

## The Knesset Presents: The Picture that Causes Commotion

**Storm in the Knesset: a painting hung on the Knesset walls presents an Arab family from Jaffa in the 1930s and angers Knesset Member Eldad. The reason, according to him: "it perpetuates the Nakba"**

Arik Bender, 18.5.2011

<http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/241/809.html>

An exhibition of Israeli art work that the Knesset acquired to be permanently hung on the Knesset walls is causing a storm. MK Ariyeh Eldad (National Unity) demands that Knesset Chairperson Reuven Rivlin remove from the exhibition a painting which presents an Arab family from Jaffa of the 1930s, as according to him this is a "Nakba picture" which presents the Palestinian narrative.

One year ago the Knesset published for the first time in its history an open call inviting artists to suggest to the Knesset creations for acquisition and presentation in its public space. A professional public committee decided to acquire 46 works of the hundreds presented to it. The exhibition that will be entitled "Israeli texture" will be launched on 31 May in the new wing of the Knesset. The painting that angered MK Eldad is entitled "The Citrus Grower" and it is the creation of the artist Eliyahu Arik Bokobza.



The painting is based on a picture of the Armenian photographer Elia Qahwejian from 1939, which immortalises a Jaffa Arab family. The painting includes 13 figures, the elderly Arab owner of the orchard, his wives, sons and grandchildren dressed in traditional Arab clothing.

The painting was prepared for an exhibition of paintings of ancient Jaffa in the Nahum Gutman Art Museum as part of what Bokobza dubs "the ongoing discussion with the Orientalism of early Israeli art and the old Bezalel generation". Yesterday MK Eldad wrote to Rivlin that he heard with horror about the decision to acquire and exhibit the painting "The Citrus Grower" which is based on a photograph of an Arab family in Jaffa.

### **Arik Bokobza: I don't want to create provocations**

"The naïve, the one pretending to be naive and the stupid will certainly say: well, what is wrong with that? This is part of the history of Israel. Arabs lived here. There are still Arabs here," wrote MK Eldad. Eldad further wrote to Rivlin that "also when you ensure freedom of expression for Arab Knesset members – you are not commanded to be a tool in the hands of the 'Nakba' knights."

"This picture does not even attempt to play dumb. It comes to say that we dispossessed and deported them, but we won't succeed in erasing the past. At the end of the day, only a post modern reality, and therefore post-ideological and post Zionist, can reconcile with a rolling of eyes the simultaneous existence of two truths."

"It is not enough the defamatory statements of the Arab Knesset members who curse Israel's wars each day, which you allow through insistence on the principle of freedom of expression," continued Eldad, "but why do you also ask to add an artistic expression of an Israeli artist that comes to say that the Arab lie is the truth, and from here it negates our truth."

In response, the artist Eliyahu Arik Bokobza said yesterday that "my goal is not to create provocation. I do nothing secretly but I am a conceptual artist with a political agenda and my opinion is legitimate. I am trying to bring back a faded memory."

Translated by: Connie Hackbarth