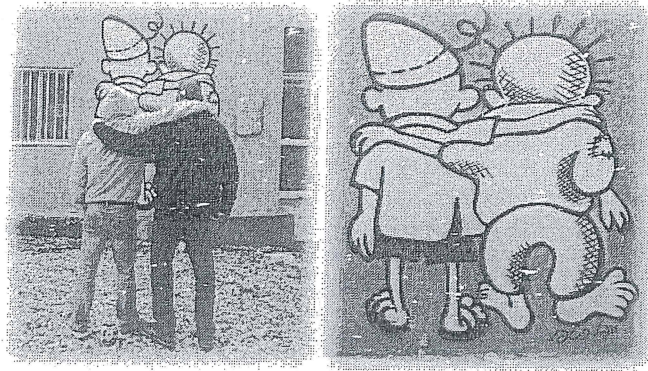


## SRULIK & HANDALA: ICONIC MESSAGE ON THE WALL

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### ICONIC CARTOON CHARACTERS SRULIK & HANDALA

In the days when some political cartoonists risk their lives in order to pursue artistic calling, two iconic cartoon characters – one Israeli and the other Palestinian – nowadays adorn the outer wall of the Givat Haviva Art Center and Peace Gallery.

The eye-catching cartoon, drawn by Israeli artist Yuval Caspi, was part of an exhibition of Jewish and Arab artists. That exhibition has since been replaced by another but the two infectious characters painted alongside the Art Center's main entrance are remaining. They have found a permanent home on the wall of a building actually constructed by the British Army during the British Mandatory Palestine period when the site was an army base.

For Israelis and Palestinians their icons are as recognizable and as hefty in their symbolism as Britain's John Bull or Andy Capp, the working class fellow who never worked, or the Franco-Belgian Asterix and Gauls attempting to fight off Roman occupation. However, most Israelis have not been introduced to Handala the urchin of the Palestinian refugee camps nor Palestinians been introduced to the likes of Srulik.

On the Art Center wall the two larger-than-life in more ways than one characters Srulik and Handala show us their backs as they nonchalantly put an arm around each other's shoulders but we cannot see the expression on their faces as they look into the future – in this case possibly too symbolically – a thick British built brick wall.

Srulik is a mischievous, loveable but highly critical Israeli born kid dressed in baggy shorts, kova tembel – fool's hat – toes wiggling freely in open sandals. He was created by Hungarian Holocaust survivor and Israeli political cartoonist, Kariel Gardosh who signed himself as Dosh.

Handala, the barefooted Palestinian boy with spikey hair and patched shirt was created by Palestinian refugee and political cartoonist Naji al-Ali when he was working in Kuwait in 1969. His character would always only show his back to the world, hands clasped tightly over his bottom.

Handala's stance and stubbornness not to give in have become a much respected and popular symbol of Palestinian defiance and can be found printed on clothing, key rings and graffiti – particularly in Palestinian refugee camps.

Like their two highly acclaimed iconic cartoon characters the two artists shared a past of deep physical and emotional suffering. Born in Budapest, Kariel Gardosh struggled to survive the Shoah working as forced labor in a copper mine. He lost most of his family in Auschwitz. Naji al-Ali was born in a village in the lower Galilee and exiled with his family

to a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. He eventually left Lebanon after many years of living in refugee camps, heading for Kuwait before moving to London in 1985. At the time of his death he was one of the most prominent political cartoonists in the Arab world.

Gardosh, who immigrated to Israel in 1948 when he was known as Karl Goldberger, portrayed Srulik as a carefree, innocent kid growing up on a tough neighborhood tenement block. He first appears in 1956 and as time goes by gets involved in all sorts of scrapes, becoming the epitome of the seen as weaker but determined underdog who eventually becomes the victor against all odds over the nasty neighbors. The Israeli David to the combined Arab world's Goliath if you will.

Collections of Dosh cartoons were published in a number of books with one volume coming out after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, entitled "Sorry We Won." In 1953, Dosh joined the staff of the Maariv newspaper his cartoons appearing daily. Dosh's popularity gave impetus to his writing articles and satirical skits for Maariv and he was the recipient of many prestigious awards recognizing his work. Karl Goldberger aka Kariel Gardosh aka Dosh, died aged 79 in the year 2000 leaving behind the impish but battle scarred scamp Srulik to fend for himself.

Handala, the creation of Naji al-Ali, was born at the age of 10 – the age when al-Ali was exiled with his family from Palestine. Naji al-Ali was assassinated in 1987 on the streets of London by a Palestinian PLO/Israeli Mossad double agent as he stood on the pavement outside the offices of the Kuwaiti newspaper for whom he worked. Apparently the Mossad knew there was a plan to assassinate al-Ali, did not inform their British counterparts and following al-Ali's murder on the streets of Chelsea, an infuriated Prime Minister – Margaret Thatcher – expelled 3 Israeli diplomats and shut down the Mossad base in Kensington for a number of years.

Naji al-Ali was known not only for his highly critical and caustic cartoons dealing with Israeli and Palestinian leadership but also for scathing political criticism of Arab regimes in general. He was just 49 when assassinated and left over 40,000 cartoons. Handala, still with his back to the world, was 10 years old when his creator first introduced him and following al-Ali's assassination doomed to remain stuck in time, forever ten, never to turn around or unclasp his hands from behind his back.

Three books of his cartoons were published between 1976 and 1985 and al-Ali was working on the fourth at the time of his death. Shot in the face at close range by the assassin, al-Ali died just over a month later in Charing Cross Hospital.

A few years before al-Ali moved to London from Kuwait, Kariel Gardosh resided in that city when serving as the Cultural Attache at the Israeli Embassy in the British capital.

So much in common but unable to find a bridge across the divide between them, the two characters on the wall – their backs to the world and facing an uncertain future – certainly kick-start a great deal of thought and discussion for passers-by.

If the two loveable characters, created by an Israeli and a Palestinian cartoonist with extremely painful pasts could really walk hand in hand into the future, having recognized the different narratives that divide them but also working for a more positive and inevitable shared future, then maybe the legacy of Dosh and al-Ali will be a more positive one.

If Handala and Srulik can achieve that first but all-important crack in the wall between the Israeli and Palestinian people, then maybe it will tumble down after all.

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