

SUHA SHOMAN

Founder and chair of Darat al Funun, Khalid Shoman Foundation, Amman



Suha Shoman next to Fahrelnissa Zeid's portrait *Divine Protection*, 1981. Image courtesy of Darat al Funun



Interior view of Dar Khalid showcasing portraits by Fahrelnissa Zeid from 1982/1985. Image courtesy of Darat al Funun



Interior view of Beit al Beiruti with Vera Tamari's *Oracles from the Sea*, 1994. Image courtesy of Darat al Funun

Egypt, Ahlam Shibli from Palestine and Oraib Toukan and Ala Younis from Jordan, to name a few. Also worth mentioning are Emily Jacir, who had her first retrospective at DAF, and Mona Hatoum, who came for a month-long residency and solo show.

NK: How has DAF helped nurture Palestine-based artists?

SS: We channel our artistic support where the artists lead us and where we consider there is a need. We nurtured as many Arab artists as we did Palestinians. I'm very proud that we recently received the Jerusalem Award for Culture and Creativity in the Arab world at such threatening times for Jerusalem and for the Palestinian people generally. Of course, Palestine is home for me. I am from Jerusalem, awaiting my right of return. But Jordan, where I live now, is my home too, as well as Lebanon, where I studied, and Egypt, where I grew up.

NK: How has the Khalid Shoman Collection developed over time?

SS: Ours is not a typical collector's or investor's collection. It has grown through the years, as our aim has always been to support artists at their most difficult times. In 2016 we published the book *Arab Art Histories* about the collection, hoping that it would be a valuable tool for further research into the evolution of Arab art in recent decades.

NK: You are a practicing artist as well, and knew Fahrelnissa Zeid. How did she affect your work as an artist and as a founder of DAF?

SS: Simply put, Fahrelnissa was my teacher and mentor. She made me the artist I am today. But my husband Khalid supported my vision and I am blessed that both of them believed in me and guided me.

NK: What sort of balance between private and public funding is best when it comes to building an infrastructure for the arts in the Middle East?

SS: Both elements are vital and, with genuine commitment, all forms of support can be effective in the region, and everywhere for that matter. The challenge for artists is to keep on working and the challenge for us is to keep on supporting them. I like to think of DAF as a hub for learning, for research, for production, for experimentation and dialogue. An oasis for creative minds. Our vision is of a space where all artists feel at home, work and exhibit, learn and exchange ideas, experiment and move forward. ☺

Nadine Khalil: What was your objective in establishing Darat al Funun (DAF) 30 years ago?

SS: We set out in 1988 to provide a platform for contemporary Arab artists, art practices and artistic exchange at a time when there was neither support for this nor international interest in Arab art, unlike now. DAF is housed today in six renovated historical buildings dating back to the 1920s, and hundreds of artists and other creatives have exhibited here, given talks, performed, stayed at our artists' residency and carried out research in our art library and archives. We are an artist-led space open to all creative minds, but especially targeting the new generation and young people.

NK: Why did you choose to base the new institution in Amman?

SS: I didn't choose Amman, it chose me! Khalid Shoman, my husband, was the president of the Arab Bank and first patron of DAF. This is where I belong. That's always where patrons, founders, curators etc should be based – where they feel they belong.

NK: How do you balance established artists with emerging talents?

SS: Many established names have left their mark on up-and-coming artists and the region's art scene by exhibiting, giving talks at DAF or by directing our Summer Academy. Obvious examples include Shaker Hassan and Marwan Kassab-Bachi. Others have held their first solo shows with us, including the late Amal Kenawy, Wael Shawky, Moataz Nasr from