

Women's Central Role in Lebanon's Modern Art World

A new exhibition takes a close look at the friendships of a major artist and critic in 1960s and '70s Beirut, and the charmed art world she helped bolster.

[Hrag Vartanian](#) November 4, 2019



Curators Carla Chammas and Rachel Dedman with a photo of critic and artist Helen Khal in the background along with one of her paintings (all images by the author for Hyperallergic)

Born in 1923 in Pennsylvania to Lebanese parents, [Helen Khal](#) would go on to become an important presence in the modern art world of Lebanon as a prominent art critic and artist. A new exhibition at Beirut's Surssock Museum tells the history of that period through her friendships and

relationships with a coterie of artists and writers who would become some of the most important artist voices in the region.

Commissioned by [Ashkal Alwan](#) for its biennial Home Works gathering of lectures, performances, exhibitions, and events — most of which, with the exception of the exhibitions, has been [indefinitely postponed because of the recent nationwide protests](#) in Lebanon. The exhibition at the Sursock Museum is titled [At the still point of the turning world, there is the dance](#) and includes work by Chafic Abboud, Yvette Achkar, Etel Adnan, Huguette Caland, Simone Fattal, Farid Haddad, Helen Khal, Saloua Raouda Choucair, Aref Rayess, and Dorothy Salhab-Kazemi.

Curators Carla Chammas and Rachel Dedman spoke to me about this incredible art historical show that combines paintings, ceramics, furniture, letters, publications, videos, and other primary source materials from the “[Golden Era](#)” of pre-Civil War Beirut. We’ve included an assortment of images in this post to give you a flavor of the exhibition, and we’ve included the items the curators selected as personal favorites, which they also discuss on the podcast.

For this episode we’ve used the sounds from the [recent street protests in downtown Beirut](#), which were sparked by decades of growing corruption and new taxes that were proposed and since rescinded.

This and more in the current episode of our weekly [Art Movements](#) podcast.

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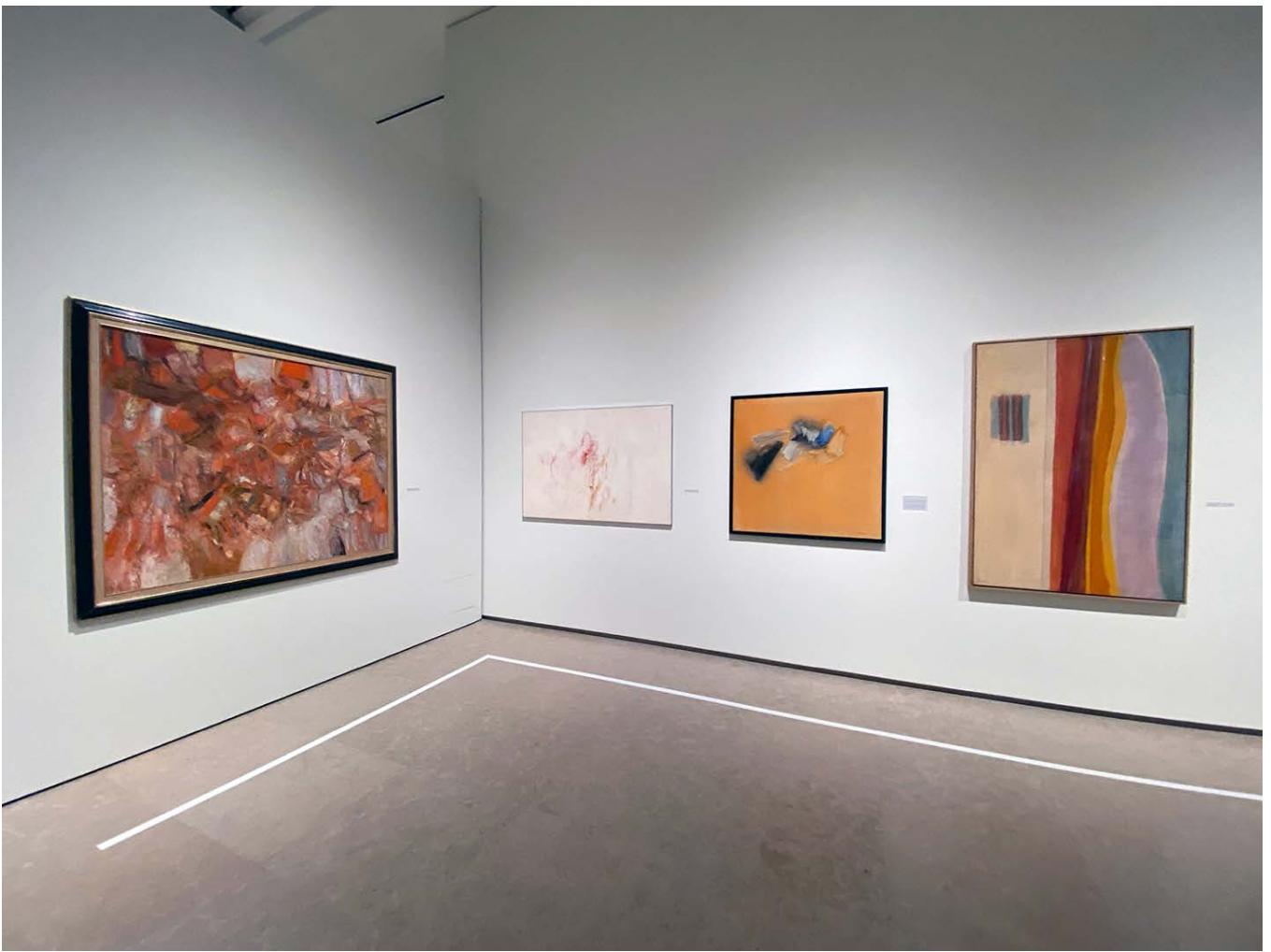
Helen Khal, "Chafic Abboud in a Brown Sweater" (1972)



Furniture and rug by Saloua Raouda Choucair designed for her daughter's bedroom, 1962. The painting is also by her, "Rhythmical Composition with Red" (1951)



Ceramics by Dorothy Salhab-Kazemi from the 1970s



Paintings by (left to right), Chafic Abboud, Simone Fattal, Yvetter Achkar, and Aref Rayess.



Copies of *Shi'r* journal (1960s) with covers designed by Helen Khal



A view of a gallery



Paintings by Huguetta Caland on the left, and Chafic Abboud and Aref El Rayess on the right



Paintings by Helen Khal (left), "Moon" (1968), and Simone Fattal (right), "Crescent Moon" (1977-78)