

# Sarah Rogers

## — Histories in the Making: The Khalid Shoman Collection and Darat al Funun

The Khalid Shoman Collection represents one of the earliest collections dedicated exclusively to contemporary art of the Arab world. Begun in the early eighties, the collection reflects the shifts and transformations of artistic practices in the region. It now represents over 100 modern and contemporary artists and a range of media, including works on paper, oil painting on canvas, photography, artist's books, sculpture, video, and installation. Moreover, the collection is historically unconventional in its mission. For husband and wife Khalid and Suha Shoman, the act of collecting was about neither tracking down the next best artist nor documenting a regional comprehensiveness, if such a project were even possible. The artwork is less an object to be acquired and more an investment in the artist and support of his or her practice. This initiative gained significant impact during the eighties and nineties when there was very little support for contemporary Arab art, particularly within the private sector. Furthermore, this was a collection formed through the eyes of a practicing artist.

When Suha Shoman settled in Amman in the early seventies, she embarked on what is now a nearly forty year dedication to the arts. A student of Turkish-Jordanian artist Fahrelnissa Zeid, Shoman was inspired by her mentor in both her practice and support of contemporary art. For five years, beginning in 1988, Shoman utilized the space of the Scientific and Cultural Center at the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation to host exhibitions and lectures on contemporary Arab art.<sup>1</sup> This experience led Shoman to conceptualize what was needed for artists in the region: neither a museum nor gallery but a home that provided opportunities for research, creativity, and exchange. In 1993, Darat al Funun (a home for the arts) opened. Housing exhibition halls, workshop studios, research spaces, a library, and garden café, today Darat al Funun hosts an extensive array of programming including residencies for artists and scholars, workshops, exhibitions, lectures, film screenings, and artistic and curatorial exchange programs. Darat al Funun thus provides an infrastructure for a complete trajectory of artistic production and reception. It is this focus on contemporary artists and their practice that reveals the integral relationship between The Khalid Shoman Collection and Darat al Funun, each one critical to the other's growth and both constitutive of a regional history of art.

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A pioneering private foundation, the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation was established in Amman in 1978 and named after Abdul Hameed Shoman (1890–1974), the founder of the Arab Bank and father of Khalid Shoman (1931–2002). Dedicated to the promotion of knowledge, research, and development in the fields of sciences and humanities, the foundation expanded its patronage to the arts in 1988 when it began hosting exhibitions and talks on Arab art.

A large, horizontal expanse of canvas is shattered into geometric fragments through the use of bright, bold colors. Curvilinear black lines dance across the painted surface, further portioning the composition into patches of densely applied paint and brief stretches of solid color. The viewer's eye is lost among the twists and turns of line and color.

The painting described above dates to the 1960s and is one of a number of pieces by Fahrelnissa Zeid held by The Khalid Shoman Collection (Fig. 1). As we shall see throughout this essay, the formation of The Khalid Shoman Collection reveals a history of relationships between artists, the Shomans, and Darat al Funun. The Khalid Shoman Collection's presence of over ten works by Fahrelnissa attests to the longstanding relationship between Fahrelnissa and Suha Shoman, one that Darat al Funun honored with the 2001 Centenary Exhibition of Fahrelnissa.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Fahrelnissa's role as a mentor to Shoman was formative to the unfolding history of Darat al Funun.

The relationship between the two artists began in 1975 when Fahrelnissa settled in Amman to be near her son, Prince Raad bin Zeid, the Chief Chamberlain at the Royal Hashemite Court of Jordan. By this time, Fahrelnissa already had a distinguished career. Her artistic training began as a youth in Istanbul's Imperial School of Fine Arts for Girls, where her training included techniques of academicism and impressionism in the fashion of art academies throughout the former Ottoman Empire. A life embraced by creative passion was furthered by Fahrelnissa's first marriage to prominent Turkish writer Izzet-Melih Devrim, who took her on her first trip to Europe in 1924. This visit initiated the artist's lifelong relationship with Paris, the European capital of modern art. In 1927, Fahrelnissa studied under artist Roger Bissière at the Académie Ranson. This had a profound influence on her work as she became immersed in the practice and philosophy of European modernism. Several years later, in 1934, Fahrelnissa married her second husband, Amir Zeid, often appointed acting regent to the Kingdom of Iraq and ambassador to the court of Saint James (1946–58). Despite her diplomatic duties, Fahrelnissa maintained an atelier in Paris and continued to exhibit throughout Europe, including a 1949 show at the Colette Allendy Gallery and at the 1951, 1953, and 1954 Salon



Fig. 1 — Fahrelnissa Zeid, *Untitled*, 1960s. Oil on canvas, 546 x 221 cm.

des Realites Nouvelles. Her presence in solo and group shows garnered the critical acclaim of Charles Estienne, the French art critic credited with coining the term 'lyrical abstraction.'

Thus Fahrelnissa brought with her to Amman an artistic life well-versed in the formal and theoretical languages of modernism.<sup>3</sup> It was this experience that she passed on to a group of students who came to meet weekly in her home. Known as the Fahrelnissa Zeid Royal Institute of Fine Arts, her house served as both an art studio and museum, as her work crowded the rooms and paintings hung on the ceilings. For her students, one of whom was Suha Shoman, time spent in Fahrelnissa's institute was about more than acquiring technical skills. Encouraging her students to approach the blank canvas with a confidence to pursue self-expression, Fahrelnissa embraced a particularly European modernist aesthetic. Positioning the artist as one who has a story to tell, Fahrelnissa gave her students confidence to explore abstraction rather than to function like a human camera transcribing the surrounding world. This is evident in her abstract paintings as well as her large-scale portraits, five of which are in The Khalid Shoman Collection. Fahrelnissa's aesthetic reveals a modernist genealogy whose distortion of form derives its meaning from multiple cultural references. In Jordan at the time this was a radical approach to art-making. The students' embrace of their mentor's artistic method resulted in the country's first collective show of abstraction: the 1981 exhibition, *Fahrelnissa Zeid and her Institute*.<sup>4</sup>

Both Fahrelnissa's philosophy of art and her accompanying visual language are evident in the work of Suha Shoman.<sup>5</sup> Her early work, including those paintings in the 1981 exhibition, readily suggest her mentor's influence: large scale canvases; an abstract formal language; careful attention to the materiality of the paint; and titles that hint at a philosophical interest in truth and universalism. Shoman's later video and installation work further traces this aesthetic. Yet the relationship between the two artists transcends an affinity declared visually. The sixteen years Shoman spent with Fahrelnissa inspired Shoman to approach art as a life-encompassing practice. One of Fahrelnissa's most important lessons imparted to Suha was the courage to explore new horizons. Just as Fahrelnissa did, Shoman nurtured innovative artistic practice in Jordan and the region. The first was her 1988 initiative to use the space of the Scientific and Cultural Center at the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation for organizing exhibitions and lectures on contemporary Arab art and the second was Darat al Funun.

The composition is abstract, with the exception of handwritten scratches whose identity as Arabic numerals just barely surface. Layers of pale brown, off-white, and gray paint create an atmospheric effect. Accents of deep amber at once embolden the numerical figures and further deepen the spatiality of the compositional surface.

Part of The Khalid Shoman Collection, Shaker Hassan al Said's *Al Jidar* (*The Wall*, No. 3) (1992) marks a significant period in the Iraqi artist's body of work: the culminating stage of his aesthetic theory, *al bua'd al-wahid* (one dimension), which

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See *The Centenary of Fahrelnissa Zeid* (Amman: Darat al Funun in association with the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, 2002). Exhibition catalogue.

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On Fahrelnissa's life and work, see *Fahrelnissa Zeid* (Amman: The Royal National Jordanian Institute Fahrelnissa Zeid of the Fine Arts, 1984).

4

*Fahrelnissa Zeid and her Institute* (Amman, 1981).

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On Suha Shoman's work, see *Suha Shoman* (Amman: Darat al Funun in association with The Khalid Shoman Foundation, 2009). Exhibition catalogue.

grappled with the relationship between time and space (Fig. 2).<sup>6</sup> In these later works, Al Said sought to transcend the two-dimensional surface of the canvas through physical impingements upon the canvas such as burning or slashing. Furthermore, letters and numerals, for Al Said, served as a point of departure towards the pure plastic value of line as he sought to transcend the figures' linguistic and cultural identities. The formal language of *The Wall, No. 3* thus underscores Al Said's deep investment in aesthetic theory. Moreover, at the beginning of the nineties, Al Said was based in Amman and collaborated with Suha Shoman on a project that sought to bring together visual practice and discourse. Interestingly, the shades of pale browns accented with handwriting in *The Wall, No. 3* conjure up the dusty urbanscape of Amman's city walls peppered with graffiti.

In 1990, with the onset of the first Gulf War, Al Said left Baghdad for the Jordanian capital. Working closely with Shoman, Al Said directed a lecture series on contemporary Arab art that took place over a two-year period at the Scientific and Cultural Center at the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation. The lecture series not only introduced the Jordanian public to artists and critics throughout the region but also signaled the Shomans' aim to promote research in the field. Furthermore, the lectures were published in 1995 as *Hiwar al-Fan al-Tashikly* (Dialogues on Art), making a substantial contribution to the region's art history—one that predates the contemporary flurry of archiving practices.<sup>7</sup> For five years, the center provided a support system for contemporary Arab artists by generating debate on the relationship between theory and practice and encouraging a local audience and market for the visual arts.

Shoman chose exhibitions based on her visits to the studios of contemporary artists in the region, introducing Amman's public to the most recent practices at the time. For a 1990 exhibition on Iraqi artists (which included Al Said), for example, Shoman traveled to Baghdad, where she met with Leila Attar, the director of the Saddam Hussein Cultural Center who died during the first Gulf War. Furthermore, the relationships forged during Shoman's work at the center continued after the founding of Darat al Funun, thereby confirming the importance of supporting an artist's practice to The Khalid Shoman Collection and Darat al Funun.



Fig. 2 — Shaker Hassan al Said, *Al Jidar (The Wall, No. 3)*, 1992. Mixed media on wood, 123 x 123 cm.



Fig. 3 — Ismail Fattah, *Man and Mask*, late 1980s. Bronze, H.138 cm. Installed at Darat al Funun, 2007.

Ismail Fattah, one of seven artists included in the 1990 Iraqi exhibition, later displayed his sculptures and paintings in a 1995 solo show at Darat al Funun. The bronze sculpture, *Man and Mask* that now stands at the entrance to Darat al Funun was included in the 1995 exhibition (Fig. 3). The artist offered to make Shoman a copy for the Khalid Shoman Collection, but she insisted on the original. In a serendipitous act, the original now safely guards over Amman's skyline, protected from the 2003 looting in Baghdad.

The safety of Fattah's original from the fate of numerous modern artworks in Iraq underscores the role of the Khalid Shoman Collection and Darat al Funun as a protected space in the region for artists and their work. Because of this, many of the artists represented in The Khalid Shoman Collection developed long-term relationships that moved beyond a one-time exhibition opportunity. Lebanese artist Emmanuel Guiragossian represents another such story.

Suha Shoman first met Guiragossian in the eighties when he traveled to Amman from Beirut. Remaining in the Jordanian capital for a number of years due to the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), he helped Shoman with the technical aspects of transforming the Scientific and Cultural Center into an exhibition space. Guiragossian, who had trained in Dresden, also gave academic anatomy classes to a small group of Fahrelnissa's students, including Shoman. In 1989, the Lebanese artist and his father, renowned artist Paul Guiragossian, held their only exhibition together at the center, an important exposure in Amman to Lebanese art during a period when the Lebanese Civil War restricted contact between the two countries. Both artists are represented in The Khalid Shoman Collection.

In another instance of exchange and exposure, the center hosted a 1992 exhibition of seven artists working in the Palestinian Occupied Territories: Nabil Anani, Tayseer Barakat, Yacoub Al-Kurd, Suleiman Mansour, Jawad al Malhi, Khalil Rabah, and Vera Tamari. Four of the artists—Anani, Barakat, Mansour, and Tamari—were known collectively during the first intifada as the New Visions group. Fostering a revolutionary approach to aesthetics in Palestinian art through the medium of production, the artists participated in the intifada by boycotting art supplies imported from Israel and working instead with natural materials such as coffee, henna, and clay. This body of work documents an important moment in the history of Palestinian art: the making of art is politicized via the very mechanisms of its production. Although the artists adopted a nationalist agenda similar to other artists working in the social realist style, the distinction lies in an abstracted visual result. Visual production no longer merely represents the political, but instead is itself a political act. Bringing examples of this work to the center offered Amman's public an insight into contemporary practices in the neighboring Occupied Territories, which are still inaccessible for a large majority of Jordanian Palestinians.

As the stories of Al Said, Fatah, Guiragossian, and the artists of the New Visions demonstrate, the space at the Scientific and Cultural Center at the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation developed into a meeting place that offered a platform for creative exchange among artists and their publics. Committed as it was to contemporary practices, the center also promoted the role of the

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For an in-depth study of Shaker Hassan al Said's aesthetic theory and his work, see Nada Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007), 97-121.

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Shaker Hassan al Said, *Hiwar al-Fan al-Tashikly* [Dialogues on Art] (Amman: Darat al Funun in association with the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, 1995).

private sector in the visual arts. In this way, it was a historically unique initiative in the region. Furthermore, Shoman began to appreciate the necessity of a support system for artists in the Arab world and in Jordan. Indeed, each year the center exhibited local artists. Despite the singularity of the National Gallery of the Fine Arts, dedicated as it was to contemporary arts of the Islamic world, a place did not yet exist that supported either the very process of artistic creation or emerging artists. Amman's visual artists did not have the same opportunities as those in other regional capitals such as Cairo and Beirut. Shoman's experience at the center was thus the embryo for the conceptualization of Darat al Funun as she came to realize the necessity of an organization that, in its very mission, catered to a contingent way of working and programming that adapted to shifts and transformations as they occurred both in the city and throughout the region. Thus, for instance, for an artist newly arrived in Amman from Baghdad or Beirut, Darat al Funun offered a space for that artist to continue his or her practice and to find camaraderie among the artists already at work in the studios. A space in which artists gathered together, shared works, and exchanged ideas is, without a doubt, one of most critical roles identifying Darat al Funun as an active participant in an art history whose regional context often prevents the circulation of artists, ideas, and art works due to the violent conflicts that continue to impact the Arab world. The 1993 opening of Darat al Funun was therefore an event, in the words of Suha Shoman, "that had to happen in order to continue on the path started."

A fawn-colored stonewall pushes up against the paper's two-dimensional surface. Visual relief from the shades of pale brown that color both the wall and foreground comes from a solitary, time worn door depicted in pale blue. The calm stillness of the architecture is interrupted only by the leaves of a Palm tree jutting up against the blue sky.

Ali Jabri's 1979 drawing on paper, *The Palm Tree of Musa's Grandfather* (Fig. 4) along with *Maan* and his drawings of *Khirbet al Nawafleh* in Petra—all represented in The Khalid Shoman Collection—are suggestive of a visual imagery that draws on Jordan's architectural and archaeological heritage. Portraying the landscape and urban environment through a style that might be



Fig. 4 — Ali Jabri, *The Palm Tree of Musa's Grandfather*, 1979. Mixed media on paper, 89 x 65 cm.

characterized as fragmentary realism, Ali's formal language speaks to the history of Darat al Funun itself—an institution dedicated to a dynamic collage of Jordan's past and present and a regional creativity.

Nestled in the heart of Amman, Darat al Funun's belief in bringing together the traditional and contemporary begins with its architecture. Housed in five historic houses dating to the 1920s/1930s and a former warehouse, the six buildings of Darat al Funun hold stories of engagement with the region that speak to Amman's history and its role as a regional center.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, each of the structures was built by and subsequently served as residence for Amman's Jordanian, Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese communities, thus tracing the city's history from the seat of government in the Emirate of Transjordan to the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The original three buildings were restored by Jordanian architect Ammar Khammash to house exhibition halls, workshop spaces, administrative offices, a garden café, and library. When Khalid Shoman, President of the Arab Bank, deputy chairman of the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, and Darat al Funun's patron, passed away in 2001, one of the buildings was dedicated to his memory and legacy and is now known as Dar Khalid (home of Khalid). The site of Darat al Funun also includes the remains of a sixth century Byzantine Church, built over a Roman Temple, which now serves as a venue for the performing arts. The findings excavated from the garden under the direction of Pierre Bikai, former director of the American Center for Oriental Research, in cooperation with the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, are currently on view in Darat al Funun's library. In 2005, Jordanian architect Sahel al Hiyari designed a new front for the upper boundary walls of Darat al Funun. Combining stone and concrete, Al Hiyari introduced a modernist aesthetic to the traditional buildings of Darat al Funun. Most recently, in 2011, two neighboring structures were restored. The first houses the headquarters of the Khalid Shoman Foundation and spaces for researchers with a rotating exhibition of works from The Khalid Shoman Collection.<sup>9</sup> A fifth building, a restored warehouse extension named "the Lab," opens directly onto the streets of Jabal al Weibdeh and serves as an experimental space and hub for multidisciplinary artists and researchers. An apartment building adjacent to the Lab and another historic house from the 1930s have also been renovated to serve as residences for visiting artists and to provide additional exhibition spaces. For Suha Shoman, the decision to locate Darat al Funun in Amman's oldest residential neighborhood in the heart of the city was a simple one: art is not a luxury but an integral part of the community.

Within only the first few years, Darat al Funun introduced its public to contemporary Arab artists. Opening with the 1993 inaugural show, *50 Contemporary Arab Artists*, Darat al Funun held this exhibition annually until 2002, an initiative distinct in presenting a bird's eye view of contemporary artists in the region. Additional shows, rotating on a monthly basis, featured artists working throughout the Arab world. Moreover, many of the artists exhibited are represented in The Khalid Shoman Collection. To name only a selection of artists includes the following: Jordanians Wijdan Ali, Rajwa Ali, Aziz Ammoura, Hind Nasser, Ahmad Nawash, Rula Shukairy, Samer Tabaa, and Mahmoud Taha;

<sup>8</sup> For a history of the architectural restoration and archaeological excavations, see *Darat al Funun: Art, Architecture, Archaeology* (Amman: Darat al Funun in association with the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, 1998), 57-138. Also see Darat al Funun's website, [www.daratalfunun.org](http://www.daratalfunun.org)

<sup>9</sup> In memory of Khalid Shoman, his wife and children established the Khalid Shoman Foundation in 2002. See website dedicated to Khalid Shoman's life, [www.khalid-shoman.com](http://www.khalid-shoman.com)

Palestinians Tayseer Barakat, Samia Halaby, Jumana Hussein, Suleiman Mansour, and Vera Tamari; Egyptians Ragheb Ayyad, Huda Lufti, Adam Henein, and Seif Wanly; Sudanese Mohammad Omar Khalil and Rashid Diab; Algerian Rachid Koraichi; Moroccan Farid Belkahia, Mohamed Kacimi, and Najia Mehadji; Tunisians Rafik el Kamel, Abderrazak Sahli, and Gouider Triki; Iraqis Himat Ali, Ismael Fattah, Halim Mahdi, and Rafa' al Nasiri; Lebanese Etel Adnan, Chaouki Choukini, Mohammad el Rawas and Amine el Bacha; and Syrians Youssef Abdelké, Marwan, and Ziad Dalloul. Equally dedicated to supporting emerging practices, Darat al Funun hosts exhibitions, often accompanied by residencies, for a younger generation of artists such as Adel Abidin, Hani Alqam, Doa Aly, Jananne al-Ani, Mohammed al Hawajri, Raed Ibrahim, Saba Innab, Maha Mustafa, Ibrahim Rashid, Ahlam Shibli, and Basma Alsharif, all of whom are represented also in The Khalid Shoman Collection. For a number of these artists, Darat al Funun hosted their first solo. Importantly, these exhibitions are documented through recorded lectures, a photographic archive, artists' files, and publications. Moreover, these archives have been accessible to a virtual public since 1997 when Darat al Funun launched its website, one of the earliest in the field. For audiences and scholars today, these archives provide an understanding into a regional cross-section of artistic practices over the past several decades.

Darat al Funun's role as a regional center for the practice and study of the visual arts is thus witnessed in its active programming.<sup>10</sup> Since the early nineties, Darat al Funun has invited critics and scholars such as Dr. Mazen Asfour, Dr. Khaled Khreis, and poet May Muzafar to present general courses on the history of art along with art films followed by audience discussions. More recently, art historians and museum directors such as Gerald Matt, Bartomeu Mari, Simon Njami, and Ulrich Looock have delivered talks based on current shows. Illustrative, bilingual exhibition catalogues serve as a further resource. Collaborative exhibitions with regional and international institutions enable curatorial partnerships; recent examples include *Out of Place* with Tate Modern London (2011) and *Sentences on the Banks and Other Activities* (2010) curated by Abdellah Karroum. Artists' residencies and education programs promote mobility, networks, and career opportunities for artists. Annual workshops in printmaking, painting, installation, and video art directed by artists such as Sama Alshaibi, Tarek Atoui, Ziad Dalloul, Muhanna Durra, and James Webb, for instance, provide opportunities for education and artistic circulation. Within this broad range of activities, one of Darat al Funun's most important initiatives was the Summer Academy (1999–2003), which aimed to serve as an open studio for all artists rather than a formal academy.

In September of 1999, a group of art students from Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria undertook an intensive course under Syrian artist Marwan Kassab Bachi (known more commonly as Marwan), former professor at the Berlin College of Fine Arts and member of Akademie der Künste. By bringing students together under the guidance of an established artist and professor, Darat al Funun created a platform for education, exchange, and exposure as the young artists practiced in an open studio environment and engaged in collective critiques. For many, even those enrolled in art departments, the lengthy critiques offered a unique forum

to discuss in depth various modes of interpretation, or ways of looking, as well as the details of the process of working. Jordanian artist Raed Ibrahim, who had come from his studies in the Fine Arts Department at Beirut's Lebanese University, for instance, was unaccustomed to such intense discussions that focused on the work itself. After several weeks of practicing within a shared space, the participants developed a deepened sense of trust among one another that enabled the critiques to assume a deeply formative process.

A number of students from the first Summer Academy were invited to attend subsequent sessions and over the years built sustained relationships at Darat al Funun; one of these artists is Ali Kaaf. After studying under Marwan at the first Summer Academy, Kaaf worked as his assistant in 2003. He was then invited to exhibit at Darat al Funun in 2004 for his first solo show. Moreover, he continued his training under Marwan in Berlin at the Fine Art Academy. Another student from the first Summer Academy, Mohammed al Hawajri from Gaza, was also invited back for three consecutive years, allowing him to train and pursue his career. In 2012, he was invited again to Darat al Funun for a residency and exhibition. As these stories show, the experiences and relationships initiated at Darat al Funun have long-lasting effects.

Darat al Funun also facilitates more than individual projects due to its long-standing place in the regional art scene and its sustained presence as an infrastructure for providing support for arts production and research investigation. In 2011, Darat al Funun hosted Fulbright fellow Rijin Sahakian, founding director of Sada (echo), a non-profit organization for contemporary Iraqi artists. Central to Sada's mission is education for the next generation of artists in Iraq. Amman's proximity to Baghdad and the historical connection between the two capitals enabled the exchange of creative forces, research, and on the ground programming development that would not have been possible otherwise. As a result, this residency played a major part in spearheading Sada.

Continuing its commitment to research, Darat al Funun announced an annual fellowship in modern and contemporary Arab art in 2012. Awarded to students pursuing a PhD, each recipient will spend several months exploring the resources at Darat al Funun and participating in the creative and intellectual life there. As the first existent fellowship exclusively designed to advance scholarship in the field, the Darat al Funun - Khalid Shoman Foundation Fellowship for the Study of Modern and Contemporary Arab Art is a landmark achievement.

Identical miniature bronze soldiers stand connected in a circle. With legs tense in a forward thrust of movement, the soldiers pointedly position their guns. As the weapon of each soldier touches the figures in front and behind, creating a circular motion, the installation is at once aggressive and childlike in its figurative postures, rhythms, and delicate scale.

The dynamic opposites in the installation *Round and Round* (2007) is a hallmark of Mona Hatoum's minimalist practice, one that engages a series of thematics relevant to the region—exile, displacement, conflict—and yet is equally invested in the history

of art, its cultural icons, formal styles, and attendant ideologies (Fig. 5). The piece, represented in The Khalid Shoman Collection, was exhibited at Hatoum's 2009 solo show at Darat al Funun following the artist's month long residency.<sup>11</sup> During her time in Amman, Hatoum created three new works: *Interior Landscape*, an installation and two ceramic pieces, *Still Life* and *Witness* in collaboration with the Iraq Amir Women Cooperative Society, located in a small village just outside of Amman.<sup>12</sup> The latter work is also part of The Khalid Shoman Collection.

Shoman had met Hatoum in 1997, when the two artists participated in an exhibition featuring contemporary Palestinian artists at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris.<sup>13</sup> Shoman invited Hatoum to exhibit at Darat al Funun—a show that finally happened in 2009. Previous to this, Shoman acquired Hatoum's video works, *So Much I Want to Say* (1983) and *Measures of Distance* (1988), marking the beginning of The Khalid Shoman Collection's interest in video and new media art. Since then, the collection has come to include new media and installation pieces by artists such as Jumana Emil Abboud, Buthayna Ali, Emily Jacir, Amal Kenawy, Moataz Nasr, Wael Shawky, and Oraib Toukan. Here, we see the way in which the collection enables glimpses into aesthetic shifts in regional practices as new media practices have become prevalent over the last decade. Although these artists have become important figures on the international art stage, many entered The Khalid Shoman Collection early in their careers. A consideration of the collection and the relationships within its formation suggests a number of possible narratives for a history of art in the region.

A number of artists represented in the collection share an ongoing relationship with Shoman and Darat al Funun. Amal Kenawy is one such artist. After seeing her video piece, *The Room* (2003) in a 2004 group exhibition, Shoman sought to meet Kenawy and acquired the work for The Khalid Shoman Collection (Fig. 6). The encounter marked the beginning of an enduring professional and personal relationship, at the basis of which was Shoman's deep respect for Kenawy's artistic practice. Darat al Funun held Kenawy's first solo show in 2007. It was the first time her works were shown together, allowing for a comprehensive vision of her practice. In 2012, Darat al Funun hosted a tribute exhibition to Kenawy in celebration of her art and life.



Fig. 5 — Mona Hatoum, *Round and Round*, 2007. Bronze, 61 x 33 x 33 cm.



Fig. 6 — Amal Kenawy, *The Room*, 2003. Video, 11'06".



Fig. 7 — Marwan, *Untitled*, from *Faces/Ibn Arabi* series, 1997-98. Series of 99 etchings, 22 x 16 cm each.

In many instances therefore, Shoman first becomes acquainted with an artist through his or her work, as was also the case with Marwan. Shoman was introduced to Marwan's work at the Institut du Monde Arabe during the late eighties, subsequently purchasing three pieces from Atassi Gallery in Damascus. When Darat al Funun launched the Summer Academy in 1999, it was under the direction of Marwan. This long-standing relationship is reflected in The Khalid Shoman Collection, which holds a substantial number of his oil paintings and etchings dating from the early seventies and eighties until the twenty-first century, including *Faces*, a series of ninety-nine etchings, inspired by the poetry of Ibn Arabi. Such a range of works, produced across a period of forty years, enables one to track the artist's increasing abstract depiction of the figure (Fig. 7).

The collection is thus a critical resource in studying different moments of an artist's career, revealing shifts in media and practice. Importantly, Marwan is not an isolated case in this regard as the same holds true for artists such as Fahrelnissa Zeid, Farid Belkahlia, Ziad Dalloul, Adam Henein, Mohammad Omar Khalil, Rachid Koraïchi, and Faisal Samra. In one striking example, Samra, most well known for his 2005 video and photographic series, *Distorted Reality*, previously produced small clay and collage pieces under the title, *Nabatiyyat* (1998) in which we witness the iconography of the bird from the later *Distorted Reality*.

The collection also enables us to work in the reverse: rather than study an individual artist's formal trajectory we might consider artistic responses, in their convergence and divergence, to specific historical events. In addition to the work of Palestinian artists who participated in the first Intifada, the collection also holds Leila Shawa's 1994 series, *Walls of Gaza*. In these lithographs, a notable turn from the artist's previous paintings, Shawa incorporates photographs of wall graffiti taken during the first intifada when graffiti served as a critical means of communication and resistance. Other possible case studies include the following: Tahia Halim's 1960 oil on canvas, *Nuba*, painted prior to the flooding of the Nubian region following the construction of the Aswan Dam; Dia Azzawi's 1979 *Nasheed al Jassad* (bodily anthem) after the Tel al-Zaatar massacre in Lebanon; Adnan Yehya's *Sabra and Shatila* (1983–84) series; Mohamed Kacimi's 1991 mixed media series, *The Gulf War*; and most recently Adel Abidin's 2009 video installation, *Memorial*, after a 1991 US bombing in Baghdad.

Certain concentrations within the collection beckon more in-depth examinations. Pieces by Lebanese artists Walid Raad, Akram Zaatar, and partners Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige highlight the practices of Lebanon's first postwar generation of artists. This body of work has become known for an archival aesthetic that converges around a critical interest in the visual document as a mediation of history. Resonating with postmodernist strategies that question grand narratives, postwar art in Lebanon is nonetheless intimately grounded within the immediate circumstances of its production as the history of the Lebanese Civil War serves as both the subject and lens of analysis. In turn, Berlin-based Lebanese artist Salah Saouli's mixed media on plexiglass box, *Divided Cities* from 1999–2000, also grapples with the subject of the Civil War through visual and textual archival documents that question the possible legibility of visual

<sup>11</sup>

Mona Hatoum (Darat al Funun in association with the Khalid Shoman Foundation, 2009). Exhibition catalogue.

<sup>12</sup>

The Iraqi Amir Women Cooperative Society is an initiative of the Noor Al-Hussein Foundation that employs women in the production of handmade paper, hand-woven fabric, ceramics, and food processing. Since 2001, the women also receive training on finance and administrative towards the marketing of their products.

<sup>13</sup>

*Artistes Palestiniens Contemporains* (Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 1997). Exhibition catalogue.

narrative. In contrast to the postwar generation, however, Saouli refuses to mimic the formal language of the archive from which it draws its material and instead deploys a montage aesthetic. The collection also includes Rayyane Tabet's 2008 installation of seven cement-covered suitcases, included in Darat al Funun's 2008 exhibition, *Art Now in Lebanon*, curated by Andrée Sfeir-Semler. A member of Lebanon's next generation of artists, Tabet's work reflects the contemporary transformations in postwar Beirut practices, as do the collection's Randa Mirza's 2006 photographic series, *Abandoned Rooms* and Hussein Baydoun's 2008 installation, *The Last Protection*.

A collection dedicated to contemporary practices that expands over three decades invites broader aesthetic questions. How, for example, has abstraction as a formal and theoretical language shifted over the last thirty years and among artists practicing in different media? We might focus this inquiry further through a consideration of abstraction as a mode for depicting the history of Palestine, as in the paintings of Samia Halaby, setting that in relation to the use of the photograph and a more explicit Palestinian iconography witnessed as in the work of Tarek al-Ghoussein and Rula Halawani. Or, we might consider the scope of visual and textual collaborations among works such as the following: Etel Adnan's 1978 artist's book, *Harrouda* with a text by francophone novelist Tahar Ben Jalloun; the project *A Nation in Exile* (1997) by Rachid Koraichi and Palestinian writer Mahmoud Darwish; and Ziad Dalloul's 1993 artist book, *La main de la pierre dessine le lieux*; Mona Saudi's 1996 *Petra Series* and Kamal Boullata's *The Twelve Lanterns of Granada* (1996), all three inspired by Syrian poet and writer Adonis.

With a particular interest in supporting contemporary Arab art, The Khalid Shoman Collection offers a selection that suggests possible regional definitions of "the contemporary" at precise historical moments. Yet to account for the collection's formation at the hands of individual choices hints at the parameters and limitations of when and how we begin to narrate a regional art history. In this way, The Khalid Shoman Collection is a platform from which to both define modern and contemporary Arab art and question where such categories exceed their own definition. This dialectic stands at the heart of The Khalid Shoman Collection and, more importantly, enables its role as a foundation for a critical approach to art history in the Arab world.

This essay traced The Khalid Shoman Collection and Darat al Funun's historical engagement with contemporary Arab art, its practices, and discourses. The present publication represents a culmination of these sustained efforts. Considering the flurry of curatorial and scholarly interests in contemporary Arab art, Darat al Funun's historical investment in the field awards it a responsibility to critically reflect on the formation of the field and its future.

This publication consists of three interwoven components. The first brings together scholars working in different disciplines to explore issues of art historical concern through works in The Khalid Shoman Collection. We open with Faisal Darraj's contribution "The Peculiar Destinies of Arab Modernity," in which he traces how modernity as both an ideology and lived reality has been grappled with by competing forces in the region.

Through a consideration of the contemporary ramifications of the region's charged debates over modernity, Darraj's piece provides a contextual background to the essays that follow.

We begin with art historian Anneka Lenssen's contribution, "Distances greater than between these walls: On ideals and the constitution of an audience." Focusing on representations of the coffeehouse, Lenssen examines the site as both an artistic trope and historical place of interface between artist and public, each of which enable particular imaginings of art's public relations. In doing so, Lenssen raises the question of an artist's social responsibility, a fraught question whose modern urgency retains a contemporary relevance in today's purportedly global art world.

Next is anthropologist Kirsten Scheid's contribution, "Between the Promise of Life and Its Fragility: The Arab Body at Darat al Funun." Rather than consider how Arab artists have portrayed the human body—or conversely, avoided its representation—Scheid positions the body as a product of social practices, one of which is art-making. Through a close reading of a number of works in the collection, Scheid identifies four compositional motifs—conflation, emergence, absence, and immobilization—that utilize the physicality of the human body to address the political issue of being Arab today.

In "Art History outside the History of Art," anthropologist Saleem Al-Bahloly mobilizes the very parameters of writing an art history from within a private collection to explore works outside of the imposed genealogies of modernism. Rather than consider art works as objects located within an already determined historical trajectory, Al-Bahloly focuses on four photographic series to ask how aesthetics give form to definitions of home in the Palestinian Occupied Territories; representations of the Gulf War; the aftermath of war in the south of Lebanon; and the icons of Palestine's memory in Jordan.

With a similar methodological approach, in "Transitions and Translations," art historian Ulrich Loock utilizes the history of The Khalid Shoman Collection and the works represented to conceptualize a rupture in art practices in the region. Focusing on the introduction of new media, Loock considers the historical contingencies of the emergence of reproductive media and the radical sociopolitical upheavals in the region that have produced a substantial population of Arabs living in exile and in the diaspora. Resistant to offering a simple cause and effect relationship between artistic practice and historical circumstance, Loock confronts a diverse collection that seeks neither historical nor thematic cohesiveness yet nonetheless reveals instances of displacement, rupture, exile and struggle as potentially formative to an art historical understanding of the region.

The historical relationship between photography and painting is examined by literary theorist Stephen Sheehi in "Before Painting: Nicola Saig, Painting, and Photographic Seeing." Through a focus on one the region's earliest modern painters, Sheehi argues that in the Arab world a formalist relationship between the two media is less critical than the sharing of a historically contingent visual lexicon suggesting the epistemology of modernity. For Sheehi, Saig's hybrid formal language, combining religious and national icons, underscores the radical sociopolitical transformations effecting Ottoman Palestine at the time.

We conclude with “The case against continuity, or is it possible to be enchanted?” in which Hassan Khan offers a reading of works in The Khalid Shoman Collection from the position of an artist practicing in region. Through a critical insistence on his own position, Khan imagines his potential engagement with modern Arab art, a relationship that is often assumed or imposed by outside forces, including the discipline of art history itself. Moreover, in writing from a contemporary perspective, Khan considers shifting relationships between the artist and the state in a radically transformative moment within Egypt’s history.

The second component presents the voices of artists, curators, critics, and scholars who have lived the history of Darat al Funun. Sharing memories, experiences, and perceptions, these contributions provide an intimate glimpse into the various perspectives on Darat al Funun’s regional role: an institutional history narrated through the individuals whose lives and careers animate the institution’s very function. For this, we thank all those who took the time and energy to tell their story and we acknowledge those who, for one reason or another, were unable to submit a contribution yet nonetheless have shaped Darat al Funun.

Interspersed throughout the essays and reflections are the objects that animate these histories: the works that form The Khalid Shoman Collection. Integral to the textual narratives, the paintings, sculptures, photographs, video stills, and installation views also stand independently. Whispering their own stories, the visual gives voice to multiple histories—of form, of aesthetics, of an artist, of a region, and of a collection. Through its form and content, “Arab Art Histories: The Khalid Shoman Collection,” is suggestive of these intersecting narratives.

This publication furthers Darat al Funun’s dedication to new possibilities of practice and scholarship of the visual arts. Through the life of these extensive and ongoing initiatives, The Khalid Shoman Collection continues to generate questions and explorations in the nascent field of modern and contemporary Arab art. It is through these critical investigations that the parameters and methodologies of the field define its own future becomings. The stories of The Khalid Shoman Collection and Darat al Funun are suggestive of this history in the making.

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