



Bandits with planes ... came through the skies to kill children ... and through the streets the blood of the children ran - simply - like children's blood.

Pablo Neruda

In his travel journal of 1838, David Roberts R.A., the first western artist to paint the sights of Egypt and the Holy Land, noted significant changes as he travelled from Egypt into southern Palestine. As his camel train passed up the ancient via maris to Gaza on the coast, his artist's eye recorded the changing landscapes, as the arid, burning deserts of Sinai gave way to a richly cultivated land of palm-trees, olive groves and orange orchards. 'The ground ... carpeted with flowers, the plain studded with small villages,' he enthused, 'this country is the loveliest I ever beheld.' To the painterly Scot, Palestine's fertile gardens proved a delightful vision of paradise.

Nor was Roberts alone in imagining luxuriant gardens, replete with flowing water and carpets of flowers, a premonition of paradise. His Arab guides had already informed him that al-Jannah, the garden, was the commonest

THE OTHER SIDE OF PARADISE

word denoting that heavenly paradise where the righteous would dwell for eternity. Conversely, Islamic eschatology describes as Jahannam that place of burning torment, like the Christian Hell, where those unworthy of entering 'the Gardens of Everlasting Bliss' are condemned to suffer the endless torments of unimaginable fires.

Laila Shawa, born in Gaza just over a century later recalls an idyllic childhood in the lush gardens that surrounded the spacious house her grandfather had built. Palestine was, at that time, administered under the British Mandate. Laila was eight years old when, on May 14th, 1948, the State of Israel was declared to exist in her Palestinian homeland, and from that day onwards things changed irrevocably. Since then, her life and developing artistic career have both moved in lock-step with the harrowing events occasioned by six decades of aggressive containment and occupation. The most immediate change, known as al-Naqba (the catastrophe), was an ethnic cleansing that flooded the narrow 'Gaza strip' with close to a million refugees who'd fled from or were expelled from their homes by marauding Israeli forces. A decade later, with her father's blessing, the young Shawa left this unsettled land to train at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome, where, for six years, she

studied under such well-known artists as the Sicilian Renato Gattuso, the surrealist De Chirico and, in Salzburg, the Expressionist Kokoschka. This diversity of influences prompted her to develop a series of divergent styles capable of drawing upon a wide array of media and techniques, but always with an overriding predilection for colour.

Over the intervening years, those diversities of style and subject-matter have been deployed to address injustice and expose oppression wherever found. Never afraid of controversy, as in Clash (2002), Shawa assumes her latest work will prove contentious, yet she refuses to deviate from what she considers the artist's basic obligation to examine in detail the injustices that others fail - or prefer not - to notice. The Other Side of Paradise, draws together the many threads of her recent work in meditating upon the conundrum that for many Palestinian souls the living hell of the present moment is sufficiently dreadful to fuel outrageous longings for an imaginary 'paradise' beyond.

The core series *Trapped* (2010) developed from a Channel Four programme aired in 2007, which addressed the incendiary subject of female suicide bombers. That documentary showed CCTV footage from an Israeli border

checkpoint, of a young Palestinian woman with a suicide device who had been isolated in a cage and forced to undress to reveal the explosives hidden on her body. The moment by moment progression of her anguish is starkly visible: from being inescapably trapped, to the

realisation - since the device was faulty - that even her determination to escape the trap through death is unachievable, condemning her to forceful imprisonment by the Israeli guards. This girl's all-too-human fragility is portrayed, in poignant contrast to the military-industrial cage where these events were so dispassionately recorded from afar. Fascinated, as much by her failure as the reasons behind her decision to carry out this act, Shawa, whose art has always engaged critically with the position of women in the Arab world, began a long journey of contextual research into the complex issues surrounding women suicide bombers.

Images from the footage of the would-be suicide's capture are re-drawn to powerful effect in several of the resulting works: Stranglehold (2012), Death Dance (2012), Trapped and Scream (both 2011). In some, the foreground 'Arabic' text (impossible to decipher 'greeking') appears to imprison the woman in a culturally-conditioned trap, the realisation of which seems indelibly etched upon her anguished face. In Stranglehold this text, set against a striking backdrop of traditional Palestinian embroidery, coils insidiously round her neck and arms as though to restrain her struggles. These searing images – date-stamped and time-coded – replay frame by freeze-frame

the caged woman's frustrated attempts to blow herself to oblivion, before succumbing to the ultimate betrayal of her failed incendiary device. Shawa comments, 'That's what unlocked this story for me: she'd been given this bomb by some moron who hadn't even ensured she could use it properly she's a woman - she's expendable! This infuriated me. The more I learned the facts of her case, the more she seemed the victim, a minor pawn in someone else's power-game, whose volunteering for "martyrdom" only spared her from becoming another casualty of honour killing!'

Scream is a radical revision of Warhol's Marilyn Diptych, where Shawa recontours the fusion of themes of media-celebrity and mortality surrounding Monroe's suicide, in 1962, by portraying this latter-day woman who'd failed. Yet, this same tortured image overlaying the woeful scene of charred destruction in Cast Lead (2011), suggests a righteous indignation underpinning her motives that ennobles her torment far beyond that of the more successful western starlet. 'Cast Lead,' of course, was the chilling Israeli codename for the three-week long assault on Gaza City, beginning in December '08, where aerial bombardment and the indiscriminate shelling of



Clash / Twin Towers, 2002.
Gold Kufic script reads la ilaha illa Allah.
MDF and acrylics,
150 x 15 x 15 cm
Collection of the
Wereldmuseum,
Rotterdam, the
Netherlands

residential areas – using white phosphorous shells - caused traumatic scarifying burns amongst the mainly civilian population. Since Shawa can no longer return to Gaza, she photographed burning dolls as stand-in actors for those incandescent scenes of hellish terror, layering the results on her canvases to eerily disquieting effect.

In partial respite, bright acrylic tones and cartoon cut-out shapes grace other pictures on display. In Gaza Sky (2011), the brilliant blue heavens normally denoting fine weather and serene unconcern provide a more sinister backdrop, with a nod to Lichtenstein's Whaam, to the deadly Predator drones swarming above. Their vengeful presence erodes all sense of security, controlled as they are by malevolent creatures from another place. The omnipresent drones return in Birds of Paradise (2011), circling above Habib Allah's 17th century Persian miniature illustrating Farid ud-Din Attar's classic Sufi tale of the Conference of the Birds. Shawa's addition of trumpeting angels reconfigures this natural garden scene to become the Day of Judgement, and we note the familiar, anguished shahida figures, multiplied and dressed in the martyr's green burial-shroud, now adorned with golden texts of gobbledygook, at the very instant they emerge into paradise. Yet even in their moment of triumph, the hapless newcomers to the Gardens of Delight find themselves targeted by the infernal drones. Inside Paradise (2011), provides a still more bitterly ironic perspective on a similar theme.

The contradictions of logic spiralling beyond all rational control are a signature device of Shawa's unflustered account of the current chaos in Palestine. As logic twists into its opposite, her Fashionista-Terrorista series annexed new territories for exploration as she co-opted the world of fashion to add its own surreal gloss to this debate. The traditional Palestinian head-dress, or keffiyeh, has flourished as a fashion statement internationally, a 'cool' sign of solidarity with the oppressed Palestinian people. This head-gear is now mass-produced in China, whilst the last manufactory of authentic Palestinian keffiyehs struggles to survive the flood of cheap foreign imitations. This underlines how the internationalisation of its just cause impacts negatively upon realities of Palestinian life, where anyone sporting the keffiyeh is considered a terrorist – not a fashion icon.

By merging these two developing lines of fashionistas and suicide-bombers together, Shawa arrived at a typically tongue-in-cheek breakthrough, the Disposable Bodies series (2011), offering her own outrageous take on what such issues might mean to the fashion-conscious young Arab women of today. Clumsy suicide-belts hidden by voluminous veils were ripe for a fashion 'make-over', so her mannequins model customised styles designed to appeal to different niches in this yet-to-be-exploited market. Employing the coded language of design, each 'archetype' presents a different vision of what might motivate a young woman to destroy herself and others rather



Death Dance, 2012. Mixed media on canvas, 100×170 cm.

than live in a world to which there's no acceptable alternative. At the core of this cat-walk revolution lurks a troubling confusion of eroticism and weaponisation: from the fetishistic apparel of the first black widow's corset with tassles, designed and decorously ornamented with nails by Rachel Spencer, to the locked and chained grenade (a decommissioned Israeli model) that coquettishly doubles as a cache-sexe. While one mannequin's skin is overwritten with incoherent text, the shapely form of another is covered in roses. This refers to Arafat's speech in Ramallah in January 2002, where he proclaimed to a phalanx of young girls, 'Women and men are equal!' before adding 'You are my army of roses that will crush the Israeli tanks!' Arafat seemed unconscious of any irony in Palestine's women having finally achieved their goal of sexual equality at this utterly unenviable price.

The blood-red body needs little gloss, except to note the cactus motif referring both to torture and to the long-suffering perseverance required to survive in extreme conditions. The Arabic word for cactus, saber, also means 'patience' and this motif symbolises resistance. This figurine's army-issue 'suicide-belt'

boasts a set of gold accessories created by the Lebanese designer, Nadine Kanso, whose scripts, reading 'Pride', 'Hope', 'Land' and 'Freedom', denote the single-minded focus of this model's ambitions. As for the peacock-feather and bandolier adorned nymphets, pushing the confused boundaries of sexploitation further still, they remind us, perhaps, that Delilah herself was a beautiful girl from Gaza. In metaphorically dressing these young women in symbolic designer lingerie, even as they're exposed to the onlooker's candid stare, Shawa assigns to each aspirant an individual identity, of which horrific reports of another female suicide bomber in the Middle East would otherwise rob her, were she ever to succeed in unveiling her questionable charms. Yet for all this toying with volatile ideas each model is still headless, lacking any limbs to act to defend herself, and ultimately remains the plaything of some nexus of powerful forces far beyond her own control.

This overriding concern for individuals trapped by circumstances beyond their control has been a constant *leitmotif* since *The Walls of Gaza* screen-prints, of 1992, cemented Shawa's reputation as a critical commentator on Gaza.



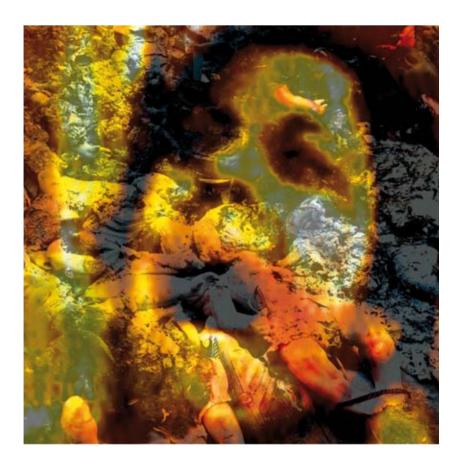
Describing the importance of photography over painting for this series, she said, 'Unseen fragments and fleeting moments are captured in photographs. These can be replicated and become immortalised. Anyone caught writing graffiti would be shot on sight. I wanted the world to witness what was actually happening, even as the Israelis tried to destroy the incriminating evidence of their occupation.' Shawa realised that the ephemeral writing on those walls revealed not only the defiant spirit of Gaza's people, but constituted a new samizdat process whereby Palestinians living through a total media blackout published their daily experiences as a necessary means of rebellious exchange. Shawa determined to create a lasting record of this for wider circulation abroad. Target (1992) which centred a set of cross-hairs on the forehead of a winsome child making a victory salute was the simplest of all devices - yet it encapsulated a frightening truth, exposing the de facto Israeli orders to target any graffiti-painting youths! Here the 'writing on the wall' is definitely not meaningless 'areeking': it tells the harrowing stories of that time.

Other works like Against the Wall (2008), with repeating Handala cartoon images of a young boy turning his back on everything, likewise concentrate on the plight of Gaza's youth. Since up to 65% of all Gazans are still young, Shawa's blood boils when she describes how the children are being wilfully targeted and both physically and psychologically traumatised. Boy Soldiers (2008), springs from two quick snap-shots taken in a refugee camp, of a young boy missing a shoe, playing with a pipe as though it were a gun. By repeating his image and reworking it against different backgrounds Shawa expands beyond that unique child to define the twisted spiral of inexcusable violence done to all the children deprived of their rights to grow up in a peaceful environment. 'By targeting our children,' Shawa maintains, 'Israel is annihilating our future.'

And you'll ask: why doesn't his poetry speak of dreams and leaves and the great volcanoes of his native land?

Come and see the blood in the streets, come and see the blood in the streets, come and see the blood in the streets!

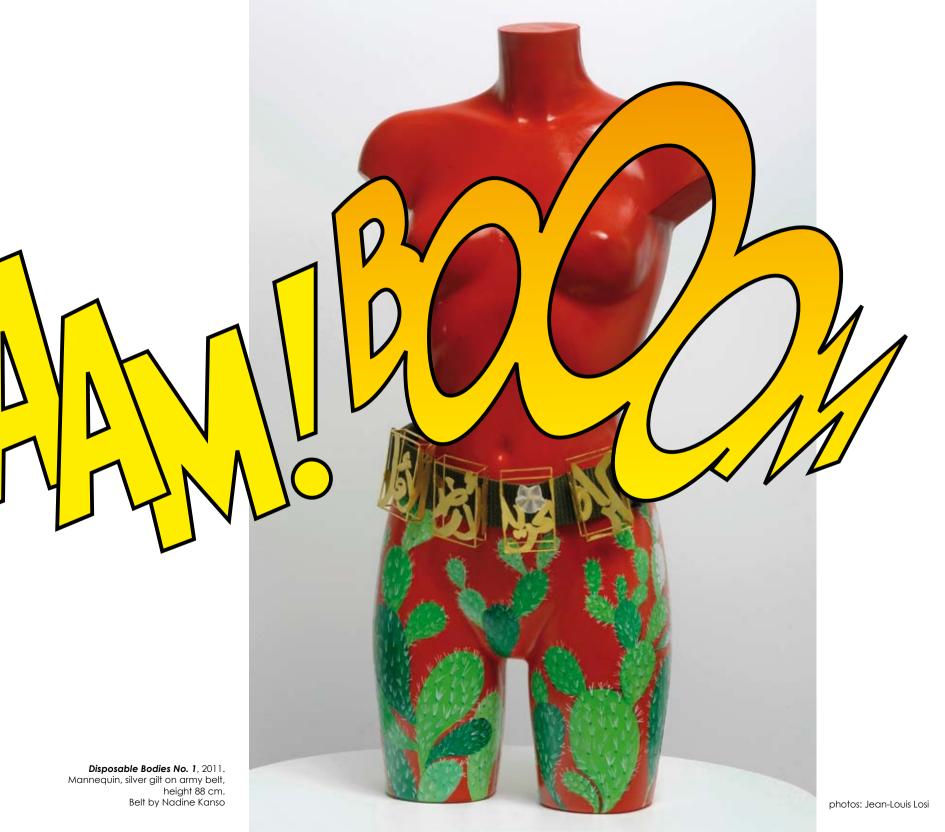
Pablo Neruda: excerpts from I'm Explaining a Few Things.



Left: **Stolen Lives, Stolen Deaths**, 2011. Photography and mixed media on canvas, 100 x 110 cm. Edition of 2.

Above: **Cast Lead**, 2011. Photography and mixed media on canvas, 100 x 100 cm. Edition of 2.







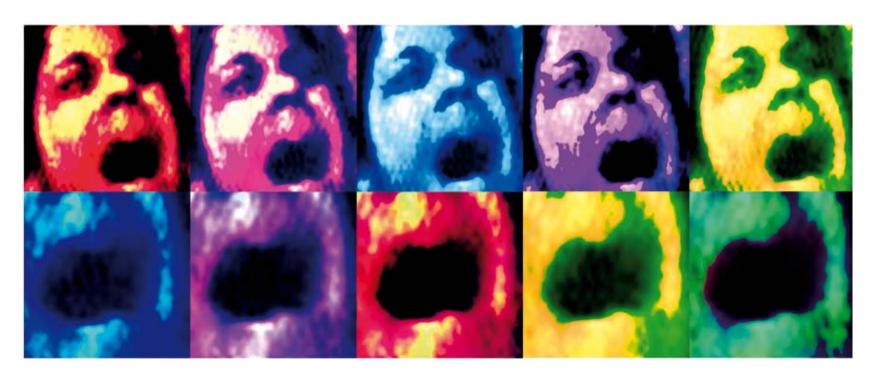
Right: *Inside Paradise*, 2011. Photography and mixed media on canvas, 120 x 120 cm. Edition of 2.





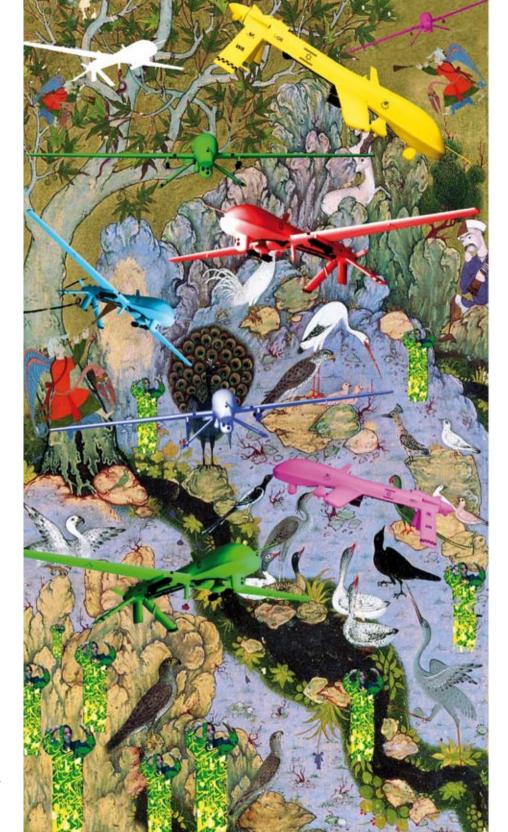
Diposable Bodies No. 4, 2011. Mannequin, mixed media and ammunition, height 88 cm.





Scream, 2011. Photography and mixed media on canvas,100 x 250 cm. (2 parts: 100×150 cm / 100×100 cm)





Birds of Paradise, 2011. Photography and mixed media on canvas, 170 x 95 cm. Edition of 2.



Gaza Sky, 2011. Photography and mixed media on canvas, 170 x 95 cm. Edition of 2.





Trapped II, 2011. Photography and mixed media on canvas, 100 x 110 cm. Edition of 2.





Trapped III, 2011.
Photography and mixed media on canvas, 100 x 110 cm.
Edition of 2.

Trapped I, 2011.

Photography and mixed media on canvas, 100 x 110 cm.

Edition of 2.



Target, 2008, Silk screen on canvas, 100 x 160 cm. Edition of 3.









ΙΔΙΙ	A SHAWA		
		2002	Between Legend and Reality, Modern Art from the Arab World,
1940	Born in Gaza, Palestine; lives and works in London, UK		Reykjavik Art Museum and Akureyri Art Museum, Iceland
		2002	From the Ocean to the Gulf and Beyond: Arab Contemporary Art,
Biography			the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, Amman, Jordan
	School of Art Leonardo Da Vinci, Cairo, Egypt	2002 - 11	Breaking the Veils: Women Artists from the Islamic World, exhibition organised by
	Accademia di Belle Arti di Roma, University of Rome, Italy, BA Hons Fine Arts		the Royal Society of Fine Arts, Jordan, and Pan-Mediterranean Women Artists
1960 - 63	Summer Courses under Austrian Expressionist Oskar Kokoschka, School of Seeing,		Network F.A.M. (Femme-Artist-Méditerranée) based in Greece which travelled
10/0 //	Salzburg, Austria		throughout Europe, Australia and USA
1960 - 64	Scuola di Arti Ornamentali San Giacomo, Rome, Italy. Diploma in	2002	A Thousand Ways of Being. Memory and Presence in the Arts of Diasporas,
10/5 /7	Plastic & Decorative Arts		October Gallery, London, UK
1965 - 6/	Supervisor for Arts & Crafts education in refugee camps for UNRWA	2002	Masterstrokes: Contemporary Arabic Calligraphy, October Gallery, London, UK
10// /7	(United Nations Relief and Works Agency) in Gaza	2002	Transvangarde, An Artistic World Wide Web, October Gallery, London, UK
	Lecturer with UNESCO Institute of Education for UNRWA in Gaza Full-time artist in Beirut	2001	Twelve Arab Artists, Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
	Lived between London and Gaza. Collaborated on the building and design of	1998 - 00	Art Beyond Borders, UNESCO and TIMOTCA (The International Museum of
17/0 - 00	The Rashad Shawa Cultural Centre, in Gaza, for which Laila Shawa executed		Twentieth Century Art); UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France; Mitra Municipal
	the stained glass windows	0000	Gallery, Lisbon, Portugal; Las Vegas Art Museum, USA
1988 -	Returns to live mainly in London where she resumed work as a full-time artist	2000	First International Forum for a Culture of Peace by Pan-Mediterranean Women
present	Reforms to live mainly in Editaon where she resorted work as a foil fifte arisi	1000 00	Artists Network, Rhodes, Greece
ргозотн		1999 - 00	Dialogue of the Present, Hot Gallery, Bath; Plymouth Arts Centre, Plymouth;
Selected	Group Exhibitions		Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London; Pittshanger Manor Gallery, London; Brighton University Gallery, Brighton, UK
2011	Abu Dhabi Art Fair, October Gallery (London, UK), Abu Dhabi, UAE	1998	Mediterranea, Grand Palais, Brussels, Belgium
	Art Dubai, October Gallery (London, UK), Dubai, UAE	1997	Artistes palestiniens contemporains, Institute du Monde Arabe, Paris, France
2011	Passport to Palestine, La Scatola Gallery, London, UK	1996	Transvangarde, October Gallery, London, UK
2011	Contemporary Art/Arab & Iranian, Sotheby's, London, UK	1996	Contemporary Arab Artists, the World Bank Gallery, the World Bank Building,
	Miragens: Contemporary Art in the Islamic World,	1770	Washington DC., USA
	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, touring to : Sao Paolo,	1996	The Right to Write: Calligraphic Works from the Collection of the Jordan National
	Brasilia, Brazil	1770	Gallery of Fine Arts, The Dalton Gallery, Agnes Scott College, Decatur,
2010	Sajjil, A Century of Modern Art, Mathaf, Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar		Georgia, USA
2010	Co-incidence, Galerie Imane Farès, Paris, France	1995 - 97	
2010	Crunchtime: Artist's Responses to the Global Crisis,		South Africa (whole exhibition was lost in Sarajevo 1997/8)
	International Visual Arts Event, York, UK	1995	Contemporary Middle Eastern Art, recent acquisition, John Addis Gallery,
2009 - 10	Contemporary Calligraphic Art from the Arab World, Nabad Gallery,		British Museum, London, UK
	Jabal Amman, Jordan	1995	Artists' View, The Arab World, Willamette Arts Gallery, Willamette University,
2009	Middle Eastern and European Art, the Recessionists, Somerset, UK		Salem, Oregon, USA
2009	Arabesque: Arts from the Arab World, the Kennedy Centre, Washington, DC, USA	1995	Contemporary Arab Artists, Riwaq Al Balqa'a Gallery, Darat Al-Funun,
2008	Arab Print, Edition I, Meem Gallery, Dubai, UAE		Amman, Jordan
2008	Routes, Middle Eastern and Arab Art, Waterhouse & Dodd, London, UK	1994 - 95	Forces of Change, Artists of the Arab World, National Museum of Women in the
2008	Roads Were Open, Roads Were Closed, Third Line Gallery, Dubai, UAE		Arts, Washington, DC; Dudley House, Lehman Hall, Harvard University,
2008	Mediterraneo, Italian Cultural Institute, London, UK		Cambridge, MA; The Chicago Cultural Centre, Chicago Illinois; Wolfson Gallery
2008	Spring Show, October Gallery, London, UK		and Central Gallery, Miami-Dade Community College, Miami Florida;
2008	Word into Art, a British Museum touring exhibition, The Atrium, DIFC, Dubai, UAE		Nexus Contemporary Art Centre, Atlanta, Georgia; Bedford Gallery,
2006	Word into Art, British Museum, London, UK		Walnut Creek, California; Gwinnett Arts Center, Duluth, Georgia, USA
2006	Text Messages, October Gallery, London, UK	1994	Shawa and Wijdan, October Gallery, London, UK
2005	Walled In: Walled Out, Laila Shawa and Noa Lidor,	1994	From Exile to Jerusalem, Al-Wasiti Art Centre, Jerusalem, Israel
	Green Cardamom, London, UK	1993	Exhibition of Limited Prints Editions at SAGA, Salon de l'estampe et de l'édition
2003	Religion, Art and War, Maison Des Artes, London, UK		d'art à Tirage limité, Grand Palais, Paris, France
2003	Transvangarde: Contemporary Art from Around the World,	1992	Three Artists from Gaza: Fayez Al Hasani, Kamel al Mughanni and Laila Shawa,
	(October Gallery), Kulturbrauerei, Berlin, Germany		The Shoman Foundation, Amman, Jordan

1990	Malaysian Experience, National Art Gallery of Malaysia,
	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
1989	Contemporary Art from the Islamic World, Barbican Centre, London, UK
1988	The Baghdad Biennale, Saddam Centre, Baghdad, Iraq
1987	Arab Women Artists in the UK, Kufa Gallery, London, UK
1968 - 78	With Palestinian Union of Artists, based in Beirut, exhibitions in most
	Arab countries, North Africa, Russia, China, Japan, Malaysia, Europe,
	UK and USA

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2012	The Other Side of Paradise, October Gallery, London, UK
2011	Trapped: A Female Suicide Bomber, Galerie Imane Farès, Paris, France
2010 - 11	Sarab (Mirage), The Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE
2010	Arabopop, Articulate Baboon Gallery, Cairo, Egypt
2008	Sarab (Mirage), Atrium Gallery, DIFC, Dubai, UAE
2000	In the Name of God: Crucifixion 2000, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK
1994	The Walls of Gaza Series II, The Library, SOAS, University of London, London, UK
1992	Women and Magic, The Gallery, London, UK
1990	Women and the Veil, Jordan National Gallery, Amman, Jordan
1975	Of Horses and Cities, L'Antiquaire Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
1972	Exhibition at Sultan Gallery, Kuwait City, Kuwait
1971	Cities of Gold, Dar Tunis, The Tunisian Cultural Centre, Beirut, Lebanon
1970	Laila Shawa at the Vendome, Hotel Vendome, Beirut, Lebanon
1968	Exhibition of drawings by Laila Shawa, The Book Centre Gallery,
	Beirut, Lebanon
1965	Contrast and Difference, Marna House, Gaza, Palestine

Works in Public Collections

The National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The National Art Gallery, Amman, Jordan

The British Museum, London, UK

The Museum of Modern Art, Glasgow, Scotland

The Arab Bank Limited, Amman, Jordan

The Palestinian Union of Artists, Beirut, Lebanon

The Kuwait Fund, Kuwait City, Kuwait

The Rashad Shawa Cultural Centre, Gaza, Palestine

The Khaled Shoman Foundation, Amman, Jordan

The National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington DC, USA

The Qatar Museum for Contemporary Middle Eastern Art, Mathaf, Qatar

The Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam, the Netherlands

The TIMOTCA, Las Vegas, USA

The World of Islam Festival Trust, London, UK

The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK

The Burrell Collection, Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, Scotland

DIFC, Dubai, UAE

Spazio Brazzà, Moruzzo, Italy

The Benevolent Society, Gaza, Palestine

Back cover: Fashionista Terrorista II (The Walls of Gaza III), (detail) 2011. Mixed media with Swarovsky beads on canvas, 130 x 100 cm. Edition of 2.



This catalogue was published on the occasion of the exhibition

THE OTHER SIDE OF PARADISE

at October Gallery 9th February to 31st March, 2012

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