



MOHANNA DURRA

A Jordanian painter widely regarded as a pioneer of the Jordanian Arts Movement and for being the first to introduce Cubism and abstract art into the Jordanian visual arts community. He is a professor at the Faculty of Fine Art and Design at University of Jordan and serves as the President of the Jordan Association of Fine Arts.

Born in Amman, Jordan in 1938 to a Lebanese father and a Turkish mother, Al-Dura was raised in a striking red hilltop villa in downtown Amman. The house is only a few blocks away from Amman's popular tourist attraction, the Roman amphitheatre, and is commonly believed to rest atop an ancient Roman cemetery. As a child, spooky folklore about his neighbourhood sparked a fascination with ghouls and "ignited fantasy in what was beyond the observable, physical world."

A notoriously rebellious youth with a penchant for drawing, he was sent by his father to study art with George Allief (also known as *George Aleef*), a former Russian officer with the Tsarist army. Allief taught him the basics of watercolour, drawing and painting, and the European understanding of perspective. These lessons with Allief marked the young artist's transition from childhood drawing to the disciplined work of a professional artist. According to Dura's memoirs, Allief taught his students to meticulously render a matchbox as an exercise in perspective.

Following the formative years with Allief, the young Mohanna met Dutch painter, William Hallowin, who introduced him to Rembrandt and the Dutch school which sparked an obsession with the power of light. In 1954, he was sent to the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome to become the first Jordanian to receive a formal art education. He claims to have been disillusioned by the academy and committed himself to studying the classics through art in museums and churches. After graduating in 1958, Durra returned to Amman to teach history of art at the Teachers' Training College. In 1964, Durra established the Fine Arts Section at the Department of Culture and Art, Amman, and then established the Jordan



Untitled, Acrylic on card, 1980, 65x43cm

This website uses cookies

This site uses cookies to help make it more useful to you. Please contact us to find out more about our Cookie Policy.

[MANAGE COOKIES](#)

[ACCEPT](#)

art studio; the first Jordanian to establish an art studio to teach local students. Among his notable students was the Princess Wijdan Ali who is best known for her attempts to revive the traditions of Islamic art. Another student was Nawal Abdallah, who is one of the leading lights of Jordan's contemporary arts scene. Durra is best known for his portraits and also for the way he treated shifting masses of colour. He is also acknowledged as the first artist to introduce cubism and abstract art to the Jordanian arts community.

Exhibitions:

Durra held numerous solo exhibitions in Rome, Florence, the USSR, various Arab and European capitals, Washington D.C., Plazzo Venezia, the 1988 Venice Biennale Exhibition, and the Fine Arts National Museum of Valletta, Malta.

He later held solo exhibitions in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts and the Austrian Parliament Central Hall in Vienna. In 2000, "Mohanna Forever: Pioneer of Modern Art in Jordan" was exhibited at the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts and in 2006, he had a solo show at Lines Gallery, Amman, Jordan.

Durra's work is represented in various national and international collections, including that of the Vatican, the Imperial Court of Japan, the President of the Philippines, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau of Canada, David Rockefeller, The Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, Fannie Mae Bank in Washington, D.C., Bonn City Hall, Washington, D.C. City Hall, the University of San Francisco, Georgetown University, as well as several Jordanian institutes.

Honours and recognition:

Durra served as a diplomat in Italy, Tunisia, Egypt and later Russia, as Ambassador to the Arab League in Moscow. In 2002 the Postal Authorities of Jordan issued a 200 fils postage stamp in honour of Mohanna Durra displaying one of his paintings.

In November 2006 the Ministry of Culture named an art gallery after Mohanna Durra, and held a national symposium about his art with the participation of prominent Jordanian artists and critics.