

# The Poster Artwork in the Art of the Palestinian artist Marwan Al-Allan

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## ABSTRACT

**Aims:** To propose an artistic analysis of the evolution of Palestinian poster art via the analysis of the artwork of the artist Marwan Al-Alan. The artist Marwan Al-Alaan witnessed the tragedy of Palestine and expressed it through his paintings and posters, and he followed the events that Palestine had witnessed through his creative art works in this field.

**Study design:** The study is a qualitative approach that used the descriptive analysis of literature and interview

**Place and Duration of Study:** The study is a descriptive discussion of the artwork of the Palestinian Artist Marwan Al-Allan. An interview conducted with the artist in October 2017.

**Methodology:** a non-structured interview was conducted with the desire artist to provide an insight of his work and its relation to the Palestinian cause. The author mainly contributes in choosing the proper artwork, which was analyzed for its artistic features and values.

**Results:** It is clear how influenced the Palestinian artist Marwan Al-Alan with his relation to the Palestinian land and with everything that it is going through from events, and how his style, and contents of his works change according to the nature of his connection to the event. The artist's influence with non-Palestinian environment, and its effect of this on his beliefs when he is outside of his country and there are no events related to home like it used to be when the artist was in Jordan during the eighties. It is noted that there is a qualitative difference in the symbols of artistic artwork. Symbols are used during the outbreak of the revolution and armed struggle, but disappeared during the first Intifada (insurrection) and the rock replaced the rifle. In addition, national identity symbols such as Kuffiyeh (Arab head cover) and the map of Palestine were present in some of the paintings and designs.

**Conclusion:** The symbolic indications of elements and the symbols used in the Palestinian graphic experience have contributed to preserving the identity of the Palestinian heritage, and transforming it to the outside world, though in difficulty, since the Palestinian artists lack the freedom to travel due to the Israeli occupation.

**Keywords:** (Poster, Palestine, Jerusalem, Marwan Al-Allan, Art Analysis)

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## 21 1. INTRODUCTION

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23 To understand the power poster art has to whip up public emotion we need to remember the days  
24 before mass media (Moore, 2010). It was a time when the street was the most effective space for  
25 propaganda, and posters were used to shape opinion or encourage action (Gandolfo, 2010; Moore,  
26 2010). Poster design has been used to promote revolutionary causes, including the Palestinian cause  
27 (Walsh, 2011). If we consider visual work as a human activity, it is an ingenious and conscious  
28 treatment for a mediator in which the issues of human being are expressed, whether individual private  
29 or collective public issues (Allen, 2006; Said, 1999).

30 In the Palestinian situation, which is based on the constant resistance against the  
31 occupation, the political theme had dominated the majority of the Palestinian painting, and  
32 therefore, the poster obtained a wide area from this art (Bamieh, 2018; Slitine, 2018).  
33 Palestine gave rise to many visual (fine) and graphic artists over the period of the Israeli  
34 occupation for the Palestinian land (Ankori, 2013; Fisher, 2010). Among these artists was  
35 the artist Marwan Al-Alan (Fig. 9) who was raised up in Palestinian campus and experienced  
36 displacement and exile that had influenced his psychological composition and was later  
37 reflected in his paintings and posters. In his artistic path, he had accomplished dozens of  
38 revolutionary posters through which he expressed the endurance of the Palestinian people,  
39 their resistance, and their steadfastness against the occupation machine (Hammer, 2009;  
40 Tripp, 2012).

41 The aim of the study is to propose an artistic analysis of the evolution of Palestinian poster  
42 art via the analysis of the artwork of the artist Marwan Al-Alan. The artist Marwan Al-Alaan  
43 witnessed the tragedy of Palestine and expressed it through his paintings and posters, and  
44 he followed the events that Palestine had witnessed through his creative art works in this  
45 field.

## 46 1. ABOUT MARWAN AL-ALLAN

47  
48 This artist was born and raised in Aqabat Jaber camp near Jericho until the year 1967,  
49 where he immigrated to Amman - Jordan with his family after the war of 1967. He studied at  
50 the teachers' institute in Irbid, and majoring in the field of arts, and from there his artistic  
51 experience began (FineArtAmerica.com, 2017). During this period, the armed revolution in  
52 Amman blow up (erupted), which impacted his artistic career so he turned towards the  
53 Palestinian poster that focused on the symbols of armed resistance such as the rifle (gun),  
54 Kuffiyeh (Arab head cover), images of martyrs, raised fists and the map of Palestine (Alalan,  
55 2014; Tripp, 2012). After that, he worked in the field of graphic design and his artistic style  
56 turned from the poster to the painting that deals with the themes of the Palestinian cause  
57 through the events the Palestine had been through such as the burning of Al-Aqsa Mosque,  
58 and the invasions of the army of occupation against the Palestinian villages. He remained  
59 like this until the first Intifada (insurrection) where he returned by virtue of the event to his  
60 revolutionary style in expressing the events, where the Intifada was the breaking point of his  
61 artistic path (Alalan, 2014; pixels.com, 2017).

62 In 1999, the artist returned to Palestine and stayed there, lived in his country, and witnessed  
63 the events over there, and saw with his eyes the practices of the Israeli Zionist against his  
64 people. He managed during that time to visit his entire country where he saw the cities,  
65 villages, beaches, and groves, as well as crossing points and the Israeli barriers and the  
66 practices of the Israeli forces against the Palestinian citizen, he also witnessed how the  
67 Israeli Zionist settlements devours the Palestinian lands and how the settlers assault the  
68 Palestinian people. Meaning that he experienced the existence and the suffering of the  
69 entire Palestinian people and embodied all of these visions in his artistic designs and

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70 paintings where he held exhibitions in different Palestinian cities. In 2000, the second  
71 Intifada (insurrection) erupted which was the main event in the modern history of Palestine  
72 by virtue of being set out under the Palestinian authority and it was the bloodiest and the  
73 most aggressive. The artist expressed it in two exhibitions that are considered the most  
74 important of his artistic exhibitions, one of them is entitled as Blackness at its Darkest, and  
75 the other one entitled as Windows of the fall. In that period, the artist returned to school and  
76 went to Al-Quds Open University, and obtained his Bachelor in Arabic Language, and MA in  
77 Islamic History from Birzeit University, and then he went to the National University of  
78 Malaysia UKM. The Israeli Zionist took advantage of the artist leaving the country and  
79 prohibited him to return to his homeland, so he stayed in Jordan after graduating from  
80 Malaysia and he is currently working as a professor of arts at Philadelphia University (Alalan,  
81 2014; FineArtAmerica.com, 2017).

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83 The artist's style in carrying out his artistic works during the periods when the Palestinian  
84 matter was going through a state of relative tranquility was shifting from the direct expressive  
85 nature to different art schools such as Cubism, Surrealism and the Classic. During his time  
86 in Jordan, the content of his painting dealt with themes of equality between men and women,  
87 and inviting women to rebellion and revolution against their socially imposed feminist  
88 condition, and their demand of equality. He continued in this until the end of the nineties of  
89 last century (Alalan, 2014; pixels.com, 2017).

### 90 91 3. ANALAYSING THE ARTWORK

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93 One of the artist's famous posters is the poster of Intifada (insurrection), as seen in Figure 1  
94 (pixels.com, 2017). He had accomplished this artwork in the year 1988, which was aligned  
95 with the commence of the Palestinian first intifada in the same year. He expressed the spirit  
96 of the Palestinian Revolution in a creative design by using a cubic style, and included  
97 characters in a state of revolution using rocks as a weapon against the Israeli Zionist, where  
98 fists are visible, and it is clear that the painting includes all segments of the Palestinian  
99 society, even the children. The figure of a horse that seems to be in a state of rebellion is a  
100 symbolize of the resistance spirit of the Palestinian people. The red colour is clearly evident  
101 to express the martyrs and the sacrifices of the Palestinian people during the revolution  
102 activities. The painting is bold and powerful with direct content, and it relies on the  
103 distribution of forms with a balance, where the center included the form of a man and woman  
104 and the vocabularies distributed around them.



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Fig. 1. Poster 1, Marwan Al-allan

Jerusalem as a holy city has a great interest in most of the Palestinian arts. Jerusalem is considered one of the most important symbols of the Palestinian poster and the Palestinian

110 painting, and is linked with the religious conscience of the Palestinian people, where  
 111 defending it means defending religion and abandoning it is counted as abandoning religion.  
 112 Jerusalem is the first of the two Qiblas and the third of the two Holy Mosques for Muslim  
 113 people (ABU-KHALAF & DAOUD, 2013; Bamieh, 2018). It is the place of Al-Isra and the  
 114 beginning of the journey of Al-Miraj according to all Muslims, especially the Palestinian  
 115 people. The Palestinians felt the Israeli Zionist danger against it, and have declared in many  
 116 occasions that Jerusalem is in danger and that they have to protect it with everything they  
 117 have, even with their own souls. From here, the Palestinians used the symbol of Jerusalem  
 118 in all of their artistic works and posters (Aldabbagh, 2017; Walsh, 2011).

119 As been stated before, Jerusalem is the most important symbol in the Palestinian poster  
 120 visual art. Many of Marwan Al-Alan artworks are related to Jerusalem. In Figure 3  
 121 (pixels.com, 2017), the scene of Jerusalem city is drawn by the method of sketching with  
 122 very simple coloring, and is executed with black and white of light colors. The poster  
 123 represents the city with its past history and current situation. The strokes in the back  
 124 represent the modern western Israeli Zionist Jerusalem, while the rest of the painting  
 125 represent the Arab Eastern Jerusalem, where domes, traditional buildings, Roman ruins and  
 126 the architectural style that combines between the old and the new can be seen. In the front,  
 127 the wall of the old Jerusalem is seen and then the racist neighbor's that was built by the  
 128 occupied Israel to separate between the places where Palestinians live and the places  
 129 where the Jewish settlers live. The idea of the poster stands on the red line that separates  
 130 the city, which is the line of blood that represents the Israeli assaults on the city and its  
 131 people.



Fig. 2. Poster 2, Marwan Al-Allan

136 The word "Palestine" has a great emotional value for all Palestinian and have its magic  
 137 whenever used in art (Aldabbagh, 2017). That is why they write it as artistic patterns, as  
 138 seen in Figure 4 (Al-Allan, 2016). In Posters, the word "Palestine" is written from different  
 139 Palestinian cities while Jerusalem city in the middle. Different cities representing Palestine  
 140 such as, Nazareth, Haifa, Jaffa, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Gaza are surrounding the holy city,  
 141 Jerusalem (Alan, 2009; Fisher, 2010). The painting/poster shows how the Palestinian person  
 142 is associated with the whole place, the cities, mountains and seas, and it asserts the will of  
 143 the Palestinian people to regain their homeland country. Notably, the artist Marwan Al-Alan  
 144 always tries to stay away from slogans written on the paintings, satisfied with the effect that



145 the paintings have on the viewer. The painting is executed by using oil colors and with a size  
146 of 80cm x 200cm, and it is placed at the Palestinian embassy in Kuala Lumpur.  
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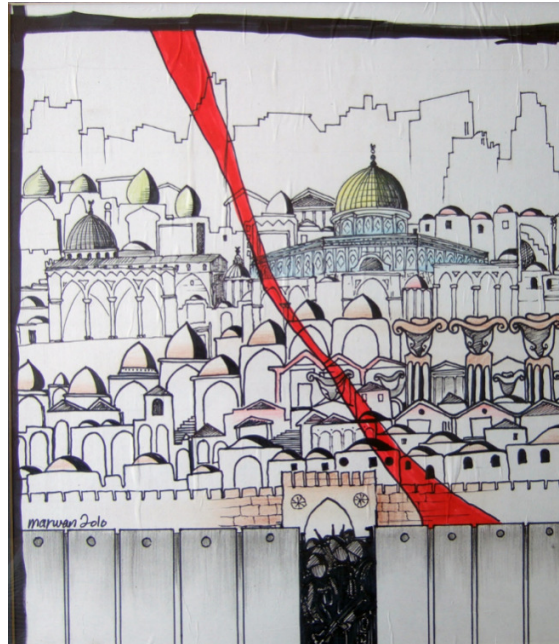


Fig. 3. Poster 3, Marwan Al-Allan



Fig. 4. Poster 4, Marwan Al-Allan

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155 The raging Palestinian fighter played an important role in the artistic awareness of the  
156 Palestinian artists, where his rifle, his Kuffiyeh (Arab head cover), his military outfit, strong  
157 looks in his eyes and his Arab features all form a part of this character that has been  
158 memorized in the Palestinian mind representing the Palestinian Revolution (Aldabbagh,  
159 2017; Bamieh, 2018). In Figure 5 (Al-Allan, 2016), the fighter is seen standing in a bright  
160 spotlight carrying his rifle on his shoulder, covered by his Kuffiyeh, with strong looks in his  
161 eyes, and he is standing next to a wall that he managed to cross. The painting is executed  
162 by using oil colors with a size of 80cm x 100cm.



**Fig. 5. Poster 5, Marwan Al-Allan**

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Palestinian revolutionary songs have a great emotion value in the Palestinian history (Bamieh, 2018; Tripp, 2012). Therefore, some famous lyrics are used in artworks of Marwan. Marwan used an excerpt from a poem recited by the famous Lebanese singer Marcel Khalife, it is a chant for the homeland, and it says that the Palestinian person has chosen his country willingly and by his own desire. The poster in Figure 6 (pixels.com, 2017) is divided into three sections, upper, middle and under. The upper section represents the horizon where trees are high and long despite not having leaves on them, while the middle section includes words from the poetic excerpt written in free calligraphy consistent with the composition of the given space. As for the lower section, it includes the land where the roots of the trees grown under. The horizon was painted in white to indicate the brightness, intensity, and clarity of the relation between the homeland and the citizen. The tree has emerged from the letter (K) in the word, while the roots emerged from the letter (A). The painting was executed with oil colors on fabric with a size of 80 x 80cm.

Palestine revolution is governed and managed by multiple revolutionary organization such as AlJabha. The letter (J) here represents the Palestinian organizations and it constitutes the first letter of the word (Jabha) which stands for the armed leftist organizations in the Palestinian Revolution (Bamieh, 2018). The artist used it in Figure 7 (pixels.com, 2017) on a dark floor to appear strongly and clearly, and on the left appears the Palestinian map due to the connection of those organizations with Palestine. And the red line rising from the bottom of the painting can be seen to indicate the line of blood and the sacrifices that the Palestinian people have made. The painting is executed in oil colors and the artist had used the knife in painting it instead of the brush.



Fig. 6. Poster 6, Marwan Al-allan



Fig. 7. Poster 7, Marwan Al-Allan

The symbol of the horse is usually used in the Palestinian poster to express the revolution, rebellion, and rejection to yield, and these are adjectives characterized by the Palestinian in his confrontation against the **Israeli Zionist**. As seen in Figure 8 (pixels.com, 2017), the poster consists of many horses with different forms and shapes, executed by the method of graphic lines and dotting, is lifting its front legs and stretching its head upwards. The artist Marwan AL-Alan employs the horse to express the pride that the Palestinian fighters have when confronting the **Israeli Zionist**. In the poster, there are four horses rising from a destroyed ground to indicate that all attempts of destruction exercised by the **Israeli Zionist** against the Palestinian person will not stop him from starting a revolution, but will be a reason for that revolution. The four horses indicate the four colors of the Palestinian flag, but as for the fifth horse, it is to indicate the Palestinian color itself, and inside it features of Palestine had been drawn; as if the horses are the ones who protect the country. The



210 painting is executed on paper by the method of dotting with simple colors and with  
211 measurement of 40 x50cm.  
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**Fig. 8. Poster 8, Marwan Al-Allan**



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**Fig. 9. Dr. Marwan Al-Allan**

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#### 4. DISCUSSION

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In some of his paintings, there seems to be abstract tendencies. When the events were accelerating on the Palestinian scene, the Palestinian spirit of the artist was raging. He went back to revolutionary themes and the old style in expressing his designs and painting, and he stayed that way until his return to Palestine where he returned to the revolutionary style and the subject of the second Intifada (insurrection) controlled his artistic works and designs in a less direct styles. During his residency in Jordan, he held an exhibition in Amman that included more than content, though the theme of Jerusalem was the most important (On the Borders of Memory) in year 2016.

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Based on the previous presentation, it is clear how influenced the Palestinian artist Marwan Al-Alan with his relation to the Palestinian land and with everything that it is going through from events, and how his style, and contents of his works change according to the nature of his connection to the event.

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The artist's influence with non-Palestinian environment, and its effect of this on his beliefs when he is outside of his country and there are no events related to home like it used to be when the artist was in Jordan during the eighties.

It is noted that there is a qualitative difference in the symbols of artistic works in the adoption of revolutionary symbols during the outbreak of the revolution and armed struggle while these symbols disappeared during the first Intifada (insurrection), where the rock replaced the rifle, while symbols such as Kuffiyeh (Arab head cover) and the map of Palestine were present in some of the paintings and designs.

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#### 5. CONCLUSION

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The Palestinian artist is fully connected with his homeland, and that this connection directly affects his artistic works in terms of contents and method used. The Palestinian artist's influence with his living reality, and that doesn't mean dropping his homeland out from his memory and conscience in case he left his homeland, but always remained waiting for the right moments, occasions, and events to come out and express the issues of his homeland through his art once again. The surrounding conditions and political changes and daily events have negatively affected the artistic product related to the field in its scattering, and lack of development, unity, and positively in its abundance and prevalence. The symbolic indications of elements and the symbols used in the Palestinian graphic experience have contributed to preserving the identity of the Palestinian heritage, and transforming it to the outside world, though in difficulty, since the Palestinian artists lacks the freedom to travel due to the Israeli occupation.

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The study proposed a flash shoot on the contemporary poster artwork evolution. The linkage between the posters' design and Palestinian struggle can be seen clearly through the artwork of Marawan Al-allan work. The discussion of the design elements, content, and form

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267 and its relation to the chronicle of Palestine struggle, provide a great information to the  
268 researcher in the domain of the Palestinian art.

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