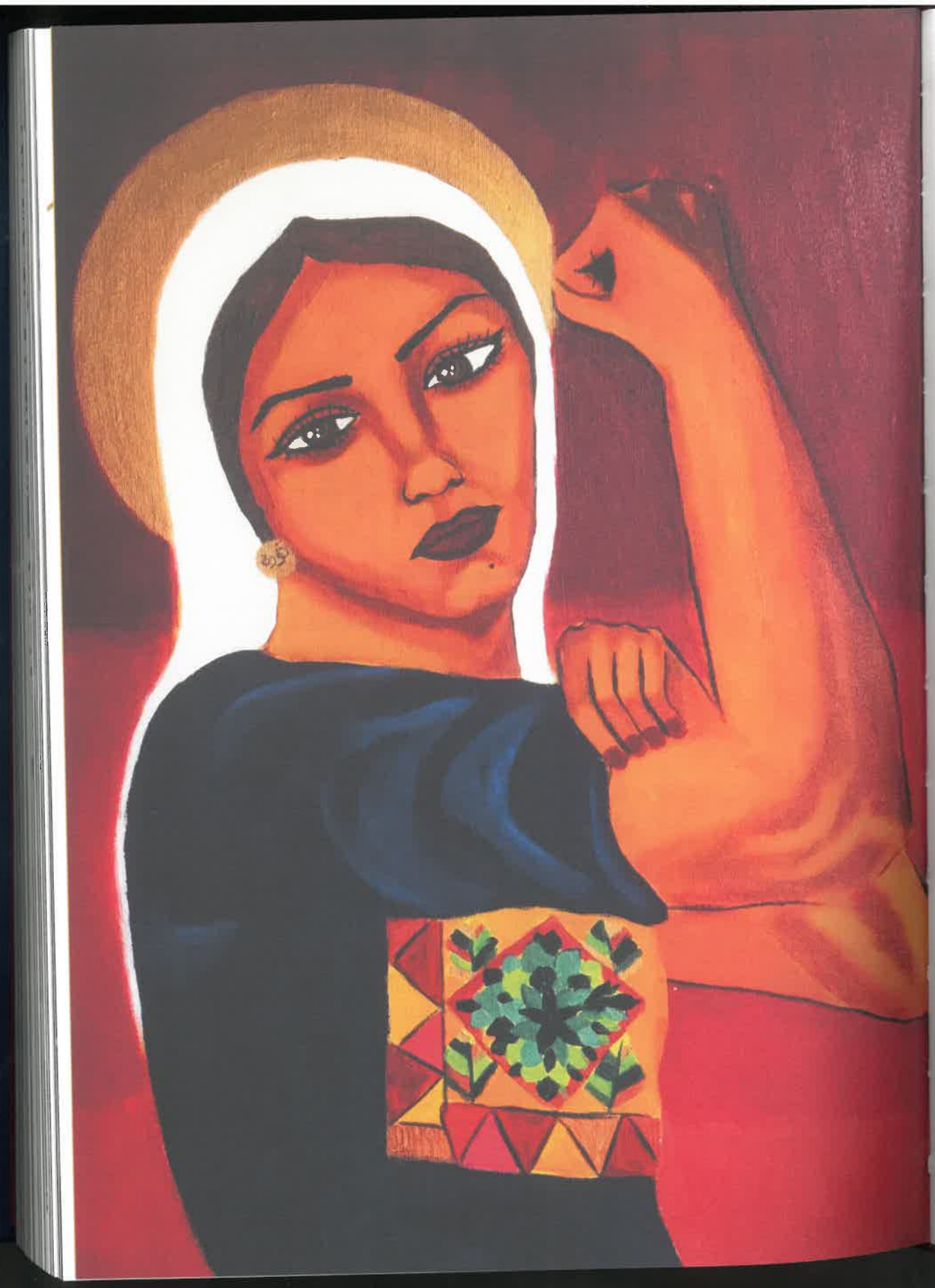


PAINTING Malak Mattar, *Thawra*

Maybe 'possibility' is just another word for 'miracle'.
Malak Mattar

Possibility

When I was little I was taken on a school trip to a church in Gaza. I'm not a Christian, but my mum was keen I see the local heritage. I found the artwork in the building compelling. We didn't really have museums or galleries where we lived, so it was the first time I'd properly seen portraits. I was transfixed by the open faces gilded with halos. It was the beginning of something.

I always enjoyed drawing as a child, but I only became religiously devoted to my craft when I was fourteen. Life in Palestine was hard, and getting harder. The Israeli attacks on Gaza in 2014 meant my neighbourhood became a place of violence and trauma. Art was a way to escape.

Yet it became something more — a form of possibility, for myself and others. I could use my art to express my pain at seeing other artists killed, knowing I was painting for them as well as for myself: I knew that sharing stories and ideas from Gaza could influence people and create change. The stories I told through my art made it possible for me to speak out fight back and survive.

When my work started to gain a global audience, I tried to bring it to the UK to speak at Greenbelt. I was excited to talk to people about my art and activism, and why the two go hand in hand.

It wasn't simple. I was due to start school in Turkey, but was told by the UK government that this wasn't proof enough that I wouldn't try to stay.