

## Larissa Sansour

### Project

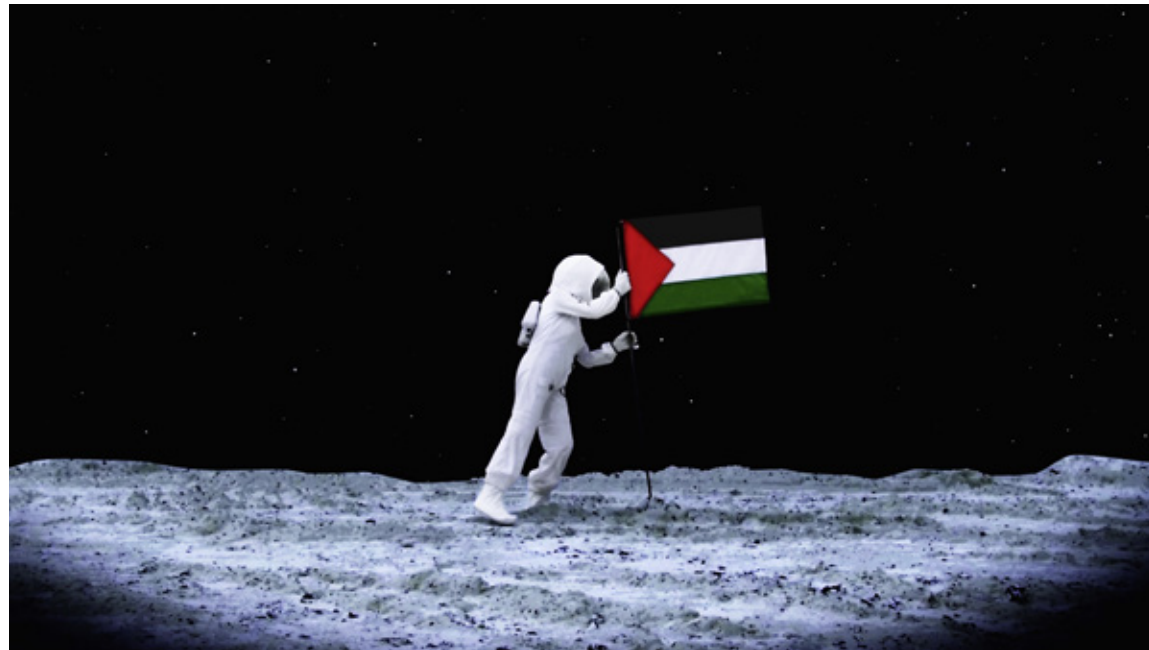
*A Space Exodus*

### Description

London-based Sansour draws from the dystopic themes of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* in her own video work. She plays a Palestinian astronaut who successfully lands on the moon, but is unable to establish contact with ground control in Palestine. The film is often shown alongside *Palestinians*, an installation consisting of 30-cm-tall vinyl sculptures of cartoon astronauts.

### Objective

To address statehood and Palestinian politics through the idiom of lunar exploration and technological progress.



Video stills from *A Space Exodus*, 2009, 5:24', courtesy of the artist

### Between Places

My background has been crucial in shaping my cognitive and artistic processes. Being born and raised in Palestine under Israeli occupation meant that my identity was shaped very much by the Palestinian experience. As a holder of a Palestinian passport, I have encountered many difficulties both at home and abroad. I suppose that is why the Palestinian question permeates my work so much.

### The Tug between Fiction and Reality

I use digital media copiously because it is more appropriate for the purposes of my current projects, although I must stress that the choice of medium mostly comes after I have developed the concept. When I first started working with digital media, it was out of a need to document what was going on in Palestine. When you grow up under occupation, you easily become obsessed with documentation – houses get demolished, entire towns are ruined and things just disappear. I can no longer visit my friends because they happen to be on the other side of the Israeli wall. Using video and photography allows me to document things that might not be around in the future. In addition, it is harder to question video and photography than it is to question, say, painting or sculpture. I am also very interested in how film and television can alter the way we relate to the world, both socially and politically. It seems that we now mimic what we see in digital form rather than the other way round. I find this tug and pull between fiction and reality rather compelling.

### A Space Exodus

In my video work *A Space Exodus*, I play a Palestinian astronaut who tries to get in touch with Jerusalem from outer space, but fails to establish contact. The film is first and foremost an autobiographical statement. I now live in Bethlehem, which is just ten minutes away from Jerusalem, but I have not been able to enter the city for the last eight years. Little wonder that a lot of Palestinians think that it would be easier to get to the moon than to reach Jerusalem.

I also wanted to situate the Palestinian crisis within the universal human condition. When I finally land on the moon, I say: 'One small step for a Palestinian, a giant leap for mankind.' In paraphrasing Neil Armstrong's famous words, I want to show how the Palestinian agenda is not an issue that should be considered in isolation.

### Designing the Set and the Spacesuit

It took me a long time to find a location that could pass off as a lunar landscape. I almost gave up and considered shooting the entire video on a green screen and then superimposing the footage onto a computer-generated moon. Luckily for me, I found this amazing chalk quarry in Denmark that bore an uncanny resemblance to the moon. This made post-production work so much easier. The spacesuit was designed by a costume designer and tailored in Denmark as well. The thought of just purchasing a secondhand spacesuit from NASA did cross my mind, but it would not have been the same. Because so much of the film's narrative can be epitomized by the suit, I wanted it to be entirely unique. It was designed to be more feminine, with an elegant, small oxygen tank. It also was important for me to include Palestinian embroidery on one of the sleeves and the Palestinian flag on the other. I like the way these small nuances can transform the context in which they appear.

### Palestinians

The *Palestinians* were first conceived of as part of a fundraising effort to send a Palestinian astronaut to the moon for real. I produced 500 small vinyl sculptures called the *Palestinians*, and today they are often shown alongside the film as part of an installation that examines the prospect of Palestinian space exploration. They usually appear in groups of approximately 100. The intention was for them to have a cartoonish appearance. It is hard to associate the *Palestinians* with anything grim, and that is exactly the point.

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