



AL-NAKBA

EXHIBITION OF REMEMBRANCE

17 - 18 MAY 2008

MELBOURNE - AUSTRALIA

EXHIBITION OF REMEMBRANCE

Australians for Palestine and *Women for Palestine* are jointly presenting this Exhibition of Remembrance to mark the 60 years since the 1948 al-Nakba – *the Catastrophe*, that saw the destruction of over 500 Palestinian towns and villages and the ethnic cleansing of 750,000 Palestinians. It is with great sadness that we see the 15 May 2008 pass with still no justice for the Palestinians who have been denied their homeland and their freedom and dignity. Palestinians – the indigenous people of the land which is now Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory – are still suffering from historic injustices as well as ongoing injustices which are the result of colonisation and dispossession of their territory and resources in violation of international law and UN resolutions.

For sixty years Palestinians have been denied their right of return and now 7 million live as refugees internally displaced or in enforced exile. Over four million live under military occupation, 1.5 million of which are subject to an unprecedented draconian siege and blockade in Gaza, which amounts to collective punishment of the civilian population with dire consequences that go under reported in the Western media.

Since the 1970s, the United Nations has repeatedly reaffirmed that Palestinians are a nation entitled to self-determination, independence and refugee return but there has been little political will to implement what is enshrined in international law. Endless negotiations have not secured a just peace rather it has seen the further fragmentation of both Palestinian land and the people. It is hoped this exhibition will raise some awareness in the Australian community of the issues that are the cause of this ongoing conflict and to show the humanity of the people affected by it.



Rich Wiles Muftah al Awda (*Key to return*) 2006

RICH WILES
Portraits of Palestine

Rich Wiles is a British photographic artist who has been living and working in occupied Palestine for much of the last five years. He brings to Melbourne the Lajee Centre/Rich Wiles International Photography Tour from the Aida Camp in Bethlehem in occupied Palestine. This comprises two exhibitions from Palestinian refugee children and youth - *Dreams of Home* and *Our Dreams and Nightmares*, alongside his own work, *Portraits of Palestine*.

Following a trip to Palestine in 2003, where he began photographing the lives of people living in refugee camps and the events unfolding there, he began working as a volunteer at the Lajee Centre spending 6 months of the year in occupied Palestine. Under his guidance Lajee members have now produced several photography exhibitions which have been exhibited around Palestine, but also internationally in the UK, US, Italy, France and in the Netherlands. He has travelled with the exhibitions, giving talks to introduce the works and to explain the realities of life for the young artists he is helping to train. Since 2006 he has been writing from Occupied Palestine under the title 'Behind the Wall' for a forthcoming book. Much of this work is based in and around the refugee camps highlighting daily life and memories of refugees who still live in forced exile nearly 60 years after al-Nakba.

Portraits of Palestine represents an ongoing body of work from 2003, which captures moments in Palestinians' lives living as refugees and under occupation in the West Bank. The simple but evocative image "Muftah al Awda" (*Key to Return*) encapsulates the al-Nakba experience of the Palestinian refugees, who are today still denied their inalienable right of return but whose loving memories of a Palestine they cherished is being passed on to future generations. Likewise *Generations* eloquently portrays this profound connection and how memory of an injustice to a people cannot simply be erased by the mere passing of one generation.



Rich Wiles *Generations*

Artist's statement:

"The project was never intended as a documentary on the occupation but rather a more intimate and personal study of the lives of people living in contemporary Palestine, specifically in the West Bank. It consciously avoids the dramatic media-styled images of the worlds' press which can sometimes paint a very polarized and distorted vision of Palestine and its people. Instead it endeavors to show the rigors of daily life in Palestine and the humanity and resilience with which these challenges are met. These are portraits of people attempting to raise their families, live in a secure family home, grow up, work, study and travel.

The images attempt to show not only the physicality of life in Palestine, but also to raise questions regarding the psychological effects of living under occupation, particularly through the eyes of children. How must a child feel to see bullets riddle their bedroom walls, to be trapped by checkpoints and fences, or to live behind caged doors to keep extremist settlers out?"

Palestinians refer to the events
of 1947- 1948 as

Al-Nakba
meaning the Catastrophe

Some 300,000 Palestinians
were forcibly displaced
by Zionist forces when
Palestine was still under
British Mandate in
November 1947- 14 May 1948.
Neither Britain nor the United
Nations intervened to protect
the Palestinians

The United Nations also failed
to prevent the ethnic cleansing
that occurred in the first
Arab-Israeli war of 1948
where 750,000 - 900,000
were displaced representing
85% of the pre-war population
of what became Israel

In 1967 when Israel conquered
the remainder of Palestine
a new wave of 350,000 refugees
was created, while those remaining
have lived under military
occupation to this day

For 60 years international law
human rights conventions,
the 4th Geneva convention
and UN resolutions have been
transgressed denying
Palestinians their most basic
human rights



Dora Mc Phee
is a Melbourne based artist
The works in
this exhibition are drawn from
"Disappearing Palestine" series
exhibited in 2007
"Palestine Lost"
exhibited in 2004
and
"Dispossession-Parts of a Whole"
exhibited in 2002

Al- Nakba 1948
oil on canvas
167 X 138cm
was created for the 2008
EXHIBITION OF REMEMBRANCE
to mark the 60 years of
dispossession
denial of the right of return
and denial of justice

**A LAJEE CENTRE/RICH WILES PROJECT
AIDA REFUGEE CAMP, BETHLEHEM
OCCUPIED PALESTINE**

In 2000 eleven young people from the Aida Camp in Bethlehem, which has an estimated 4,500 residents - half of them children, established the Lajee Centre. This was to serve the young refugees of the camp providing them with cultural, educational, social and developmental opportunities. The Lajee Centre seeks to encourage and enhance the talents of the children by supporting and fostering their cultural, artistic and athletic abilities through special developmental programs and relies on volunteers to help implement these programs. More information on the Lajee Centre can be obtained through visiting the website: <http://www.lajee.org>

Rich Wiles on being introduced to the people of the Lajee Centre immediately saw that the potential of teaching the children the skills of photographic and digital media would be a way of empowering them to tell their own stories of how they lived and perceived their lives. This began an ongoing project from 2005 where Rich Wiles has been running workshops in the Lajee Centre to teach the basics of black and white photography enabling the children to develop the skills of composition and light, editing and image selection as well as visual story telling. The students are all aged between 11 and 20 and have had no photographic experience prior to the workshops.

It is through the creative process and the exhibition of the resultant works that these children have been given a voice to show the world their humanity. Like all children they have hopes and dreams for a life free of the conflict they have been thrust into. Having been brought into the world as the children of refugees and living under a military occupation that denies them many of their most basic human rights the chance to have a platform to the outside world through the medium of photography is a rare gift indeed.

As part of the Melbourne's *Al-Nakba – Exhibition of Remembrance* for 2008 two photographic exhibitions of the children from the Lajee Centre will be presented. The first exhibition: “*Dreams of Home*” is particularly poignant as in this project the Palestinian refugee children visited their families’ original villages in order to capture images of what is left of those villages today. When viewing these images one cannot help but think of the ongoing exile and continued refugee status that the refusal of the right of return means for the 1948 al-Nakba survivors and their children. One is also reminded that for 60 years many of those survivors were not fortunate enough to revisit their former homes or what is left of them and those still alive live on with their children and grandchildren internally displaced in refugee camps like Aida or in refugee camps where they are exiled and displaced from Palestine altogether.

The second exhibition: “*Our Dreams and Nightmares*” provides a powerful vision of realities of life that these children who live under occupation and as internal refugees in their own homeland. It is hoped that it will give the viewer pause to think what life must be like when justice is denied and life is circumscribed by an all encompassing ongoing military occupation that denies people their freedom to self-determination and prolongs the deprivation of their full potential. It is not just the shadow of the occupation that blights the lives of these children but the very real dangers of getting caught up as actual victims. Even peaceful demonstrations in solidarity with those who are being killed or collectively punished in Gaza can and has resulted in these children being killed, injured or arrested as the Israeli occupying forces respond aggressively to such demonstrations.

All the children have lived their entire lives under occupation with some having spent time incarcerated as child prisoners. Some have been injured themselves, witnessed family members being shot or experienced violent night-time raids into their homes by Israeli soldiers. All of these experiences colour how they see their world.

Dreams of Home....

Beit Jibreen

*Maybe Occupation can
prevent us from return,
or staying there, but for
sure it cannot prevent
us from dreaming.'*

Maysan Al Azzeh (13yrs)



Beit Atab

*'I did not feel a stranger
when I entered Beit Atab!
I felt it belongs to me,
and I belong to her...'*

Yazan Ikhlayel (11yrs)



Al Kabu

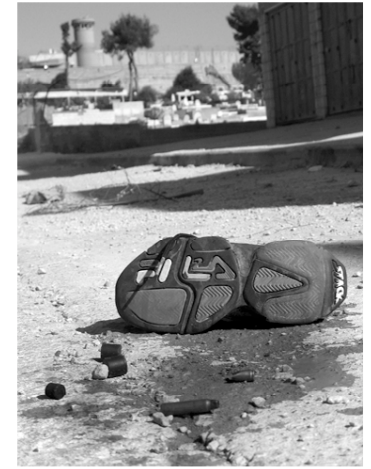
*'I was happy there
sitting, playing
and dreaming.....'*

Hibu Abu Nasser (12yrs)

OUR DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES ...



Mohammad's Nightmare



Layan's Nightmare



Abeer's Nightmare



Shorug's Dream..
'I dream about breaking down
the sieges and checkpoints
so we can move around Palestine
and about moving
from one country to another
with freedom..'