

An abstract painting with a complex, layered texture. The colors are vibrant and varied, including shades of green, blue, red, yellow, and dark brown/black. The brushstrokes are thick and expressive, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall composition is dense and non-representational.

# MODERN ARAB MASTERS

Grosvenor  
Gallery



*Cover*

**Jamil Hammoudi (b.1924)**

Ermenonville (detail)

# **MODERN ARAB MASTERS**

27 SEPTEMBER - 12 OCTOBER 2012

# INTRODUCTION

Grosvenor Gallery is proud to present an exhibition of paintings by some of the foremost Arab artists of the late twentieth century.

We have collected the work of pioneering artists from Iraq and Syria to attempt to display the inception and development of the modern art movement in these countries, both equally rich in history and heritage.

We are especially fortunate to display two rare and important paintings from the first group exhibition of Arab art to tour the West, as part of *Carerras Craven 'A', Arab Art Exhibition* in 1967.

These works; Dia Azzawi's *Islamic Compositions*, and Hashim Samarji's *Composition of Sights*, have not been displayed publically since the late 1960s and were heavily complimented by the organisers of the exhibition, with Samarji's work winning first prize in the Iraqi section of the show.

Artists from Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the United Arab Republic took part in the exhibition, which toured ten capital cities over a period of nine months, finishing in Rome on the 7th August 1967.

The Carreras exhibition is a true milestone in the history of 20th century Arab art, marking the first time a large group exhibition of works by Middle Eastern artists had been exposed to European audiences.

During the mid 20th century, the governments of Iraq and Syria were instrumental in promoting the visual arts in their respective countries. Young artists were sent to study in Rome, Paris and London to learn about Western techniques, and faculties of art were established at universities in Baghdad and Damascus.

When the artists returned home they took what they had learnt in Europe and amalgamated it with familiar scenes, local cultural phenomena and long held traditions to create wholly indigenous works of art.

There is no certainly doubting the influence the work of Iraq and Syria's pioneer artists had on both the cultural landscape of their countries, as well as on the work of future generations of artists.



# PLATES

**1.Dia Azzawi (b.1939)**  
Islamic Compositions, 1966

Oil on canvas  
106.5 x 87cm. (41 ¾ x 34 in.)

Exhibited:  
*Carreras Craven 'A', Arab Art Exhibition, 4th December 1966 – 7th August 1967.*  
Published in the exhibition catalogue, No. 31



CARRERAS CRAVEN 'A'  
ARAB ART EXHIBITION  
EXPOSITION D'ART ARABE  
ORGANISEE PAR  
CARRERAS CRAVEN 'A'  
MOSTRA D'ARTE ARABA  
ORGANIZZATA DA  
CARRERAS CRAVEN 'A'





فريد الزاوي ٦٦  
D. ALAZZAWI 66

## **2. Issam El-Said (1938–1988)**

Sodom and Gomorrah, 1962

Oil on canvas

70 x 90cm. (27 ½ x 35 7/16in.)

Published:

*Issam El-Said: Artist and Scholar*, Issam El-Said Foundation, London, 1989, p.81



### **3. Issam El-Said (1938-1988)**

Untitled (Two Women), 1983

Acrylic, felt pen and gold leaf on canvas  
98.5 x 98.5 cm. (38 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 38 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.)

Published:

*Issam El-Said: Artist and Scholar*, Issam El-Said Foundation, London, 1989, p.98





#### **4. Fateh Moudarres (1922–1999)**

Untitled, 1986

Oil on canvas

55 x 75cm. (21 ½ x 29 ½ in.)





## **5. Fateh Moudarres (1922–1999)**

Untitled, 1981

Oil on canvas

100 x 100cm. (39 ½ x 39 ½ in.)



## **6. Fateh Moudarres (1922–1999)**

The Beast and the Boy, 1970

Oil on canvas

100 x 125cm. (39 ½ x 49 ¼ in.)





**7. Nazir Nabaab (b. 1938)**

Untitled, 1969

Oil on canvas

28 x 38cm. (11 x 15 in.)





**8. Nazir Naba** (b. 1938)

Untitled (Still life with Pomegranates), 1975

Oil on card

49 x 49cm. (19 ½ x 19 ½ in.)





**9. Faik Hassan (1914-1992)**  
Untitled (Two Figures), 1966

Oil on canvas  
55 x 38.5cm. (21 5/8 x 15 1/4 in.)





## 10. Hashim Samarji (b. 1937)

### Composition of Sights, 1966

Oil on canvas, diptych  
90.2 x 118.4cm. (35 5/8 x 46 5/8 in.)

Exhibited:

*Carreras Craven 'A', Arab Art Exhibition*, 4th December 1966 – 7th August 1967, No. 31  
Published in the exhibition catalogue, No. 25

Earned the 'Commended Award' at *Carreras Craven 'A', Arab Art Exhibition*



CARRERAS CRAVEN 'A'  
ARAB ART EXHIBITION  
EXPOSITION D'ART ARABE  
ORGANISEE PAR  
CARRERAS CRAVEN 'A'  
MOSTRA D'ARTE ARABA  
ORGANIZZATA DA  
CARRERAS CRAVEN 'A'





**11. Hafiz El-Droubi (1914-1991)**

Untitled, 1960

Gouache on card

72.5 x 43cm. (28 ½ x 16 15/16 in.)



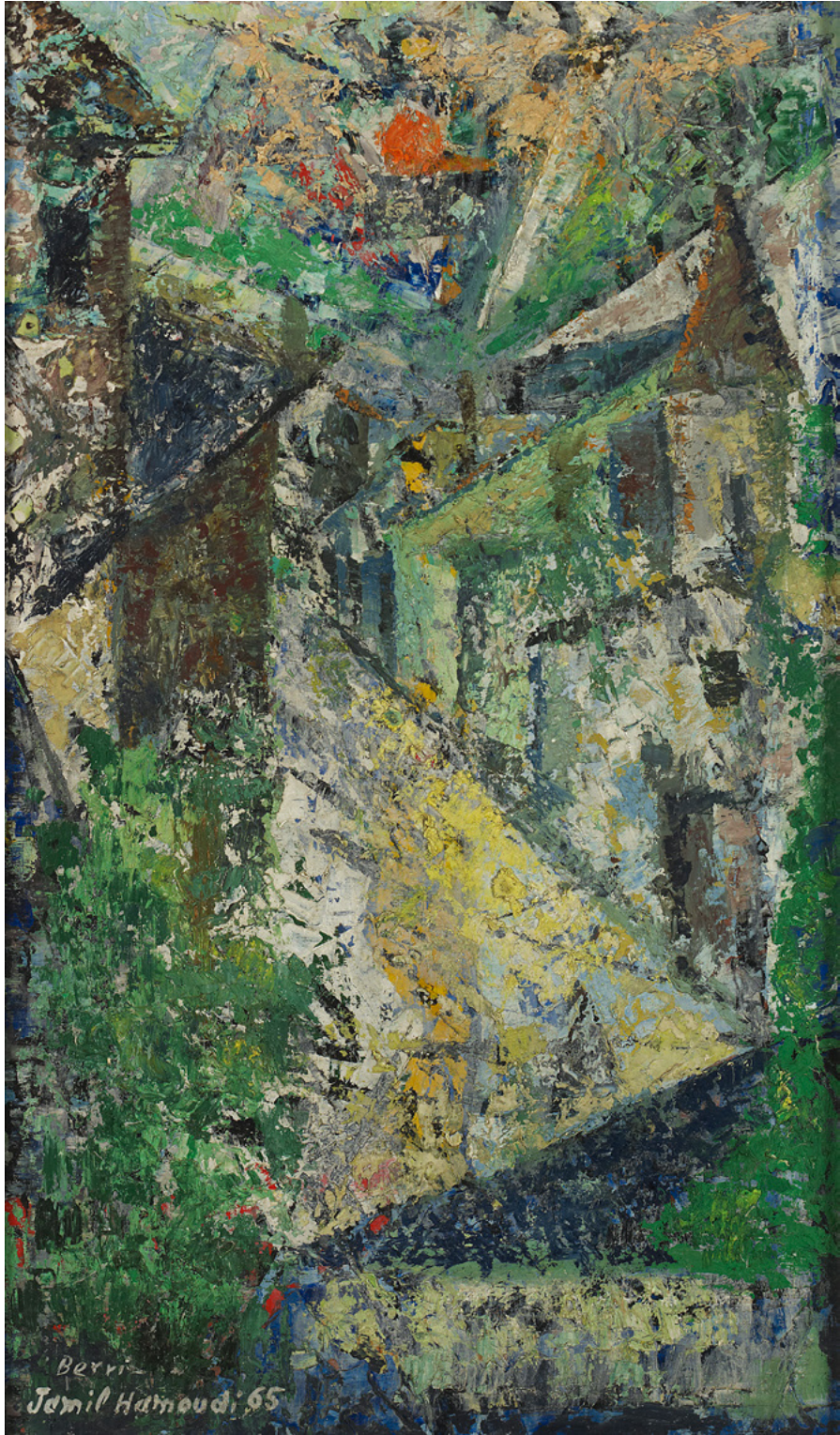
**12. Jamil Hammoudi (b.1924)**

Ermenonville, 1965

Oil on board

50 x 29.7cm. (19 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 11 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in.)





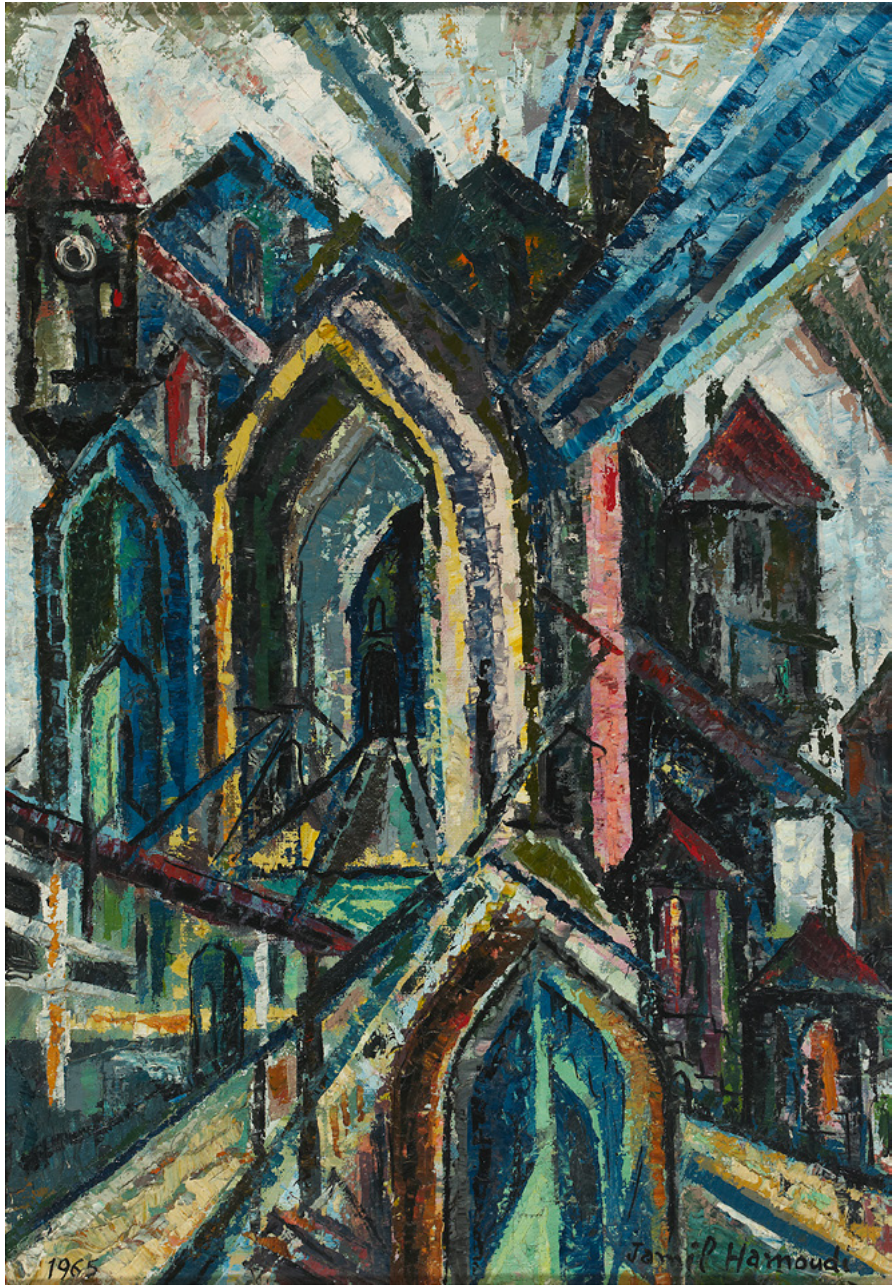
**13. Jamil Hammoudi (b.1924)**

Untitled, 1965

Oil on canvas

54 x 37.2cm. (21 ¼ x 14 5/8 in.)





**14. Nouri Al-Rawi (b.1921)**

Untitled (Townscape at Night), 1973

Oil on canvas

75 x 91cm. (29 ½ x 35 ¾ in.)



# DIA AZZAWI

Dia Azzawi was born in 1939 and is widely considered one of the most important artists in the Arab world. Azzawi graduated from the 'Institute of Fine Arts' in Baghdad in 1964 and was part of the 'Impressionists Group', a group of artists that thrust Iraq towards modernism in the early 1960s. Dia Azzawi comments; 'The movement started as an attempt to create an Iraqi Impressionist School...but soon this conglomeration became saturated with personal research in abstraction, Cubism, and sensitive Impressionist colours.'

Azzawi's work is executed in a variety of media including painting, sculpture, drawing and 'artist's books'. His early work, informed by his degree in Archaeology from Baghdad University in 1962, is notable for its use of bold colour and aimed to link the visual culture of the past to the present. In 1967 Azzawi formed the 'New Vision Group' (al-Ru'yya al-Jadidah), uniting fellow artists ideologically and culturally as opposed to stylistically. This led to a shift in both style and subject matter, with Azzawi focussing on themes of pain, death and conflict and altering his style accordingly with bold outlines and a greater attention to detail.

Dia Azzawi has exhibited extensively in the Middle East, North Africa, United States, India, Brazil, and Europe, including a retrogressive exhibition, Dia Azzawi, at the Institute du Monde Arabe in Paris in 2002. His work is held in a number of public and private collections including the Museums of Modern Art in Baghdad, Damascus, Tunis and Amman and the British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum and Tate Modern in London.



# ISSAM EL-SAID

Born in 1938 Issam El-Said graduated from Cambridge University with a degree in Architecture in 1961 and from the Hammersmith College of Art and Design in 1964.

The creative work of Issam El-Said in the form of painting, sculpture, printmaking, calligraphy, design and architectural projects shows his dedication to the expression of the Islamic cultural identity. His interest in geometry and geometric patterns is evident throughout his work, even those with a more figurative subject matter, and this led him to prepare for a doctoral thesis titled Methodology of Geometric Proportioning in Islamic Architecture in 1988 which he was sadly unable to complete due to his untimely death that same year.

His artworks are in private and public collections world wide including the British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad; National Museum of Modern Art, Amman.

# FAIK HASSAN

Faik Hassan was born in Baghdad in 1914 and is considered one of the most prominent figures in the formation of Iraq's modern art movement. He graduated from the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris in 1938, whereupon he returned to Baghdad to head the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Institute of Fine Arts. In 1941 Hassan co-founded the first arts society in Iraq, called the 'Friends of the Arts', a group that consisted of artists such as Akram Shukri, Jawad Salim and Hafiz El-Droubi, who contributed to the wider academic appreciation of art in Baghdad in the early 1940s.

In 1950, Faik Hassan founded the artist's group 'La Societe Primitive', which later changed its name to 'The Pioneers'. Many of the artists that would go on to teach and found artist's groups of their own were at some stage of their careers, members of 'The Pioneers'. Hassan also went on to found 'The Corner Group' in 1967, the most notable members of which were Ismail Fattah and Kadhim Hayder.

# HAFIZ EL-DROUBI

Hafiz El-Droubi was born in 1914, studied in Rome in 1936 and earned a government scholarship to attend Goldsmiths College in London. A pioneer of modern Iraqi art since the mid 1930s, Droubi was a co-founder of the first Iraqi art society and a member of 'The Pioneers'.

He is known for establishing the 'Impressionists Group' in 1953, which, in spite of its name, was credited with encouraging experimentation in a variety of Western styles and techniques. He later became dean of the Iraqi Fine Arts Academy and was one of the four artists honoured by the state at the al-Wasiti Festival in 1972. Droubi, who influenced and mentored a generation of Iraqi and Arab artists, explored Surrealism and Futurism but is known for using the Cubist style to depict city scenes with narrow, winding street, and open country landscapes.

# HASHIM SAMARJI

Hashim Samarji was born in 1937 and was awarded a degree in painting from the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad in 1957. In 1967 Samarji was granted a scholarship from the Gulbenkian Foundation to study graphic art.

Samarji was also a member of Dia Azzawi's 'New Vision Group' in the late 1960s, and used geometrical formations composed of repetitive units, such as squares and triangles, that together form moving combinations in order to express an eternal continuity. His early work was characterised by the use of heavy impasto to portray abstract works exploring the interaction of shapes, colours and light.

Notably, Samarji was awarded first prize in the Iraqi section of the Carreras Craven A, Arab Art exhibition in 1967, the first time a group show of paintings by Arab artists had been exhibited in Europe, when the exhibition visited Rome, Paris and London.



# NOORI AL-RAWI

Noori Al-Rawi was born in Rawa in 1921. He graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts, Baghdad in 1959 and was a founding member of the 'Iraqi Artist Society', a member of the 'Al Rowad Group' as well as 'The Pioneers'.

Al-Rawi was extremely active on the art scene. As well as a painter, he was also an art critic and a member of the association of Iraqi Art Critics, publishing work in both Iraqi, Arab and foreign newspapers and magazines as well as numerous art books. In addition, he was editor of 'The Journal of New Iraq' and the 'Al-Rawaq Journal' (1937) and contributed to a number of other prominent newspapers, being the first to establish a literature and arts page. He was one of the founders of the National Museum of Modern Art in 1962, and he even presented a television program about plastic arts between 1957 and 1987.

Al-Rawi has held solo exhibitions in Iraq and abroad - Baghdad, Budapest, Amman, Paris, Bahrain, and North Carolina.

# FATEH MOUDARRES

Born in Aleppo, Syria in 1922, Fateh Moudarres was one of the leaders of the modern art movement in Syria in the late 20th century. He studied at both the 'Accademia di Belle Arti' in Rome in the late 1950s, as well as at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in the early 1970s where he developed a distinctive style. Influenced by realism, expressionism and surrealism, Moudarres work from this point onwards possessed a naïve quality, heavily influenced by Syrian history as well by Assyrian carvings.

After he returned to Syria, Moudarres taught at the University of Damascus, where he was able to interact with many young Syrian artists in an increasingly overcrowded and hostile city. His paintings during this time focus on the everyday life of ordinary people and the struggles they encountered.

His works are permanently displayed in the Syrian Ministry of Culture, the National Museum in Damascus, the Dummar Museum and the Presidential Palace.

# NAZIR NABAA

Nazir Nabaa was born in 1938 in Damascus, Syria. A pioneer of modern Syrian art, he studied in Cairo from 1959–1965 and continued his training at École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts from 1971–1974. After completing his studies he returned to Damascus and joined the faculty of the College of Fine Arts at Damascus University.

Nabaa's style is noted for blending together traditional and modern themes and his work has been shown in exhibitions around the world including Damascus, Aleppo, Cairo, Paris, Madrid, Bologna, Sao Paolo, Moscow, Tokyo, Leipzig and Bratislava. Nabaa has been active for many years, in graphic arts, media, childrens' books and contributes writings on arts to various journals.



An abstract painting with a dense, textured surface. The colors are varied, including dark blues, greens, yellows, and reds, with visible brushstrokes and impasto techniques. The overall effect is one of intense energy and complexity.

# Grosvenor Gallery

21 Ryder Street  
London SW1Y 6PX

[art@grosvenorgallery.com](mailto:art@grosvenorgallery.com)

+44(0)20 7484 7979

[www.grosvenorgallery.com](http://www.grosvenorgallery.com)