I Don't Create for Institutions; I Create for My People

The First Tricontinental Art Bulletin (March 2024)



Solidarity with Palestine

30 March marks forty-eight years since Israeli forces killed six Palestinians and injured hundreds who were among those resisting dispossession from the Galilee region. On this day, now known as **Land Day**, people and movements from around the world mobilise in solidarity with Palestine, demanding an end to the Israeli occupation and genocide in Gaza. In honour of Land Day, I interviewed Malak Mattar, an artist from Gaza, about her latest and largest five-metre mural, *Last Breath* (2024), which bears witness to Israel's crimes in her hometown since 7 October 2023. Malak began painting when she was around fourteen years old, shortly before Israel began the major military assault Operation Protective Edge on the Gaza Strip in 2014. When I sat down with Mattar in her studio to talk, she was preparing for a **solo exhibition** of the mural at Cromwell Place in London, UK (you can watch our full half-hour interview **here**).



Malak Mattar with Tings Chak in front of *Last Breath* (2024) in London, United Kingdom.

Despite her upcoming show, she said, 'I do not create for institutions; I create for my people. And this painting, the fact that it is written in Arabic, it's for us, because I painted my people. I didn't paint it for some Westerners to see, approve of, and welcome in their spaces.' Malak dreams that one day this painting will be exhibited in Gaza 'to remember the artists who couldn't make it, who were killed'.

Artists such as Heba Zagout. Duniyana Al-Amoor. Muhammed Sami. Majd Arandas. The list goes on.

In the last six months, there have been countless numbers of Palestinian actors, artists, journalists, musicians, and poets killed amongst the 32,000 martyred, with another 75,000 injured in Israel's attacks on the Gaza Strip. Despite the censorship and repression of those expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people, cultural workers continue to speak out, from the **Art Not Genocide Alliance** that mobilised 23,000 artists to call for Israel to be excluded from the Venice Biennale to various pro-Palestine **protests** at art institutions across capitals in the Global North.

Since October 2023, under the banner 'Artists Against Apartheid', cultural workers from over 60 countries have created artwork, organised events, and joined political actions, and 11,000 have signed onto a joint statement, which **declares**:

As artists and cultural producers, we join hands with the people of the world and with the heroic people of Palestine to stop this genocidal war and put an end to 75 years of occupation. We understand the power that our work has in shaping public opinion in our time. As artists we have a unique responsibility to use our voice and artistic practices to protest apartheid and amplify the just cause of the Palestinian people and their resistance against occupation and oppression.



¡Puebla por Palestina! street actions in Puebla, Mexico. Artwork by Kael Abello (left) and Tings Chak (right).

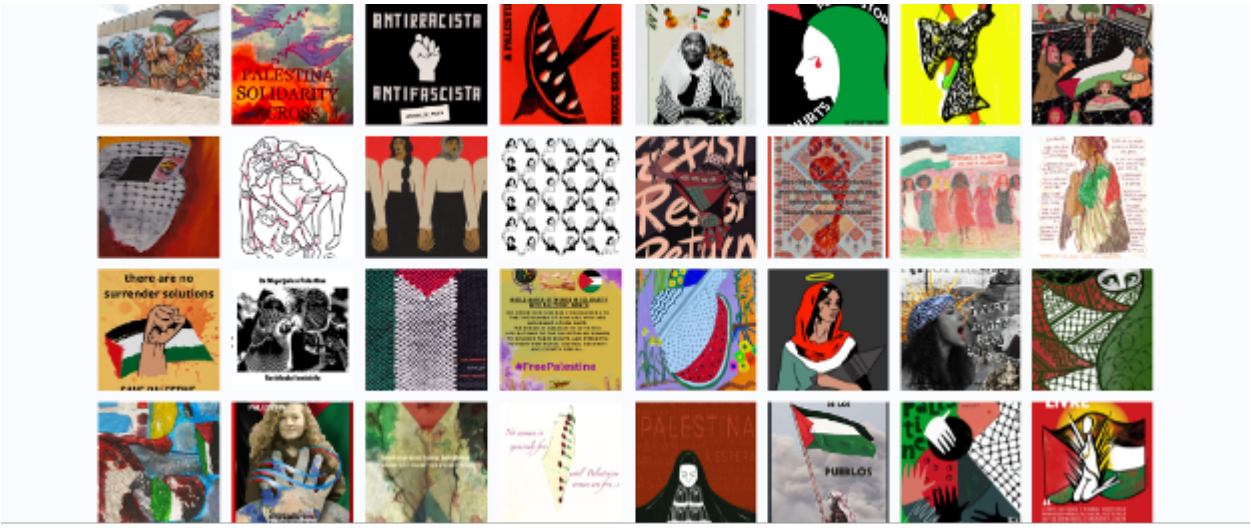
Several posters from Tricontinental artists and our close friends found their way to the **¡Puebla por Palestina!** ('Puebla for Palestine') street actions in Mexico, organised by Frente Amplio en Defensa de la Educación Pública (FADEP) and supported by Grupo Tiempos Modernos, Utopix, and other people's organisations. Meanwhile, in Durban, South Africa, our artwork decorated the head office of the shackdwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo at a **political education event** with Gaza-based writer, activist, musician, and author Haidar Eid. His book ***Decolonising the Palestinian Mind*** (October 2023), with cover artwork by Malak Mattar, was recently published by Inkani Books in South Africa.



Abahlali baseMjondolo event with Haidar Eid in Durban, South Africa.

Making a work of art is not an end in itself, but a means of engaging in the **battle of emotions**, the battle over the hearts and minds of the people. Artists have a responsibility to move people to action and help us envision a path forward. In our interview, Malak challenged us, and her viewers, to action: 'You now have to do something for my own cause… the Palestinian cause', she said. 'It's also the moral parameter. I see the world has failed miserably, and I do not believe humanity exists, so if the world wants to prove me wrong, please go ahead'.

Celebrating International Working Women



Selection from an exhibition of feminist posters in solidarity with Palestine. Image credit: Capire.

To celebrate **International Women's Working Day** – a day that was won through the struggle of communist women – the International Peoples' Assembly together with Capire, ALBA Movements, and Utopix launched an online **exhibition** of feminist posters in solidarity with Palestine. Forty-four posters from seventeen countries were produced for the exhibit, with entries stemming from Poland to Puerto Rico, China to Colombia, South Africa to Sweden.



Cover artwork of *Interrupted Emancipation: Women and Work in East Germany* (March 2024) by Daniela

Ruggeri and Ingrid Neves.

Looking back at the history of women's struggles, our March dossier, ***Interrupted Emancipation: Women and Work in East Germany***, discusses the achievements and legacy of women's liberation in the German Democratic Republic, as well as the challenges it faced. Original portraits of six women leaders were illustrated for the dossier, which was produced jointly with Internationale Forschungsstelle DDR and the Zetkin Forum for Social Research, uplifting the histories and contributions of Katharina 'Käthe' Kern, Hilde Benjamin, Lykke Aresin, Helga E. Hörz, Grete Groh-Kummerlöw, and Herta Kuhrig.





Handkerchief from a feminist group in South Korea (left); banner created by women of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil, which reads 'Free Palestine! It's not war, it's genocide' (right).

For us at Tricontinental, **every day is International Working Women's Day**. Over the years, we have created hundreds of portraits uplifting the life and work of revolutionary women. This year, the feminist group linked to the Justice Party and the International Strategy Centre in South Korea included many of these portraits in their handkerchief. One of our posters was also turned into a banner in Mato Grosso state, Brazil, as part of the MST's national actions that mobilised 20,000 landless women across the country on 8 March.

Culture as a Weapon of Struggle



Panel on art and resistance organised in Delhi, India.

On 2 March, the panel 'Entering the Neo-Feudal? Art and Resistance in the Age of Platform Capitalism' was organised in Delhi, India, with the artists and academics Sandip Luis, Shukla Sawant, and Anupam Roy. The panel took the Tricontinental dossier ***Culture as a Weapon of Struggle: Medu Art Ensemble and Southern African Liberation*** as a starting point to discuss recent developments in the art world and historical precedents for the collectivisation of artists on the Indian subcontinent. Both panellists and audience members echoed their shared interests in resisting the commodification of art and the right-wing turn of art patronage in India, emphasising the need for militant artists to be engaged directly with ongoing grassroots struggles.



Cover art of *Culture as a Weapon of Struggle: Medu Art Ensemble and South African Liberation*.

Two months earlier, in January, Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and Artists Against Apartheid hosted the event 'Art, Culture, and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle', where we launched our dossier on the Medu Art Ensemble. The event, co-hosted by Hannah Craig of Artists Against Apartheid and me, featured Wally Serote, Poet Laureate of South Africa and Medu Arts Ensemble co-founder; Judy Seidman, member of the Medu Arts Ensemble; Clarissa Bitar, award-winning Palestinian oud musician and composer; and Niki Franco, podcaster and cultural worker. You can watch a recording of the event **here**.

Every Day Is Red Books Day!



Red Books Day poster by Junaina Muhammed (India).

Though 21 February – the anniversary of the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 – has come and gone, Tricontinental and the International Union of Left Publishers are continuing our **Red Books Day** tradition on the 21st of each month by publishing a poster that takes its inspiration from a book about revolutionary movements, figures, and history. Together, these posters will be compiled into a Red Books Day calendar. Our fourth poster, designed by **Junaina Muhammed** of Young Socialist Artists in India, is inspired by Naveen Kumar's book *Kadana Kana* ('Battlefield'), which documents the historic farmworkers' movement in India.

In Other News…



The People's Forum is hosting an eight-week hybrid course, whose instructors include our institute's director, Vijay Prashad, and researchers Mikaela Erskog and Manolo de los Santos. I will also be teaching a course on art and national liberation. Sign up **here**.



On 31 January, legendary Indonesian artist Amrus Natalsya, also a member of the Sanggar Bumi Tarung collective and the **Lekra** communist cultural front during its fifteen-year existence, passed away at the age of 90 years. Read about his life and work **here**.

We hope you enjoyed our newsletter. Make sure to subscribe **here** to receive future editions and follow the hashtag **#TriconArt** on Tricontinental's social media platforms to keep up with our latest creative work. Please tell us what you think as we find our feet and by writing to us at **art@thetricontinental.org**.

Warmly,
Tings