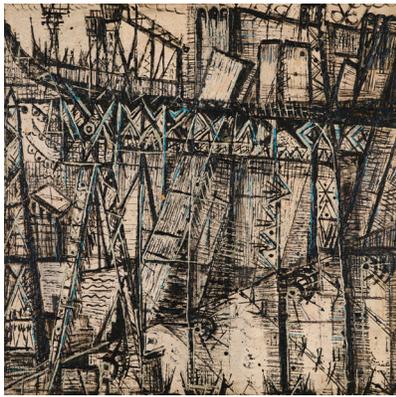


MODERN ART FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

Exhibition celebrates 175th anniversary of Arabic studies at Yale with works by Egyptian, Iraqi, Lebanese, and Syrian artists on loan from the Barjeel Art Foundation

February 24–July 16, 2017

February 24, 2017, New Haven, Conn.—The Yale University Art Gallery is thrilled to participate in a campus-wide, yearlong celebration marking the 175th anniversary of the field of Arabic studies at Yale University, which was inaugurated in 1841 when Edward Elbridge Salisbury, B.A. 1832, became the first professor of Arabic and Sanskrit in the United States. On the occasion of this milestone



Effat Naghi (Egyptian, 1905–1994), *The High Dam*, 1966. Acrylic on wood. Collection of the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. © Effat Naghi

anniversary, the Gallery presents *Modern Art from the Middle East*, a selection of paintings, sculptures, and works on paper by important Middle Eastern artists rarely exhibited in the United States. The 19 artworks on display are on loan from the Barjeel Art Foundation, an impressive collection of modern and contemporary art located in Sharjah, the United Arab Emirates. Established by Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi, the foundation promotes the art of the Middle East through international collaborations.

The Middle East encompasses countries with extremely diverse cultures. During the second half of the 20th century, following the end of the era of colonialization of the region, several of these countries saw a new generation of artists begin to explore a more modernist language in their works, creating unique styles that merge historical sources with contemporary art practice. *Modern Art from the Middle East* presents artworks from the 1950s to the 1980s from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria; these objects exemplify how the end of colonialism and the establishment of nation-states carved from the former Ottoman Empire triggered a quest for identity in the arts. The selected works chart the concurrent rise of major art centers in cities such as Baghdad, Beirut, and Cairo that furthered the propagation of the visual arts with the opening of museums and academies.

Many Middle Eastern artists had direct or indirect exposure to European art, particularly through study abroad—including Kadhim Hayder at the Central College of the Arts, in London, Michel Basbous at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, in Paris, and Effat Naghi at the Accademia di Belle Arti, in Rome—where they were introduced to a European formal vocabulary. When they returned home, these artists were inspired to combine many different influences in their works, ranging



Marwan Kassab Bachi (Syrian, active in Berlin, 1934–2016), *The Three Palestinian Boys*, 1970. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. © Marwan Kassab Bachi

from the traditional arts of the Middle East—which date as far back as the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt—to European modernism. The products of this cross-cultural contact are highly original works of art that hover between figuration and abstraction and draw from various sources, such as calligraphy, archaeology, ancient artifacts, and contemporary urban and rural culture. Dia Azzawi, Hamed Ewais, Mahmoud Hammad, and other artists also responded to the sociopolitical climate in their respective countries and to larger conflicts in the Middle East, notably the Arab-Israeli Wars that took place between 1967 and 1973.

The exhibition emphasizes the singularity of the artistic centers in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria and includes work by several of the main protagonists from these countries. “The artists in this show engage with issues of nationalism and modernity, abstraction and figuration,



Saloua Raouda Choucair (Lebanese, 1916–2017), *Composition in Yellow*, 1962–65. Oil on panel. Collection of the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. © Saloua Raouda Choucair

and the ways in which cultural production impacts everyday life,” explains Kishwar Rizvi, Director of Undergraduate Studies and Associate Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture, Yale University, and co-curator of the exhibition. “Their work provides an important resource for understanding the complex social and historical factors that defined the Middle East in the 20th century.” Naghi’s paintings, for instance, are imbued with elements from Egyptian archaeological artifacts and folklore; the artist combines a multitude of facets in visually complex pictures that reveal underlying social concerns. Seemingly abstract, her painting

The High Dam (1966) was prompted by the building of the Aswan Dam from 1960 to 1970, an enormous government project that was undertaken after the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 and caused various human and natural disasters. Similarly, the Syrian-born, Berlin-based painter Marwan Kassab Bachi became known for his stylized portraits derived from life and from sociopolitical events such as the Six-Day War of 1967, which inspired his *Three Palestinian Boys* (1970).

“This exhibition highlights the diversity of modernism, a diversity which has far too long been overshadowed by the canon of Western modern art,” states Frauke V. Josenhans, the Horace W. Goldsmith Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Gallery and co-curator of the exhibition. “Artists in different countries in the Middle East invented a truly unique aesthetic that merged various influences and makes us rethink the history of modernism altogether.”

On View

February 24–July 16, 2017

Related Symposium

Thursday–Friday, March 30–31

“Writing/Curating the Middle East”

This exhibition coincides with an international symposium, “Writing/Curating the Middle East,” which is organized by the History of Art Department, the Yale University Art Gallery, and the Council on Middle East Studies, and takes place on Thursday and Friday, March 30–31. The

symposium opens with a keynote lecture on Thursday, March 30, delivered by the celebrated Egyptian artist Wael Shawky, and sessions on Friday examine issues of national identity and diversity, bringing together curators and art historians who engage with the Middle East through research, publications, and exhibitions. Very often the cultural production of the Arab world and Iran is viewed solely through the lens of European and American modes of art theory. This symposium takes new avenues of research as a launching pad from which to examine entanglements and synchronicity, proposing a new discourse on art from the Middle East that illustrates both how it was inspired by and contributed to global modern art movements. The symposium is organized by Kishwar Rizvi, Director of Undergraduate Studies and Associate Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture, Yale University, and Pamela Franks, Senior Deputy Director and the Seymour H. Knox, Jr., Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Gallery, and is sponsored by the Edward J. and Dorothy Clarke Kempf Memorial Fund from the MacMillan Center. The keynote lecture is generously funded by the Hayden Visiting Artists Fund and is free and open to the public. Registration for the symposium is required and is also free; for more information visit salisbury175.yale.edu.

Related Programs

Exhibition Tour

Tuesday, March 7, 12:30 pm

Artist Talk

Thursday, March 30, 5:30 pm

“Keynote for Writing/Curating the Middle East”

Wael Shawky

Robert L. McNeil, Jr., Lecture Hall, Yale University Art Gallery

Symposium

Friday, March 31, 9:00 am-5:30 pm

“Writing/Curating the Middle East”

Loria Center, 190 York Street, Room 351

Registration required; visit salisbury175.yale.edu.

Gallery Talks

Wednesday, April 5, 12:30 pm

“Saloua Raouda Choucair: The Way to Abstraction”

Frauke V. Josenhans

Wednesday, April 19, 12:30 pm

“Building a New Egypt”

Kishwar Rizvi

(Inter)sections

Thursday, April 20, 5:30 pm

“Critical Hip-Hop Arts in the Arab Diaspora”

Yassin “Narcy” Alsalman and Najwa Mayer

All programs are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. For more detailed programming information, visit artgallery.yale.edu/calendar.

Exhibition Credits

Exhibition organized by Frauke V. Josenhans, the Horace W. Goldsmith Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Yale University Art Gallery; Kishwar Rizvi, Director of Undergraduate Studies and Associate Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture, Yale University; and Mandy Merzaban, Founding Curator, Barjeel Art Foundation; with Najwa Mayer, PH.D. candidate, American Studies, Yale University; in collaboration with the Barjeel Art Foundation. Made possible by the Art Gallery Exhibition and Publication Fund.

Yale University Art Gallery

The Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest college art museum in the United States, was founded in 1832 when the patriot-artist John Trumbull gave more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then its collections have grown to more than 200,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present.

General Information

The Yale University Art Gallery is located at 1111 Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut. Museum hours: Tuesday-Friday, 10 am-5 pm; Thursday until 8 pm (September-June); and Saturday-Sunday, 11 am-5 pm. The Gallery is closed Mondays and major holidays. Free and open to the public. For general information, please call 203.432.0600 or visit the website at artgallery.yale.edu.

Press Contact

Joellen Adae, Director of Communications, Yale University Art Gallery, 203.432.0611,
joellen.adae@yale.edu