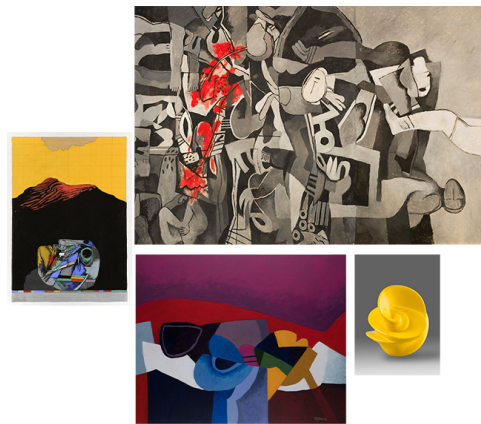


FROM NOVEMBER 2, 2020

# Dia al-Azzawi

Dia al-Azzawi's exhibition examines the prolific career of the Iraqi artist, recognised as a pioneer of modern Arab art, through a selection of his works from the 1960s until the present day, including paintings, sculptures and prints.



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Exhibition



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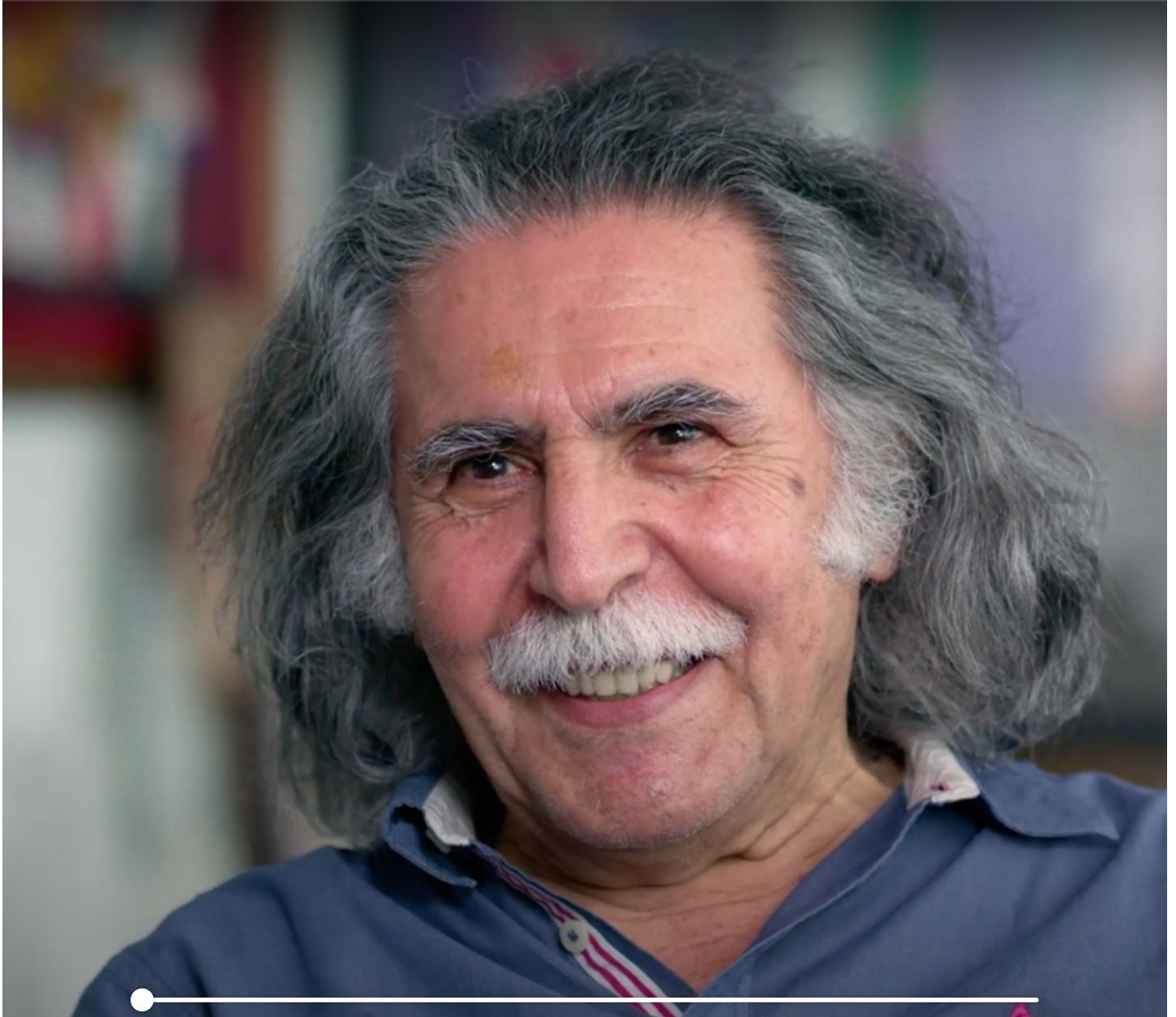
PDF

([https://www.artdubai.ae/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ADPE\\_Artwork-Catalogue\\_Dia-al-Azzawi.pdf](https://www.artdubai.ae/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ADPE_Artwork-Catalogue_Dia-al-Azzawi.pdf))



## ART DUBAI PORTRAIT

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The renowned Dia al-Azzawi, at his studio in London, discusses his practice and what drives him. Get a glimpse into the artist's practice, which spans over five decades and a range of mediums.



## EXHIBITION BACKGROUND

## Restless Intellectual Curiosity

Dia al-Azzawi's inspirations extend from European Modernist painting to Arabic calligraphy, from Moroccan garden design to Mesopotamian architecture, from ancient Middle Eastern poetry to the sculptural qualities of modern automobile design. Socially and politically engaged and yet always personal and distinctive, his works are embedded within a universal, humanist language.



Dia al-Azzawi in his London studio, 1982

### Multidisciplinary Reinvention



This curiosity extends to Azzawi's experimentation across a range of media, from paintings on

“I constantly need to challenge myself: this is why I choose to work in a variety of materials. In fact, I enjoy adapting my work to a new medium, which in turn informs my practice as it expands my ideas of what to do with it. You cannot work with acrylic in the same way as with watercolour, and you cannot hope to achieve the same look—otherwise, what is the point? And this same idea applies to sculpture too: for example, working with marble is not the same as when you work with bronze, so it can take you in new directions.”







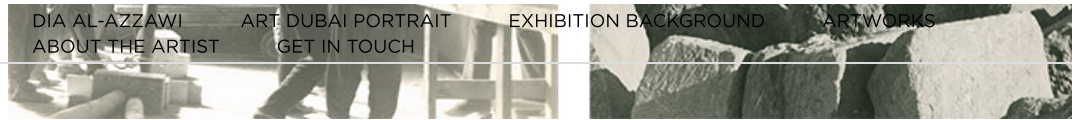
The artist in his London studio, 1980



DIA AL-AZZAWI  
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## Bringing the Past into the Present

Azzawi's days as an archaeology student at the University of Baghdad and as Director of the Iraqi Antiquities Department taught him about art from the Mesopotamian and Sumerian periods, which along with other civilisations in the region became fundamental interests. Weaving oral and visual traditions, he sees the past as an archive to discover new forms and concepts and fertile ground for experimentation within his practice.

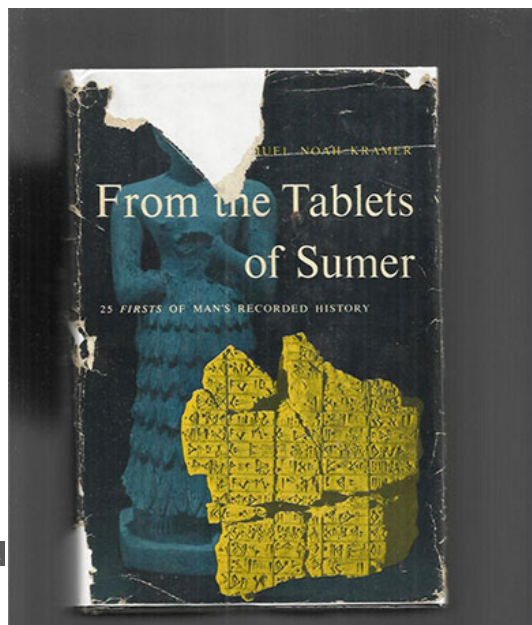
Left: Mosul Museum, 1972

Right: The artist on an archaeological expedition

From teachings and books from that period -- some of which he still has to this day, like Samuel Noah Kramer's *From the Tablets of Sumer* -- Azzawi has amassed an immense store of knowledge about art and antiquity. This has sparked a fascination with Sumerian sculpture and local artefacts, setting a fertile ground for experimentation within his practice, and relating motifs from the past into modern depictions that can be found in some of the artist's earlier works.

Left: *From the Tablets of Sumer* by Samuel Noah Kramer

Right: The artist's table (Samuel Noah Kramer, School days. A Sumerian Composition)



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The artist's fascination with Sumerian sculpture is apparent in his earlier figurative works, painted

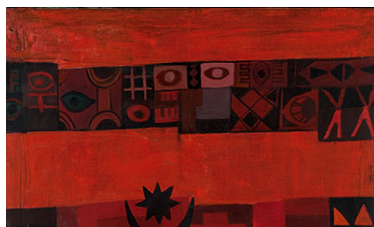
Left: Sumerian statues with the characteristic large eyes

with large, black, round eyes.  
Right: The Statue of Enlil, or Enlil, from Mari in Syria, circa 2400 BC, Louvre Museum



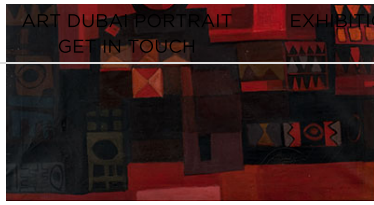


ABOUT THE ARTIST    GET IN TOUCH  
Azzawi developed an interest in oral folklore and decorative motifs found in traditional textiles from the region, inspired too by fellow Iraqi artists' Jewad Selim and Kadhim Hayder.





DIA AL-AZZAWI  
ABOUT THE ARTIST



Ancient Symbols, 1964  
Oil on canvas, 95 x 83 cm  
○



Decorative motifs found in  
Azzawi's earlier works  
○



The artist in the 70s in Iraq  
○

## Real and Imagined Landscapes

“Iraq is not just a name or a piece of land, nor is it a map of the oldest civilization or a country with a flag and national anthem: it is not a land of one faith and one race.”



[DIA AL-AZZAWI  
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Since leaving Iraq to move to the UK in 1976, and only returning once for a brief visit, the memory of Dia al-Azzawi's homeland of Iraq has stayed with him and has played an integral role in his practice. Elements of nostalgia for real and imagined landscapes are very present, evoking a sense of melancholy and sadness, as the artist himself explains: "We, who left our homeland... are painting her from our place of exile as if we live there. It is the return without reproach."

**BLESSED TIGRES** – 2008

Installation view, British Museum





Paintings about his homeland are often defined by bright colours, representing gardens, the fertility of the soil of the Mesopotamian peninsula and the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. In his sculptures, luxurious coloured bronzes morph metal into desert roses and obelisks.

Left: *Landscape (Back in Memories)*, 2013-19, acrylic on canvas, 190 x 190 cm  
Right: Sculptures from a range of media inside the artist's London studio, 2020

## Iraq's Recent History

With an acute awareness and sensitivity to shared cultural heritage, social history and human suffering and having been witness to his region's turbulent narratives, Azzawi eloquently captures historical moments, often on a monumental scale.

The events of the 1990-91 Gulf War sparked a series of paintings *Land of Darkness*, where the artist's usually colourful palette is subdued, as if the vivacity of life is being drained out of the scenes and figures he paints.

**LAND OF DARKNESS** — 1994

Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 156 cm

**WOUNDED SOUL, SILENT WIT**

Acrylic on canvas, 240 x 480 cm



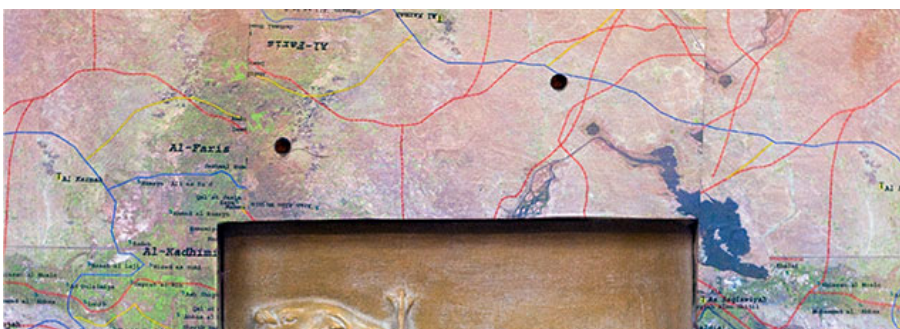




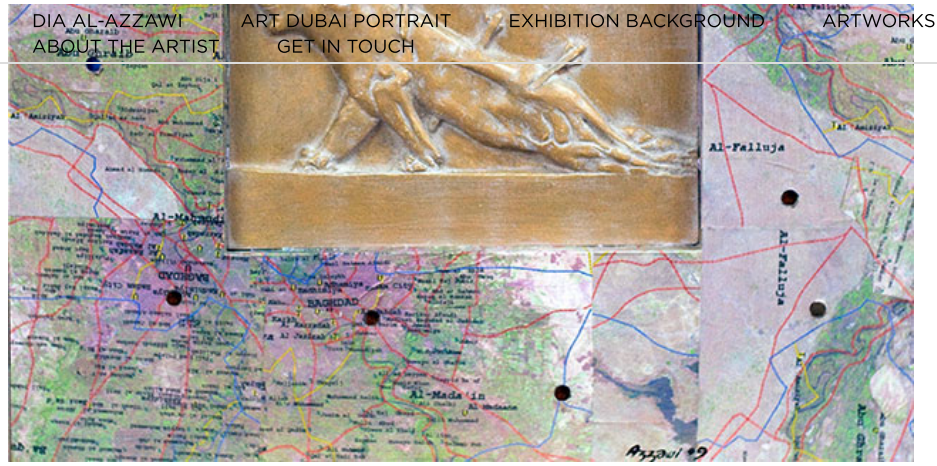
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“Iraq is my inner soul, which has kept me working all these years, and which shares a dream with its people to build the country with a free and progressive vision.”

The 2003 invasion of Iraq was another moment in his country’s history that provoked Azzawi to create a series of works attempting to deal with complex feelings of anger, sorrow and loss of hope while absorbing the implications of this destructive military act.







## EXHIBITION WORKS

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## The Land i: Scenery

Azzawi's signature paintings in acrylic on canvas contain compositions which create objects by building up straight lines combined with organic shapes defined by bold, saturated colours. They capture moments that in some cases the artist has experienced, or that he has imagined, such as the light cast on the desert after the sun has dropped below the horizon.



**AFTER SUNSET — 2018**

Acrylic on canvas

120 x 150 cm



Price Upon Request

INQUIRE



**DESERT LANDSCAPE — 2010**

Acrylic on canvas  
150 x 150 cm

Price Upon Request

INQUIRE





**BIRD DECORATED IN BLUE — 1981**

Acrylic on canvas  
100 x 100 cm



Price Upon Request



**DESERT LANDSCAPE — 1978**

Gouache on paper  
77.5 x 56 cm

Price Upon Request

INQUIRE





**IMAGINARY GARDEN NO. 1 — 2013-14**

Acrylic on canvas

100 x 230 cm

Price Upon Request

INQUIRE



## Land 2: Desert Rose

The artist became fascinated with rose-like formations he came across during visits to the desert in the Gulf region, known as the desert rose. Initially, the artist attempted to replicate these forms in wood, but changed to create them first in terracotta, then cast in different materials. The petals began to take on individual forms that eventually began to morph into something else -

**SOMETHING DIFFERENT: SCULPTURE AND TAPESTRY –**  
sometimes reminding the artist of

obelisks  
Exhibition view, Meem Gallery





**DESERT ROSE NO. 1 — 2013**

Polyester resin  
30 x 28 x 32 cm

Price Upon Request

INQUIRE





**DESERT ROSE NO. 4 — 2013**

Polyester resin  
40 x 34 x 35 cm

Price Upon Request

INQUIRE







**WHITE OBELISK — 2014**

Polyester resin  
186 x 84 x 79 cm



INQUIRE



**ABSTRACT FORM NO. 3 — 2012**

Polyester resin  
72 x 38 x 33 cm

Price Upon Request

INQUIRE



## The People

Azzawi deconstructs the human body by experimenting with colour, perspective, scale and media. These fragmented body parts become signifiers of the events people have experienced and stand as testament to suffering inflicted in Iraq and throughout human history.



This triptych is a work of art that marries the art of tapestry, the weaver and Azzawi's painting mastery, where paint on paper is transported to dye on wool. The work reflects on themes of human suffering and its denunciation, and is characterised by the black and white shades found in the artist's body of work, *Land of Darkness*.

Dia al-Azzawi in front of *Jenin*







**JENIN** — 2003/2015  
14 portées thread wool and bobbins  
Triptych, 300 x 456 cm

INQUIRE





**EMIGRANTS** — 2018-19

Woodcut on paper

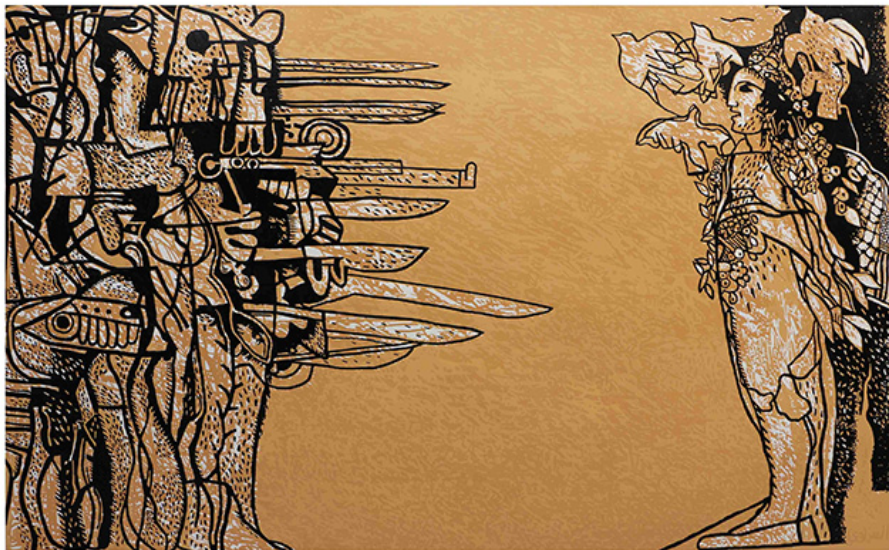
124 x 194 cm

Edition of 12

USD 15,000

INQUIRE





**JENIN: 23.3.2012 — 2018**

Woodcut on paper

120 x 190 cm

Edition of 11, Greenway colour edition of 2

USD 15,000

INQUIRE







**SUMERIAN SCULPTURE — 2017**

Acrylic on canvas

194 x 194 cm

Price Upon Request

INQUIRE





**VILLAGER — 1966**

Oil on canvas

70 x 90 cm

Price Upon Request

INQUIRE





### **Mission of Destruction**

*Mission of Destruction*, is a recent large-scale work directly responding to President George W. Bush's infamous words on the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US: "mission accomplished". The 15-metre painting illustrates the physical and psychological breakdown of human beings undergoing trauma and encapsulates the essence of that tumultuous time.

Azzawi in front of *Mission of Destruction*





## Mission of Destruction at MoMA PS1

This monumental work was displayed at MoMA PS1 earlier this year as part of the exhibition *Theater of Op*

While exhibited at MoMA PS1, New York, Azzawi added a performative gesture to the experience of the pe



**MISSION OF DESTRUCTION — 2004-07**

Installation view, *Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars, 1991-2011*, MoMA PS1, 2019.



**MISSION OF DESTRUCTION — 2004-07**

Acrylic on canvas  
240 x 1500 cm

▲  
Price Upon Request

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

# Dia al-Azzawi

Dia al-Azzawi (born 1939) attained a degree in Archaeology from Baghdad University (1958–62), at the same time as a diploma from the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad (1959–64). He began to exhibit his work in 1964, quickly became a central figure in Iraqi modernist art, founding the New Vision Group (1969); joining the One Dimension Group (1971); and, as secretary of the Iraqi Artists' Society, establishing the pioneering al-Wasiti Festival (1972). In 1976, Azzawi moved to London and his work became influenced by world politics, especially injustice in the Arab World. Although primarily known as a painter and draftsman, he works in a huge variety of media, ranging from graphic design to monumental sculpture and both two- and three-dimensional printing.



[www.azzawiart.com](http://www.azzawiart.com/) (<http://www.azzawiart.com/>)



## NOTABLE EXHIBITIONS

Dia al-Azzawi's artwork has been exhibited worldwide, including most recently as part of MoMA PS1's *Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars, 1991-2011* and *Taking Shape: Abstraction From The Arab World, 1950s-1980s* at NYU's Grey Art Gallery (2019-20).

The artist's work has been collected by numerous prestigious museums and institutions including Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah; Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; The British Museum, London; Colas Foundation, Paris; Darat al Funun, Amman; Foundation ONA, Casablanca; Calouste Gulbenkian Collection, Lisbon; Guggenheim, Abu Dhabi; Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, Amman; Kinda Foundation, Riyadh; Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum (LACMA), Los Angeles; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha; Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad; Museum of Modern Art, Damascus; Museum of Modern Art, Tunis; Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah; Tate Modern, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London and The World Bank, Washington, D.C.



MoMA PS1

(<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5084>)

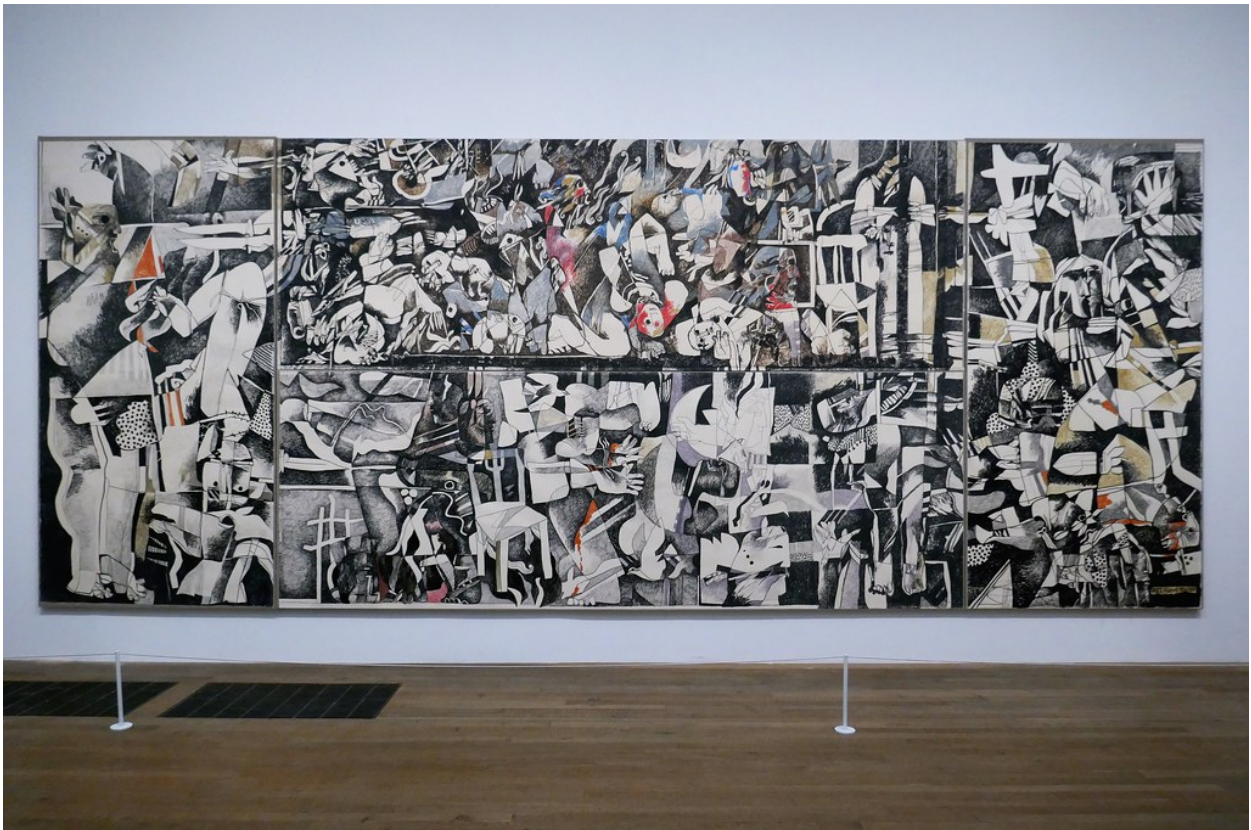






[Grey Art Gallery](https://greyartgallery.nyu.edu/exhibition/taking-shape-arab-abstracton-1950s-1980s-barjeel-january-14-april-4-2020/)

(<https://greyartgallery.nyu.edu/exhibition/taking-shape-arab-abstracton-1950s-1980s-barjeel-january-14-april-4-2020/>)



[Tate Modern](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/al-azzawi-sabra-and-shatila-massacre-t14116)

(<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/al-azzawi-sabra-and-shatila-massacre-t14116>)



## GET IN TOUCH

# Meem Gallery

Meem Gallery is a leading international presence in the management and promotion of modern and contemporary Arab, North African and Iranian art. Founded in 2005 by Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi, Mishal Hamed Kanoo and Charles Pocock, the gallery deals with primary and secondary market sales. Running an ambitious programme of solo and group exhibitions with a special focus on regional Modern Masters including Dia al-Azzawi, Kamal Boullata and Parviz Tanavoli, Meem Gallery also exhibits the work of innovative contemporary artists such as Zhivago Duncan and Mahmoud Obaidi. Works by represented artists can be found in the collections of international museums and institutions such as The British Museum, Tate Modern and The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi; Centre Pompidou and Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; LACMA, Los Angeles; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha and The Metropolitan Museum of Art and MoMA, New York.

In addition to its extensive exhibition schedule, Meem Gallery oversees Meem Editions, a respected in-house publishing programme that regularly commissions work by many of the most well-regarded scholars, academics and writers in the field. The Noor Library for Middle Eastern Art, housed at the gallery, is recognised as one of the largest and most comprehensive resource centres for the arts of the region. To date, the library houses a collection of over 16,000 books, journals and auction catalogues relating to modern, contemporary, classical and ancient Middle Eastern art.

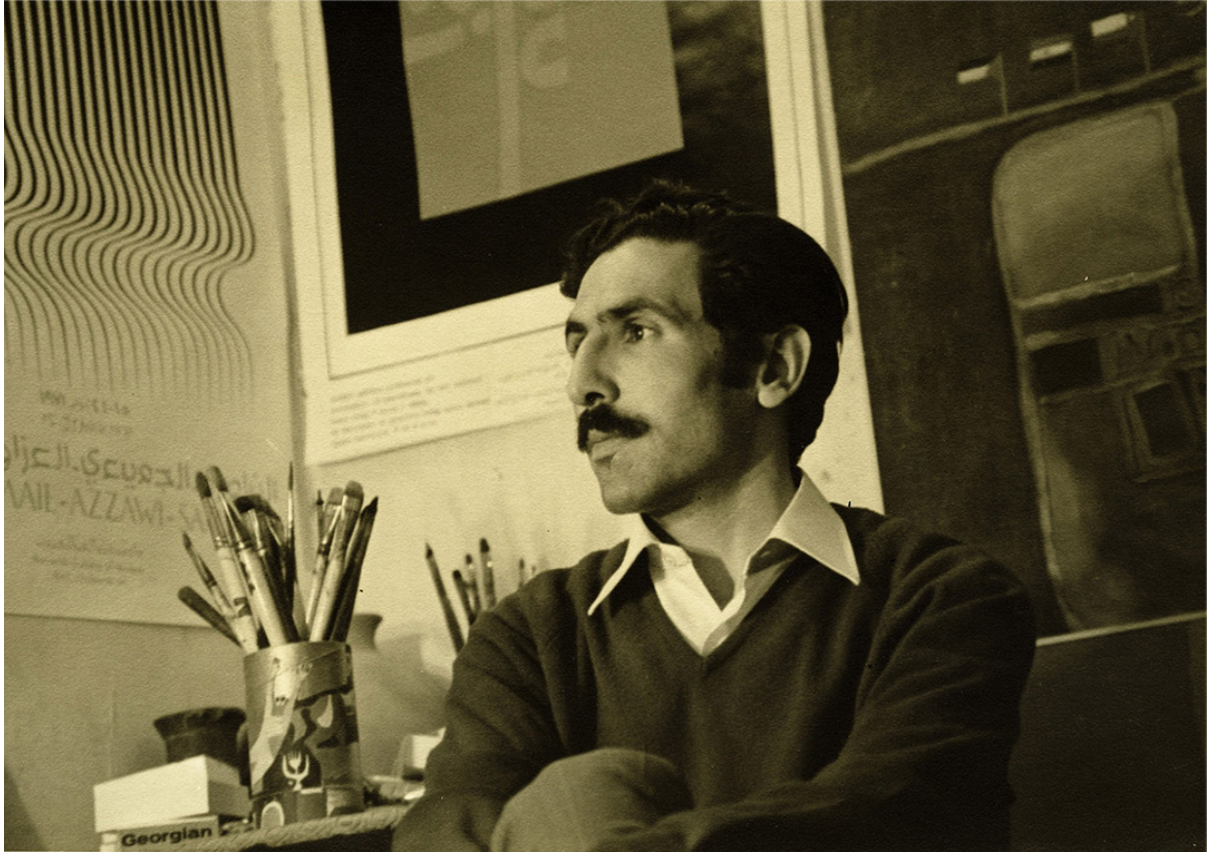
Images are courtesy of Meem Gallery and the artist.

## Locations

Meem Gallery  
Al Quoz, P.O. Box 290  
Dubai, UAE  
T +971 4 347 7883  
W. [www.meemartgallery.com](https://www.meemartgallery.com) (<https://www.meemartgallery.com/>)

[CONTACT](#)<mailto:info@meemartgallery.com>





Dia al-Azzawi in his Baghdad studio, 1972

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