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Jumana El Husseini

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Jumana El Husseini (1932-2018) was born to a prominent Palestinian family in Jerusalem in 1932. El Husseini's grandfather, **Hajj Amin al-Husseini** had served as Grand Mufti of

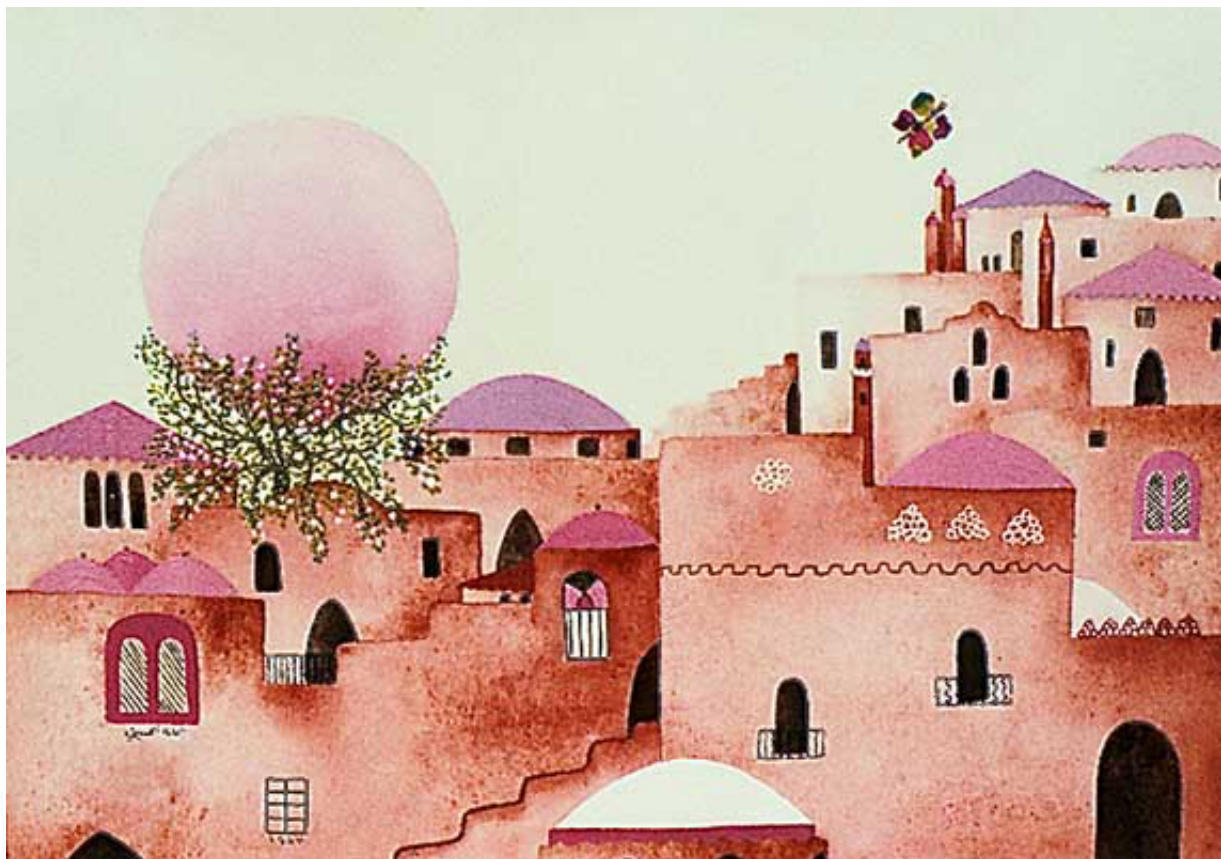
Jerusalem during the Mandate era and was known for his resistance towards both British and Zionist colonial rule. The family, El-Husseini's father **Jamal El Hussein**, a nationalist leader, and mother **Nimati El Alami**, together with their children were forced to leave Palestine in 1948 in the aftermath of the Nakba and settled in Lebanon. El Hussein married **Orfan Bayazod** in 1950 and enrolled at **the Beirut College for Women** (nowadays the Lebanese American University) in 1953 to study for an undergraduate degree in political science. Soon after El Hussein, a mother of a two-year-old, transferred to **the American University of Beirut (AUB)**, where she decided to study art after having been encouraged to do so by her teachers. The 1954 established **Department of Fine Arts** at the AUB offered an alternative to the more conventional art classes given at other local art institutions. El Hussein graduated in 1957 and participated in her first group exhibition at **the Sursock Museum** three years later in 1960. She also exhibited at the Sursock's **Salon d'Automne** in 1964 and 1967, as well as took part in the Biennali of Alexandria (1969), Kuwait (1973), Baghdad (1974) and Venice (1979). El Hussein lived and worked in Beirut until the Israeli invasion of 1982, when she relocated to Paris, where she lived until her death in 2018.



'Untitled' (1973). Courtesy of the Dalloul Art Foundation.

For a Palestinian artist in Lebanon El Husseini occupied a somewhat a peculiar position as she was neither part of the inner circle of the cosmopolitan Beiruti art gallery and café scene, nor did she practice from the Palestinian refugee camps. At the same time, the ethos of El Husseini's art was exceptional as it was politically motivated yet experimental aesthetically and visually.

El Husseini's oeuvre is characterised by the geometric representations of Jerusalem. These depictions of the city of her birth are fairytale like; dreamy representations, reveries, depicting an idealised picture of Jerusalem, free from any concrete reference to the experience of living in the city. Exceptionally, there are no people – only the city of her soul with its mesmerising architecture. El Husseini portrays Jerusalem's well known buildings, studded gates, arched windows, domes, belfries and minarets, devoid of humans, creating a personal dreamscape, in a calm, equally dreamy colour palette of pastel colours and whites, accented with gold, resembling medieval miniatures of the Holy City. Palestine was El Husseini's main source of artistic inspiration and Jerusalem a recurring theme and main motif in her work. She offered viewers opportunities to gaze and adore Jerusalem through her own dreams, which represent her childhood and youth, a dream-like world that was no longer accessible to her in reality.



Courtesy of the artist.

In addition to the recurring Jerusalem motifs, El Hussein's practice is characterised by the use of various media, ranging from painting to sculpture and from ceramics to embroidery. The use of mixed media, for instance combining oil paint with stitching, came into El Hussein's practice in the early 1970s. These multidimensional compositions accentuate El Hussein's unwillingness to differentiate between 'fine arts' and 'crafts' – an obsession usually very present in various art historical discourses. In the 1980s and 1990s, El Hussein continued creating mixed media works. These increasingly abstract compositions consisted of scratched scribbles, shapes and words. As El Hussein's work became more abstract, her colour scheme darkened: her usual bright hues were replaced by darker, moodier colours.



'Untitled' (1970). Courtesy of the Dalloul Art Foundation.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

Galerie Joëlle Mortier Valat, Paris, France (2004)

Darat Al Funun, Amman, Jordan (2002)

Al Ma'mal Gallery, Jerusalem, Palestine (2002)

Qattan Foundation, Ramallah, Palestine (2002)

Anadil Gallery, Jerusalem, Palestine (1993)

Arab Heritage Gallery, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia (1984)

Woodstock Gallery, London, UK (1965)



'Untitled' (1970). Courtesy of the Dalloul Art Foundation.

Selected Group Exhibitions

Rituals of Signs and Transitions (1975-1995), Darat Al Funun, Amman, Jordan (2015)

Tajreed, CAP, Kuwait, Kuwait (2013)

Nabad Gallery, Amman, Jordan (2008)

Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, Amman, Jordan (2002)

Institut du monde arabe, Paris, France (1989)



'Untitled' (1999).

References and Further Readings:

[Alessandra Amin's biography](#) on Jumana El Husseini.

Kamal Boullata (2009), *Palestinian Art 1850 to the Present*, London: Saqi.

Kamal Boullata (2004), Artists Re-Member Palestine in Beirut, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 32(4).

The artist's biography on her [Website](#).

Tags: Palestine



by *Elina Sairanen*

Elina Sairanen is a museologist, art historian and the co-founder of Mathqaf. Currently, she's pursuing a PhD in museology at the University of Leicester exploring the region's first pan-Arab art museums. When she is not writing or thinking about museums and art, you can find her in the countryside skiing and hiking.

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