura of a work of art has declined; a ruin that Walter Benjamin described as an opening for a different perspective, for a possible future that lies in the sediment of tradition (Benjamin 1970, and see Walden 2013, p. 3).

In the dynamic dismantling she offers in these paintings (there are two such paintings), Shanan appears to create a stack of superimposed emblematic images as if indicating that what we identify as regulated by law is incoherent. The ornament that had been previously defined according to a mechanical model, as a geometric arrangement, as an organic whole, as a grammar with an internal structure as an image, or as a system of stable images, thus shatters; and, as a consequence, the disassembled rug offers a multiplicity of occurrences and conflicting meanings. These fragmented works should be viewed in relation to Shanan's series of paintings that stopped halfway: works that were not completed and consisted in colored spots that did not converge into recognizable images, objects that did not join a familiar environment, lines that did not channel into a converging point, all of which are related to what Benjamin perceives as the "horror space of art"¹⁴, which in the context of the works of the female artists that lie at the heart of the present research, are interwoven into the existential space in which these artists face a process of reenactment.

In the works of both Shanan and Abu-Rumi, gender stereotypes are inverted. Whereas women are often seen as presenting a passive and restricted response to reality, in the deconstruction of "ritual" objects, in the decomposition of ornamental organicity, in the shattering of gender hierarchies, and so on, these artists have chosen an active, assertive, destructive

approach to the artistic space and its traditional signifiers. Juliet Miller wrote about this in *The Creative Feminine and Her Discontents*: “The acceptance and understanding of the positive aspects of aggression can bring about a change in a woman’s self-experiencing, for by doing so she steps into uncharted territory.” (Miller 2008, p. 139).

Rather than expressing the order and stability inherent in the traditional ornamental system and its potential to spread, Shanan’s and Abu-Rumi’s decompositions of the ornament and/or ornamental object present a process of entropy. The artists’ works achieve their criticism by breaking the distinct artistic boundaries associated with ornament; they overcome the field of forces or transgress the aesthetic field and walk a path of radical criticism by breaking the stylistic or design rules. They provide a kind of aesthetic format that enables the production of artistic radicalism. The dismantling or dimming of the ornament is the result of a negative experience that is more than just an expression of an aesthetic mindset—rather, it is an attempt to dive into society and effect change.

The patterns featured on Shanan’s rugs do not closely resemble the traditional ornamental object; they are far from a meticulous naturalism or perfect optical realism. They appear to have a built-in mimetic “flaw” that prevents them from being a perfect imitation. This practice, I believe, constitutes an expression of the desire to disrupt the mimetic mechanism by means of the gendered agent’s identity is formed; the shift it offers seeks to reflect the possibility of considering a non-conformist identity in the social conditions in which the artist operates.

Butler emphasizes the significance of reenactment in the context of gender because: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory framework that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.” (Butler 1999, p. 45). Gender identity is formed through practices that produce corporeal configurations that might appear “natural” to us but in fact are the result of reenactment, repeated gendering practices, and other social norms.

Such reenactment and imitation are necessary conditions for the development of social skills and self-positioning within an individual culture.

I started this essay by asserting that all post-Nakba Palestinian art can be read through the lens of reenactment. The three female artists discussed here live and work in a post-catastrophe society that is fighting for its right to land and housing, as well as its right to self-determination as a nation in a continuous state of occupation.¹⁵ The patterns that were created as a result of these conditions trap women within a life frame that restricts their development and functioning in almost every way.¹⁶ Social practices, together with religious, military, and patriarchal protocols, have imposed norms and behavioral patterns, the repetition of which determines and limits the woman and her horizons. The reenactment art created by these female artists offers resistance and a new horizon to Palestinian, Muslim, Druze, and Israeli society, as well as to the women who live and work in it.

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Notes

- ¹ As Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder and Naomi Weiner-Levy claim in their article: “Palestinian women’s agency in Israel . . . is not only structured by Arab cultural and religious resources, but is also structured by Jewish-Israeli spatial-cultural resources.” (Abu-Rabia-Queder and Weiner-Levy 2013, p. 88).
- ² The Nakba, commonly referred to as the Palestinian disaster, occurred in 1948 when the Palestinian society and homeland were destroyed, and the majority of Palestinian Arabs were forcibly uprooted.
- ³ Fatma Shanan identifies as a Druze rather than a Palestinian. Shanan’s work and practice are interpreted here as an expression and response to the Druze social environment that serves as the foundation for her creations, as well as in light of the gap that has been created between her and Israeli-Jewish society and the Zionist-Western ethos. As a result, her work exists alongside, or in clear political collaboration with, other Palestinian works and female artists. For information on the status of women in Druze society as a conservative and patriarchal society (see Barakat et al. 2018; Barakat 2021, 2022).

- 4 Haaretz newspaper published a Kafkaesque story from the opposite perspective of Manal Mahamid's story. Yoav Eliassi ("The Shadow"), an Israeli right-wing/nationalist rapper, posted a photo of the sign from the Jerusalem Biblical Zoo on his Facebook page and responded to it by writing: "A question to all those garbage-can geniuses on the left—why is it called Israeli in Hebrew and Palestinian in English? What do you say to that, arrogant, self-righteous and insufferable scum." The zoo responded to the post and replied that the "(Palestine Gazelle) is the gazelle's official scientific name, as accepted by the international community. When we list the name of an animal, we are obliged to list its name as it appears in the scientific literature. These are the accepted norms throughout the world, regardless of politics." (Yaron 2015). To be clear, I do not believe Mahamid claims in her work that the gazelle represented in her work is a new zoological species born for the first time in Palestine, as we know the presence of the gazelle since the Neolithic period (see: Sapir-Hen et al. 2009).
- 5 It should be noted that the gazelle appears frequently in art history and has representations in Hellenistic, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim art. The focus of this article is on reading the meaning of the gazelle in Mahamid's work through the Palestinian context, rather than on the incarnations of the gazelle image in art history. See Talgam's book for early representations of the gazelle image in art history (Talgam 2014).
- 6 A discussion of the Nakba events in Ain Al Gazelle can be found at Khalidi (Khalidi 1992, pp. 147–48; Morris 1988, pp. 9, 10, 61, 118, 213–14). According to Khalidi, and contrary to what is described by Morris, Ein Ayala was not built on the village's land (Khalidi 1992, p. 148).
- 7 Vardit Rispler-Chaim States that "In some Islamic societies it is expected that the husband, after consummating marriage with a wife who he believed to be a virgin, demonstrates her virginity by hanging a white handkerchief stained with her 'virginity blood' on the door of the site of their first seclusion." (Rispler-Chaim 2007, p. 326).
- 8 In recent years, the subject of covering and veiling has been presented and discussed in the context of the work of many artists, particularly in the Palestinian Muslim-Druze context, of which I will only mention a few: Hiam Mustafa, Amira Zian, Siraj Azam, Mai Daas', Morjan Abu Diba, Fahed Halabi, and others.
- 9 Fatima Abu-Rumi, *Exit*, video sound, 03:38. 2012.
- 10 "As an Arab woman artist and as a Palestinian, I use hair to express protest and attempt to make it into a symbol through which many women from diverse population groups may self-identify with the messages that I wish to send. . . . My occupation with hair flows from a personal and social perspective: its inception in the private domain, whence it evolves into a universal statement of both national and genderic validity." (Abu-Rumi 2017, p. 38).
- 11 Regarding the law and play see (Marnin-Distelfeld 2018).
- 12 See Fatman Shana, *Self Portrait and a Carpet 3*, 2017, Oil on Canvas (in *Fatma Shanan: Works 2010–2017* 2017, Figure 34, p. 85).
- 13 The concept of dis-Orientalism is central to Ganit Ankouri's book on Palestinian art and has been criticized by Palestinian critics (see Ankori 2006; Farhat 2009).
- 14 Benjamin writes in the context of Baudelaire's fleur du mal: "do we show the public . . . the mechanism behind our effects?... Do we display all the rags, the paint, the pulleys, the chains, the alterations, the scribbledover proof sheets—in short all the horrors that make up the sanctuary of arts?" (Benjamin 2002, pp. 329–30).
- 15 It should be noted that the three artists discussed in this article are all graduates of Israeli art schools. Over the last two decades, the number of art students, particularly female art students, has risen from a few individual students to several dozen annually. The female artists here are part of a major turning point in the encounter between Arab, Palestinian, and Druze minorities and Israeli higher education in recent decades. Female artists are becoming increasingly accepted into the Israeli art world, winning awards, and critical acclaim, exhibiting in new spaces, and engaging in sophisticated intellectual artistic discussions with Palestinian Arab society within and beyond the borders of Palestine, as well as with the colonial enterprise.
- 16 I do not claim that the subjugation of women in Palestine began with the Nakba, but rather that the Nakba and the occupation forced stagnation upon the development of Palestinian society in terms of both modernization and urbanization, determining the inferior status of women. See the discussion at the beginning of the article on Manar Hassan's claims (Hasan 2005, 2017).

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