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Masterpieces of Iraqi Modernism soar at Bonhams



Kadhim Hayder (Iraq, 1932-1985). How He Wandered with the Heart of a Martyr. Sold for £598,750. (Estimate: £100,000 - 150,000). Photo: B

LONDON.- Important works from the collections of the Iraqi architects, Mohammed Makiya (1914-2015) and Said Ali Madhloom (1921-2017) achieved superb results at [Bonhams'](#) Modern & Contemporary Middle Eastern Art sale yesterday (2 June), with the collection of Said Ali Madhloom (lots 14-30) 100% sold. Significant works by 'The Pioneers' of Iraqi Modernism, including Jewad Selim (1919-1961), Dia Azzawi (1939-), Kadhim Hayder (1932-1985), Faeq Hassan (1914-1992) and Shakir Hassan Al-Said (1925-2004), all far-exceeded pre-sale estimates. The top lot was How He Wandered with the Heart of a Martyr by Kadhim Hayder (Iraq, 1932-1985), from the collection of Said Ali Madhloom (1921-2017), which sold for £598,750 against an estimate of £100,000 - 150,000 – a new world record for a work by the artist.

Works by Jewad Selim also achieved particularly impressive results with Mother and Child, setting a new world record for a sculpture by the artist, having sold for £444,000 (estimate: £60,000 - 100,000) and Motherhood, selling for £125,250 (estimate: £40,000 - 60,000).

The 99-lot sale made a total of £3,048,414 with 75% sold by lot and 83% sold by value.

Nima Sagharchi, Bonhams Director of Islamic, Middle Eastern and South Asian Art, commented: "The renowned architects, Mohammed Makiya and Said Ali Madhloom were central figures in Iraqi Modernism, both of whom amassed incredible collections. The works offered in this sale were quite simply exceptional. The sale was a testament not only to the creative endeavours of the artists Jewad Selim, Dia Azzawi, Kadhim Hayder, and Shakir Hassan Al-Said, but the foresight, passion, and care of two visionary collectors who ensured the survival of these pioneering works. If the spirit of Modern Iraqi art could be captured in a single group of works, then this was it. I'm not surprised they achieved such fantastic results."

One of the highlights of the sale was the sculpture Mother and Child by Jewad Selim. The work – which sold for £444,000 against an estimate of £60,000 - 100,000, setting a new world record for a sculpture by the artist – was executed upon Selim's return to Iraq after the artist's time studying at the Slade – where he was a pupil of both Henry Moore, and Reg Butler. Selim's sculptural composition in Mother and Child is unlike anything produced in Iraq at the time. The work was part of Selim's own personal collection and was a favourite toy of the artist's daughter, Miriam. Upon their sudden departure from Baghdad in 1971, Miriam and Selim's wife Lorna were unable to transport the fragile work to London, and decided to give it to Said Ali Madhloom, who continued to care for it, even after he himself later resettled in the United Kingdom.

Miriam Selim, the artist's daughter, commented: "I used to play with the Mother and Child and wanted to bring it with me to England, but my mother couldn't, so she left it with Said Ali Madhloom. I am delighted that one of my childhood loves is safe."

Other highlights of the collections included:

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- How He Wandered with the Heart of a Martyr by Kadhim Hayder (Iraq, 1932-1985). Sold for £598,750 (Estimate: £100,000 - 150,000). From the collection of the renowned Iraqi architect Said Ali Madhloom (1921-2017).
- Motherhood by Jewad Selim (Iraq, 1919-1961). Sold for £125,250. (Estimate: £40,000 - 60,000). Formerly in the collection of Said Ali Madhloom.
- Woman Waiting by Jewad Selim. Sold for £125,250 (Estimate: £100,000 - 150,000). The work, which was painted in 1943, was gifted by Selim to his close friend Said Ali Madhloom.
- El-Allabat (The Curd Sellers) by Faeq Hassan (Iraq, 1914-1992). Sold for £106,500 – a new world record for the artist. (Estimate: £25,000-50,000). From the collection of the renowned Iraqi architect Mohammed Saleh Makiya (1914-2015).
- Hob al-Watan min al Iman (With Love of Motherland and Faith), by Shakir Hassan Al Said (Iraq, 1925-2004). Sold for 175,250 – a world record for an abstract painting by the artist. (Estimate: £60,000 - 100,000). Property from the collection of the renowned Iraqi architect Mohammed Saleh Makiya (1914-2015)..
- Oh Ali! by Dia Azzawi (Iraq, born 1939). Sold for £119,000 (Estimate: £40,000 - 60,000). Formerly property from the collection of the renowned Iraqi architect Said Ali Madhloom (1921-2017).

Emerging during Iraq's postcolonial period, Iraqi Modernism was deeply rooted in the country's rich artistic past: the treasures of the Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian cultures of Mesopotamia, and the great works of medieval Islamic craft. It was also greatly inspired by the European avant-garde. Bringing together elements of local heritage and currents of international artistic modernity, Iraqi modernism strove to create a distinctive new secular style, both modern and revolutionary.

The 1940s and 1950s were decades of increased art consciousness in Iraq. Conversations between artists, architects, poets, and other intellectuals, led to more organized groups and movements – Said Ali Madhloom (1921-2017), along with his brother Medhat, and Mohammed Makiya (1914-2015) were part of these conversations. Both studied architecture in Liverpool and, after their return to Iraq in the 1940s, they became prolific members of the Baghdad art scene. Madhloom joined Iraq's first art group, the Friends of Art Society, where he engaged with many of Iraq's main modernists, such as Jewad Selim and Hafidh al-Droubi. Makiya, who participated in the initial meetings in 1955, became the first elected President for the Iraqi Plastic Arts Association in 1956.

In the 1960s, Makiya, with Said Ali Madhloom and Henry Zvobodal, founded the al-Wasiti gallery. As the first commercial gallery, the space played a pivotal role in introducing artists, facilitating public exhibitions and widening participation in the art market. The gallery organized important and first solo exhibitions for artists such as Kadhim Hayder and Dia Azzawi. After leaving Iraq in 1971, Makiya would continue his engagement with Iraq's artists through establishing the Kufa Gallery in London.



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