Tina Sherwell

278 words

**Halaby, Sophie (1906-1998)**

Sophie Halaby was born in 1906 in Jerusalem to a Palestinian father and Russian mother. She undertook her higher education in France and Italy, between 1928-1933. In the war 1948, she fled her house in West Jerusalem to East Jerusalem leaving behind most of her belonging. During the 1950’s she opened a small shop on Zahra Street where she sold handicraft goods and her watercolor paintings. She participated in several exhibitions in the 1980s. The landscape surrounding Jerusalem was one of her main sources of inspiration, which she portrayed in different moods in her watercolors and oils, nearly always vacant of human presence. The works often seem to be taken from views from windows or balcony, and many have a melancholic and foreboding atmospheres. Unlike European painters of the Holy Land, she did not focus on religious sites and grand panoramas in orientalist traditions but rather her work express a more intimate relationship to the landscape and its details. Increasingly her watercolors of the landscape moved into abstraction.

Her domestic sketches are some of the few images we have of women working in the home and they reveal a facet of upper class life rarely seen or documented, recalling sketches of impressionist artists. Halaby passed away in 1998 at the age of 92. Her work was purchased by several Palestinian collectors, including Mazen Qupty. The significance of Halaby’s work was discovered in the late 1990’s, and she is now considered one of Jerusalem’s pioneer women artists.

**References and further Reading**

Boullata, Kamal (2009) Palestinian Art: From 1850 to the Present*,* Saqi Books, London.

Sherwell, Tina (2003) Forgotten Scene Six Pioneer Artists From Jerusalem, Al Wasiti Art Center.