Reflections
contemporary art of the
Middle East and North Africa
Please follow the one-way route as you explore the three sections of the exhibition: The Figure, Abstraction and Tangled Histories.

Further works from this collection are displayed in the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic world (Room 43).

The British Museum has collected works on paper by artists of the Middle East and North Africa since the 1980s. The works in this exhibition comprise many of those acquired thanks to the supporters group CaMMEA (The Contemporary and Modern Middle Eastern Art acquisition group) formed in 2009.

While the first room focuses on the uses of figuration and abstraction, in the second room the artists present us with a refracted image of a region through the prism of personal experience.

The artists featured, whether living in the countries of their birth or in diaspora, belong firmly within the globalised world of art. Importantly, they also allude to the artistic or literary heritage with which they are associated. Their works speak of taboos, history, and current politics and reflect on societies that have experienced extraordinary changes in living memory.
Nicky Nodjoumi
(born Kermanshah, Iran, 1942)
The Accident, 2013

A group of men are gathered aggressively around a lone man in a chair against the backdrop of a car crash. In 1974 Nodjoumi, who had been studying at the City College of New York, returned to Iran. For several months he was questioned repeatedly by SAVAK, the secret police, suspicious of his activities in the United States. This deeply troubling experience has informed his subsequent work. Today, Nodjoumi lives in New York.

Ink on paper
2014,6042.1–4.
Funded by Maryam and Edward Eisler

Samira Abbasy
(born Ahvaz, Iran, 1965)
Unravelling, 2006
From the series Chemical Hysterical

This woman’s features echo a Persian painting but are subverted by other faces that emerge from her head. The texts consist of labels for body parts taken from a Persian medical manuscript, and in her dress in Arabic are lyrics from songs by the popular Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum (1904?–1975). This blending of sources reflects Abbasy’s upbringing in Ahvaz, a city in Iran with a strong Arab tradition. Abbasy moved to Britain in 1967 and now lives in New York.

Charcoal on paper
2009,6004.1. Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund

Parastou Forouhar
(born Tehran, Iran, 1962)
Red is My Name, Green is My Name – Karree, 2008

In red and green, the colours of the Iranian flag, Forouhar traces a delicate geometrical pattern, seemingly drawn from Persian traditions of miniature painting and carpet designs. In fact, they are composed of scenes of violence, instruments of torture and male genitalia. The violent imagery reflects Forouhar’s own story and is highly visible in the art she makes.
In 1998 her parents, activists and intellectuals Dariush and Parvaneh Forouhar, were assassinated in Iran. Forouhar lives in Berlin.

Digital prints on Hahnemühle rag paper, Artist’s Proof 1/2 2016,6002.1–4. Funded by CaMMEA

Fadi Yazigi  
(born Latakia, Syria, 1966)  
Untitled, 2013

‘The Babylonians were depicting the human form 6000 years ago and I, along with others, am simply continuing what they began.’

Yazigi’s wide-eyed figures seem to hark back to an ancient time. They are part-human, contorted and without gender. The emphasis is on the face as though the body is a mere extension of it. A sculptor as well as a painter, Yazigi studied in Damascus and lives in the city.

Mixed media on rice paper 2016,6048.1. Funded by CaMMEA

‘By its rhythm, movement and sensuality, each body becomes a moment of truth, an instant of beauty to be captured by a glance.’

Noureddine Khayachi, 1918–87

The Figure

During the first half of the 20th century, art schools were being established across the Middle East in Tunis, Beirut, Baghdad, Cairo, Jerusalem and Damascus. Artists were often sent on scholarships to the art schools of Europe to Rome, Paris or Berlin. There they would study the figure away from conservatism at home as, in Muslim culture, unease prevailed over the depiction of the human figure.

From preparatory studies for sculpture or oil paintings, to observational portraiture, the subjects range from the anonymous models of a teaching studio to intimate renderings of loved ones and friends.
Noureddine Khayachi
(born Tunis, Tunisia, 1918–87)
Untitled, 1960s

Khayachi was entranced by the human body
and these sketches capture his model in
different poses. He painted the figure in various
forms, from intimate drawings on paper to large-
scale oil paintings.

Son of the prominent painter Hédi
Khayachi (1882–1948), the young Khayachi
graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in
Rome in 1941. Working in a classical style, he
became known as a painter of Tunisia. Such
is his renown that he was commemorated on
the Tunisian postage stamps of 1996.

Charcoal on paper
2017,6042.1. Gift of Nada Bayoud

Noureddine Khayachi, Hannana (the henna painter), 1970s Postage stamp, 810 millimes, Republic of Tunisia 1996.
Shafic Abboud and Michel Basbous

Abboud and Basbous both studied at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts in Beirut before pursuing their studies in Paris. Abboud, a figurative and abstract painter, was to spend time in the studios of André Lhote and Fernand Léger while Basbous, a sculptor, with Russian artist Ossip Zadkine.

Abboud was the first in the Middle East to make artists’ books. Le Bouna is a folktale about two brothers, Murr (bitter) and Helou (sweet) and their trials at the hands of the evil village priest (bouna). He learnt this story from his grandmother in the village of Mhaidse, northeast of Beirut, where he spent much of his childhood.

Basbous lived and worked in Rachana with his sculptor brothers and his avant-garde poet wife, Thérèse, turning the village into an artistic and cultural centre known as the St-Paul de Vence of Lebanon.

Many of his drawings were the basis for sculptures which can be seen in the garden at Rachana.

Michel Basbous
The garden at Rachana
Photo courtesy Anachar Basbous.
Shafic Abboud
(born Mhaidse, Lebanon, 1926–2004)
*Nu*, about 1969
Gouache and charcoal on paper
2015,6020.1. Funded by CaMMEA

Shafic Abboud
*Le Bouna*, 1953–54
Artist’s book, numbered 10/20
2016,6060.1. Funded by CaMMEA

Michel Basbous
(born Rachana, Lebanon, 1921–81)
Untitled, 1958–62
Charcoal on paper
2014,6046.2. Funded by CaMMEA

Michel: ‘I was born a sculptor. I had no choice.’ Thérèse: ‘People in the village would say that from the age of ten you would retreat to a barn at the bottom of the garden and sculpt. Above the door you had written “Art is above everything.”’

Marwan Kassab-Bachi, known as Marwan
(born Damascus, Syria, 1934–2016)

Passionate about art from a young age, Marwan left Damascus for Berlin in 1957. Between 1957 and 1962, he attended master classes there, along with Georg Baselitz, in the studio of the influential Hann Trier. During the 1970s he began to concentrate obsessively on the head or face, which over the years grew more abstract. In *Gesichtslandschaft* he transformed his own likeness into a landscape.

Marwan
*Gesichtslandschaft* (Face Landscape), 1973
Etching and drypoint numbered 29/75
2019,6011.1

Marwan
*Head*, 2008
Pencil and watercolour
2011,6020.1. Funded by CaMMEA
Hafidh al-Droubi and Marcos Grigorian

Droubi and Grigorian both studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome – Droubi in 1938, Grigorian during the 1950s. Each artist made significant contributions to the arts in Iraq and Iran.

Droubi recalls his parents warning him against sketching human figures when he was a child, afraid that a spirit might come and breathe life into his drawings. Undeterred, he taught life drawing in his studio in Baghdad.

For Grigorian, drawing was a way to promote the purity of line and form. In the woman on a chair, he combined a traditional model’s pose with ‘props’ from the bazaars of Tehran.

Hafidh al-Droubi
(born Baghdad, Iraq, 1914–91)
Untitled, late 1960s
Early sketch for the painting Magic of the Abbasids
Pencil on paper
2013,6025.9. Funded by CaMMEA

Marcos Grigorian
(born Kropotkin, southern Russia, 1925–2007)
Untitled, 1953
Ink on paper
2014,6045.3. Funded by CaMMEA

Marcos Grigorian
Untitled, 1974
Ink on paper
2014,6045.1. Funded by CaMMEA
Yehuda Bacon
Leah Bacon (née Rothberg) (left), and Käthe Becher, Jerusalem, about 1968. Photo courtesy Glenn Sujo.

Yehuda Bacon
(born in Ostrava, Moravia 1929)

Bacon emigrated to Palestine in 1946, and studied and later taught at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem where he still lives. A survivor of the Holocaust, his subject matter often evokes the trauma of his experience in the camps, where he also learnt to draw.

Included in the sketches of the faces, are those of his landlady in Jerusalem, Käthe Becher (centre), and Bacon’s wife Leah (lower right). In *Four Figures* he summons the memory of his family, his father Isidor, mother Ethel and elder sister Hanna, who perished in the concentration camps at Birkenau and Stutthof, and his younger sister Rivka who, like Yehuda, survived the war. The protective arm may allude to Bacon himself. The format of the pair of prints on the right echoes the talismans that once hung in Jewish households for protection. The figures derive from Jewish history and legend, and include, possibly King Solomon.

Sheet of studies from a clothbound workbook, about 1971–73. Pen and ink on paper.
1995,0929.21. Gift of Alice and Walter Schwab

*Four Figures*, 1957
Etching, aquatint and drypoint, numbered 3/6
1990,0407.9

Untitled, 1970s
Aquatint and soft-ground etching, numbered 5/9
1992,1003.50-51
**Hayv Kahraman**  
(born Baghdad, Iraq, 1981)  
*Honor Killing*, 2006  

In this unsettling image, women in traditional *hijab* hang in ever-diminishing sizes from the branches of a tree, the thick trunk of which recalls the brush strokes of a calligrapher. The title refers to the murder (often by family members) of women accused of breaking social conventions governing gender relations.

In 1992, after the end of the First Gulf War (1990–91) Kahraman fled Iraq with her mother and sister to Sweden and later studied in Florence.

Sumi ink and acrylic on paper  
2019,6007.1. Funded by CaMMEA

**Laura Boushnak**  
(born Kuwait, 1976)  
From the series *I Read I Write*, 2011  

Boushnak’s work is concerned with women and literacy across the Arab world. Documenting a project in Cairo, Boushnak asked the class why they wanted to learn to read and write. The answers, written by her sitters on the photographs, revealed the barriers the women faced without these essential skills.

On this photograph, Rasha Badr el-Din explains: ‘My niece asked me to read for her and I couldn’t help her, which embarrassed me... each girl should have the right to education and if it’s difficult to achieve she should fight for it.’

Photographic print, numbered 1/5  
2012,6043.1. Funded by CaMMEA

**Huda Lutfi**  
(born Cairo, Egypt, 1948)  
*Al-Sitt and her Sunglasses*, 2008  

‘Give me my freedom, release my hands...’

This playful portrait is of the legendary Egyptian singer, Umm Kulthum (1904?– 1975). Affectionately known as *Al-Sitt* (The Lady), she wears her characteristic sunglasses and lyrics of the song *Al-Atlal* (The Ruins) are inscribed across the background in the artist’s own hand.
Sponsor's statement

For Huda Lutfi, Umm Kulthum was not only a feminine icon but an important voice of social critique, which she harnesses to communicate her own views. Lutfi studied in Montreal and lives in Cairo.

Collage and acrylic paint on card 2009,6025.1. Funded by CaMMEA

**Shideh Tami**
(born Tehran, Iran, 1962)
Untitled, 2004

A self-taught artist and a poet, Tami has accompanied each painting in this book with her own handwritten words in Persian. The poems ruminate on the passing of time, love, intimacy and human fallibility.

The delicacy of the line drawings and sensitivity of the poetry are belied by the solidity of the pages – each one is a metal sheet usually used for radiographic plates, held together in a ring binder.

Handmade artist’s book with paint, metal, X-ray and paper. 2008,6038.1

‘Around my eyes, I draw two black lines. They are shadows on the past that strike my face.’

‘In my world of words You are lost maybe As the memory of a glance That one day Passed by me in the alley And I named it As a dream.’

Shideh Tami, translated by Sarah Yazdanirad
Afaf Zurayk  
(born Beirut, Lebanon, 1948)  
*Qisah (Story)*, 2016  

Afaf Zurayk writes about this work:  

‘I allowed my hand the freedom it needed to express, and sometimes to narrate, the many emotional complexities and tonalities of a final rift between two people. Each drawing grew organically to the rhythm of my thoughts and feelings as I relived in heart, mind and hand every nuance of being at once within the relationship and at the point of separating.’

Zurayk studied art in Beirut, and Islamic art at Harvard University in the United States.

Pen and ink on Arches paper  
2019,6013.1–12. Funded by CaMMEA

‘The fear of togetherness  
Dissipates in a sea of Intricacies  
Woven by time  
The spider  
Of truths  
And blessings.  
Frozen, etched and melted  
Burning from within  
Forming candles  
Inside mountains  
Drumming a glow  
Of understanding.  
Being there, almost.’

Afaf Zurayk
Canan Tolon
(born Istanbul, Turkey, 1955)
From the series *Futur Imparfait* (Imperfect Future), 1986–99

These drawings act as a memoir of the years Tolon spent in a French hospital having contracted polio as a child. The subjects are the people she encountered: ‘There are children, there are men, and there are women learning to live.’ She drew these on mylar, a translucent polyester film used in architectural design, and the compositions were erased and redrawn over many years. Tolon studied architecture at the University of California before becoming an artist. She lives in the United States.

Ink and graphite on mylar
2013,6039.1.1,18,19 and 25. Funded by CaMMEA with contribution from SAHA, from a series of 33

Rachid Koraïchi
(born Ain Beida, Algeria, 1947)
*A Nation in Exile*, 1981

Rachid Koraïchi and Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008) met in Tunis in 1982. ‘It was not a question for me of illustrating his poems’ described Koraïchi, ‘I loved his texts and he appreciated my work. I wanted to seize aesthetically the emotion that was the essence of the poem.’

The compositions combine the words of the poems, written backwards or in different directions, with magical signs and symbols. Koraïchi studied in Algiers and Paris.

Etchings
2016,6059. 2b, 5b, 8b and 9b.
Gift of Rachid Koraïchi, from a series of 22.
'He greeted me on 5th Avenue
Leaning over a cement
fountain he wept
He gave the house back its shadow
We hid in the echo
Have we died yet?
No...
Have you changed a little?
No
Is the journey still the same?
And the port, is it in the heart?
Yes
It was far and even further away
It’s absence final...
Nothing has changed...
The songs have rendered me homeless,
homless
This is not my time
No, this is not my homeland
And no, this is not my body
It was what it will become...'.

From *It was what it will become* by Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008),
eulogy to his friend and poet Rashed Hassan,
translated by Lubna Fahoum

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**Timo Nasseri**
(born Berlin, Germany, 1972)
*One and One #20, 2010*

Born to an Iranian father and a German mother, Nasseri’s travels to Iran and Central Asia introduced him to Islamic architecture. He was mesmerised by the *muqarnas*, a type of honeycomb-shaped roof vaulting typically used in the architecture of Iran and elsewhere.

In this drawing, he starts from a central point expanding outwards using a compass and ruler evoking the geometrical order of the *muqarnas*. Nasseri studied in Berlin where he also lives.

White ink on inked paper
2010,6026.1. Funded by CaMMEA

‘Whether the limpid ruby love itself,
or whether its real love be for the Sun,
Indeed no difference is there in these loves
both aspects are the radiance of the dawn.’

Jalal al-Din Rumi, 1207–73
Sponsor's statement

**Y.Z. Kami**  
(born Tehran, Iran, 1956)  
*Endless Prayer XIII*, 2008

The fragments of text come from the *Masnavi* (a series of books of poetry) by the mystic poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–73), while the circular shape recalls the concentric brick domes in Persian architecture. For Kami, the dome is a metaphor for the heavens, bringing with it the notion of a temple and a place for contemplation.

After studying philosophy in Paris, Kami turned to art and studied at the University of California. He lives in New York.

Printed texts and blue squares pasted onto linen  
2010,6030.1 Funded by CaMMEA

‘Every line, thin or thicker, short or longer, vertical or horizontal carries intense emotions, a game, in which the unspoken is delicately whispered to the paper.’

Brigitte Caland on her mother Huguette, 1931–2019

**Abstraction**

Abstraction has been an influential strand in international modern art. It has also long been part of the tradition of Islamic art, together with geometry and calligraphy.

The stylistic choices of the artists are not simply attempts to avoid direct representation of the figure. They adapt shape, pattern, line and colour to represent complex, personal or conceptual subjects. At times, they are meditations on the formal purity of abstraction itself.

From shape to script, real or invented, the artists are aware of the power that geometric and calligraphic abstraction can possess. The resulting works appear effortlessly modern while also evoking a shared visual heritage.
Hanaa Malallah  
(born Nasiriyah, Iraq, 1958)  
*Street*, 1993

The drawing of interlocking paving stones of a street, scratched, stained and littered with scraps of newspaper, alludes to the degradation of existence resulting from sanctions imposed on Iraq in the 1990s by the United Nations. Malallah’s work is characterised by what she describes as ‘Ruins Technique’ of which *Street* is an early iteration that later resulted in the burning and distressing of material as a part of her practice.

Malallah studied in Baghdad and lives currently in London.

Collage and mixed media on paper  
2018,6012.1. Funded by CaMMEA

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Nabil Nahas  
(born Beirut, Lebanon, 1949)  
*Studies for the Yale Chemistry Building*, 1973

Inspired by visits to New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, Nahas began to explore the interplay of shapes he encountered in traditional Islamic art and created his own language of geometry. His drawings are often the basis for large paintings on canvas in bold colours with a striking range of shapes. These examples became a mural of six canvases created in 1973 for the Chemistry Department at Yale, where they still hang today. Nahas studied art in the United States and lives between New York and Beirut.

Ink and graphite on paper  
2014,6019.1. Gift of Nada Bayoud  
2014,6041.1. Gift of Nabil Nahas
Monir and Nazgol Ansarinia

Monir and Ansarinia reacted similarly to their culture on their return to Iran from periods of study abroad. Each was fascinated by aina-kari, (mirror-mosaic), a form of architectural decoration.

For Monir, (right) her epiphany was in the Shah Cheragh mosque in Shiraz. ‘It was like standing inside a many-faceted diamond and looking out at the sun.’ Mirror sculptures and drawings resulted, which were equally inspired by the minimalist philosophy of her friend, American artist, Frank Stella.

Ansarinia (left) also echoes the geometric abstraction of mirror-mosaic, but this work is about politics and the imposition of sanctions on Iran by the United Nations and the oil embargo by the EU from 2012. Two different newspaper articles on these subjects are cut up and mixed together rendering the text meaningless.

Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian
(known as Monir)
(born Qazvin, Iran, 1922–2019)
Untitled, 2005
Coloured markers and mirror on paper
2013,6031.1. Funded by CaMMEA
Sponsor's statement

**Nazgol Ansarinia**  
(born Tehran, Iran, 1979)  
*Iranian Oil Export to Europe Increased/Assessment of Oil Sanctions on Iran by EU, 2012*  
From the series *Reflections/Refractions*  
2012,6077.1. Gift of Maryam Massoudi

‘In Persian culture, a mirror is not solely a surface to reflect light, but it is a metaphor for light itself – emanating, refracted and scattered.’

Monir, 1922–2019

**Susan Hefuna**  
(born Berlin, Germany, 1962)  
*Building, 2004*  

‘I have to really concentrate and surround myself with a very calm atmosphere... I cannot draw every day, as I can't always achieve the right level of concentration. I have to retreat into my shell to create these series.’

Born to an Egyptian father and German mother, Hefuna’s abstract drawings evoke the wooden *mashrabiya* screens she created working with craftsmen in Cairo. Hefuna studied art in Frankfurt and lives in Düsseldorf.

Ink on cartridge and tracing paper  

**Susan Hefuna**  
*Knowledge is Sweeter than Honey, 2007.*  
This screen is on display in the Africa gallery (Room 25).  
**Sponsor’s statement**

**Dana Awartani**  
(born Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 1987)  
From the series *The Islamic Caliphates*, 2016

‘Let the beauty we love be what we do, there are a hundred ways to kneel and kiss the ground.’ (Jalal al-Din Rumi, 1207–73).

Across these meditative drawings, Awartani makes a *shamsa* (sun), a feature in Qur’an illumination. The title refers to the development of this art form under the patronage of succeeding Islamic dynasties. Awartani attended the Prince’s School of Traditional Arts in London and studied illumination in Istanbul. The poet Rumi is a great inspiration to her.

Gold leaf, shell, gold, pen and gouache on paper  
2016,6047.1.1,3,4,6,7 and 8.  
Funded by CaMMEA with a contribution from Mohamad Ali and Dina Zameli

**Nicène Kossentini**  
(born Tunis, Tunisia, 1976)  
*Shakl I*, 2015

What appear to be random dots and dashes across these sheets are in fact *tashkil*, or vocalisations, which sit above and below Arabic letters. The invisible text underneath is from *Kitab al-Jalal wa al-Jamal* (On Majesty and Beauty) by the Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi (1165–1240).

Kossentini began reading the works of Arab philosophers upon her return to Tunis following her studies in Paris. Her re-readings in French and Arabic inspired this work, which creates an illusion as mystical as the Sufi text itself.

Ink on Arches paper  
2015,6042.1. Funded by CaMMEA
Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim  
(born Khor Fakkan, UAE, 1962)  
*Untitled II*, 2008

Ibrahim paints the ‘writings’ featured in this work, his own language of signs and symbols, on the walls of buildings and rock formations in and around his native Khor Fakkan.

With no art education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and unable to study abroad, Ibrahim began to study painting with the Palestinian artist Yasser Dweik (born 1940). In 1987 he was introduced to the Emirates Fine Arts Society, becoming a member of the first generation of pioneering UAE conceptual artists.

Indian ink on paper  
2015,6041.1. Funded by CaMMEA

Barbad Golshiri  
(born Tehran, Iran, 1982)  
*Quod*, 2010

The Persian text consists of the words of A‘ezam, an Iranian political prisoner: ‘One day I looked around every corner of the cell... and then beneath the carpeting I found a rusted pin, my delight was boundless and I started to draw lines with it for hours.’ The squares become her world.

The work is an echo of *Black Square* by Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935) and also critiques the way traditional Persian script has been devalued by commercial considerations. Golshiri studied painting in Tehran.

Pigment ink-jet print on paper, numbered 7/10 2013,6052.1.  
Funded by Maryam and Edward Eisler
**Burhan Doğançay**  
(born Istanbul, Turkey, 1929–2013)  
*A Look at the Bright Side*, 1970  
From the series *General Urban Walls*

‘It was the most beautiful abstract painting I had ever seen. There were the remains of a poster, and a texture to the wall with little bits of shadows coming from within its surface.’

Arriving in New York in 1963, Doğançay quickly developed an abiding passion for depicting urban walls. Here he creates the effect of the layering of torn paper revealing the exposed surface beneath. Doğançay studied art in Paris. He divided his life between New York and Istanbul.

Gouache on paper.  
2010,6007.5.  
Gift of Joanna G. Freistadt in honour of Alice Schwarz-Gardos

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**Huguette Caland**  
(born Beirut, Lebanon, 1931–2019)  
*Silent Letters*, 2003

Caland’s daughter, Brigitte, describes these works as an ‘an invitation to her daydreaming’. It was at the American University of Beirut that she learnt the importance of the line, an obsession which was to characterise all her work. Huguette Caland began living in California in the 1980s, and gradually her work moved from figuration into abstraction.

Alongside painting, she designed her own kaftans and founded INAASH, a Lebanese association to support women producing traditional embroidery in the Palestinian refugee camps.

Acrylic on paper. 2014,6044.1–2.  
Funded by CaMMEA
Introduction

Fahrelnissa Zeid
(born Istanbul, Turkey, 1901–91)
Untitled, 1954

Roland Penrose, co-founder of the Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) in London, would give artists he knew this book to draw in. It includes sketches by Joan Miró, Marc Chagall and Henry Moore. Fahrelnissa Zeid’s were added during her exhibition at the ICA in July 1954. By this time, Zeid had committed to abstraction having begun as a figurative painter.

One of the first female graduates of the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul, she later studied in Paris.

Institute of Contemporary Arts Visitor’s Book Coloured inks on paper 1975,0726.4.29–30. Gift of Roland Penrose

Mohamed Abla
(born Belqas, Egypt 1953)
In Conversation, 2011

A conversation is taking place between young activists and policemen in Tahrir Square, Cairo, which was the centre of the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Abla lived in the square at the time, supporting the protesters as they came in ever greater numbers.

As he asserts: ‘To be an artist is to have duties, to talk to people, educate them, and encourage their participation. You can reach things that you cannot reach by any other means.’ Abla studied art in Alexandria.

Oil and photographic print on paper 2012,6069.1. Gift of Mohamed Abla and Artspace Gallery
‘Art is criticism of society and of life, and I believe that if life were to become perfect, art would become meaningless and would cease to exist.’

Naguib Mahfouz, 1911–2006

**Tangled histories**

Political struggle, revolution and war unite the works displayed here. Seen through the prism of personal experience artists are drawn to a specific event, such as the burning of the National Library of Baghdad in 2003.

Works also emerge from and address longer-running struggles, and focus on the complexities of the Israel/Palestine conflict, the Lebanese Civil War or the ongoing war in Syria.

There is no single narrative but a multiplicity of interwoven stories.

**Timeline of events referred to in the works on display**

1914–18
First World War and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East. British and French Occupation of former Ottoman provinces.

1915
Start of mass killings and deportations of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

1948
Establishment of the state of Israel and flight of 700,000 Palestinian refugees.

1953
A US- and British-backed coup removes Prime Minister Mosaddegh from power, restoring Mohammed Reza Shah.

1956
End of the French protectorates in Morocco and Tunisia and full independence.
1963
Syria: the Ba`th Party comes to power.
Tunisia: withdrawal of last French troops.

1967
War between Israel and the Arab states ends in victory for Israel and occupation of all of historical Palestine, including all of Jerusalem.

1968

1975–90
Lebanese Civil War

1978–79
Iranian revolution ending in the overthrow of the Pahlavi monarchy and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, led by Ayatollah Khomeini.

1980–88
Iran–Iraq War.

1991
US-led military force expels Iraqi forces from Kuwait; bombardment of Baghdad in January.

2003
Iraq: US-led military invasion and occupation and overthrow of the Ba`thist regime.

2009
Iran: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad re-elected president – result contested in Green Movement demonstrations and protests.

2011
Tunisia: flight of President Ben Ali after anti-regime demonstrations; first democratic elections are held.
The start of the Arab Spring

Egypt: anti-government demonstrations lead to the downfall of President Mubarak.

Syria: protest demonstrations meet armed government crackdown leading to armed resistance and civil war.
Sponsor's statement

**Monif Ajaj**
(born Deir al-Zor, Syria, 1968)
Untitled, 2012

*Al-haya li'l abad* (Life to the end) are the words inscribed in spray paint on the back of the kneeling figure. The uprisings that began in Syria in 2011 saw activism on the streets, brutal repression by the government, and a surge of graffiti in towns and cities all over Syria.

Ajaj studied art in Belarus. He left Syria for France in 2012 where, as he comments, he ‘dedicates most of his time to supporting Syria and the uprising’ through his work.

Spray paint, pastel and charcoal on paper
2016,6007.1. Funded by CaMMEA

**Aref El Rayess**
(born Aley, Lebanon, 1928–2005)
The Road to Peace, 1976

The Lebanese Civil War (1975–90) pitted different factions against each other. Militias dominated the streets of Beirut which was divided along the ‘green line’ separating east from west. Aref El Rayess, living in Algiers at this time, turned his anger against the war into a series of dramatic drawings. Using dark and sometimes surrealistic imagery, he evokes the violence suffered by ordinary Lebanese people. *The Road to Peace* was printed as a book in 1978 but the original drawings were lost during the Lebanese Civil War.

From an unbound book of thirty-seven etchings created from charcoal drawings
2015,6035.1. Gift of Hala El Rayess
Laure Ghorayeb and Raed Yassin

Ghorayeb and Yassin evoke the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90) from two different perspectives. In Ghorayeb’s haunting drawing, Arabic text is threaded across the unblinking figures whose bodies have turned into landscapes. Set during Christmas 1984, a mother tells the story of the war to her daughter, placing it within the context of Lebanon’s complex and troubled history from the beginning of the 20th century.

Born during the Lebanese Civil War, Raed Yassin depicts key moments in the conflict on a series of Chinese blue and white porcelain jars. Here, he focuses on the ‘War of Liberation’ conducted by then General Michel Aoun in 1989. It ended with his defeat by the Syrian army, leading to the cessation of hostilities and paving the way for the end of the war.

Laure Ghorayeb
(born Deir El Qamar, Lebanon, 1931)
Already Ten Years, 1984
Ink on paper
2016,6061.1. Funded by CaMMEA

Raed Yassin
(born Beirut, Lebanon, 1979)
Yassin Dynasty, 2013
Hand-painted glazed porcelain made in Jingdezhen, China
2016,6037.2
Funded by CaMMEA with contribution from Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund

John Jurayj
(born Evanston, USA, 1968)
Untitled Men (We Could Be Heroes), 2007–10

These two photographs are among a set of 30 which feature politicians whom Jurayj regards as responsible for the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90). They are printed in negative on vellum, the eyes burnt out. Shown here are Rashid Karami, Prime Minister eight times from 1955 until his assassination in 1987, and Pierre Jemayel (1905–84), founder of the Phalangist party.

Born to a Lebanese father and an American-Irish mother, Jurayj grew up and studied in the United States where he still lives.

Photographic prints on vellum
2011,6031.24 and 25. Funded by CaMMEA
Rafa Nasiri and Walid Siti

At the centre of a devastated landscape is a structure resembling the monumental ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia. Walid Siti works with icons of Iraqi history to articulate the loss of the heritage of Iraq through war and conflict. Siti was a student at the Institute of Fine Arts, Baghdad, where one of his teachers was Rafa Nasiri.

Forced to leave Iraq in 1991 following the first Gulf War (1990–91), Nasiri also expresses his sorrow at the suffering of Iraq. Here he focusses on the burning of the National Library in Baghdad, which took place in 2003.

Torn printed extracts of verses by the Arab poet Mutanabbi (AD 915–65) are placed within an abstract composition, the colours echoing the orange and red flames of a fire.

Walid Siti
(born Duhok, Iraq, 1954)
Untitled, 1998
Mixed media on paper
2009,6002.2

Jamal Penjweny
(born Sulaimaniya, Iraqi Kurdistan, 1981)
Saddam is Here, 2010

In Penjweny’s darkly comical photographs, the portrait of Saddam Hussein (ruled 1979–2003) is superimposed onto the faces of Iraqi individuals in everyday situations. Travelling around Iraq in 2007 he realised that despite Saddam’s defeat, his legacy was still very much alive. As Penjweny comments: ‘They supported him, they cheered for him, they beautified his cruelty…they simply put him in power to be the godfather of Iraq. Saddam is here.’ Penjweny began his career as a photojournalist. He lives in Sulaimaniya.

Photographic prints, numbered 4/5
2017,6019.1, 2, 4, 5. Purchased with support from CaMMEA and Art Fund

Art Fund
Sponsor's statement

Rafa Nasiri
(born Tikrit, Iraq, 1940–2013)
*A Library Set On Fire*, 2008
Silk-screen numbered 16/20, from a portfolio of six
2015,6019.3. Gift of May Muzaffar

‘An April day when
the Tigris was pregnant
with apprehension and
dreading its merger
with the betraying
waters of the Gulf...’

Etel Adnan, born 1925

Jewad Selim
(born Ankara, Turkey, 1919–61)
*Nasb al-Hurriyya* (the Freedom Monument), about 1959

These sketches are preparatory drawings by
Jewad Selim, a major figure of Iraqi art, for
*Nasb al-Hurriyya*, (the Freedom Monument). It
was commissioned in 1959 to celebrate the

revolution the previous year. *Nasb al-Hurriyya*
was inspired by the monumental gates of
ancient Babylon and is a visual narrative
expressing themes of injustice, resistance,
solidarity and hope in the style of symbolic
realism. Selim tragically died before the work
was completed but the monument itself still
stands at the heart of Baghdad today.

Pencil and watercolour on paper
1993,0305,0.1-2.
Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund
in central Baghdad.
Photo courtesy of Ahmed Naji.

Emily Jacir and Michal Rovner

These prints are from the series 35 Years of Occupation. The title and date of the portfolio, marks the duration of the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem since the Six-Day War of June 1967. It brings the works of 35 Israeli and Palestinian artists together in an edition of 35. Produced in conjunction with the Israeli–Palestinian Peace Coalition, it also includes a joint statement: ‘In defiance of the painful situation in which we presently find ourselves... we artists are determined to promote peaceful dialogue towards a shared peaceful future for both peoples.’

Emily Jacir presents imprints of feet going round in a circle, with the words rihlat al-‘awdah. Rovner highlights the continuing distrust of ‘the other’ while no peaceful resolution is found.

Emily Jacir
(born Bethlehem, Occupied Palestinian Territories, 1972)
Rihlat al-‘awdah (The journey of return), 2002
From the series 35 Years of Occupation
Silkscreen print, numbered 12/35
2009,6028.8. Funded by CaMMEA

Michal Rovner
(born Tel Aviv, Israel, 1957)
Would you be afraid? 2002
From the series 35 Years of Occupation
Silkscreen print, numbered 12/35
2009,6028.5. Funded by CaMMEA

Tayseer Barakat and Larry Abramson

Barakat and Abramson were among those who initiated the project of 35 Years of Occupation, as one of the joint projects that had been undertaken by Israeli and Palestinian artists since 1980s.

Barakat evokes a game of strategy that appears to have reached stalemate, the shadowy faces
blocked at every turn by the grey pyramid structures.

‘On the asphalt outside the devastated headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in Ramallah’, writes Abramson, ‘I saw and picked up a run-over olive branch, the outline of which later entered my print for the project, hovering over a pile of rubble and a black flag flying from it.’

**Larry Abramson**  
(born South Africa, 1954)  
*Black Flag*  
From the series *35 Years of Occupation*, 2002  
Silkscreen print, numbered 12/35  
2009,6028.27. Funded by CaMMEA

**Tayseer Barakat**  
(born Gaza, Palestine, 1959)  
*The Human Being* 2002  
From the series *35 Years of Occupation*, 2002  
Silkscreen print, numbered 12/35  
2009,6028.21. Funded by CaMMEA

**Mustafa al-Hallaj**  
(born Salama, Jaffa, 1938–2002)  
*Untitled*, 1980

This starkly rendered scene of desolation draws on stories of war among the biblical Canaanites to reference the present conflict in Israel/Palestine. Hallaj left Palestine in 1948, the year of the *Nakba*, or ‘Catastrophe’, as Palestinians describe the creation of the state of Israel in that year.

Hallaj studied art in Cairo, and spent his last years in Damascus where he tragically died trying to save one of his works – a large-scale narrative of the history of Palestine – from a fire in his studio.

Woodcut on masonite, numbered 4/10  
2016,6003.1. Funded by CaMMEA
Sponsor’s statement

‘I am the land and the land is you.’

Mahmoud Darwish, 1941–2008

Rula Halawani
(born Jerusalem, 1964)
From the series Negative Incursion, 2002

‘On the 28th March 2002 I was in Ramallah when the major Israeli incursion happened. I was shocked; everything around me looked so different. Every street and square I visited was dark and empty; no one was on the streets that day except for the Israeli army and its tanks. I felt depressed and cold.’

Halawani portrays the darkness of this event quite literally by printing the photographs as negatives rather than positives. ‘As negatives,’ writes Halawani, ‘they express the negation of our reality that the invasion represented.’

Photographic print on metallic digital paper 2012,6027.2. Funded by CaMMEA

Sliman Mansour
(born Birzeit, Occupied Palestinian Territories, 1947)
Homeland, 2006

In an ironic twist on the title of the work, Homeland, Mansour underscores the dehumanising experience faced by Palestinians on a daily basis as they go through the electronic gates at the Qalandia checkpoint that separates Jerusalem from Ramallah.

The high walls on either side evoke the Separation Wall that divides Israel from the Occupied Territories. Mansour studied art at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem and lives in the city.

Charcoal and acrylic on paper 2010,6004.1. Funded by CaMMEA
Hazem Harb
(born Gaza, Palestine, 1980)
TAG 09, 2015
From the series TAG

Harb’s abiding childhood memory was looking through his mother’s treasured photographs which she kept in an old sweet tin. In the TAG series, highlighting the degradation of Palestinian lands under occupation, he employs the tagging system used in social media to identify people and places. Here, however, the knowledge that tags bring – of who and where – is absent as no names or places appear beside the boxes. Harb studied in Rome and currently lives in Dubai.

Inkjet photocopy print and collage on fine art paper
2015,6043.1. Funded by CaMMEA

Héla Ammar
(born Tunis, Tunisia, 1969)
Disrupt I, Part I and II, 2018

Repurposing editions of the Journal Officiel (Tunisia’s official gazette), Ammar, comments on two significant moments in Tunisia’s history. Tunisia gained independence from France in 1956 but French troops remained at the naval base of Bizerte. In July 1961, a bloody battle took place there, and the partial nature of the Tunisian victory is highlighted by the needles and the red thread. It was not until 15 October 1963 that the last French soldier left Tunisia, and the crown is now complete. Héla Ammar is an artist and a professor of law.

Archive installation
2019,6027.1. Gift of Héla Ammar
2019,6008.1. Funded by CaMMEA
‘If the people will to live, Providence is destined to favourably respond.’

Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi, 1909–34

**Nidhal Chamekh**  
(born Dahmani, Tunisia, 1985)  
*Nos visages no. XI* (Our Faces no. XI), 2019

Chamekh’s interest lies in neglected moments in the history of his home country Tunisia. *Nos visages no. XI* tells the story of the many troops from the French colonies who helped to liberate France during the Second World War but who were afterwards cast aside and forgotten.

The two contradictory half faces, drawn from the newspaper *Le miroir*, serve to emphasise the denial of their existence. Chamekh studied in Tunis and Paris.

Ink on paper  
2020,6001.1. Funded by CaMMEA

**Malek Gnaoui**  
(born Gabès, Tunisia, 1983)  
*Esaid Carthage* I and II, 2018

Details of marble sculptures from the ancient city of Carthage in the Bardo Museum Tunis, are rendered in brick dust, crushed and turned into pigment. Gnaoui addresses Tunisian history and is inspired by the sentiments of the historian Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406).

Born in Tunis, Ibn Khaldun lamented that the grandeur of ancient civilisations had turned to desolation and that lessons from history had not been learnt. Gnaoui studied in Tunis where he also lives.

Screen-print and red brick-dust, numbered 1/3  
2019,6009.1. Funded by CaMMEA  
2019,6010.1. Gift of the artist
Sponsor’s statement

**Hengameh Golestan**  
(born Tehran, Iran, 1952)  
*Untitled*, 1979, printed 2015  
From the series *Witness ’79*

The Iranian revolution brought in the enforced wearing of the *hijab*. On 8 March 1979, over 100,000 women took to the streets of Tehran to voice their opposition. Hengameh Golestan, documented the demonstration.

‘The mood was one of anticipation and excitement, and a bit of fear. We were actively taking part in shaping our future through actions rather than words and that felt amazing.’  
By the summer of 1980, however, women were compelled to wear the *hijab*.

Black and white photograph printed on Epsom exhibition fibre paper, numbered 2/10 2017,6018.2. Purchased with Art Fund support

**Art Fund**

‘My country, I will build you again!  
Even if it means with fragments of my being.’

Simin Behbahani, 1927–2014

**Mitra Tabrizian**  
(born Tehran, Iran)  
*Surveillance*, 1990

This photograph marks key moments in the political history of Iran that have come to define the modern era. Against a background of demonstrators, on the left is the 1953 coup backed by Britain and the US, against the democratically elected government of Mohammad Mosaddegh. On the right is the return of Ayatollah Khomeini from exile in 1979. The central tableau represents the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88).

Mitra Tabrizian, photographer and filmmaker, studied in London where she also lives.

Lightjet print on paper, Artist’s Proof 2 2016,6017.1. Gift of Mohammed Afkhami
**Mehdi Farhadian**  
(born Tehran, Iran, 1980)  
* Cannons and Ballerinas, 2018

Monumental triumphal arches were built across Iran to commemorate key moments – revolutions, coronations and military victories.

Here, ballet dancers emerge delicately through pink washes of paint, and Farhadian reveals a dark side to this fantasy represented by cannons and military flags: ‘The decoration of the arches with weapons has a paradoxical meaning of peace versus violence... it is more symbolic than real.’

Farhadian studied in Tehran where he also lives.

Watercolour on paper  
2018,6013.1. Funded by CaMMEA

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**Farideh Lashai and Koorosh Shishegaran**

Mohammad Mosaddegh, prime minister of Iran (1951–53) and his democratically elected government were overthrown in 1953 by a US- and UK-backed coup. He spent the rest of his life in internal exile. His promotion of secular democracy inspired a younger generation of Iranians during the 1960s and 1970s.

In Shishegaran’s poster, Mosaddegh draped in the Iranian flag, is called upon to guide the Iranian nation towards a forward-looking future. The Persian text reads ‘Dr Mosaddegh’ and ‘I am a follower of the wise man who would save me from ignorance’, a verse from the poet Hafez (about 1325–89).

Lashai pictures Mosaddegh as a sad and lonely figure wearing a long coat and carrying a cane.

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**Farideh Lashai**  
(born Rasht, Iran, 1944–2013)  
* Mosaddegh, 2011–12, printed 2019 (from a series of twelve)  
* Photo etching and drypoint on paper  
2019,6018.1.7. Funded by The Farjam Foundation
Koorosh Shishegaran  
(born Qazvin, Iran, 1944)  
*Mosaddegh, February 1979*  
Poster (from an edition of 2,000)  
2020,6010.1. Funded by the Farjam Foundation

‘The younger sister loved her older brother. The brother would hand out pro-Mosaddegh flyers, the five-year-old sister would sing songs for Mosaddegh and beat her head and chest – later she will remember days when the brother has been expelled from school, they have caught him red-handed while handing out flyers.’

Farideh Lashai, 1927–2014

Nahid Hagigat  
(born Tehran, Iran, 1943)  
*Escape and Surveillance*, 1977

Haggiat wrote, ‘While I was growing up in Tehran there was this atmosphere of fear and panic that someone might be watching you. Everyone was aware of the secret police and everyone was suspicious of their neighbors.’

This is the atmosphere evoked by *Surveillance*, while in *Escape*, Hagigat’s protagonist discards her veil as a protest against a patriarchal society. Hagigat studied art in Tehran and later in New York. She is one of the few Iranian women artists from the period who deals with issues of gender and politics.

Aquatints  
2014,6047.1-2. Funded by CaMMEA

Ardeshir Mohassess  
(born Rasht, Iran, 1938–2008)  
*Valentine’s Day*, 1997

Political prisoners wear green hats in a gesture of humiliation. The locks that bind their chains are red bleeding hearts, hence the ironic title *Valentine’s Day*. Mohassess was Iran’s most prominent satirical artist. With a few simple strokes he would highlight oppression, corruption and the humiliation of the individual.
His relentless mockery of the Pahlavi regime caused him to leave Iran in 1976. Following the revolution he remained in New York for the rest of his life. He inspired a generation of artists, including Rokni Haerizadeh.

Pen and ink on Arches paper 2019,6026.1. Funded by The Farjam Foundation

**Rokni Haerizadeh**  
(born Tehran, Iran, 1978)  
*Breaking through the Doors of Eden*, 2009  
From the series *Fictionville*

The Iranian presidential elections in June 2009 were marred by accusations of fraud. Millions of Iranians in Iran and around the world protested against the results.

From his Dubai home Rokni Haerizadeh imbued the scenes playing out on television with a sense of the ridiculous. A rhinoceros horn and a bulbous hat are added to the head of President Ahmadinejad, while violent scenes play out within a heart in a similarly ironic vein to Mohassess’s Valentine’s Day.

Mixed media and gesso on photographic paper 2010,6008.1,2, 6 and 8. Funded by CaMMEA

**Bahman Mohassess**  
(born Rasht, Iran, 1931–2010)

Bahman Mohassess worked in different media from prints to sculpture and made *Assemblages* using cut up magazines. Edvard Munch’s ‘The Scream’ is set against the Firth of Forth Bridge.

Mohassess studied art in Tehran and, following the coup against Mosaddegh in 1953, he left Iran for Rome, where he enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts. On his return to Tehran, he found patronage under Empress Farah Pahlavi. After the revolution, some of his work in Tehran was destroyed as ‘decadent art’.

Untitled, 1971  
Lithograph numbered 9/60  
2014,6037.1. Funded by Maryam and Edward Eisler
Afsoon
(born Tehran, Iran, 1961)

These works speak to Afsoon’s preoccupation with her own past. ‘Iran lives inside me. I create and re-create it through my work.’

Distilled memories of her life in Iran are expressed through objects given a voice by added onomatopoeic words and phrases linked to their function. ‘As a child, I saw life in many lifeless objects... I would imagine the camera calling out: “Come on, give us a smile!”.

The portraits are personifications of particular traits including trust, greed and desire, which are communicated by coloured accents of a striped shirt or a necktie – details evoked from passing memories.

Newsha Tavakolian
(born Tehran, Iran, 1981)

Bita, 2014–15
From the series Blank Pages of an Iranian Photo Album

Tavakolian imagined completing albums of photographs that were left empty, focusing on a single character to tell a story of everyday life. Bita is pictured as a teenager perhaps on her birthday. As the book unfolds different aspects
of her later life are glimpsed. She first undergoes a lip enhancement operation accompanied by her friend Shabnam. She is then shown at home or with friends – an ordinary existence in contrast to her hopes and dreams.

Inkjet prints on Hahnemühle rag paper mounted on Dibond 2017,6020.1. Purchased with Art Fund support

Ramin Haerizadeh
(born Tehran, Iran, 1975)
*Bad Hejab*, 2008

‘My mission is to have fun with all this seriousness’ wrote Ramin Haerizadeh. He took photographs from web blogs that show women being castigated for not being properly covered in the street. The women are images of himself.

The story is both about the enforced wearing of the *hijab*, and a commentary on homosexuality in Iran. ‘In restrictive societies’ he comments, ‘they always have to keep things a secret and pretend that these men are straight people.’

Photo collage, ink and pastel on handmade watercolour paper, numbered 4/8 2008,6036.2 and 4

Azza Abo Rabieh and Hamid Sulaiman

‘I could never believe that human beings could inflict such horrors on other human beings.’

Hamid Sulaiman (whose words are above) left Syria in 2011, targeted as an activist, and came to fame through his graphic novel *Freedom Hospital* (2016). The drawings are based on events he either witnessed, heard about from friends, or captured directly from the news. Azza Abo Rabieh also created a biographical narrative which continued until her expulsion from Syria in 2017. Inspired by Goya and his *Disasters of War*, like Sulaiman she focuses on the individual victims of the war. Sulaiman is now living in Paris, Abo Rabieh in Beirut.
Azza Abo Rabieh  
(born Hama, Syria, 1980)  

Our Revolution is on the Boot of Our Government  

Still Singing  

They carried him - the shame  
Three etchings from the series Traces, 2011  
2014,6052.1-2, 2014,6017.1 Funded by CaMMEA  

Hamid Sulaiman  
(born Zabadani, Syria, 1986)  

Untitled, 2012  
Ink on paper  
2014,6016.1-3. Funded by CaMMEA  

Elias Zayat  
(born Damascus, Syria, 1935)  

Untitled, 1970 and 1972  

All his life Zayat has been obsessed with Palmyra (Tadmor in Arabic), the city in the Syrian desert once ruled by Queen Zenobia, parts of which were destroyed by Daesh in 2015. Zayat is one of the founders of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Damascus established in 1960.  

Evoking ancient mythologies in his work, in these delicate drawings figures from statues in the National Museum of Damascus merge with fantastical creatures of the past.  

2017,6028.1. Funded by CaMMEA  
2017,6029.1. Gift of Olivier Georges Mestelan  

Alshaab alsori aref tarekh  
(The Syrian People Know their Way), 2011  

‘Prepare for Rebellion’  
‘I’m taking to the streets to protest’  

Following the uprisings in Syria in 2011 an anonymous collective began working under the name ‘The Syrian People Know their Way.’ They produced posters which circulated through social media to be downloaded by activists across Syria. With dramatic images and
strongly worded text in Arabic, these posters testify to a moment filled with hope for change. A member of the collective wrote: ‘We wanted to present something... provoking, attention-seeking and effective... we also wanted to rid the country of its heritage of ugly Ba‘th Party propaganda.’

Digital images, printed in London 2016,6034. 35, 41. Funded by CaMMEA

**Youssef Abdelke**
(born Qamishli, Syria, 1951)
*Figures (No. 2)*, 1991–93

The three sinister figures evoke an atmosphere of patriarchy, patronage and corruption. Politics and the satirisation of the ruling regime have played a central role in the work of Abdelke. He spent time in prison during the 1970s and was arrested again briefly in 2013 during the course of the Syrian uprisings that began in 2011.

Abdelke studied in Damascus and Paris where he moved in 1981. He is currently based in Beirut.

Pastels and collage on paper
2011,6002.2

**Sulafa Hijazi**
(born Damascus, Syria, 1977)
*Untitled*, 2012
From the series *Ongoing*

A moment of hope and promise is seen starkly through the prism of the Syrian Civil War. Hijazi, digital artist and filmmaker began producing the *Ongoing* series in 2011, circulating the images online via social media.

She describes the mood in the early days of the revolution: 'Before I left the country in 2012, people were still trying to do something positive. We had great hopes about the prospect of changing our country through peaceful means.'

Digital print on archival paper
2016,6050.4. Funded by CaMMEA
Manal AlDowayan
(born Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, 1973)
From the series If I Forget You, Don’t Forget Me, 2012

‘How does one stop the act of forgetting? … How do you capture a moment that existed 50 years ago in Saudi Arabia?’

Manal AlDowayan’s father was an ‘oil man’, working in the nascent oil industry based in Dhahran in Saudi Arabia. Keen to understand her past, she set about interviewing men and women who played key roles in what became Saudi-Aramco. AlDowayan asked her interviewees to bring objects with them and from these, created a series of collages.

Gelatin silver prints
2013,6040.1.1,11,14 and 18. Funded by CaMMEA

‘You go because there’s nothing left to hope for; Because there’s everything to hope for and all life is a risk.’

Ruth Padel, born 1946

Leila Alaoui
(born Paris, France, 1982–2016)
No Pasara (No Entry), 2008
Natreen (We are waiting), 2013

A young man dreams of starting a new life across the enticing and forbidding barrier of the sea, migrants fleeing war-torn Syria wait patiently on the border with Lebanon. Two different series are represented here: No pasara ‘No entry’ was a photographic project on migration and cultural diversity around the Mediterranean.

It later inspired Natreen ‘We are waiting’ about Syrian refugees. When Alaoui was tragically killed by a terrorist attack she was in Burkina Faso documenting a women’s rights campaign, ‘My Body My Rights’, run by the charity Amnesty International.

‘She was fighting to give life to those forgotten by society, to homeless people, to migrants, deploying one weapon: photography.’

( Jack Lang)

Photographic lambda prints
2017,6030.1-3.
Purchased with Art Fund support.
**Paul Guiragossian**  
(born Jerusalem, 1926–93)  
*La misère humaine* (Human Misery) and *La mère douloureuse* (The Grieving Mother), 1984

These drawings were made to commemorate the expulsion of thousands of Armenians from Turkey in 1915 following the mass killings that took place. Forced into encampments at Deir al-Zor in the Syrian desert, Guiragossian’s mother was among them and lost a child during this ordeal, a tragedy that he evokes in *La mère douloureuse*.

Guiragossian describes his quest for identity with these words: ‘When I was a child, people around me were talking different languages. I was wondering then: who am I? And in what language should I express myself: in Armenian, Arabic or French? Finally I understood that my first language is painting; and I should only talk through painting and nothing else.’

China ink on paper  
2020,6004.1–2. Funded by CaMMEA

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**Ibrahim El-Salahi**  
(born Omdurman, Sudan, 1930)  
*By His Will We Teach Birds How to Fly No. 4*, 1969

Ibrahim El-Salahi’s father was a devout Sufi. Whilst praying, he would point his index finger, creating a shape resembling the beak of a bird. ‘The bird … is almost like my conscience, reminding me of what should be done.’ El-Salahi studied art in Sudan, then at the Slade in London.

Disappointed on his return home in 1957 by the lack of interest in his Western-style art, he started looking for the art people did appreciate, and began incorporating Arabic calligraphy and African decorative motifs into his work.

Together with Osman Waqialla (1925–2007) and Ahmed Muhammad Shibrain (1931–2017), in 1960 he helped to found the Khartoum School, a modernist art movement seeking to develop a new visual vocabulary reflective of Sudan’s distinctive identity. *By His Will*, one of a series of black and white drawings he made in the late 1960s, confidently reflects that identity.
Find out more

Events
Explore the themes of the exhibition through related events – from the curator’s introduction to panel discussions. For the full programme, visit britishmuseum.org

Publication
Many of the works shown here are included in *Reflections Contemporary art of the Middle East and North Africa* by curator Venetia Porter with Natasha Morris and Charles Tripp published by British Museum Press (2020). Available in the Museum shops and at britishmuseum.org/shop (£25, paperback)

The collection
Further works from this collection are displayed in the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic world (Room 43).

Works on paper by artists of the Middle East and North Africa are mainly housed in the Department of the Middle East. The work of over 300 artists, which includes prints, drawings, photographs, posters and artists' books from across the region are included. The study room is open by appointment. For more information visit britishmuseum.org or email MiddleEast@britishmuseum.org

Next in Room 90
The next exhibition in Room 90 will be on the drawings of Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849)

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