It was deeply disappointing. If a UK visa is rejected, it's almost impossible to get another one. My sense of possibility faded.

Thankfully I had an ally in the form of my UK-based promoter, Peter Bigg. When I tried to come to Greenbelt in 2022, I had to tell him that my visa had been rejected once again; but to my surprise and delight, a phone call from the Home Office to the consulate smoothed things over. Within three hours, my visa had arrived. Peter had explained my situation and they had acted. It was unbelievable.

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

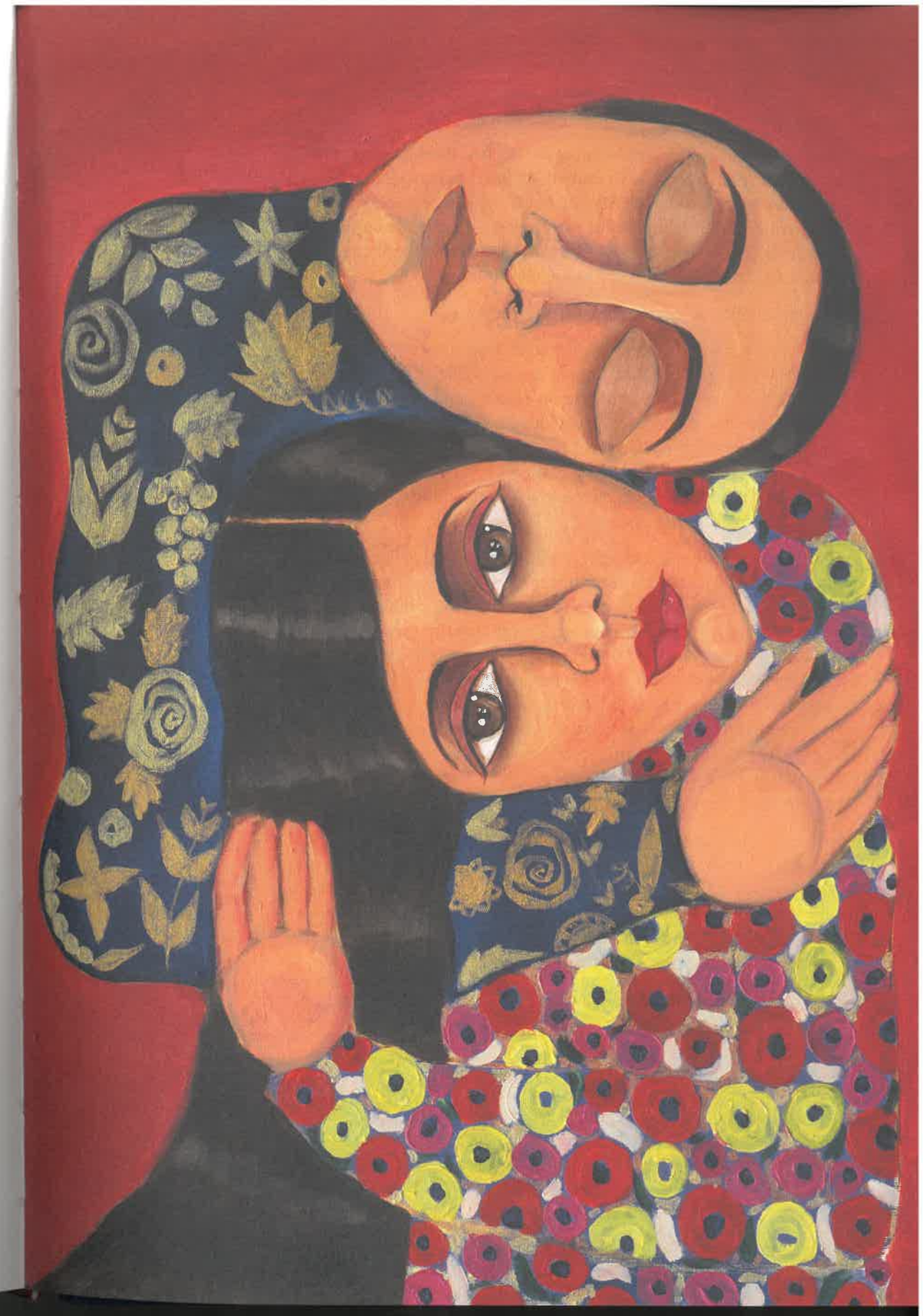
There is a lot of darkness in my work. I come from a part of the world where miracles are still in short supply. Yet art doesn't have to be about pain. It comes from people, and it can involve joy and humour just as much as trauma, but for me, I know there is a correlation between suffering and creativity. Whenever I experience torment or anguish, I lean into my creativity to help me get through. Every artist has to listen to their intuition, and knowing what is happening to my community is what guides me.

I still have great faith. I see so many people from my homeland who are prepared to take risks to get the truth out there about the hardships we face. For all that we have endured, there is something strangely resilient about Palestinians. I've seen people go straight back to their lives only a few hours after a ceasefire. We have endured trauma through multiple generations. My own grandparents were turned into refugees by the occupation. But I won't be defined by it. Strength, community, culture and a sense of giving are what make me want to keep celebrating life. I am not just a victim, and want this to be reflected in my work, which I hope will bring people healing and connection when they see it, and a sense of what's possible in their own lives.

There are so many great Palestinian artists out there, from painters to filmmakers to writers, and it's time we had more of a voice on the global stage. It's encouraging to see how many Palestinians in the diaspora, people who have never set foot in Gaza, are speaking out. I hope I am a part of that movement of possibility and hope, letting people know how much potential we have as artists, and as people.

I've faced so many dead ends, but each one is never truly the end. There is always possibility.

Malak Mattar was speaking to Maddy Fry



PAINTING Malak Mattar, *You and I*