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ARTIST

Ahmad Nawash

PALESTINE 1934 - JORDAN 2017.

"In *The Palestinian Cause (Golda Meir and the Funeral)* from 1973, Nawash also addresses the martyrdom of the national body. A Palestinian flag covers a child's sized coffin. The pallbearer on the left is a pair of feet that shares the martyr's head and dangling arm. At its other end, the coffin merges with the upright body of an awkwardly leaning woman who wags her finger over the child in a parody of Muslim benediction for the dead. Three other figures populate the scene. One of these is lopsided like the gesturing woman and shares a leg with her. Another sports an armless rectangular trunk. The body of the third consists of an oval encircled by a band and sprouting tiny, pointy feet. You could see in these figures a dead child, a mourning mother (upper left), an emasculated (disarmed) father (lower right), and a pair of aggressors who have arrogated to themselves the role of pronouncing the meaning of death.

What is important to keep in mind is the inevitably tentative quality of such attributions. To tidy them into secure identities would be to ignore Nawash's deliberately ambiguous style. Beyond a few emphatically nationalist symbols - such as the Pales-

ARTIST'S WORK IN THE KHALID
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tinian flag - Nawash's figures are rarely ethnically identifiable. They are more distinctive for how they cavort playfully with figures from paintings by Juan Miro and Pablo Picasso. They are disproportional, fragmented and absurdly conjoined. A single anatomical mass by merge three bodies so that one head shares three postures, or the torso of one may share the legs of his aggressors. It is as if Nawash sought to show the ambivalence and confusion inherent in this type of embattled existence. Nevertheless, titles such as *The Uprising* and *The Palestinian Cause* firmly direct the itinerary of French Cubist and Surrealist modernism into his native territory. Where the Arab body meets brutal occupation and colonialism, it *also* meets high art and universal modernity. Both facets are visually present in Nawash's work. Each is representable and gains density, in relation to the other: modernism becomes universal by arising in non-metropolitan settings, and Arabs become makers and subjects of high art by importing metropolitan styles."

- Excerpt from 'Between the Promise of Life and Its Fragility: The Arab Body in The Khalid Shoman Collection' by Kirsten Scheid

Arab Art Histories - The Khalid Shoman Collection, published by The Khalid Shoman Foundation, 2013

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