



Mythology

Art as Interpreted by the Old Masters

Tag: Georges Hanna Sabbagh

14 Paintings, MODERN & CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EASTERN ART, With Footnotes – 4



Laila Shawa, B. 1940, PALESTINIAN

THE ZAR (FROM THE WOMEN AND MAGIC SERIES), c. 1992

Acrylic on canvas

90.7 by 90.5cm.; 35¾ by 35½in

Private collection

The Zar is best described as a “healing cult” which uses drumming and dancing in its ceremonies. It also functions as a sharing of knowledge and charitable society among the women of these very patriarchal cultures. Most leaders of Zar are women, and most participants are women. Many writers have noted that while the majority of the possessing spirits are male, those possessed are generally female. This is not to say that the men do not contribute to zar ceremonies: they may help with drumming, the slaughter of ritual animals, or may themselves be a husband or relative required to make offerings to the possessing spirit. In fact, it is perhaps an unfortunate trend that in cultures where the zar becomes more visible, there is more of a tendency for men to co-opt the ceremonies, and for men to become zar leaders. [More on The Zar](#)

Laila Shawa (Born Gaza 1940) graduated summa cum laude in Fine Arts from the Italian Accademia di Belle Arti in 1964 and received a diploma in plastic arts from the Accademia San Giacomo in Rome. From 1965 to 1967, she returned to Gaza to teach arts and crafts to underprivileged children. She now lives and works in London. As a Palestinian artist, Shawa’s concern is to reflect the political realities of her country, becoming, in the process, a chronicler of events. Her work is based on a heightened sense of realism and targets injustice and persecution wherever their roots may be.

Her work has been exhibited in Italy, Germany, Austria, and the United Kingdom, in most Arab countries, North Africa, Iraq, Russia, China, Japan, Malaysia and USA. She is represented in public and private collections across the world, including the National Galleries of Jordan and Malaysia, the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, the British Museum in London and the National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington D.C. Her work is currently on tour in Brazil, in the Centro Cultural Banco do Brazil’s exhibition Isla, the first major exhibition of Islamic Art in Brazil.



Khadiga Riad, B.1914, EGYPTIAN

UNTITLED (NUBIA SCENE), c. 1952

Oil on canvas

33 by 47cm.; 13 by 18 1/2 in.

Private collection

Nubia is a region along the Nile rivers encompassing the areas between what is today central Sudan and southern Egypt. It was the seat of one of the earliest civilizations of ancient Africa, with a history that can be traced from at least 2000 B.C., and was home to one of the African empires. Nubia became divided between Egypt and the Sennar sultanate, resulting in the Arabization of much of the Nubian population. Nubia was again

united within Ottoman Egypt in the 19th century, and within the Kingdom of Egypt from 1899 to 1956. [More on Nubia](#)

Khadija Riad, born in 1914 in Cairo, Egypt, studied at the Mere de Dieu college and from 1950 to 1954. She is regarded as Egypt's foremost female surrealist.

She followed an informal education in painting from the studio of the Armenian Egyptian artist Zorian between 1950 and 1955. In the 1950's she won fame as she was awarded a prize in the 1959 Alexandria Biennale. In 1960 she exhibited in the Venice Biennale and in 1962 she won the first prize in a national Egyptian painting competition.

Riad adopted an abstract style characterized by the heavy use of a multi-layered paints delicately treated on the surface to give an ethereal and surrealist dimension to her compositions. [More on Khadija Riad](#)



Laila Shawa, B. 1940, PALESTINIAN

Birds of Paradise, 2011

Photography and mixed media on canvas

70 x 95cm

Private collection

Shawa's multi-media pieces have spanned four decades. As someone who has a close proximity to her native Palestine's politics, her analysis and documentation of events there is at the core of her work. For that, it is in strength that she is known for her "uncompromising documentation of events of today's Middle East." [More on Laila Shawa](#)

Shawa uses freeze-frames from this awful footage, digitally combining them with imagery edited from cartoons, news footage and photographs of dolls who serve as mute puppets re-enacting the real-time political traumas of the present. These mixed media works see-saw between hyper-realism and surreal landscapes of the imagination; between stark representation and vivid interpretation; and between brutal distortion and fantasy-fuelled idealist aspiration. [More on this work](#)



Hamed Owais, 1919-2011, EGYPTIAN

AL HOD HOD (THE HOPOOE BIRD), c. 1998

Oil on wood panel

80.8 by 65.8cm.; 31¾ by 25 7/8 in.

Private collection

Hamed Owais, 1919–2011, was born into a peasant family in the small village of Kafr Mansour. He received his primary and secondary education before becoming a metalworker. He moved to Cairo, where he joined the School of Fine Arts. After he graduated in 1944, he pursued his studies at the Institute of Art Education in Cairo. He received his diploma in 1946 and in the following year, he founded the Group of Modern Art, together with other artists of his generation.

From 1948 to 1955, Owais worked as a drawing teacher in the Farouk 1st Secondary School in Alexandria. He traveled to Italy in 1952 and visited the Venice Biennial where the works of Italian Social Realist artists were being exhibited. In 1958, he was appointed a professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Alexandria. Owais received a scholarship to continue his studies at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid. From 1977 to 1979, he served as the head of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Alexandria. He died in Cairo in 2011, at the age of ninety-two. [More on Hamed Owais](#)



Paul Guiragossian, 1926-1993, LEBANESE

MÈRE ET ENFANT (MOTHER AND CHILD), c. 1987

Oil on canvas

90 by 70cm.; 35 1/2 by 27 1/2 in.

Executed circa 1987

Private collection

Paul Guiragossian (1926 – November 20, 1993) was an Armenian Lebanese painter. Born to Armenian parents, Paul Guiragossian experienced the consequences of exile from a very tender age. Raised in boarding schools, he grew up away from his mother who had to work to make sure her two sons got an education.

In the 1950s, Guiragossian started teaching art in several Armenian schools and worked as an illustrator. He later started his own business with his brother Antoine, painting cinema banners, posters and drawing illustrations for books. Soon after he was discovered for his art and introduced to his contemporaries after which he began exhibiting his works in Beirut and eventually all over the world.

In 1956, Guiragossian won the first prize in a painting competition, which landed him a scholarship by the Italian government to study at The Academy of Fine Arts of Florence.

In 1962, Guiragossian was granted another scholarship, this time by the French Government, to study and paint in Paris at Les Atelier Des Maîtres De L'Ecole De Paris.

By the mid 1960s Guiragossian had grown to become one of the most celebrated artists in Lebanon and eventually of the Arab world and even though war broke out in the early 1970s, his attachment to Lebanon grew bigger and his works became more colorful with messages of hope for his people.

In 1989, Guiragossian went to Paris to exhibit his works in La Salle Des Pas Perdus in UNESCO and lived in the city with part of his family until 1991. In that year, he had a solo exhibition at the Institut du Monde Arabe. This exhibition was extended and marked the first solo show at the IMA for any artist. [More on Guiragossian](#)



Hossein Khosrojerdi, (Iran, born 1957)

Untitled

Acrylic and digital print on canvas

Numbered 2/5

127.9 x 98.8cm (50 3/8 x 38 7/8in).

Private collection

Hossein Khosrojerdi (Iran, born 1957), prominent artist of his generation and well-known in Iran, was born in 1957 in Iran and graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts of Tehran University. He twice participated in the Triennale-India, was included in the Venice Biennale in 2003, received an award at the Sharjah Biennial in 2001 and has been a founding member of the Iranian Artists' Association. His body of work increasingly takes a strong abstract and geometric direction which has an impactful yet refined quality. While deeply rooted in his heritage as a person. [More on Hossein Khosrojerdi](#)



Hassan Hajjaj, (Morocco, born 1961)

Sista, c. 2000

c-print on board

129.8 x 94cm (51 1/8 x 37in).

Private collection

Hassan Hajjaj (born Larache, Morocco in 1961) is a contemporary artist who lives and works between London, UK and Marrakech, Morocco.

Hajjaj's work is in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum, New York; the British Museum, London; the Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, Durham, NC; the Newark Museum, New Jersey; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; the Farjam Collection, Dubai; Institut des Cultures d'Islam, Paris; Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Tunisia; and Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond, VA.

Hajjaj was the winner of the 2011 Sovereign Middle East and African Art Prize and was shortlisted for Victoria & Albert Museum's Jameel Prize in 2009. In 2013, Rose Issa Projects published a monograph of the artist exploring his upbringing in Morocco and London. [More on Hassan Hajjaj](#)



Georges Hanna Sabbagh, 1877 – 1951, EGYPTIAN

THE MINARET OF IBN TULUN MOSQUE

signed and dated G.H. Sabbagh 1940

oil on canvas

73 by 60cm.; 28 3/4 by 23 5/8 in

Private collection

The Mosque of Ibn Tulun is located in Cairo, Egypt. It is arguably the oldest mosque in the city surviving in its original form, and is the largest mosque in Cairo in terms of land area.

The mosque was commissioned by Ahmad ibn Tulun, the Turkic Abbassid governor of Egypt from 868–884 whose rule was characterized by de facto independence. The historian al-Maqrizi lists the mosque's construction start date as 876 AD,[1] and the mosque's original inscription slab identifies the date of completion as AH 265 (878/879). [More on The Mosque of Ibn Tulun](#)

Georges Hanna Sabbagh (1877–1951) was an Egyptian-born French artist, born at Alexandria to a Catholic family of Lebanese origin. He studied art in Paris, being the first Egyptian at the Louvre School. He was a pupil of Paul Sérusier, Félix Vallotton and the Symbolist painter Maurice Denis, and worked beside Amedeo Modigliani. His family and the region of Brittany provided him with subjects for many of his paintings, before trips to Egypt led him to rediscover the lights, landscapes and characters of his childhood. He excelled in portraits, nudes and landscapes both in France and in Egypt. A painter of talent, Georges Sabbagh forms one of the group of artists who Jean Cassou called “the sacrificed generation”, absorbing the school of Les Nabis, Fauvism and Cubism at the beginning of the century, but forgotten after the Second World War. [More on Georges Hanna Sabbagh](#)



Georges Hanna Sabbagh, 1877 – 1951, EGYPTIAN

THE ASWAN CATARACT , c. 1925

Oil on canvas

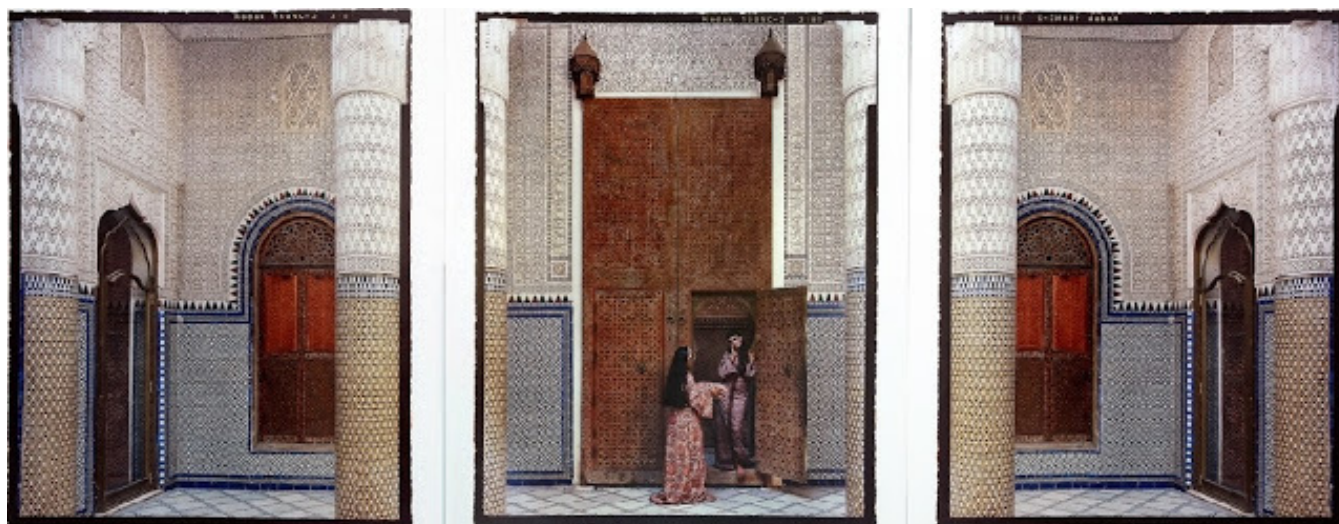
66 by 81.5cm.; 26 by 32in.

Private collection

The Aswan Low Dam or Old Aswan Dam is a gravity masonry buttress dam on the Nile River in Aswan, Egypt. The dam was built at the former first cataract of the Nile. When initially constructed between 1899 and 1902, nothing of its scale had ever been attempted; on completion, it was the largest masonry dam in the world. The dam was

designed to provide storage of annual floodwater and augment dry season flows to support greater irrigation development and population growth in the lower Nile. The dam, originally limited in height by conservation concerns, worked as designed, but provided inadequate storage capacity for planned development and was raised twice, between 1907 and 1912 and again in 1929–1933. These heightenings still did not meet irrigation demands and in 1946 it was nearly over-topped in an effort to maximize pool elevation. This led to the investigation and construction of the Aswan High Dam 6 kilometres (3.7 mi) upstream. [More on the Aswan Dam](#)

Georges Hanna Sabbagh, 1877 – 1951, EGYPTIAN, see above



Lalla Essaydi, Moroccan, b. 1956

Les Femmes du Maroc: Harem #11, 2009

Chromogenic prints (c-print) mounted on aluminum, in three parts

40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm.)

Private collection

Moroccan born photographer **Lalla Essaydi** explores Arab female identity by hand-

painting Arabic calligraphy in henna on different surfaces such as female bodies, fabric and walls. Through her compositions, Essaydi references nineteenth century **Orientalist style** and rejects traditional objectified representations of Arab women. The artist critiques French painters such as Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres and Eugène Delacroix who often painted middle-eastern harems filled with eroticized Arab female bodies. Her photographs address and deconstruct the complex power structures imposed on the Arab female body by alluding to historical stereotypes. [More on Lalla Essaydi](#)



Lalla Essaydi, Moroccan, b. 1956

Harem, #12

Private collection

In her series Harem, Essaydi refers to the dangerous nature of the harem, contrasting the idealistic setting that Western artists previously depicted. The artist places her

figures within the Moroccan Palace Dar El Basha and dresses them in patterns similar to the palace's mosaics, wood carvings and stained glass. By camouflaging the women's bodies into the background, Essaydi illustrates how women seemingly appear as another piece of décor in the room. To counter societal norms, Essaydi utilizes calligraphy and applies henna to adorn the female bodies. The text is not necessarily meant to be read or understood, but rather alludes symbolically to the restrictions faced by women in today's societies and how they find their voice despite all imposed restrictions. Through the perspective of an Arab woman living in a Western world, Lalla Essaydi redefines Arab female identity. [More on Lalla Essaydi](#)



LALLA ESSAYDI

Harem #15, 2009

Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate

30 × 40 in, 76.2 × 101.6 cm

Edition of 15

Private collection

Harem a sacred inviolable place; for female members of the family. Harem properly refers to domestic spaces that are reserved for the women of the house in a Muslim family and are inaccessible to adult males except for close relations. Similar institutions have been common in other Mediterranean and Middle Eastern civilizations, especially among royal and upper-class families and the term is sometimes used in non-Islamic contexts. The structure of the harem and the extent of monogamy or polygamy has varied depending on the family's personalities, socio-economic status, and local customs. A harem may house a man's wife—or wives and concubines, as in royal harems of the past.

In the West, Orientalist imaginary conceptions of the harem as a fantasy world of forbidden sexuality where numerous women lounged in suggestive poses have influenced many paintings, stage productions, films and literary works. Several European Renaissance paintings dating to the 16th century defy Orientalist tropes and portray the women of the Ottoman harem as individuals of status and political significance. In many periods of Islamic history women in the harem exercised various degrees of political power. [Harem. More on the Harem](#)

More on Lalla Essaydi, above



Mahmoud Said, 1897-1964, EGYPTIAN

NU COUCHÉ AU DIVAN BLEU (NUDE LYING ON A BLUE SOFA), c. 1938

Oil on panel

68 by 98cm.; 26 3/4 by 38 5/8 in

Private collection

Mahmoud Said, 1897-1964, EGYPTIAN. Born into a wealthy Alexandrian family, Mahmoud Said first studied jurisprudence at the French School of Law in Cairo in the 1910s. During his studies, he became interested in painting, and joined the studios of Italian painters Amelia Casonato da Forno and Arturo Zanieri, before travelling to France to study in Paris, briefly at the Académie Julian. Though he worked for almost thirty

years as a lawyer and then a judge, he continued to paint in his free time until he quit law in the late 1940s and devoted himself to art completely. He is considered the foremost painter of the 'Pioneer' generation of Egyptian artists, renowned for his bold, richly coloured portraits, nudes, and landscapes. He painted continuously until his death in 1964.

Said's works are housed in private and public collections including Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha; Museum of Modern Egyptian Art, Cairo; Mahmoud Said Museum, Alexandria, and Ministry of Culture, Egypt. [More](#)



Sohrab Sepehri, 1928-1980, IRANIAN

UNTITLED (FROM THE TREE TRUNK SERIES) , c. 1972

oil on canvas

97 by 126cm.; 38 1/8 by 49 1/2 in.

Private collection

Sohrab Sepehri (Persian: Sohrāb Sepehri) (October 7, 1928 – April 21, 1980) was a notable Iranian poet and a painter. He was born in Kashan, Iran. He is considered to be one of the five most famous Iranian poets who have practiced modern poetry.

Sepehri was also one of Iran's foremost modernist painters.

Well-versed in Buddhism, mysticism and Western traditions, he mingled the Western concepts with Eastern ones, thereby creating a kind of poetry unsurpassed in the history of Persian literature. To him, new forms were new means to express his thoughts and feelings.

His poetry has been translated into many languages including English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Swedish, Arabic, Turkish and Russian. An English translation of his selected poems by Ali Salami appeared in 2003.

Sepehri died in Pars hospital in Tehran of leukemia. His poetry is full of humanity and concern for human values. He loved nature and refers to it frequently. [More on Sohrab Sepehri,](#)

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