

They Started the War to Kill Our Hopes, but We Won't Let That Happen



☒ Listen to Li Fairouz - Nai Barghouti

Listen to 'Li Fairouz' by Nai Barghouti. The Palestinian singer dedicated this song to the people of her country and Lebanon.

A few days ago, I found an unread email dated 28 October, which had gotten lost in my inbox. It was from Ibraheem Mohana, an eighteen-year-old artist living in the north of Gaza. 'All I want is to share my art with the world before I die', he wrote, and thus began our exchange. He shared some of his sketches and paintings made in different media – pencil, oil pastels, acrylic paint, and pen and ink. They are mostly portraits: the Statue of Liberty, a neck coiled in barbed wire and a face full of tears; a person clothed in a keffiyeh, a Palestinian flag, and roses; three ghost-like figures, wrapped in white cloth smeared with red fingerprints.



Artwork by **Ibraheem Mohana** (Palestine), 2024

These are the images you might imagine an eighteen-year-old living in Gaza to create, coming into adulthood in the midst of a genocide that has lasted over a year. Across the world, far away from Gaza, we have seen images again and again of the over 40,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, who have been murdered with impunity by Israel.

‘They started the war to kill our hopes, but we won’t let that happen’, reads one of Ibrahim’s social media posts, and for him, painting, drawing, and sketching is an act of resistance, defending the hope of his people. ‘The artist is the one using his eyes, his mind, and his creativity in order to do something useful, in order to deliver his message’. Ibraheem’s message is not just a personal one, but a collective message, crafted with the children in his neighbourhood to whom he has been teaching art. Not too long ago, as a child himself, Ibraheem learned to make art in classes organised by his teacher Mohammed Sami. ‘Abu-Sami’ taught them to make art from nature, garbage, and ‘whatever was around’.



Ibraheem Mohana and his students in Gaza, 2024.

On 17 October 2023, **Mohammed Sami** was killed in the early days of Israel’s latest genocidal assault against Gaza. ‘He was a wonderful person’, Ibraheem told me, ‘but I don’t want to use the word “was” – his soul is still alive’. Barely an adult, Ibraheem is following his teacher’s path. ‘Art is how we speak when words don’t come easily. With a pen, a piece of paper or even an empty food can, I show kids here in Gaza that art is everywhere. It’s a way to tell our stories, to let out what we feel inside’. He tries to teach classes in a ‘fun and entertaining way, so they can understand art a little bit, and be proud of themselves’ – the children in Gaza, after all, are still just children.



Artworks by Ibraheem Mohana, 2024.

My favourite of Ibraheem's paintings is a portrait of a man whose eyes are rendered with dark circles around them, dense lines that prematurely age the otherwise youthful face. A keffiyeh is draped on one shoulder, while two green cacti sprout from the other. He sent me a sketch of the original image which was drawn in white chalk on a green chalkboard in the nearby Asmaa School. Ibraheem remembered the date of its creation – 21 August. Last month, the Israelis bombed the school. In genocidal times, a school can be obliterated as quickly and as carelessly as chalk lines erased from a chalkboard.

In the digital remake of the original, Ibraheem wrote in Arabic, 'We are so patient, even cacti grow from our shoulder'. From the ruins and rubble, Palestinian resistance continues to sprout, the poppies and cacti will inevitably return. In the lead up to the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November, we at Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research are launching an exhibition of the artworks of Ibraheem and his students, which you can view [here](#).

So That the World Would be Reborn in Its Turn

Daughter of the sea waters
asleep in their entrails,
I am reborn from the gunpowder
which a guerrilla rifle

spread on the mountain
 so that the world would be reborn in its turn,
 that the whole sea would be reborn,
 all the dust,
 all the dust of Cuba.

– ‘Rebirth’ by Nancy Morejón

On 30 October 2024, for the thirty-second year in a row, 187 countries at the United Nations voted to condemn the inhumane blockade against Cuba. The same two countries responsible for the genocide in Gaza voted in favour: Israel and the US.



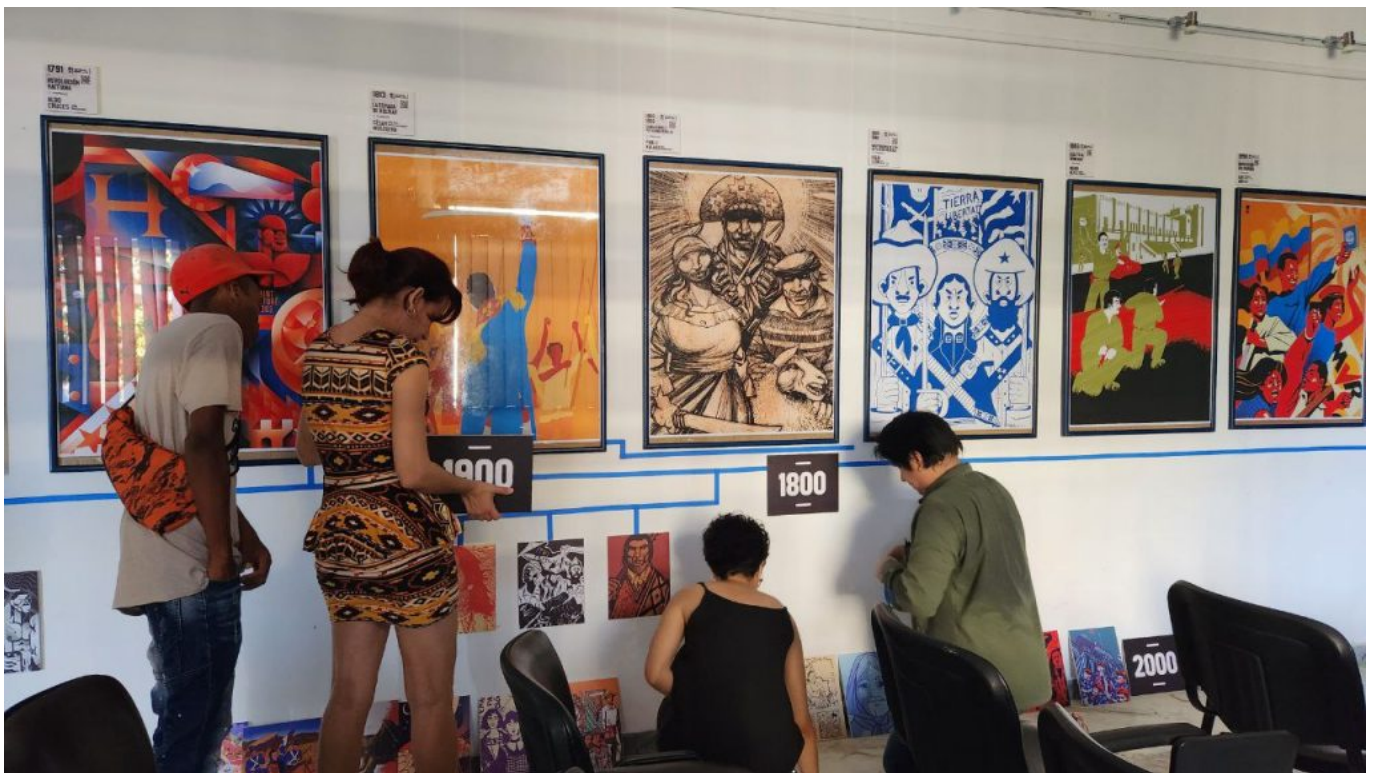
Artwork by Kael Abello (left) and Our Solidarity Can't Be Broken (right).

The #CubaIsNotAlone exhibition, an act of international solidarity coinciding with this vote, was organised by the Artists vs Blockade movement, gathering fifty works from fifteen countries. The displays on the streets of New York City, are a collective celebration of Cuban resilience in the face of the economic, commercial, and financial blockade imposed by the US for over six decades. This blockade has been deadly, and its effects felt especially keenly in the past few weeks. Hurricanes Oscar and Rafael struck the Caribbean island, knocked out power for millions, worsening an already fragile electrical grid. Followed by a magnitude 6.8 earthquake, the disasters destroyed at least 34,000 homes and essential infrastructure countrywide. Western

media are quick to blame the disaster on the incapacities of the Cuban state, as if the destruction is proof of socialism’s failure. The blockade, very conveniently, is never mentioned.

As part of the exhibition, Artists vs Blockade published a pamphlet quantifying the real cost of the blockade. Eighteen days of the blockade are equivalent to the annual maintenance cost (excluding fuel and investments) for the national electric power system. That is, the same power system that has been rendered obsolete due to the blockade and is destroyed during yearly storms. Twenty-one hours, not even a full day of the blockade, are equivalent to the cost of purchasing the country’s insulin demand for one year. Over the past sixty years, the blockade has cost Cuba over US\$164 billion in damages, and that number continues to grow. Electricity, fuel, food, medicine, the list of the blockade’s damage goes on – leaving no aspect of Cuban life unscathed.

‘It’s incredibly important to highlight the fact that the fight against the blockade is a cause for all of humanity’, Kael Abello, member of Utopix and Tricontinental’s art department, told us about his participation in the exhibition. ‘International solidarity with popular struggles worldwide has been a key aspect of the Cuban Revolution. This has had a prolific outcome in terms of graphic production. Cuban artists have joined the most pressing Global South causes. It is only fair that artists from around the world also join the Cuban people’s fight’. You can see the online exhibition [here](#) and join the artists demanding an end to the US blockade and for Cuba’s removal from the list of state-sponsored terrorism.



The Cartography of Memory and Struggle exhibition in Havana. Credit: Casa de las Américas.

Despite these extremely trying times, the Cuban people continue to practice internationalism. Initiated by Casa de las Americas, from 4 to 8 November, Casa Tomada in Havana hosted a gathering of youth from the Americas on the theme of ‘identity and resistance’. In this context, Utopix and Tiempos Modernos organised the Cartography of Memory and Struggle exhibition, with thirty posters from international artists who helped

build a timeline of popular struggles in Latin America – including Tricontinental’s Ingrid Neves.

In Other News...



Exhibition at Florestan Fernandes National School. Credit: Sara Sulamita.

Last month, the MST 40 Years exhibition that was jointly organised by the Landless Rural Workers’ Movement (MST) and other partners, including Tricontinental, was shown at the Florestan Fernandes National School. You can see all the artworks from over 150 artists and more in the new ebook, *MST 40 anos, por terra, arte e pão* (‘MST 40 years, for land, art, and bread’).



Event at East China Normal University (left) and University of São Paulo (right).

As part of the fiftieth anniversary of diplomatic relations between Brazil and the People’s Republic of China, we participated in two cultural events, from Shanghai to São Paulo. There was the **Cinema da Terra** (‘Cinema of the Land’) film event, which included a screening of Camila Freitas’ award-winning documentary on the MST, *Chão* (‘Landless’). Discussions were hosted by the School of Communication at the East China Normal University, highlighting the struggle for land and agrarian reform as a connecting thread between the peoples of Brazil and China.

In Brazil, the **O outro lado do mundo** (‘The Other Side of the World’) event was held on 7 November at the School of Communications and the Arts at the University of São Paulo, celebrating decades of cultural exchange through theatre, cinema, and literature between Brazil and China. There, we also exhibited illustrations from two of our publications, *Go to Yan’an! Culture and National Liberation* and *Serve the People: The Eradication of Extreme Poverty in China*. Explore the long cultural and political connection between the Brazilian and Chinese people in my article, ‘Seven Decades of China-Brazil Friendship: Cultural Diplomacy Agrarian Reform, and the Cold War’, recently **published** in *Monthly Review*.



Tings Chak (China/Tricontinental), 2024.

Finally, we are launching the final poster in the series celebrating Red Books Day every month. This month's artwork is inspired by Indonesian writer Purnawan Basundoro's *Merebut Ruang Kota: Aksi Rakyat Miskin Kota Surabaya 1900-1960* ('Taking Over a City Space: Action of the Poor in Surabaya 1900-1960s'). Together with the International Union of Left Publishers, we will feature the entire series in the Red Books Day 2025 calendar, available [here](#).

Warmly,

Tings Chak

Art Director, Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research