

Notable Palestinian artist and intellectual passes away at 77



Bilqis 5
(Acrylic on canvas,
120 x 328
cm, 2014)
by Kamal
Boullata,
featured
from the
Barjeel
Art

Foundation (<https://www.barjeelartfoundation.org/collection/bilqis-5-kamal-boullata/>) website.

Palestinian artist, writer, and historian Kamal Boullata passed away today in Berlin.



Kamal Boullata. Image courtesy of the [Arab American Institute](https://www.aaiusa.org/announcing_gibrangala_awardee_kamal_boullata_renowned_palestinian_artist)
(https://www.aaiusa.org/announcing_gibrangala_awardee_kamal_boullata_renowned_palestinian_artist)

Boullata was born in Jerusalem in 1942. His oeuvre engages with themes pertaining to his own Palestinian identity, exile, and loss. He grew up in the Christian Quarter of the Old City, which fell under Jordanian control after 1948, when Israel occupied West Jerusalem. As a boy, he taught himself the basics of art in the absence of opportunities for a formal education. His parents sent him to study at renowned iconic painter Khalil al-Halabi's studio in the summers of his youth. Repeatedly painting icons and breaking down the figurative art process led him into further investigations of geometry and abstract painting.

In several interviews, he has [spoken](http://myoliveroots.org/arts/kamal-boullata/) of sitting as a child near Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, sketching out its geometric patterning and calligraphic adornments. In his work, he has transformed angular Kufic designs into colorful geometries that tessellate across his silkscreens and canvasses. His art is suffused with influences from traditional Palestinian embroidery patterns and elements of Western geometric modernism, according to the [Barjeel Art Foundation](https://www.barjeelartfoundation.org/artist/palestine/kamal-boullata/).

Lam Alif (Silkscreen, 51 x 51 cm, 1983) – Kamal Boullata. Image courtesy of the [Barjeel Art Foundation](https://www.barjeelartfoundation.org/collection/lam-alif/)
(<https://www.barjeelartfoundation.org/collection/lam-alif/>) website.

“I belong to Jerusalem, to Palestine,” he said in an [interview](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9TUN2X8OLE) with Art Dubai. “It’s been half a century of my life that I have spent away from home. In the meantime, I have found my home in



my own work, in my own painting.”

After selling some of his paintings at exhibitions in Jerusalem and Amman, he was (<https://www.paljourneys.org/en/biography/9735/kamal-boullata>) able to fund his study of art in Rome at the Academia di Belle Arti, followed by three additional years at the Corcoran Art Museum School in Washington, DC. He worked briefly as the art director for a publishing house, Dar al-fata al-'Arabi, in Beirut, designing the templates for future publications.

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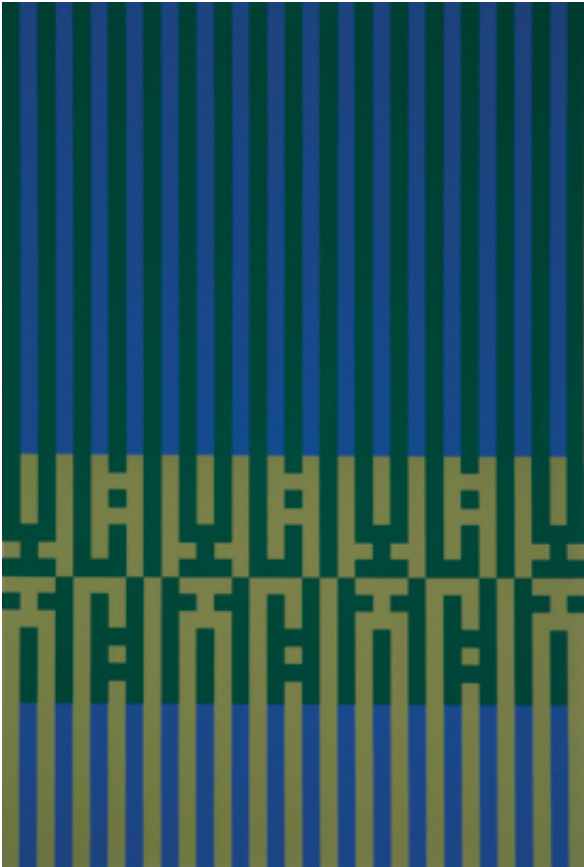
Kamal Boullata

Engaging in hurufiyya (hurufism, or letterism), his artworks often abstracted the letter and offered lettering – regardless of its legibility – as itself a work of art. After 1967, he often used the form of a square, which he “dissected” through “lines and thin layers of oppositional colors...transform[ing] the surface of the paper into a prism refracting colour and light,” **according** (<https://www.barjeelartfoundation.org/artist/palestine/kamal-boullata/>) to the Barjeel Art Foundation.

Later in his life, he cited Berlin’s influence on his art, particularly referencing the impact of music and the presence of more than 80 concert halls and three opera houses in the city. In 2012-2013 he was elected to be a Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg (Institute of Advanced Study) in Berlin.

Boullata’s works have been shown at the British Museum, the Museum of the Alhambra in Granada, the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, the New York Public Library, the Bibliotheque Louis Notari in Monaco, the Sharjah Art Museum, the Zimmerli Art Museum in New Jersey, and the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts in Amman. He has received awards in Morocco and New York.

As a writer, he has also **pursued** (<https://www.paljourneys.org/en/biography/9735/kamal-boullata>) research on the history of art. He authored the seminal, authoritative text of Palestinian art history, *Palestinian Art: From 1850 to the Present*, elevating the history and lives of countless Palestinian artists to the level of world art historical discourse. In 2001, he received a grant from the Ford Foundation to conduct field research on post-Byzantine painting in Palestine. His writing has been displayed in catalogues, anthologies, and academic journals, and has also been translated into French,



German, Italian, Hebrew, and Spanish.

“For me, writing is like a way to go home,” Boullata said in an [interview \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0V1FAfZ5vg\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0V1FAfZ5vg) with Art Dubai.

Boullata will live on through his legacy as an intellectual titan of the Palestinian diaspora. Boullata’s latest book, *There Where You Are Not: Selected Writings of Kamal Boullata*, is set to be released in November 2019.

Comments are closed.

There Is No I But I (Silkscreen, 60 x 40 cm, 1983) —

Kamal Boullata. Image courtesy of the [Barjeel Art Foundation](https://www.barjeelartfoundation.org)

(<https://www.barjeelartfoundation.org/collection/there-is-no-i-but-i/>) website.

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