The Body as an Unresolved History: On the Works of Artist Samah Shehadeh

With precise lines and minimalistic visual language, Samah Shehadeh presents the Palestinian female body as a charged space of memory, rupture, and contemplation. Drawing with charcoal, a black and raw material, embodies an artistic act that exists on the seamline between erasure and exposure. The body in her work is not a closed representation but a continuous movement, silent yet present, exposing questions that representation cannot resolve.

/ Reem Ghanayem [1] February 12, 2026

In Samah Shehadeh's works, the body appears not as a self-evident phenomenon but as a charged space - emotional, political, and gendered -through which a complex act of contemplation unfolds between the personal and the collective. Her drawings, marked by material and emotional precision, serve as acts of holding on: holding on to memory, identity, and the rupture between them. Shehadeh works from a position that does not seek to mediate the body but allows it to exist as a living, almost silent, testimony to unresolved history.

The choice of charcoal - a raw, difficult-to-control, intense material - echoes the internal struggle between visibility and erasure. It signals presence but also obscures; it requires physical proximity to the image but at the same time maintains distance. Through this medium, Shehadeh constructs an unstable body: exposed yet opaque, intimate yet distant.

The body reflected in the drawing is not a single figure, but an intersection of voices, worlds, and experiences. It is a body that exists within a continuous system of tensions: between Western visual language and local Palestinian content, between a specific geographical-cultural space and a desire for universality. It occupies an “in-between” space, which offers no solution but instead creates conditions for cautious movement within the cracks of identity. Here, hybridity is not a means of compromise but a strategy for artistic and emotional survival - a place where foreignness is not betrayal, but possibility.

In many ways, Shehadeh's works present a model of art that chooses to operate from a place of rupture - not in an attempt to repair it, but in recognizing that the rupture itself is the substance of memory, consciousness, and life. The body she paints is a place, but also an action that seeks to hold the gaze, delay understanding, and turn silence into a statement.

It is precisely out of the visual language’s minimalism, out of the choice not to “tell everything,” That a sharp statement emerges about the place of the Palestinian woman artist in an artistic field where language, identity, and gender are not just categories but ongoing challenges of representation. The works do not seek to confirm an existing identity, but rather allow the question of identity to remain open, vibrant, and alive.

"For me, the body is not just a physical presence but a place where everything happens: emotions, memories, questions," writes Shehadeh. In this sense, her art operates not only within history but also against it - not as frontal resistance, but as a proposal for a different kind of action: one that occurs in a line, a texture, a partial erasure, a figure that gazes, and perhaps remains silent.

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