

# THE WEXNER FOUNDATION

## Asim Abu Shakra: Longing for Roots

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Asim Abu Shakra (1961-1990), b/d Umm al-Fahm

### Tally Tamir, "The Shadow of Foreignness: On the Paintings of Asim Abu-Shakra," vol 6, No 1, 1999

A closer look at his works and a detailed examination of their content reveal a deep connection to Palestinian art, which is not readily apparent, and a persistent concern with questions of identity, conflict and foreignness. Indeed, any discussion of Abu-Shakra's paintings must take into consideration his complex identity as an Arab-Palestinian-Israeli which, in Azmi Bishara's words, constitutes "a contradiction at the heart of identity." Bishara rejects the idea of perceiving Arab-Israeli identity as one in which two identities coexist, seeing it rather as a dialectic existing in an uneasy state of tension: "The Palestinian and the Israeli identities are two sides in conflict and do not live in peace with one another." According to Bishara, the Arab in Israel is condemned to perpetual foreignness in a country that "is his and is not his at one and the same time . . . but is in no way his homeland."

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**Cactus, 1988**  
Oil on Paper  
910 x 690 mm



**Neckties, 1988**  
Oil on Paper  
100 x 70 cm



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**Self-Portrait, 1988**

Oil on Paper  
100 x 70 cm



**This is by the Grace of My Lord, 1985**

Oil on Paper  
99.5 x 74 cm

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## **Yossi Klein Halevi, *Herzl and Arab Israelis as in Herzl's Vision Today***

...Arabs possess all the formal rights of citizens. ...Arab citizens of the Jewish state have surely prospered ... Still, discrimination persists, there are major gaps in income and social status between Arabs and Jews and government budgets have been skewed toward Jewish municipalities. And so this irony too has been noted: that a people that suffered for centuries as a minority has so far failed to fulfill its promise, enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence, to offer full equality for its Arab minority ...

Israel's ability to create a shared identity for its Arab and Jewish citizens has been undermined by its formidable security challenges. Many Jews deeply distrust the loyalty of Arab citizens, some of whose Knesset representatives have lauded Palestinian terrorists as heroes and approved terror attacks, especially against IDF soldiers ...

For Arabs, a history of government land confiscation and systemic budgetary discrimination, as well as the seemingly endless occupation of the Palestinians, have left deep wounds and mistrust. The fear of another uprooting – a second 'Nakba'—is embedded in Arab Israeli consciousness. The implicit message Arabs take from the country's Jewish identity—from its national symbols and its ethos of 'ingathering of exiles,' granting citizenship to any Jew—is that they don't quite belong.

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## **Reflection Question**

Asim Abu Shakra's struggle between wandering and belonging is a deeply Palestinian struggle that resonates with the Jewish experience.

**Can the conversation on exile and longing be part of a common conversation that builds bridges between these two nations?**

## **Zionist Challenge**

Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky (1880-1940), the father of Revisionist Zionism, wrote, "a considerable Arab population will always remain in Palestine. If things fare badly for this group of inhabitants then things will fare badly for the entire country. The political, economic, and cultural welfare of the Arabs will thus always remain one of the main conditions for the well-being of the land of Israel. In the future Jewish state absolute equality will reign between residents of both peoples, both languages and all religions. . ." Jabotinsky was both a realist and idealist in the articulation of this vision.

**How can we become more attentive, attuned & sensitive to the needs of the 'other nation' in our midst toward building a shared society and nurturing the 'well-being' of all?**