

Lots of variation in Palestinian art exhibition

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A Palestinian woman in a cute white spacesuit plants a Palestinian flag on the moon. The artist, Larissa Sansour, remarks: "One small step for Palestinians is a giant leap for mankind", and waves the blue earth goodbye. A homeland, finally? No, because the film ends with the astronaut hurtling through space on an outbound journey from the earth. The exodus is not over.

Mona Khazindar, the curator of *Palestine: la création dans tous ses états*, has brought together twenty artists in a comprehensive overview of Palestinian art today. Her choice faithfully reflects the composition of the Palestinian art world: mostly young and upcoming artists together with established ones (Mona Hatoum and Emily Jacir), along with a few representatives of the previous generation. The young artists' slant towards irony is immediately apparent in the first works on display. Sharif Waked's *Chic Point: Fashion for Israeli checkpoints* shows male models walking up and down a catwalk with clothing especially designed to facilitate body searches at checkpoints.

Next door the conceptual artist Khalil Rabah has installed a sales office of the *United States of Palestine Airlines*. The empty office, with all the logos and paraphernalia of such places but no trace of any activity, allows for multiple readings. The same can be said of Rana Bishara's impressive installation *Homage to Childhood*, which tackles the artistically difficult issue of child victims of Israeli military operations. The installation is poignant but avoids melodrama and militancy.

The kind of activist indignation that permeates the videos of the elder artist Suha Shoman is rarely to be found among the young artists. They may give expression to their rage, such as Hani Zurob in his impressive *Standby* paintings, but they are too wizened to claim the moral high ground.

The exhibition draws a lot of visitors and is a milestone in the presentation of Palestinian artists, even if the lack of curatorial concept is a little disappointing. As the curator points out, the exhibition demonstrates that Palestine has a highly varied and developed art scene.

Palestine: la création dans tous ses états can be seen in the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris until November 22, 2009.