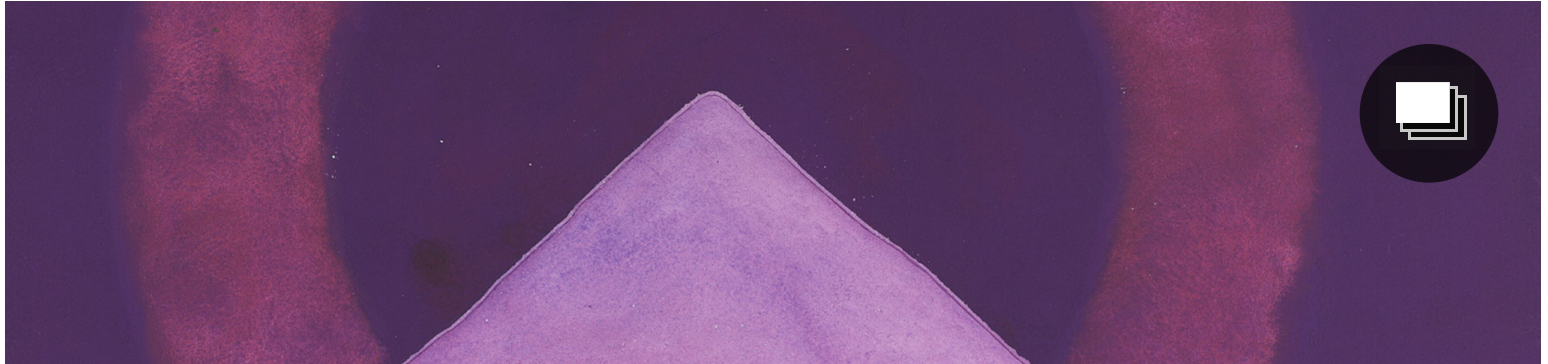





## Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History


### West Asia: Postmodernism, the Diaspora, and Women Artists






For western Asia, postmodernism applies to the post-1980 period that witnessed a shift from more individualistic art, with one or two points of reference, to forms of expression with multiple references that do not necessarily converge into a single dominant aesthetic. Each country in the region entered this period from its own unique path of development, with divergent and at times conflicting views on the meaning of postmodernism. The diverse ethnic and religious cultures that exist in the region and within each country (such as in Iraq or Israel) provide artists with a complex and rich palette of references. For example, Israeli artists from diverse cultural backgrounds cross boundaries and fuse elements from Islamic and Jewish art (1983.199).

Abstract art is the preferred vehicle for expressing personal experiences within a collective sensibility that is unique to the environment. The short history of postmodern art in the Arabian Peninsula represents a frantic attempt to salvage an indigenous culture that experienced an almost instant

transformation from nomadic life to a modern consumer society. Within this context, art vacillates between abstraction and realistic representations of local culture. Iridescent colors derived from traditional textiles or the desert landscape define the visual representations that meld with Western aesthetics and techniques (Abdel Rahim Sharif, *Composition* ; Yussef Ahmad, *Composition* ). Arabic script embedded in mixed-media formats has found a flourishing market in the Gulf (Faisal Samra, *Text Body* ). Kuwait, a country with only a recent history in modern art, saw one of its artists established on the international scene defining art beyond traditional concepts and local influences (1996.264.3). In the 1970s, Israeli artists were the first in the region to use Conceptual art to express political themes. In the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the first Palestinian *intifada*, Israeli artists have interrogated identity politics, the boundaries of cultures, and for the first time are exploring, with Palestinian artists from the West Bank and inside Israel, the dilemmas faced by both peoples.

Pluralism characterizes the postmodern period, and in art the references are not exclusively Western. Artists use innovative techniques and materials, including electronic technology, video, photography, installation, performance, and sculpture. In contrast to the earlier romanticized imagery of the environment or cultural representations, artists in the last decades of the twentieth century confronted the historical and political forces that bind the cultures of the region, such as globalization and the consequences of decades of civil war. Their themes draw attention to social inequities, human rights violations, environmental and economic issues, neocolonial interests in the region, and repressive regimes. The sophisticated multilayered approach to art and the critical exploration of controversial issues often censored in the Arab media contribute to the popularity of this genre of art among the younger generation (Walid Ra'ad, *My Neck Is Thinner Than a Hair 1/100*; Khalil Rabah, *Grafting* .

## Diaspora

Ongoing conflict and violence mark the twentieth-century history of many countries in the region. Exile and dislocation are consequently common experiences among artists. The majority of the artists working outside their countries of origin are Lebanese, Palestinian, and more recently Iraqi. Among the post-World War II immigrants, several had distinguished careers and contributed to art in their adopted countries (Chafic Abboud, *Lebanon* ; Mona Hatoum, *Light Sentence* ; Marwan Qassab Bachi, *Al-Wakef* ). Initially, many artists in the diaspora considered their exile temporary and insisted they would return home once conditions were favorable. However, since the 1990s, artists have become less troubled by issues of locality and work freely between two and sometimes three cultures. Diaspora artists are setting the trend for contemporary art in the region; those whose work is acknowledged by Western art institutions are celebrated at home. The work of these transnational artists, along with a renewed Western interest in the region and in Islamic culture, have helped draw international attention to contemporary art. Arab artists, for example, are participating in international exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale and documenta in Germany. Whether working in the diaspora or in their respective countries, artists are forging a new consciousness that is both universal and humane.

## Women Artists

The status of women differs from country to country and cannot be generalized for the entire region, which contains a population of over 300 million, half of whom are women. In Muslim countries, the status of women depends on the constitutional and legal role of Islamic law, on economic and educational progress, as well as political stability and security. It also depends on variables such as social traditions that are often alien to Islamic precepts. With the exception of the segregation of exhibition visitors in Saudi Arabia, women have long had equal opportunities to study and exhibit their work.