

Maha Rukab's
The Potter's Purpose

by [John Kohan](#)

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(Courtesy of the artist)

Maha Rukab's artistic talent was first recognized by a sixth-grade teacher who praised her sense of color in painting a pottery jug at the Friends School in the West Bank city of Ramallah. The Palestinian Christian artist's life trajectory would be changed by the Six-Day War and Israeli occupation, foreign job opportunities, and family concerns that left no time for art. Rukab took it up again in her 30s, working as an elementary school teacher and translator, raising two children on her own in Dubai.

For Rukab, art-making is praying with paint. She finds a sense of spiritual release in creating abstract compositions in swirling colors with no set plan in mind. Then she meditates on the finished pieces, linking them to passages from the Bible. One painting in bright primary colors proved an especially meaningful joining of word and image when Rukab drew its title from Isaiah 64:8: “We are the clay, you are the potter; we are the work of your hand.”

Rukab does not normally use black, but in adding outlines to the original abstract, she summoned up the first painted jug of her childhood and the pottery workshops of the Ramallah she once knew, turning the clay pieces into spiritual vessels. A portrait emerged of a Palestinian woman, much like herself, “pondering the reason God created her.” As Rukab explains: “Art has been given to me as a divine gift to lighten my soul burdens. Every work becomes a prayer for peace—in my heart, in the Holy Land, and in the world.”