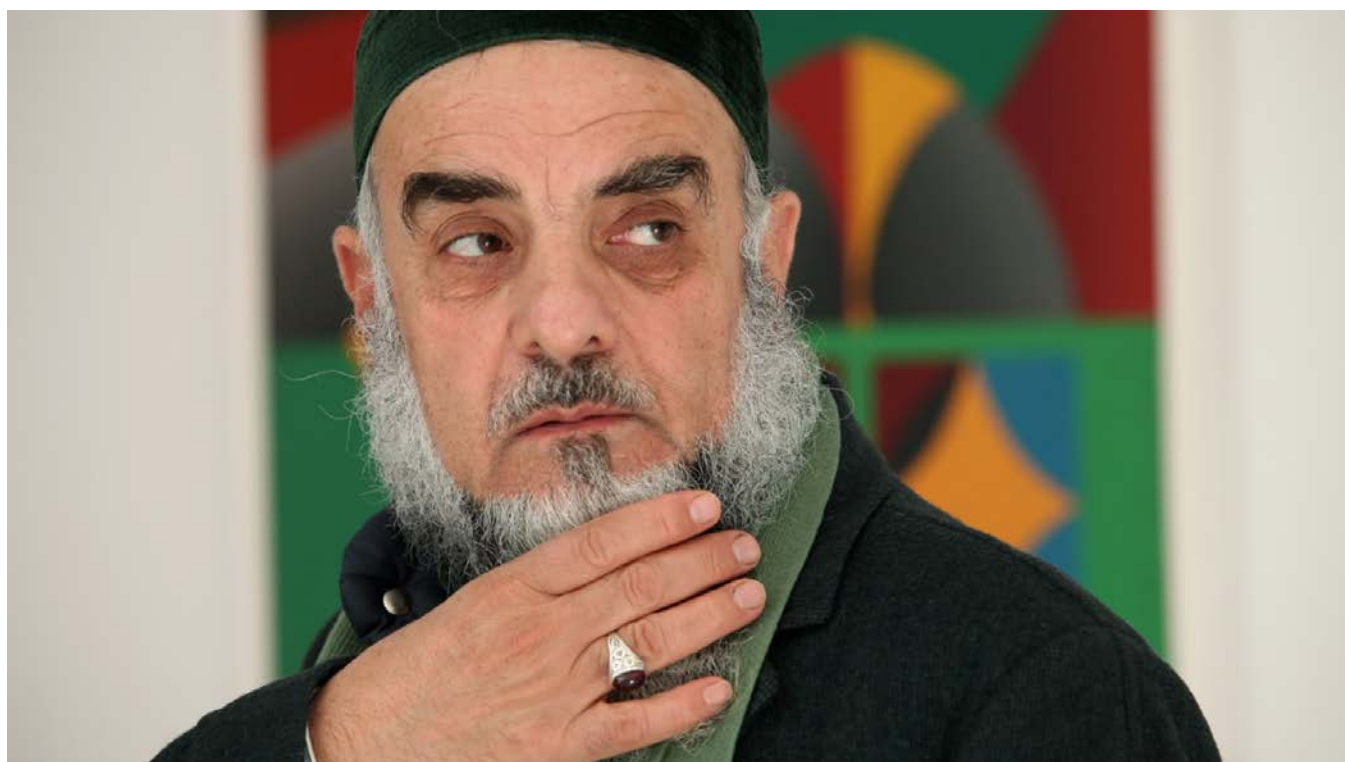


Walid Abu Shakra, Pioneer of Palestinian Art in Israel, Dies at 73

Abu Shakra came from a family of prominent artists in Umm al-Fahm and took to projects that focused on Palestinians' connection to their lands

[Naama Riba](#) Mar 06, 2019 11:44 AM



Palestinian Israeli artist Walid Abu Shakra. Moshe Shai

Palestinian Israeli artist [Walid Abu Shakra](#), scion of a well-known family of artists and collectors, died in London on Monday at the age of 73.

Abu Shakra was the first Palestinian to study at an Israeli artschool, an opportunity funded by a pair of [Holocaust survivors](#).

"Walid was part of a group of artists who paved the way for the Palestinian art created in villages and mixed [Arab-Jewish] cities," Palestinian artist Abed Abdi said. "From 1948 until the early 1970s, very few people studied

in [Israeli art] academies.”

Abu Shakra, who was born in Umm al-Fahm in 1946, began studying at the Avni Institute at age 22. Shakra’s brother, Said Abu Shakra, founded an art gallery in Umm al-Fahm, while another brother, [Farid Abu Shakra](#), and a nephew, Karim, are also noted artists. His uncle Assam, who died in 1990, was also involved in the art world.



Almond Tree, 1979, Umm al-Fahm Gallery. Yakis Kidron



A view from Umm al-Fahm, 1976. No credit

In 1972, Abu Shakra emigrated to London and specialized in printmaking at Saint Martin's School of Art. His prints focused on the Palestinians' connection to their lands.

At first, he painted in color, including a series of paintings from the 1970s containing colorful Islamic motifs. In the 1980s, Shakra began drawing the landscapes of his childhood from photographs – olive and almond trees, hills and rocks. These included prints such as "Olive Tree in Ein Jarrar."

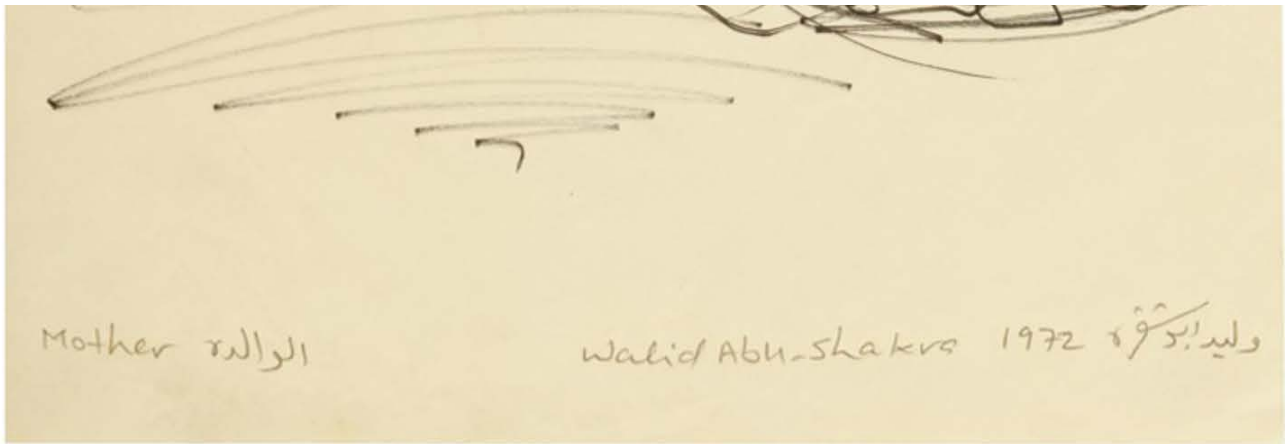
In 2012, the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and the Umm al-Fahm gallery jointly hosted a retrospective of his works, curated by Irit Hadar and Farid Abu Shakra. The exhibition was called "Mintarat Al-Batten." Al-Batten is a prominent hill in the Umm al-Fahm area which, because of its location, became a guard post ("mintara" in Arabic) for protecting the surrounding agricultural lands.

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In an interview with the daily Yedioth Ahronoth at the time, Abu Shakra spoke about his obsession with the landscapes of his childhood.

“Those who live in Umm al-Fahm don’t realize or sense that nature and the landscape are changing rapidly,” he said. “Only someone like me, who returns periodically from abroad, sees how everything is changing and how the landscape in which we grew up no longer exists.”





"My Mother in the Kitchen," 1970.No credit





"My Father Joseph," 1967. No credit

In an interview with Haaretz that same year, he discussed other aspects of his career. He said he "hadn't thought too much" about his decision to study at Avni; "I felt that I was part of everyone." He also said his family had trouble accepting his move to England. While his mother understood, "my father was more skeptical."

Though he visited Israel periodically, he added, "Every time I came, the disappointment was greater. Every year I'd come with money, planning to build a house, but because of the changes that had occurred there, I'd return empty-handed."

In a 2015 catalogue, "The Identify of the Palestinian Artist," Farid Abu Shakra described how his brother would photograph the landscapes of his childhood and then study them from afar, in foggy London, ultimately producing works in which the Middle Eastern landscape, with its light and shadows, was integrated into a territory with a different climate.

Walid Abu Shakra said in that catalogue that he sought to document these landscapes for the day when they could no longer be seen in real life,

because man had destroyed them.

Regarding the prominence of olive trees in his work, the catalogue explained that many local political conflicts are expressed in the land and nature. Family conflicts, conflicts over borders, party and institutional politics have all led to the destruction of the land, it said.

Abu Shakra died after a long battle with cancer. But over the past two decades, he had distanced himself from art as he drew closer to religion.

He is survived by four children from his marriages to two women.