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An Immediate Vast

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Untitled 1978, Madiha Umar (Syria)



Composition, 1969, Jilali Gharbaoul (Morocco)



Composition in Yellow, 1962-1965, Saloua Raouda Choucair (Lebanon)

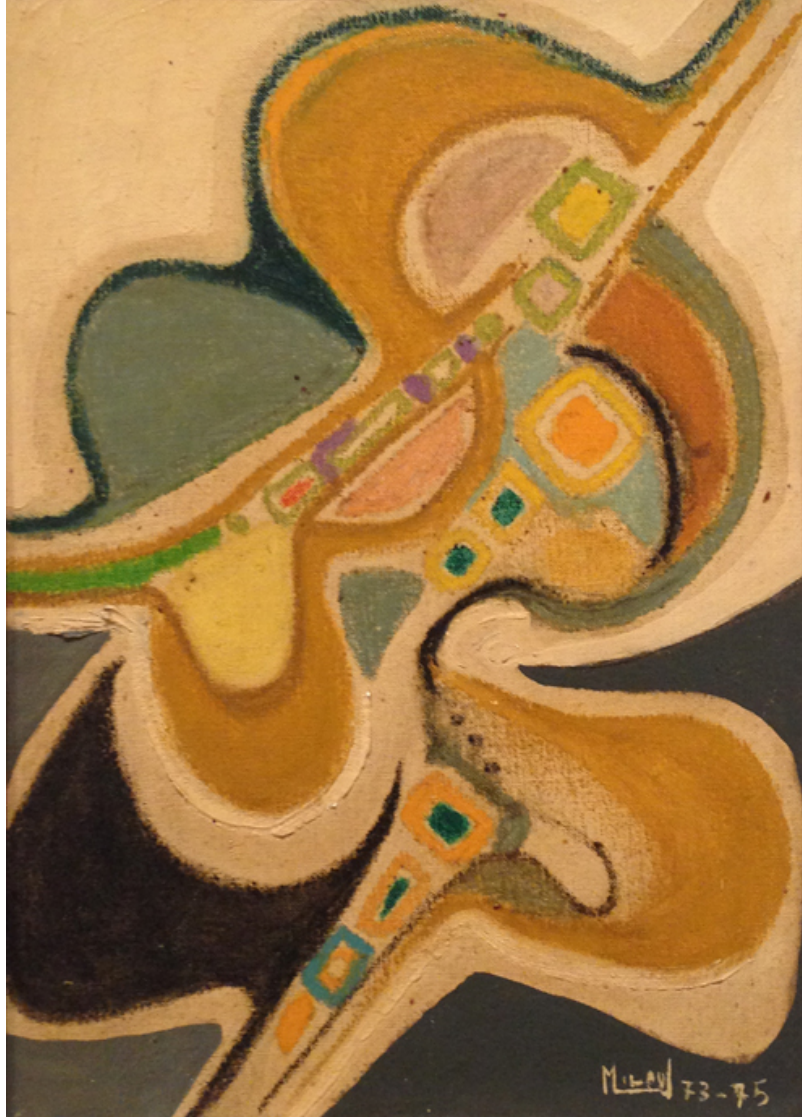
Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950's -1980's

Positing the question as to why abstraction, why then, why now, giving explanations as to its purpose, its meaning, looking for reasons, interpretations, definitions, does make for an engaging exhibition, but I often wonder if the viewer actually catches what's rooted in the subtle, invisible space that the artist has opened for dialogue, for a moment to connect, to shift one's thinking, to expand, to recognize other forms of possibilities.

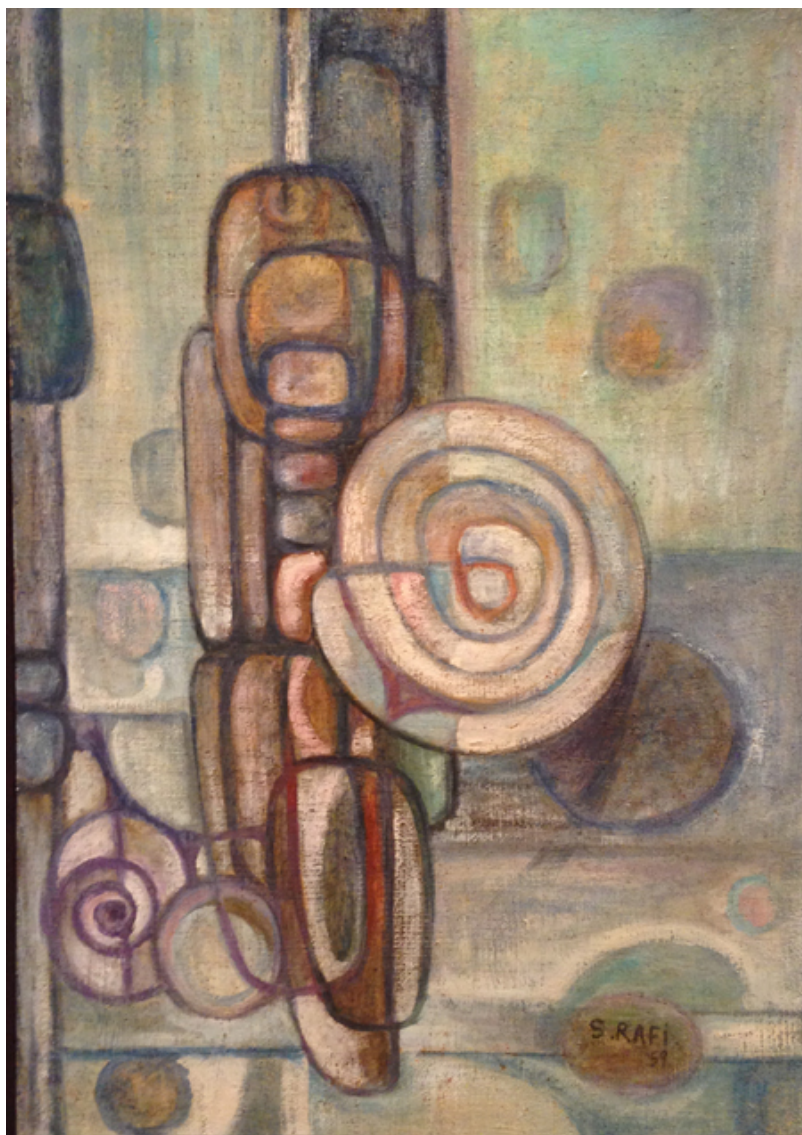
Can viewers go further than just walking away, or are they able to enter into the yet unfamiliar territory of someone else's political, historical & cultural references, to unite with the fluidity of materials, to get inside the gestures, strokes, textures, to move as they move, to feel what they feel, to embrace their concerns, their

commitments, their uncertainties, to recognize, to establish concrete modes of change within themselves and whatever surrounds them?

Whether an artist is departing from the classic Arabic letterform, figuration, or any other representational depiction, the action of breaking down visual elements to re-envision a compositional presence, without depending on established boundaries, is a universal experience open to anyone.



Composition, 1973-1975, Miloud Labied (Morocco)



Untitled, 1959, Samir Rafi (Egypt)



Al-Muntassirun (The Victorious), 1983, Shakir Hassan Al Said (Iraq)

Not every artist, no matter where they are in time & space, is/was able to separate themselves from prevailing structural beliefs. Some found refuge in other sources of inspiration, some wavered back & forth, some shied away, some formed collectives, some investigated, dissected, re-interpreted, some, organically, spontaneously, found determination & purpose in other directions.

Inspiration has not one meaning, it does not come from one place, it is not limited, it is of course, everywhere. Just like there is no mystery around abstraction. Each artist has a visual language with its treasured secrets that can travel beyond categories, labels, beyond interference.

Even after leaving the exhibition *Taking Shape*, I could still hear voices circulating, shouting, debating, the thises & thats, the imprints of loss, of gain, of conditions challenged, fairness energized, divisions toppled, not necessarily coming from whoever might have wandered in while I was there, but generated from the art itself.



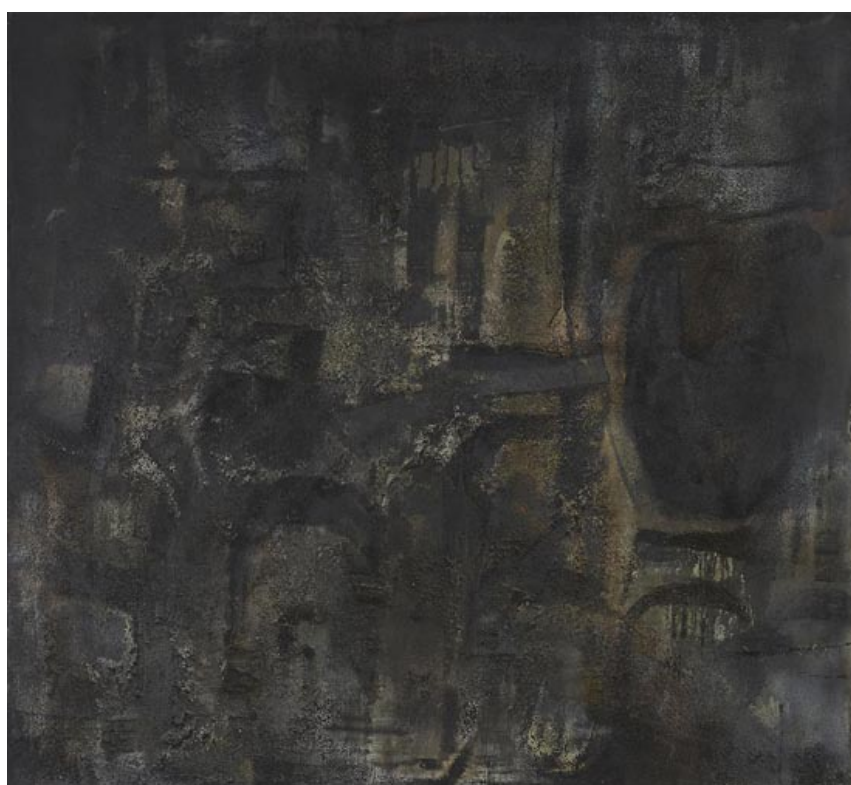
Autumn in Yosemite Valley, 1963-1964, Etel Adnan (Lebanon)



Untitled, 1970, Omar El-Nagdi (Egypt)



The Last Sound, 1964, Ibrahim El-Salahi (Sudan)



Mindscape, 1961, Maliheh Afnan (Palestine)

[Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950's – 1980's](#)

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