



A Vision for My Father

The Life and Work of Palestinian-American
Artist and Designer Rajie Cook

By **Rajie Cook**

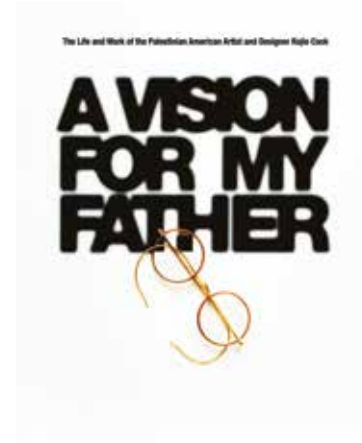
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Rajie Cook is an internationally recognized graphic designer, artist, and activist, the son of Palestinian immigrants Najeeb and Jaleela Cook who left Ramallah for the United States in search of peace and opportunity for themselves and their family. A tribute to them, this memoir evolves into a narrative of how their son made his mark on the international stage of graphic design. For Rajie, art is an organic expression of what moves him; his art activism is his gift to the world.

Sight – what we see and what we think we see – is a major theme in this narrative. On one level, Rajie returns sight to his father who was blinded in the early 1930s by the ravages of cataract. When, in 1967, Rajie started a graphic design firm that would become acclaimed for its excellence, Najeeb could not share in the excitement. He could not see the symbols that Rajie and his partner created. He died before “seeing” his talented son shake the hand of an American president in 1984, when Rajie received the Presidential Award for Design Excellence for creating the universal pictograms that guide travelers through public spaces such as airports, train stations, and hotels. However, Najeeb’s greatest legacy might be his love for Palestine.

Rajie inherited his father’s love for the Palestinian people and at the age of 54 years began to travel to the Middle East and took his first trip to Palestine. It was a life-changing, spiritual journey that turned him into a peace activist. Through poster art, sculptural assemblages, and film, Rajie calls attention to the plight of the Palestinian people and the injustices they face. Using his art as his voice and his camera as a partner, Rajie has lifted the veil of what people see or think they see with regard to the Palestinian people. Some of



his photographs are disturbing and unsettling because Rajie narrates the truth as he sees it. The pain of the Palestinian people cries out through his art: the horror and brutality of life under occupation that Palestinians and their children experience every day. Rajie wants the world to see what he has seen and, like his father before him, yearns for peace to come to this troubled and tortured region, wishing for a peace that seems forever elusive.

Rajie’s assemblages, posters, and artwork, provocative yet truthful, have been featured in art shows throughout the United States and internationally. In his own words, “My art will be my voice long after I have gone. It will never be silenced.” The Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum acquired the Symbols Signs project in 2003.

“A powerful and poignant expression of the Palestinian narrative of exile weaving together the aesthetic and the personal story of longing for home. Rajie Cook’s personal account is an intimate revelation of

the special bond between father and son in the context of the Palestinian national identity and experience. This revelation emanates from an emotional identification with an attachment to the father as a visual and artistic celebration of creative expression. The narrative is therefore multifaceted; yet it unravels in the context of an exile in the West that is essentially discriminatory and dismissive of the humanity of the Palestinian people individually and collectively.” *Dr. Hanan Ashrawi*

Review based on <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/A-Vision-for-My-Father/Rajie-Cook/9781566560320>.

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