



Suleiman Mansour

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Suleiman Mansour, one of the most prominent Palestinian artists in the occupied territories, was born in Ramallah in 1947. He studied art at the Fine Arts College in Bezzallat in Jerusalem. He left the college in his third year, dissatisfied with the preference of Israeli teachers for abstract art and alienated by increasingly serious political clashes with his fellow students.

Symbolism is a key factor in Mansour's art, a symbolism which unites historical and present Palestinian history, but the symbols are simple and understandable. The cultural history of the Palestinian people, deeply rooted in love for the land, is a recurring theme in Mansour's art - in flowers, fruits, fish and trees. History and identity are reflected in the patterns of Palestinian national dresses, handicraft and cultivating the land. The ongoing struggle of everyday Palestinian life forges the determination, dedication and seriousness of the Palestinian people as well as the art of Suleiman Mansour. Mansour calls himself a political artist «not because I want to be, but because anyone who has feel-

ings here, cannot be anything but political.»

As dramatic political developments suddenly became everyday life for ordinary people on the West Bank, political developments deeply influenced Mansour. The defeat of the Arab armies in 1967, the occupation of the West Bank, Nasser's death, the growing strength of the Palestinian guerillas and the formation of the PLO meant a lot of changes - days of hardship, but also hope. «The pressure on people increased especially from the land confiscations, and I began to make paintings which expressed this stress, and yet were hopeful.»

Yet awareness about using art in a political context was still in its early stage. It was between 1975 and 1982 that the plastic art form developed artistically as well as politically. This was also reflected by the policy of circulating art. In 1980, Palestinian artists in the occupied territories joined to form a league for plastic art. Five exhibitions were held during this period in which almost every artist showed several paintings. In 1976, the artists sought an

international audience by holding an exhibition in London, and in 1977 exhibitions in the USA. Due to this, hundreds of people abroad became familiar with Palestinian art and life.

Mansour's art cannot be separated from the daily reality of oppression, exploitation and war; neither can it be separated from the reality of the people's unquenchable will to fight on. It is definitely not in line with the bourgeois ideal of art - 'art for the sake of art', where the intention of the artist is to create a perfect harmony of dreams and beauty - a world to escape into, a drug or a painkiller to make people forget their worries and the reason for them, so they will not so easily start to fight the conditions of reality. Like the most shining examples of political art, Mansour's works expose the reality of suffering and the reasons for the suffering. Also they point the way forward. So it is not surprising that official institutions abroad, such as museums and banks in Europe, have ignored this art, as the states and capitalist circles behind them are not in the habit of supporting the struggle