

Syrian Art Facing The Light



Courtesy of Atassi Foundation

Alserkal Avenue opens its new multi-disciplinary venue Concrete during [Dubai's Art Week](#) with an exhibition of Modern Syrian art from the collection of the Atassi Foundation.

[Syria: Into the Light](#) will be the foundation's largest-ever exhibition and its first in the MENA region. Curated by Mouna Atassi, the founder of Atassi Foundation, in collaboration with the writer and curator, Rasha Salti, the exhibition takes 'Portraits and Figures' as its theme, and includes more than 60 works by over 40 artists dating from 1924 to 2016. Among them are paintings, drawings, sculpture, photography, and video art, by artists such as Toufiq Tarek, Fateh Moudarres, Elias Zayyat, Yousef Abdelke and Hiba Ansari.

The aim is to chart the shifts in both Syria's broader social history and its artistic movements through the 20th century. Much can be told of the country through the faces of the men and women depicted here, from humble workers, tradesmen and shepherds to nobles, heroes and mythological figures. The practice of prestige portraits arrived in the Middle East from Europe during the 19th century, and became very popular until considered a little old hat. It rose again in the early 20th century under a different guise, with the honest, often emotive depiction of everyday people as

a way to challenge class distinctions and those very elite who had commissioned society portrait in the century before. Then, after World War I, a new boldness crept into the genre, and portraits often steeped in allegory, as is evident in Syria: Into the Light.





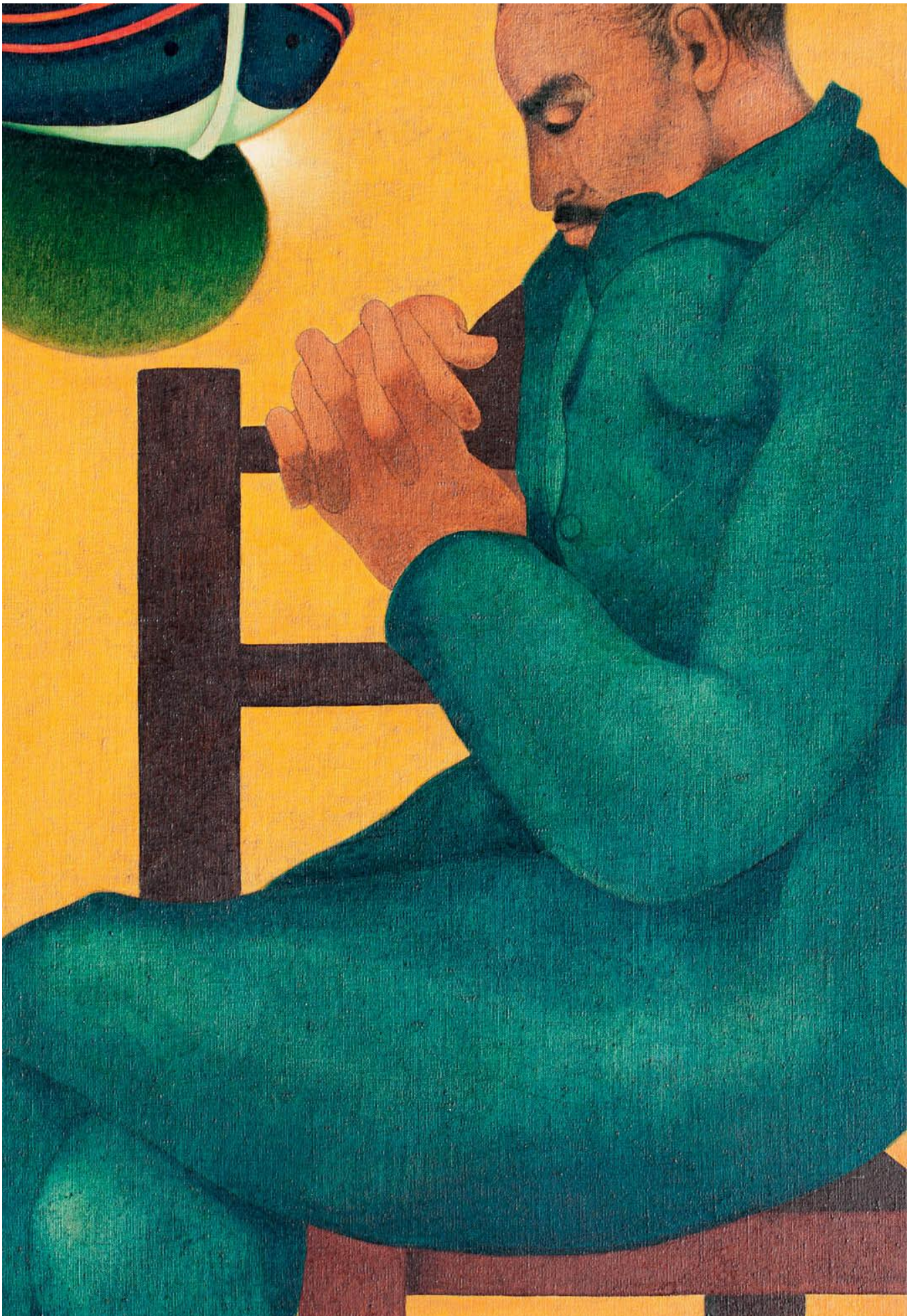
Badawiyeh. Michael Kurcheh. Oil on Wood. 53 x 38cm. Courtesy of Atassi Foundation

The hope is that the show will help redress the dearth of Syrian art seen on the international art scene, and show a different side of this beleaguered country, the foundation's main aim. "Syrian art is under-represented on the world stage and working with the Atassi Foundation to bring never seen before Syrian art to the fore felt like a great way to mark this milestone of the inauguration of Concrete" said Vilma Jurkute, Director of [Alserkal Avenue](#).

Shireen Atassi, Director of the Atassi Foundation, said "We are Syrian and we have had a long history of nurturing Syrian art, starting with when Mouna Atassi and her sister opened the first private gallery in the city of Homs back in the eighties. We believe that one can read the history of any country through its art."

Portraiture, says Atassi, has always been a key subject in Syrian art. "According to the research, the art of portraiture dates back to thousands of years BC when the skull of a deceased person was covered in clay so that it could recreate their features with new skin. Since then, the art of portraiture has continued to evolve within Syria." She adds the disclaimer that this is not a complete representation of portraiture and figurative works in Syrian art, but rather an illustrative selection.







Nap. Louay Kayyali. 1975. Oil on Canvas. 95 x 75cm. Courtesy of Atassi Foundation

“The idea was to show the diversity and richness of the Syrian social fabric from the early 20th century until today,” says Atassi. She hopes the show will help generate greater awareness of art in Syria, “bring to light the true face of our country” and “re-emphasise the role of art and culture in building bridges and opening up dialogue.”

The exhibition has been designed by Syrian architect, Michel Zayat, to suit Concrete. The space was formerly a collection of warehouses and the first project in the UAE designed by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), founded by Rem Koolhaas.

“With the opening of Concrete, we now have a space that was designed and built to accommodate international-level, museum-grade exhibitions to Dubai and the UAE,” said Jurkute. The adaptability of the space and its ability to metamorphose to bring a creative vision to life raises the bar, not only for the design industry, but for the events industry as well.”





Face. Fateh Moudarres. Oil on Wood. 30 x 25cm. Courtesy of Atassi Foundation

The plan is for it to host exhibitions and alternative arts and culture events. Future Concrete shows are yet to be revealed, but Jurkute says a few dates are already booked for 2019.

Syria: Into the Light runs from 9 March to 3 April at Concrete, Alserkal Avenue.

Atassifoundation.com