

# Visual and Literary Culture in the Middle East

Standing in between a strong classical **Middle Eastern** tradition and influences from **European** modernist ideas, the modern art and literature of the Middle East evolved unique specific styles. Initially looking for a synthesis between those contrary influences, the Middle-Eastern culture, triggered by the turbulent historic events, turned into a more **political** and **social** subject, including links to daily **life, religion, war, refugees, globalization** and the **oil** industry.



Building on the long and rich tradition of Arabic poetry, poets perpetuate the highly ornate style of their predecessors.

Imitating the only classical Arabic prose style maqama some writers nevertheless slowly introduced new ideas to the sceptic public.

**maqama**  
literary genre of rhymed prose dating to the 10th century with intervals of poetry in which rhetorical extravagance is conspicuous.



Ahmad Shawqi (1868-1932) Egypt



Muhammad Hafiz Ibrahim (1872-1932)

Emulating the style of the odes of Abbasid poets but addressing the public issues of the present.

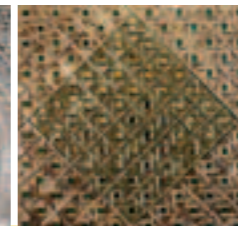


Jamil Az-Zahawi (1863-1936) Ma'ruf ar-Rusafi (1875-1945) both Iraq

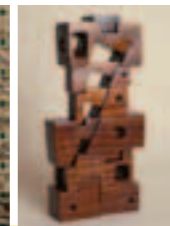
Forcing a critical view on the Western culture and civilization and its influence on the Islamic world. Condemning unreflected absorption of European ideas.



Pattern

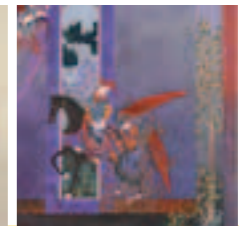


Geometry of Hope  
Monir Farmanfarmaian (\*1924) Iran



Poem II (1963-65)

Saloua Raouda Choucair (\*1916) Lebanon



Flight  
Farah Ossuli (\*1953)



Arabic Motif  
Suad al-Attar (\*1942) Baghdad

Miniature



Artists from Europe forming a romantic image of the middle east



Khalil Raad (1852-1957) Lebanon

## Photography

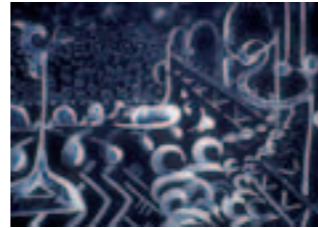
Orientalist photographers introduce photography to the Middle East in the 1850s

## "Marine" school



Abdul Qadir Al Rassam (1882-1952) Iraq  
View in Baghdad

Influenced by the Orientalist movement but also by Turkish tradition. Focus on important historical events in the scenery of the warm and luminous atmosphere of the Lebanese coast.



At the Concert (1948)  
Madiha Umar (\*1908) Iraq



Lines on a Wall (1978)  
Shakir Hassan Al Said (1925-2004) Iraq  
Focusing on the exploration of Arabic script in modern art



Shirt (1960)  
Siah Armajani (\*1939) Iran



Oh, Persepolis (1975)  
Parvis Tanavoli (\*1937) Tehran/Vancouver

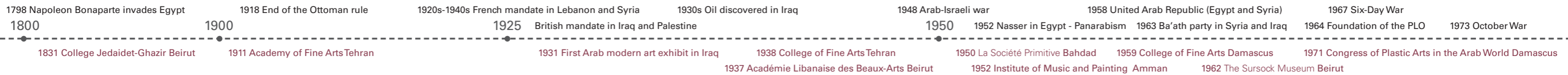


The Echo of the Word (1990)  
Mohammad Ehsai (\*1939) Iran



Hussein (1993)  
Jidan Ali (1939) Jordania

## Calligraphy



Habib Serour (1860-1938) Lebanon



## First generation of modern Lebanese artists

Classical style with classical themes and subjects - Natives types in national costumes, most characteristic landscapes

Khalil Saleeby  
Nimetallah Maadi



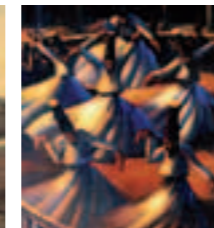
Georges Corm (1896-1971) Lebanon

Daoud Corm (1852-1930) Lebanon  
Having studied in Rome, he was the first teacher to introduce the basic principles of art technique to Lebanon.

## Second generation



Strong influence by western schools but with emphasis on own original identity.



## Neo-Pharaonic style

Mahmud Said (1897-1964) Egypt  
Youssef Hoyek  
Youssef Ghossoub  
Gibran Kahlil Gibran



Moustapha Farroukh (1901-1957) Lebanon

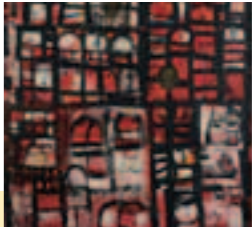
After World War II Expressionist Realist art trend gets established in Iraq, focusing on village and city scapes

Cesar Gemayel  
Omar Onsi  
Rachid Wehbi

## Expressionism



Then What? (1965)  
Louay Kayali (1934-1978) Syria



Untitled (1967)

Fateh Moudarres (1922-1999) Syria



War of 1967 (1967)  
Gazbeh Sirry (\*1925) Egypt

Artists reacting to the burst of the pan-Arabic bubble in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat.

Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998) Syria  
Marginal Notes on the Book of Defeat (1967)  
Stinging self-criticism of Arab inferiority

"My master Sultan, / You have lost the war twice // because half of our people have no tongues. / And what is the worth of a voiceless people?"



Rifa'a el-Tahtawi (1801-1873) Egypt

Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz (1834)  
Description of Western societies from a Muslim viewpoint in a self-confident, but open-mindedly modern approach.

Faris al-Shidyaq (1804 - 1887) Egypt



Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956) Egypt

Zaynab (1914)  
The story of a village girl married against her will is said to be the first novel in Arabic language

## Romanticism

In contrast to the neoclassical poetry especially emigrant poets start focussing on more radical initiatives and expression of personal emotions.

al-Fajr (The Dawn) 1925  
Weekly literary journal with great influence on Arabic influence.



Gibran Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) Lebanon/New York

"Half of what I say is meaningless, but I say it so that the other half may reach you."

The Prophet (1923)  
Being on of the best-sold works of 20th-century literature, in 26 poems many issues of life and the human condition are discussed

One of the most influential and popular Lebanese writers. Having emigrated to the United States his topics dealt with spiritual and everyday subjects as well as Syrian nationalism.

al-Mahjar (The Pen League) 1916-1932  
Arab-American literary society. Promotion of new generation of Arab writers.



Taha Husayn (1889-1973) Egypt

Mustaqbal al-thaqafah fi Misr (1938)  
Placing Egypt in a mediterranean instead of an oriental context, Husayn advocates the assimilation of European culture.

Mahmud Taymur  
Ibrahim Abd al-Qadir al Mazini  
The novel gets established as popular form of writing by a series of established writers in the 1930s.

Nasib Arida  
Kahlil Gibran  
Mikha'il Na'ima  
Ameen Rihani

Al-Sa'ih (the Traveler)  
Journal communicating the ideas and poetry of emigrant writers to the Middle East



Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987) Egypt

Ahl el-Kahf (1933)  
Inspired by the Qur'an, the Thousand and One Nights and Greek myths and thus touches the major intellectual concerns of the time

After his return from Paris he became the first Arab artist to give drama and theater a recognized place among literary arts.

Poetry as a means of enforcing his strongly Lebanese-nationalist and anti-Arab ideologies.

Sa'id 'Aql (\*1912) Lebanon

## Resistance poetry

Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) Egypt

## Islamist theory

Milestones (1964)

Setting out a road to the revival of Islam, the book has been a major influence on Islamist movements.



Men in the Sun (1963)

Telling the dramatic voyage of three Palestinian refugees having left their refugee camps and attempting to reach Kuwait in hope of finding work.

Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972) Palestine/Lebanon

Mahmud Darwish (1941-2008) Palestine

Record! I am an Arab/ And my identity card is number fifty thousand/ I have eight children/ And the ninth is coming after a summer/ Will you be angry?/ Record!/ I am an Arab/ I have a name without a title/ Patient in a country/ Where people are enraged . . . I do not hate people/ Nor do I encroach/ But if I become hungry/ The usurper's flesh will be my food/ Beware..! Beware..! Of my hunger/ And my anger!

