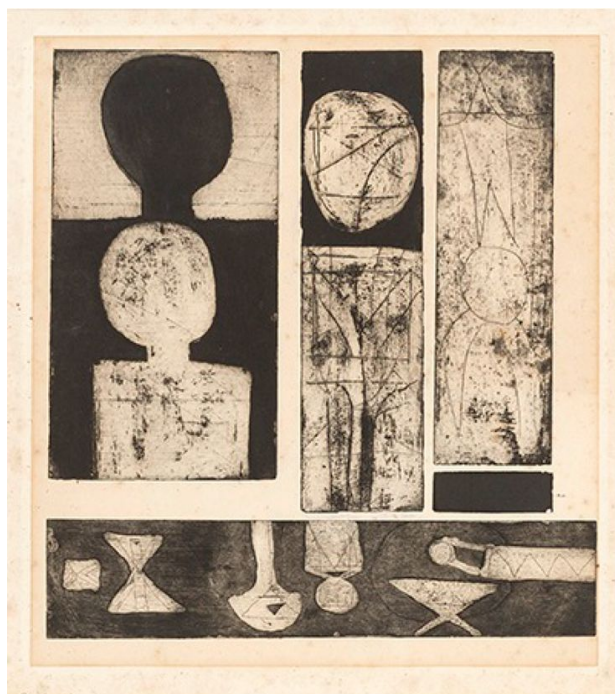




***NIGHT WAS PAPER AND WE WERE INK***  
**Works on Paper from the Barjeel Collection**

**Barjeel Art Foundation Gallery, Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah**  
**28 October 2017 – 4 February 2018**

*Note: The exhibition will not be accompanied by an opening reception. All visitors are welcome to the gallery on Saturday 28 October*



Munira Al Kazi, *Untitled*, 1962, monotype, 38 x 34 cm

Barjeel Art Foundation is pleased to present its new exhibition *Night was paper and we were ink* – a selection of works on paper from the Barjeel Collection, from the mid-twentieth century onwards. The works range from drawing, painting, printmaking and collage and have been produced by some of the most significant artists from the modern Arab world.

The title of the exhibition takes its cue from the poem *The Beginning of the Road*, penned by the popular Syrian poet Adonis (born Ali Ahmad Said Esber). Adonis is commonly credited with leading the modernist movement in Arabic poetry in the latter half of the twentieth century. This poem, which is formulated in the dialogue of two lovers, was published in a book of love poetry, *The Book of Similarities and Beginnings*, in 1980.



The exhibition has been curated by Mandy Merzaban and Karim Sultan, who examine how artists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have employed paper in their work, all the while tracing the influences of the fast-evolving, post-war world around them. This period also saw the development of new visual languages to explore more introspective themes of abstraction, language, memory, and spirituality. The use of paper allowed for a sense of immediacy and freedom for artists, who employed a variety of techniques to express themselves, from the simple sketch to labour intensive methods of print. The visual vocabulary in *Night was paper and we were ink* addresses these anxieties and aspirations and includes a myriad of influences and commentary, dealing with everyday encounters, documentation of historical events, and explorations of poetry, identity, and gesture.

The exhibition features over seventy works from artists across the Arab region. Some of the highlights in the exhibition include:

A portfolio of seventeen silkscreen prints produced by Iraqi artist **Dia Azzawi** (b. 1939), titled *Nasheed Al Jassad* (“The Body’s Anthem”) and made in 1979. Azzawi is a pioneer of Iraq’s modern art movement, garnering international recognition following a career that spans more than five decades. Through painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, book art, and installation, Azzawi draws on poetry and folklore, often combined with boldly colored abstract form, to reflect on ancient and contemporary Iraqi and Arab histories. This work in particular was created as a response to the siege of Tel El Zaatar that took place during the Lebanese Civil War.

A unique monochromatic study of a seated man, made with oil paints on paper in 1980, *Man* by Emirati artist **Hassan Sharif** (b. 1950/ d. 2017), provides an intimate glimpse into the artist’s approach to painting. Sharif is a pioneer of conceptual art in the Gulf, and his oeuvre includes performance, drawing, painting, installation, assemblage, and sculpture. Sharif showed a deep interest in everyday life and often created assemblage with found and mass-produced objects, in order to critique today’s global consumerist culture.

A set of five silkscreen prints on paper made in 1976, **Jafar Islah’s** (b.1946) *Caravan: 5 Stops on the Route* presents a meditation on globalization, travel, and the transience of contemporary life. *The Caravan*, which alludes to the artist’s own travels in France, India, Indonesia, Denmark, Turkey, Italy, and Egypt amongst other countries, is a colorful collage of geographies, cultures, and visual imagery.

A conceptual study of the effect of the Beirut sunlight on a newsprint made in 2012 by **Charbel-Joseph H. Boutros** (b. 1981), *The Sun Is My Only Ally* is part of a series that incorporates the sun into the artistic process; its stenciled title becoming visible only after being exposed to solar UV rays. Referring to the history of photography (from the Greek, ‘to write with light’), Boutros indicates that natural processes are integral to his artistic practice.



**Artists in the exhibition:** Abdelkader Benchamma, Abdul Hadi El Gazzar, Achraf Touloub, Adam Henein, Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said), Ali Al Jabri, Athar Jaber, Baya, Charbel-Joseph H. Boutros, Dia Azzawi, Fateh Moudarres, Gouider Triki, Hassan Sharif, Hussein Madi, Jafar Islah, Kamal Boullata, Kevork Mourad, Lulwah Al-Homoud, Mahmoud Hammad, Muhanna Al Durra, Mohammed Ahmed Ibrahim, Mohammed Kazem, Mohamed Mandi, Munira Al Kazi, Mustafa Al Hallaj, Naim Ismail, Nasser Al Yousif, Nja Mahdaoui, Raffa Nasiri, and Seif Wanly.

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### **About Barjeel Art Foundation**

Barjeel Art Foundation is an independent, UAE-based initiative established to manage, preserve and exhibit an extensive collection of Modern and Contemporary Arab Art. The foundation's guiding principle is to contribute to the intellectual development of the art scene in the Arab region by building a prominent, publicly accessible art collection in the UAE. Part of this objective involves developing a public platform to foster critical dialogue around contemporary art practices with a focus on artists with Arab heritage internationally. The foundation strives to create an open-ended enquiry that responds to and conveys the nuances inherent to Arab histories beyond borders of culture and geography.

By hosting in-house exhibitions, lending artwork to international forums, producing print and online publications, and fashioning interactive public programmes, the foundation strives to serve as an informative resource for contemporary art by Arab artists both locally and on the global stage.

In addition to building an informative database of artists, the foundation is seeking to develop an educational programme that both understands and involves the local community. By establishing partnerships with arts and cultural institutions internationally, the foundation looks to create opportunities to encourage public awareness of the importance of art to the community.