

30. **Youssef Abdelké**  
*25 January 2011*  
2011  
Mixed media on paper  
99 × 99 cm (39 × 39 in.)  
Private collection





nationalized the Iranian oil industry, a move that provoked Britain and the United States to support a coup against him. Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919–1980), who himself had replaced his father on the throne in 1941 following an Allied (Anglo–Soviet) invasion, oversaw the modernization of the country, yet came to be seen as increasingly out of touch.

The revolution of 1979 saw the fall of the monarchy – breaking a cycle of some two and a half thousand years – and the foundation of the Islamic Republic led by Ayatollah Rouhollah Mousavi Khomeini (1900–1989), who became the country's supreme leader and highest-ranking authority. In the following year Iraq, led by President Saddam Hussein, took advantage of a turbulent situation and invaded Iran, leading to a devastating conflict that lasted for eight years and made no permanent changes to the territory of either country. When Ayatollah Khomeini died, just a year after the end of the war, a throng of some 2 million people attended his funeral.

While Iran's theocratic regime is renowned for its conservative attitudes, the country's artists are able to reflect on contemporary issues and recent history. Social challenges and the position of Iranian women have been analysed by Shadi Ghadirian (page 180), an important female artist based in Tehran. A number of artists, including Khosrow Hassanzadeh (page 165), have addressed the tragic consequences of the Iran–Iraq War, in which Hassanzadeh himself was conscripted to serve.

Many of the images in this chapter show the victims and effects of conflict and war. The Syrian painter Youssef Abdelké has gone further than some, depicting oppression in a highly stylized form, as well as the latest violence in Syria (page 172). By contrast, *Operation Supermarket* (page 181), by the Iranian artists Shirin Aliabadi and Farhad Moshiri, reflects more impersonal influences – both economic and military – exerted from outside the region.

The Iraqi artist Dia Al-Azzawi's extraordinary image forms a powerful response to the appalling events of 1982, when Palestinian refugees were murdered at the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps in Beirut, two days after the assassination of the Phalangist leader and Lebanese president-elect Bachir Gemayel. Although the massacres were committed by Christian Phalangists, the Israeli forces occupying parts of Lebanon at the time, including the camps' outskirts, were widely regarded as having been indirectly responsible.

The French writer Jean Genet, who was in Beirut in 1982, left a vivid account of the aftermath of the killings, which greatly moved Al-Azzawi when he read it. Genet wrote: 'A photograph doesn't show the flies nor the thick white smell of death. Neither does it show how you must jump over bodies as you walk along from one corpse to the next. ... The dead generally become very familiar, even friendly to me, but when I saw those in the camps I perceived only the hatred and joy of those who had killed them. A barbaric party had taken place there.'<sup>11</sup>

Despite Al-Azzawi's debt to Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), the tone of this painting is quite distinct from the catharsis achieved by the great Spanish artist. The difficult, troubling images offer no sign of heroism or hope; even the white doves seem desperate to get away. The grotesque, bloated figures are simply the debris of a horrific episode of exceptional cruelty.

Al-Azzawi's career has been influenced by conflicts and wars throughout the region, including those involving his own country, Iraq, and Lebanon's civil war (1975–90). The latter inspired him to produce a powerful set of drawings for a book about the destruction and loss of life at the Tel al-Zaatar Palestinian refugee camp in 1976.



**Youssef Abdelké**

*Untitled*

From the *Personnages* series

1992

Pastels and collage on paper

76 x 56 cm

Private collection



In the *Personnages* composition, Abdelké, a Syrian who moved to Paris in the early 1980s, has used his experience as a caricaturist to create a potent allegory of the politics of the Arab world and the importance of the media, especially the press. The central figure, adorned with a sash and a medal, embodies political authority and greed. Faceless apart from a threatening mouth, he is flanked by a sniggering, sneering couple. The spots of colour and pastel tones merely enhance the sinister mood.

The tone of the black-and-white drawing of 2012 stands in direct contrast to that of a similarly floral composition by Abdelké from 2011 (see 'Introduction', page 30). In the earlier work the mood is one of optimism, a visual counterpart to the revolutionary song 'Good Morning to the Blooming Flowers' by the late Egyptian musician Sheikh Imam. Here, hope has faded: the flowers are dry and dying, pinned to the ground by a knife.

**Youssef Abdelké**

*Untitled*

2012

Charcoal on paper

108 x 148 cm

Courtesy of the artist



# Artists' Biographies



Shafic Abboud

**ABBOUD, Shafic**  
**BORN BIKFAYA, LEBANON**  
**c. 1926–2004**

Abboud studied art at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts in Beirut from 1945 to 1947 before moving to Paris. There, he worked in the ateliers of such artists as Fernand Léger and André Lhote, and studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. From 1955 he participated in the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, later becoming a member of its committee. Since his death in 2004 his work has been the subject of retrospective exhibitions at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (2011), and the Beirut Exhibition Center (2012).

**ABDALLA, Hamed**  
**BORN CAIRO, EGYPT**  
**1917–1985**

Abdalla was a largely self-taught artist who started drawing at an early age. Between 1931 and 1935 he studied at the School of Applied Arts in Cairo. In 1943 he opened his own studio, where he taught such artists as Tahia Halim and Gazbia Sirry (see pages 380–81 and 390 respectively). Abdalla was one of the first artists to use the Arabic script in 'word-form' compositions. He left Egypt in 1956, moving first to Copenhagen and then, in 1966, to Paris, where he lived and worked until his death. A monograph on his work was published in 2014.

**ABDELKÉ, Youssef**  
**BORN KAMISHLI, SYRIA, 1951**

Abdelké graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Damascus (1976), and from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1986). He obtained a doctorate in fine art from Université Paris VIII (1989). At the beginning of his career Abdelké specialized in caricature and children's illustrations. He lives and works in Paris and Syria.

**ABLA, Mohammed**  
**BORN BELQAS, EGYPT, 1953**

Abla graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Alexandria in 1977, and later studied at the Bauhaus Oriental School in Zurich, graduating in 1981. He has won several awards for his work, most notably the Grand Prize at the Alexandria Biennale (1997). He lives and works in Egypt.

**ADAM, Sabhan**  
**BORN HASSAKEH, SYRIA, 1972**

Adam took an interest in painting at the age of seventeen, during his military service. He is a self-taught artist with diverse interests in sociology, poetry and philosophy. Adam was a resident artist at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris (2003). He lives and works in both his hometown of Hassakeh and Damascus.

**ADNAN, Etel**  
**BORN BEIRUT, LEBANON,**  
**1925**

Adnan studied philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris; at the University of California, Berkeley; and at Harvard

University. She has taught philosophy of art at the Dominican College of San Rafael, California, as well as at a number of other US institutions. Adnan is the author of several books of poetry and fiction. She lives and works in Sausalito, California; Paris; and Beirut.

**AFNAN, Maliheh**  
**BORN HAIFA, PALESTINE, 1935**

Afnan was born to Iranian parents in Palestine. She studied sociology and psychology at the American University of Beirut, and obtained an MA in fine art from the Corcoran School of Art, Washington, D.C. (1962). She has lived and worked in Kuwait, the United States, France and Lebanon, and is now based in England.

**AHMAD, Yousef**  
**BORN DOHA, QATAR, 1955**

Ahmad is an artist, calligrapher, writer and teacher. He studied classical calligraphy, and has worked as a calligrapher, a caricaturist and an art inspector for the government in Qatar (1974–75). He received an MA in art and education from Helwan University, Cairo (1976), and an MA in painting from Mills College, California (1983). He lives and works in Doha.

**AHRARNIA, Farhad**  
**BORN SHIRAZ, IRAN, 1971**

Ahrarnia works with a wide range of media, including textiles, photography and video. He graduated from Sheffield Hallam University, England (1997). He has participated in group exhibitions around the world, and had his London solo

debut at Leighton House (2008). He lives and works in Shiraz and Sheffield.

**AJALI, Ali**  
**BORN MIANEH, IRAN, 1939**

Ajali studied at Tehran's Lycée Français and, later, at the city's College of Decorative Arts. He trained as an interior designer, and took a keen interest in painting and calligraphy. In 1974 he became a university lecturer of fine art, moving into the role of Master of Calligraphy at many university departments throughout Iran, where he lives and works today.

**AJAMI, Hamid**  
**BORN TEHRAN, IRAN, 1962**

Ajami received his basic calligraphic training from his father. He joined Iran's Calligraphy Association (Anjoman Khoshnevisan) in 1978, studying under master calligraphers Keykhosro Khorroosh and Gholam Hussein Amirkhani. Ajami attained his Masters in *nasta'liq* script from Anjoman Khoshnevisan (2008), and has created a new script named *Mo'alla* (the Exalted). He lives and works in Tehran.

**AKHAL, Tamam Al-**  
**BORN JAFFA, PALESTINE,**  
**1935**

Al-Akhal pursued her studies at Al-Makased Girls' School in Beirut. In 1953 she enrolled in the Higher Institute of Fine Arts in Cairo, becoming one of the first Palestinian women to undertake formal art training since 1948. Upon her return to Lebanon, Al-Akhal became a teacher at the girls' school that she attended as a teenager. She lives and works in Amman.