Sliman Mansour: Promises and Scars | وعود وندوب

Presented by George Al Ama and Fann À Porter

Warehouse 46, Alserkal Avenue, 15 - 22 November 2026



Sliman Mansour, *AlQuds - Metal*, 2003, Oil and rust on metal, 100 x 90 cm

- George Al Ama and Fann À Porter present Promises and Scars, a landmark exhibition bringing together five decades of work by Sliman Mansour during Alserkal Art Week 2026
- This marks the first time since 2011 that such an extensive body of the artist's work has been brought together in a single exhibition

Dubai, UAE, 5 November 2026 - *Promises and Scars* presents five decades of Sliman Mansour's relentless and experimental pursuit of aesthetic forms and media capable of expressing and responding to the Palestinian condition. The works on display reflect Mansour's critical approach to his own practice, in which he was in constant creative conversation with his previous works, the broader milieu concerned with modernity and Arab aesthetics, as well as with his people's struggle.

Mansour's work is often cast as the dream factory of a people denied its homeland and its wholeness. Against ongoing fragmentation and erasure that seek to reduce Palestinians to less than a people, his

idealized landscapes and figures are celebrated for introducing a people to itself. As in his poster for *Land Day* (1977), these images offer a people deprived of itself the means to see and recognize its peoplehood.

These idealized scenes could not reconcile themselves with imperfection. They showed no broken fences, no damaged houses, no dirty roads, and no hesitant subjects. Mansour's olive trees were always perfectly pruned and trimmed of any weak branches, as in *AlJeeb Village* (1981), and so too were his figures, as in *My Land* (1980s). These images promised and foretold a history in the form of a progressive anti-colonial romance with a guaranteed happy ending, in which an oppressed people marched confidently, in a straight line, toward its destined freedom.

In these images, Mansour formed magical landscapes of dreams and promises where history bowed to the optimism of sheer will. From a single mother's dream of a house (*My Mother*, 1971) to the storm's promise of a rainbow (to borrow from Mahmoud Darwish), they gave form to hopes both intimate and collective. They declared, in an untrembling voice to those who bear heavy burdens, that they shall inherit the earth.

Yet, despite our addiction to Mansour's romanticism, he rejected the comfort of easy answers. He was more rebellious than we demanded of him. However hard we tried to fix him in place and fit him into our rigid boxes, he always succeeded in escaping. Carrying the weight of our expectations, he kept moving, exploring new terrain in his aesthetic quest.

The versatile display of works in this exhibition demonstrates how Mansour experimented with forms and materiality with an open eye to their politics. These experiments, which matured in his mud compositions during the popular uprising of the First Intifada (1987-1993) and the establishment of the New Visions group, have their roots in his aesthetic and ethnographic research more than a decade earlier.

This quest for new material and media began in earnest in the late 1970s. As part of a wave of interest in Palestinian folklore studies, Mansour and many of his comrades started researching and documenting local crafts and arts, and traditional architecture: Tatreez (embroidery), glassblowing, copper repoussé, weaving, leatherwork, clay and ceramics, as well as painting with egg tempera, a technique more commonly associated with icons. This research enriched Mansour's practice and pushed it beyond the traditional medium of oil painting.

In works such as the repoussé From *Heritage* (1980) and the rug *Untitled* (1996), Mansour repurposed traditional techniques, injecting them with modern sensibilities and contemporary concerns. This research also shaped his treatment of his subject and composition. *From Heritage* (1980) shares the compositional logic of his 1979 painting of the same title, in which icons inspired by folk culture and supernatural beliefs are distributed across squares of different sizes, resembling the stones of Jerusalem's Old City walls. Similarly, the thobes he paints, although rarely intended to reference real dresses, reflect his confidence and proficiency in improvising new Tatreez patterns and elements with their own aesthetic legitimacy.

In *Anat* (1984), Mansour drew on yet another wellspring: archaeology and mythology. Painting a stele of Baal and Anat, he mobilizes allegory, depicting the Canaanite gods of war and fertility not as ancient deities but as contemporary warriors, bridging the temporal gap between the Canaanites and modern Palestinians. Imagery of this kind lends deep historical roots to modern national groups. It is part and parcel of what allows national consciousness, as a social imaginary, to emerge. These works show Mansour opening a dialogue between modern art and local aesthetic traditions, in conversation with the ideas that circulated among Arab artists reckoning with the local character of their own modernity.

When the First Intifada broke out, it became clear to Mansour and his comrades that this leap in popular struggle demanded an equal leap in aesthetics. As Mansour put it in one interview, *"I felt that it was impossible to make drawings of the Intifada. In reality it was too strong."* The uprising became the catalyst for New Visions, the group he formed with Nabil Anani, Tayseer Barakat, and Vera Tamari. In the uprising's spirit of self-reliance and the call to boycott Israeli goods, the group refused readymade art supplies and turned, each in their own way, to local materials in search of new aesthetic forms. Mansour found in mud the promise of a new vision and the potential to dissolve the dualities of content and form or medium and message. Instead of visualizing idealized images of the land, works such as *A Village* (1991) and *Promenade to Beit Dajan* (1993) made the land their medium. Instead of depicting the uprising, Mansour's mud works, like those of his comrades, materialized and gave form to its spirit.

While many saw in Mansour an iconographer of secular and national icons, he was also an iconoclast. He repeatedly returned to his own pictures to strip them of the religiosity with which we had endowed them, and to reveal the tragic fate of his earlier romantic heroes. When the wind changed course and brought a

new zeitgeist, he was not afraid to declare a time of apostasy. He had been among the first to promise water to the thirsty *Hagar* (1996) and *Ismael* (1997–2010). Yet, when it became necessary, he did not hesitate to warn us against drowning in broken promises. His once-vigorous epic protagonists seem to struggle for breath in *Temporary Escape* (2018), their vibrant colour displaced by the dark charcoal and a pessimistic palette in *Two Sisters* and *From Heritage* (both 2014), and in place of the dreamscapes of olive fields stands a single *Olive* (2018). It bears our scars and dreams as leaves, and awaits the return of the storm.

Laden with our wounds, Sliman Mansour departed our world in August of this year in Jerusalem, the city whose stones he knew by heart and which had occupied his imagination and art. This exhibition, which was originally planned to open in April in his presence, now opens in his bitter absence.

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