

The logo for Whitechapel Gallery, consisting of two stacked blue rectangles. The top rectangle contains the text "Whitechapel Gallery" in white, and the bottom rectangle is empty.

Whitechapel  
Gallery

# Barjeel Art Foundation Collection: Imperfect Chronology – Debating Modernism II

15 December - 17 April 2016

Large print labels and interpretation

Gallery 7

# Imperfect Chronology: Debating Modernism II

## Works from Barjeel Art Foundation Collection

The second in a series of four displays from the Barjeel Art Foundation's collection, *Debating Modernism II* focuses on the relationship between abstraction and figuration in Arab art from 1967 to 1987. Poetry, portraits and panoramas merge in this lyrical presentation, explored through the work of artists who use calligraphy, the body and landscape as formal points of examination.

At the centre of the exhibition is the large-scale painting, *The Three Palestinian Boys* (1970) from renowned Syrian artist Marwan. This unique perspective of the young boys' inflated figures, is suggestive of an ill-fated future for Palestinian youth after the events of the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. A similar concern is evoked in *Untitled* (1970), a painting of Palestinian children by prominent United Arab Emirates artist Abdul Qader Al Rais. Focusing on everyday life in his home city of Homs, Syrian artist Walid Shami's *Maryam* (1972), depicts a female figure whose expression suggests a sense of melancholy, somewhere between longing and disenchantment.

Also on view is an ink and pencil drawing *Erotic Composition* (1967–70), by Lebanese artist Huguette Caland. This is a study for the sensual, abstract paintings of the body that the artist created later in her career.

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Alongside this is *City II* (1968) in which soft curve-edged forms evoke a floating cityscape.

A highlight of this display is an entire wall dedicated to a series of silkscreens from the 1980s by the influential artist and writer Kamal Boullata, in which Islamic calligraphy is translated into abstracted colourful patterns. The Arabic texts that remain present in each artwork are statements that challenge the notion of calligraphy as a purely Islamic tradition. For example *La Ana Illa Ana* (There is No 'I' but 'I') (1983), is a play on the Islamic saying 'There is No God but God'. These works sit alongside key pieces from modern masters including Abdel Kader Guermez from Algeria, Syrian painter Fateh Moudarres and Ibrahim El Salahi from Sudan.

## **Barjeel Art Foundation Collection:**

### **Imperfect Chronology**

**An exhibition in four parts:**

**8 Sept 2015 – 8 Jan 2017**

Part of the Whitechapel Gallery's programme opening up rarely seen art collections from around the world, a series of four chronological displays highlights works from the Barjeel Art Foundation's collection of Arab art. The theme of an 'imperfect chronology' is the series' starting point: how do we narrate the history of Arab art through the lens of one collection? Over 100 works of art by 60 artists from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day are brought together here to tell this story.

The Barjeel Art Foundation is based in the United Arab Emirates and was founded by Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi in 2010. It holds one of the most extensive collections of art from the Arab world and its diaspora – a region that extends across North Africa and southwestern Asia encompassing the 22 countries of the Arab League. With a population of over 350 million of various ethnic and religious identities, Arabic (in its various dialects) is the dominant language of expression.

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## **Barjeel Art Foundation collection:**

### **Debating Modernism I**

8 September – 6 December 2015

The first display takes an expansive historical approach and explores the emergence and subsequent development of Arab art through drawings and paintings from the early twentieth century to 1967–68, an important historical period in the region, with landmark works by Munira Al-Kazi, Dia Azzawi, Inji Efflatoun, Kadhim Hayder and Hamed Ewais.

## **Barjeel Art Foundation collection:**

### **Debating Modernism II**

15 December 2015 – 17 April 2016

The second display focuses on the relationship between abstract and figurative art produced between 1968 and 1987, focusing on pioneering figures including Kamal Boullata, Huguette Caland, Marwan and Abdul Qader Al Rais.

**Barjeel Art Foundation collection:**

**Mapping the Contemporary I**

26 April – 14 August 2016

The third presentation includes photography and video made between 1990–2000. Focusing on the theme of mapping, Yto Barrada, Mohammed Kazem, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari amongst others explore territory and borders, utilising both documentary and performative techniques.

**Barjeel Art Foundation collection:**

**Mapping the Contemporary II**

23 August 2016 – 8 January 2017

The final display explores how artists using various media engage with urban transformation and architecture in landscapes where they either live or work. These artists include Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Etel Adnan, Marwa Arsanios, GCC and Iman Issa.

## Find Out More:

The exhibition catalogue *Imperfect Chronology: Arab Art from the Modern to the Contemporary – Works from the Barjeel Art Foundation* edited by Omar Kholeif and co-published with Prestel is available in the bookshop. Featuring contributions from Etel Adnan, Kamal Boullata, Iftikhar Dadi, Rasha Salti, Nada Shabout, Gilane Tawadros and Edward McDonald-Toone.

## Works from left, clockwise:

**Dia Azzawi**  
(Iraq, 1939)

*Untitled*  
1976  
Gouache and china ink on paper

*Untitled*  
1976  
Oil on canvas

*Composition*  
1980  
Gouache on paper

**Kamal Boullata**  
(Jerusalem, 1942)

*Fi-I Bid Kan-al-Kalima (In the Beginning was the Word)*  
1983  
Silkscreen

*Al-Alif wa-I-Ya (The Alif and the Ya)*  
1983  
Silkscreen

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*Lam Alif*

1983

Silkscreen

*La ana Illa Ana (There is No 'I' But 'I')*

1983

Silkscreen

*Al-Zahir Al-Batin (The Manifest and the Hidden)*

1983

Silkscreen

**Suleiman Mansour**

(Palestine, 1947)

*Olive Field*

1980

Oil on canvas

**Abdul Qader Al Rais**

(United Arab Emirates, 1951)

*Untitled*

c. 1970

Oil on canvas

**Marwan Kassab Bachi**

(Syria, 1934)

*Three Palestinian Boys*

1970

Oil on canvas

**Walid Shami**

(Syria, 1949)

*Maryam*

1972

Mixed media on board

Moudarres grew up in the countryside around Aleppo in Syria and studied in Rome and Paris. Recognised as an important figure in Arab modernism, his expressionistic works incorporate references to Christian and Muslim religious symbolism as well as Assyrian antiquity.

Al Wahesh wal Miskeen translates loosely as 'The Monster and the Miserable or the Pitiful'. One reading of this work by curator and writer Rasha Salti suggests that it might either form part of a series of works from the early 1980s entitled 'Beirut' in which he responded to the invasion of the city by the Israeli army in 1982 or to the brutal actions of the Syrian government also in the 1980s. On the left hand side of the painting is a small red creature with teeth bared which appears to be menacing a group of figures painted in Moudarres signature lozenge shaped forms. The small scale of the monster compared to the large foregrounded figures is read by Salti as a critique of authoritarian government:

'Regimes of terror need to fabricate a monster to coerce a population into subservience. The monster does not need to be terrifying, his mere evocation is far more menacing than the actual threat he poses'.  
Imperfect Chronology: Arab Art from the Modern to the Contemporary (exh. cat.), pp. 77-79

**Abdelkader Guermaz**

(Algeria, 1919 - 1996)

*Rêve (Dream)*

1975

Oil on canvas

Miloud Labeid

(Morocco, 1938 - 2008)

*Composition*

1973-75

Oil on canvas

**Shafic Abboud**

(Lebanon, 1926 - 2004)

*Relief*

1977

Ceramic mounted on bronze mounted on wood

**Farid Belkahia**

(Morocco, 1934 - 2044)

*Aube (Dawn)*

1983

Pigment on vellum

**Huguette Caland**  
(Lebanon, 1931)

*City II*  
1968

Oil on canvas

*Erotic Composition*  
1967-70

Drawing in ink and pencil

One of the most significant female artists of the Arab world, Huguette Caland is a versatile painter, draftswoman, sculptor and conceptual artist whose career over five decades connects her native city of Beirut and the ornamental patterns of the East to the disciplined formalism of abstraction and minimalism. The artist has historically been drawn to nuanced representations of womens' bodies, her early works illustrating an explosive exploration of sexuality and voluptuousness.

Caland was the daughter of the first Lebanese president and lived and studied in Paris before ultimately settling in California.

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Her early work represented by Erotic Composition focused on the sensitivity of her own body using colour, shape and line to depict the sensuality of the female form. This geography of the body recalls a landscape painted from nature, with elegant curved lines and contours defining often intimate areas of a woman's body.

**Jafar Islah**  
(Kuwait, 1946)

*Colours with Black and Grey*  
1968

Acrylic on canvas

**Ibrahim El Salahi**  
(Sudan, 1930)

*In the Present*  
1987

India ink on Bristol boards

Ibrahim El Salahi is regarded as one of the leading figures in both African and Arab modernist art movements. He started his career in Sudan in the 1950's and later studied at the Slade School of Fine Art in London. He returned to Sudan in 1957 where he contributed to a new Sudanese visual vocabulary, which arose from his integration of Islamic, African, Arab and Western artistic traditions. El-Salahi lived in Qatar before settling back in England in the 1990s. *In the Present* is made up of a series of ink drawings which depict a procession of semi-abstract figures (some evoking a Western tradition, others, a local tribal one). These merge into each other forming a frieze that suggests a blurring of polyphonous traditions and cultures.

**Hassan Sharif**  
(United Arab Emirates, 1951)

*Man*  
1980

Oil on paper



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