

## MATHAF: ARAB MUSEUM OF MODERN ART



**Adam Henein Al-Safina ('The Ship'), (20082010-) Located in front of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art © Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art**

“Mathaf”: Arab Museum of Modern Art. An unprecedented new center for Arab culture and creativity.

“Mathaf” (pronounced MAT-haff, meaning “museum” in Arabic) is the first institution of its kind in the region. “Mathaf” fosters creativity, promote dialogue and inspire new ideas about modern and contemporary Arab art.

Suited in 5,500-square-meter (59,000-square-

foot), located in a former school building in Doha’s Education City, “Mathaf” has a collection that represents the major trends and sites of production of modern Arab art spanning the 1840s through the present. Offering a rare comprehensive overview of modern Arab art, the new museum is presented three inaugural exhibitions, including the first survey of its unparalleled collection of more than 6,000 works.

Equally important, “Mathaf” is presenting programs

that engage the local and international community, as well as encourage research and scholarship, contributing to the cultural landscape of the Gulf region, the Middle East and the Arab Diaspora.

The inaugural ceremony on December 14 featured a program of live entertainment and musical performances spearheaded by Yassin Alsalman (aka The Narcicyst) under the heading Identity Card: Who We Were, Where We Are. The line-up of music and poetry underscored the opening event's theme of the resurgence of Arab artistic expression from the East and the West. Alsalman has selected poets and singers including Omar Offendum, Shadia Mansour and Suheir Hammad for the event, juxtaposing the modern with the classical, presenting an homage to history and modernity and creating a new space for the voice of Arab art.

Continuing the celebration, a two-day academic conference took place on December 16 and 17,

presented as collaboration between Mathaf and AMCA (Association for Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran and Turkey). Scholars and artists discussed topics including major genres of Arab modern art, the history and implications of art education in the Arab world, the function of critics and curators in defining the field, and the growing role of multi-nationalism and markets.

Mathaf is the outgrowth of more than two decades of activity by the Vice- Chairperson of the Qatar Museums Authority (QMA), His Excellency Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed bin Ali Al Thani. The collection was adopted originally by Qatar Foundation, which safeguarded it for four years before QMA took on the Museum as a project in partnership with Qatar Foundation. As the catalyst of this project, H.E. Sheikh Hassan has encouraged creativity in Qatar and throughout the region with his longtime commitment to Arab artists aside of his generous donation of more than 4,000 pieces of art from his private collection to the museum.

“With the opening of Mathaf, we make Qatar the place to see, explore and discuss the creations of Arab artists of the modern era and our own time,” stated QMA Chairperson H.E. Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. “We are proud that Qatar is now revealing these artistic achievements in unprecedented depth and breadth, just as our Museum of Islamic Art opened vast new perspectives on our centuries-old heritage.”

According to H.E. Sheikh Hassan, “We warmly welcome the people of our own country and region, and visitors from around the world, to a center of knowledge and creativity



**Ismail Fattah, executed by Ali Nouri The Guardian of the Fertile Crescent (2010)  
Located in front of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art © Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art**

that has long been needed. Collectors and curators are increasingly drawn toward the work of contemporary Arab artists, which is a very welcome development. But today's artistic activities can truly flourish only if they are connected meaningfully to the important history that lies behind these achievements. Mathaf deepens the conversation about Arab art and helps advance the creativity of the Arab world."

Abdulla Al Najjar, CEO of QMA, commented, "Mathaf was born out of Sheikh Hassan's profound, ongoing engagement with Arab artists and his desire to share their works with our own people and a global audience. This is the perfect illustration of our mission at QMA: to build understanding across borders and welcome the world to Doha. Mathaf fulfills this mission, and does so with the element of innovation toward which we always aspire."



Museum exterior with Adam Heneins Al-Safina (The Ship) in the foreground. © Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art



### Inaugural Exhibitions

For its inauguration, Mathaf presented three exhibitions featuring historic works of Arab modernism and many newly commissioned works, which are on view at two sites in Doha, Qatar.

### Sajjil: A Century of Modern Art

*(Curated by Dr. Nada Shabout, Wassan al-Khudhairi, and Deena Chalab)*

The first in an ongoing series of exhibitions that surveyed its unparalleled permanent collection. “Sajjil”, an Arabic word meaning the art of recording, features more than 240 paintings, sculptures and mixed-media works made by more than 100 artists, representing pivotal moments in the development of Arab modernism throughout the 20th century.

These works add up to a new record: what artists of the Arab world saw and set down in response or counterpoint to the defining events of the twentieth century.

The exhibition occupies twelve galleries and is

divided into ten themed categories: “Nature”, “The City”, “Individualism”, “Form & abstraction”, “Society”, “Family”, “History & Myth”, “Struggle”, “Horoufiyah - abstract letterform art” and finally “Doha”.

“Doha” is significant because many of the works held by Mathaf were created here under the patronage of the founder, HE Sheikh Hassan. These are an exceptional research resource, showing interactions between the artists, their patron and the new city.

Works that show Doha city and other urban centers demonstrate that artists in the Arab world tended to favor cityscapes rather than landscapes. They used images of cities to explore questions of nationality, regional identity and the relationship between the individual and the larger group. Landscapes are rare, and usually emphasize particular cultural or political concerns, especially during the first half of the twentieth century.



**Dia Azzawi ! Red Sky with Birds, 1981 Oil on canvas, 120 x 200.2 cm © Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art**

Politics remains an important subject throughout twentieth-century art from the Arab world. As well as general international worry about war and industrialization, Arab artists confronted their own regional problems: opposition to imperialism and colonialism; the emerging Palestinian crisis; increasing tension between the Muslim Brotherhood and intellectual left-wing politics; and questions about identity, nationalism and rapid technological change.

Artists tried in different ways to come to terms with these various difficulties. A large question was: how shall we deal with the past? A genre such as portraiture, which had been banned under certain Islamic dynasties, might reconnect an artist with ancient portrait painting in Egypt or Mesopotamia, or might be a way to link with modernism internationally, or, perhaps, both.

So artists looked to their own rich regional art traditions and updated them for their own purposes. Ancient figures of mother goddesses might reappear as a symbol of Palestine, or ideal motherhood. The traditional portrait of a powerful male leader could be replaced by a portrait of the couple within the

family unit. Iconic ancient shapes – such as the black almond eyes of Mesopotamian art or the Egyptian pyramid – might define a painting style or indicate the message of a particular piece.

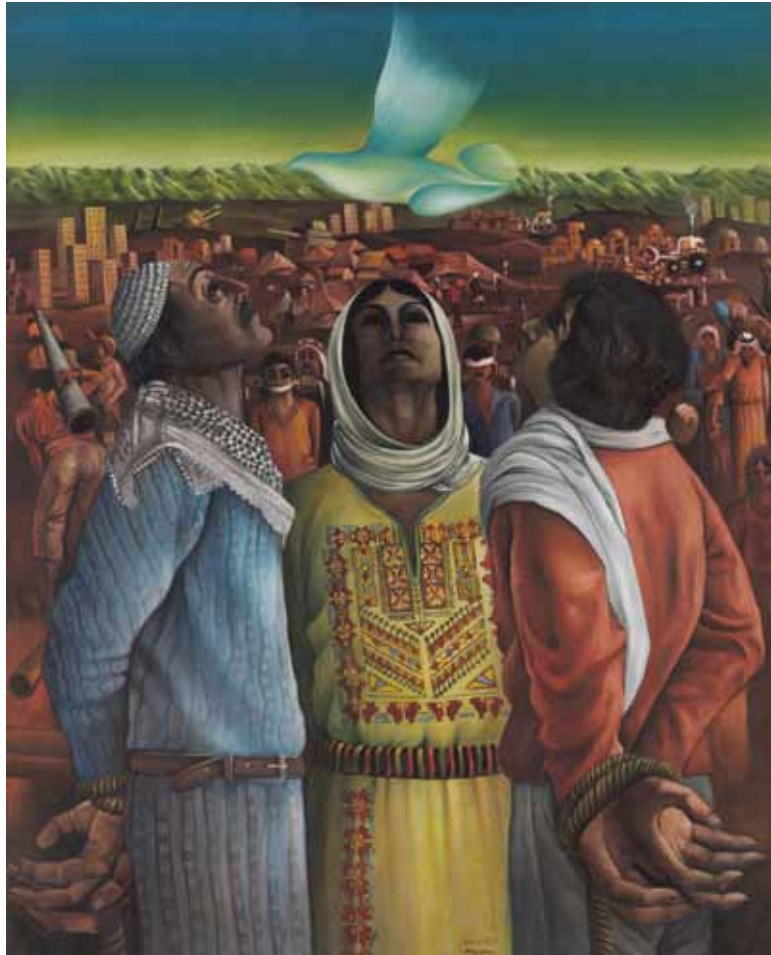
Artists in the Arab world were especially interested in form. Many pieces in the collection show a move towards abstraction even when the art tells a clear

story. Modern styles of abstract art became better known and popularly accepted partly through their use in portraiture in the Arab world.

In parallel, throughout the modern period, several artists worked with abstract letterforms as an important element of their art. These pieces are grouped together under the name horoufiyah (literally, 'letterism') and include fine examples from 1990s Iraq of the contemporary art form called dafatir ('notebooks').

The themes in Sajjil reflect these

artists' fascination with universal ideas and particular realities. We hope you will pursue the overlaps and connections between them. Observe for yourself the major trends in twentieth-century Arab art and enjoy a fresh perspective on the modernist canon.



**Sliman Mansour, Perseverance and Hope, 1976 Acrylic on canvas, 99.2 x 79.5 cm**  
© Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art



Madiha Umar - The Letter Ein, 1986 Oil on canvas, 71.1 x 81.6 cm © Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art



Mahmoud Said Title Unknown, 1938 Oil on board, 28.5 x 49.8 cm © Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art



### **Interventions: a dialogue between the modern and the contemporary**

*(Curated by Dr. Nada Shabout)*

Another inaugural exhibition profiles five major artists whose careers have spanned the years from modern to contemporary art. They are Dia Azzawi, Farid Belkahia, Ahmed Nawar, Ibrahim el-Salahi and Hassan Sharif. A new work commissioned by Mathaf from each of these artists shows in the context of existing works by the artists from the Mathaf collection.

The exhibition honors the lives and careers of these artists, who have forged and promoted modern art in their respective countries and remain influential today. Because Arabism was a major factor in the maturation of modern art from the Arab world when they came of age, their work has sometimes manifested a search for cultural identity and a desire to preserve cultural distinctiveness. At the same time, these artists have never sacrificed aesthetic growth,

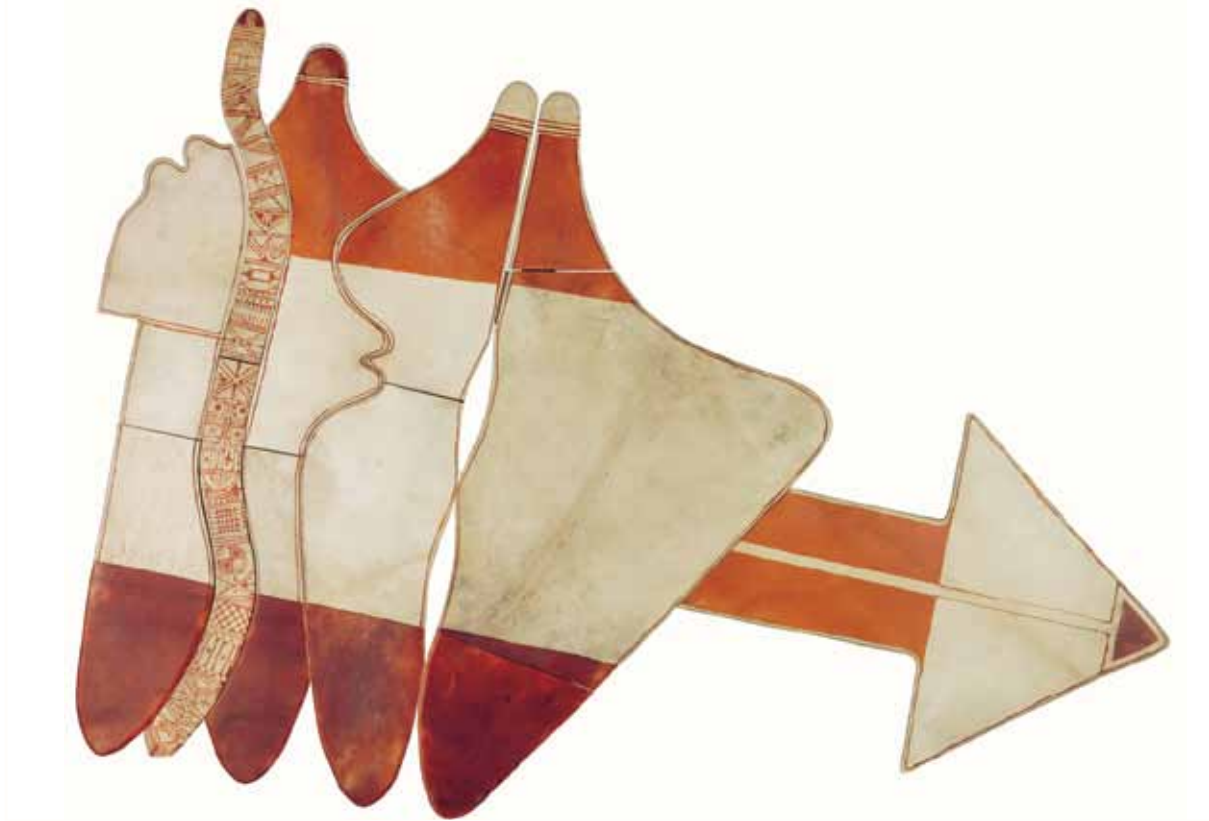
or abandoned the existential quest for understanding the modern self.

In speaking of the artists, Shabout said, “All five have challenged many social conventions and on various occasions pushed the envelope of what was permitted publicly. We hope that Interventions will be the first of a number of exhibitions that will recognize key achievements in constructing the history of modern art from the Arab world, and that will provide spaces for writing this history.”

**Contemporary Practices** asked Dr. Nada about her views, the curatorial process & the impact of these two exhibitions intended to have, following are her views:

**CP:** Please tell us about the selection & short-listing process. Why did you select those particular artists?

**NS:** For “*Sajjil*” Artists were selected based on their historical importance. Some artists become key figures for modernity in the Arab world, others



**Farid Belkahia Procession, Undated Natural dye on leather on panel 163 x 242 cm © Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art**

introduced new ideas that were developed by the generations that followed. So in other words, some artists were chosen because they were influential but also some works were chosen because they were influential and registered an important historical shift. For *“Interventions”* I thought about the artists of interventions as highlighted moments from the artists of *“Sajjil”*. The focus of the exhibition is the new commissions, however, their historical importance was emphasized through contextualizing them thematically with works from the collection. Artists were chosen for their key role in introducing modern art to their respective countries and for collectively contributing to what amounts to Arab modernity. They were key figures in their countries, in the region, and remain influential today. They were/are innovative, and in one-way or another, contributed to art education. Moreover, they also had special relationships with Sheikh Hassan and the history of Mathaf’s collection.

**CP:** Curatorial process: Who were the players in the process? Were the curators & Mathaf partners in setting criteria for this selection?

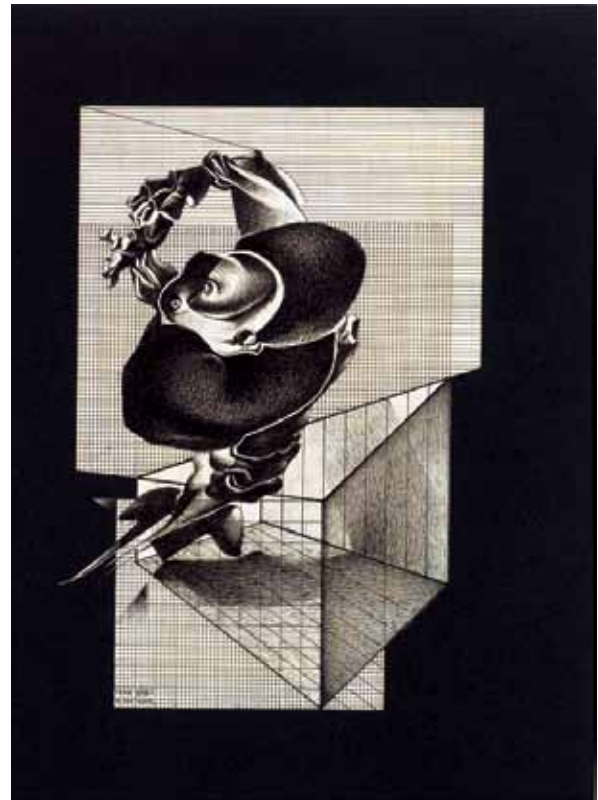
**NS:** Yes to some extent the curators and Mathaf were partners with due respect to the curator’s ideas. We had many fruitful discussions, agreements and disagreements.

**CP:** Was political correctness observed at any stage for any of your selection? Was it even a factor to consider during short listing?

**NS:** I am not sure what you mean by political correctness in this context. Politics didn’t play any role in the selection.

**CP:** Give us your reflections of areas of improvement.

**NS:** For *Interventions*, in retrospect, I would have worked with the curators of *Told/Untold/Retold* to link both exhibitions spatially as to emphasize historical continuity. As for *Sajjil*, although our main intention was to introduce a context for a discourse to develop and thus tried to keep it as neutral and objective as possible, I would have liked to include pop ups of certain movements. Time was very restrictive.



**Ahmed Nawar - War and Peace, No. 14, 1984 Ink on paper 41 x 41 cm © Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art**



**Hassan Sharif - Cow belly, 2010 Iron, aluminum and copper 375 x 200 x 100 cm © Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art**



**Told / Untold / Retold: 23 stories of journeys through time and space - December 30, 2010 – May 28, 2011**

*(Curated by Dr. Sam Bardaouil & Till Fellrath)*

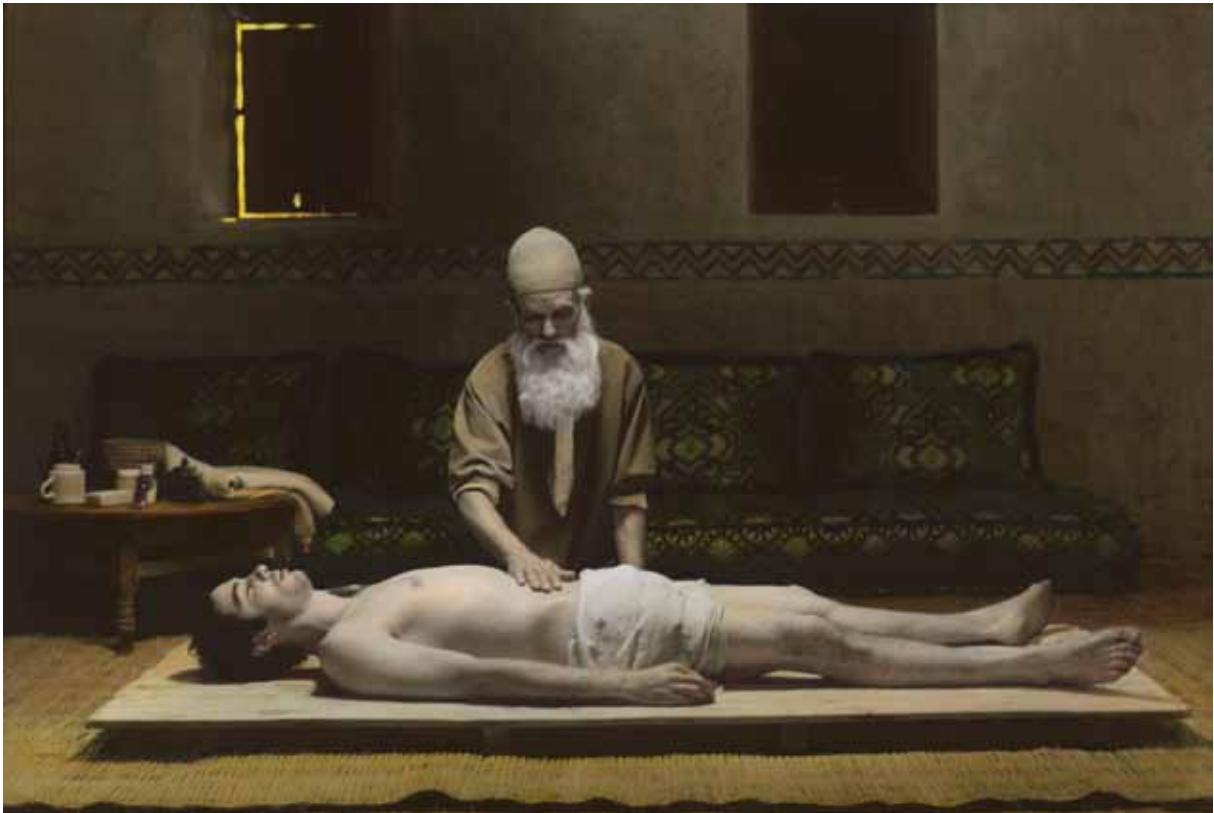
One of the most ambitious exhibition of contemporary art in the Arab world to date, features new works commissioned by Mathaf from 23 contemporary artists with roots in the Arab world. The exhibition is a collection of 23 stories each vividly expressed in new works of painting, sculpture, photography, video, multimedia installations and interactive digital art. The featured artists are Adel Abidin, Sadik Kwaish Alfraji, Buthayna Ali, Ahmed Alsoudani, Ghada Amer, Kader Attia, Lara Baladi, Wafaa Bilal, Abdelkader Benchamma, Mounir Fatmi, Lamia Joreige, Amal Kenawy, Jeffar Khaldi, Hassan Khan, Youssef Nabil, Walid Raad, Khalil Rabah, Younès Rahmoun, Steve Sabella, Marwan Sahmarani, Zineb Sedira, Khaled Takreti, and Akram Zaatari.

Some stories are “Told,” evoking autobiographical accounts and nostalgia for the things that were. Other stories are “Untold,” anticipating an imagined future that speaks of things that could be. And there are those that are “Retold,” proposing an alternative narrative to the things that are. Central to each story is the use of time as a concrete compositional element and the reflection on the act of journeying, a condition that has come to describe the rampant fluidity of today’s society.

In discussing the curatorial theme of the exhibition, Bardaouil and Fellrath said, “Today’s artists are in constant transmigration across a diversity of cities and locations, yet never escaping redundant geographical labels through which their work is misconstrued. They are in perpetual metamorphosis, in a state of ‘in- betweenness’. These journeys occur not only in place, but also in time. When you move and leave things behind, you remember, recollect and reconstruct, but you also reorient



**Khalil Rabah from BIPRODUCT, 2010 Multimedia installation, dimensions variable © Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art**



Youssef Nabil from *You Never Left*, 2010 Film and a series of hand colored gelatin silver prints, dimensions variable © Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art

and redirect yourself. These are all acts into which time is intricately weaved. This explains why time is often a significant formalistic component within contemporary artistic practice. In that sense, *Told / Untold / Retold* is a subversive confrontation, celebrating a willful act of uprooting that is reflective of the transient condition of our world.”

**Contemporary Practices** asked Sam Bardaouil & Till Fellrath about their views, the curatorial process and the impact of this exhibition intended to have, following are their views:

**CP:** Please tell us about the selection & short-listing process. We would like to shed the light on the number of profiles consulted in this selection, the type of art, artists & profiles.

**SB & TF:** Early on, we embarked on a curatorial tour visiting many artists’ studios across the ME, Europe and The US. This was preceded by several

months spent researching the work and trajectory of more than fifty artists with roots in the Arab World.

During our visit, and over the months that ensued, we were engaged in a rigorous discussion with the various artists with whom we had initiated a discussion. We were keen on exploring where each of these artists was in their own journey of artistic exploration, what their aspirations were and what potential stylistic and formal departures they were considering. With time, it was becoming clearer to us that the complexity and vastness of the themes and styles these artists represented could not and should not be reduced into a contrived thematic that attempts to make a point which does not exist in the first place. We were also keen on avoiding the ethnic groupings and generalized statements that other exhibitions might have put forward about Arabness, both culturally and artistically. We soon realized that

we had a rare and amazing opportunity at our hands: to employ this project as an experiment, a case study that attempts to shed light on any overarching trends within artistic practices today. The fact that these artists lived, worked and belonged to so many diverse cosmopolitan centers across the globe removed the exhibition from what could have been a dodgy ethnographic expose. Rather it became an attempt towards a dynamic reflection on the much wider contemporary art domain.

The final selections were a direct result of this process of dialogue and exploration. The intention was not to end up with a top 20 or so of artists from the Arab world. Nor was it a consideration of nationalities, genders and age. We eventually went with artists who had the promise to deliver a great commission, who had something exciting to say, to say it with passion, and who were willing to take risks by embarking on new departures within their artistic careers. (For more on the explorations we made please refer to the concept of Trans-Modernity that we espouse in the curatorial essays in the catalogue)

**CP:** Curatorial process: Who were the players in the process? Were the curators & Mathaf partners in

setting criteria for this selection?

**SB & TF:** The selections from beginning to end were entirely up to us as the curators of the exhibition. In the early phases there was a fair amount of brainstorming with the Mathaf team. Everyone was invited to bring his or her suggestions to the table. However, once the cut-off date occurred, we were given full curatorial freedom and this secured the integrity of the exhibition from A to Z.

**CP:** Was political correctness observed at any stage for any of your selection? Was it even a factor to consider during short listing?

**SB & TF:** Not really. If political correctness is code for censorship, we can safely assert that not once in the process did we receive any instructions to curb an artist from following a certain direction or to alter the content or form of an artwork. Some of the works in the exhibition are evidence to that. Artists, curators and public at large might have certain assumptions about thresholds of tolerance in the region when it comes to freedom of artistic expression. This could prompt many to self-censor before they face external censorship. At Mathaf, none of this is necessary. At least, this has been our experience.

**Khaled Takreti from Generations, 2010 Acrylic and collage on canvas, 6 panels 195 cm x 130 cm each © Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art**





**CP:** What is the future of the project “told, untold, retold”? Do you have plans to market the concept outside Mathaf Premises?

**SB & TF:** Told Untold Retold is the result of a specific process that had specific objectives and developed within specific cultural and logistical parameters. It is one of the three inaugural exhibitions for a museum that focuses, at least for now, on Arab creativity, both modernist and contemporary. The exhibition might travel to other museums in other parts of the world and might be adapted accordingly in order to be relevant to the respective audience and to meet certain practical and logistical realities. As Art Reoriented, we always strive to conceive and execute exhibitions and programs that offer a new curatorial intervention, tackle issue and experiments that are more challenging and ultimately trigger new ways of looking at certain art-historical and art-critical paradigms that might have been overlooked or underplayed in the past.

**CP:** The project was curated by 2 curators, how harmonious the work had been and the pros and cons of such collaboration in one project. What were, if any, areas of improvement?

**SB & TF:** Harmony is probably not relevant in this

case. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction is a better way of looking into the process. Till is German, living in various countries for more than 15 years. Sam is Lebanese with a similar international track of living in so many places. Till comes from a political economics background while Sam’s main background is art history and theater practice. We have both lectured at university and worked with museums and not for profit organizations. This diversity of cultural and professional backgrounds allows us the ability to explore things from so many different angles that eventually enriches the context in which an exhibition is presented and an artwork is explored. Do we ever have different opinions? Absolutely yes, but not on the main points. It is more on the expression of a big idea rather than the idea itself. And this is a healthy way of ensuring that nothing falls into the cracks so to speak, that every aspect of every project is best brought to the fore and that it creates a comprehensive and engaging experience for the viewer/participant.



## The People After Mathaf

**Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani** - *Chairperson, Qatar Museums Authority Board of Trustees*

Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani has played a pioneering role in the fields of culture, education and outreach, spearheading and supporting a number of local and international organizations.

As the Chairperson of the Qatar Museums Authority Board of Trustees, H.E. Sheikha Al Mayassa guides the vision for future museums and cultural projects, with the aim of transforming the State of Qatar into a leading center of culture and education for its region and the world. The Museum of Islamic Art, the flagship project of the QMA, embodies Her Excellency's vision of bridging East and West, as well as past and present. In addition to her work on cultural initiatives, H.E. Sheikha Al Mayassa is the Chairperson for Reach Out To Asia (ROTA), a philanthropic non-governmental organization that is dedicated to assisting the victims of recent natural disasters, as well as aiming to improve the quality of primary and secondary education in Asia.

**Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed bin Ali Al Thani** - *Vice Chairperson of Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) and founder of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art*

There was not a lot of public attention paid to modern and contemporary art in the Middle East in the mid-1980s, although this was when His Excellency Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed bin Ali Al Thani, first developed a serious relationship with appreciating and collecting fine art. His curiosity led him to attend lectures on art history during his time at Qatar University and he developed a connection with the artists he encountered while traveling in the region, sharing with them a mutual excitement for creative experimentation.

Rapidly, Sheikh Hassan's passion for collecting became focused; he began to cultivate an unparalleled collection of modern Arab art, and two decades after he began, his private collection included thousands of works representing the region's most influential artists and critical movements.

In 2003 he took steps to ensure this collection's longevity by placing it under the care of Qatar Foundation, with the understanding that it would be made accessible as an educational resource for Qatar. After QMA was created in 2005, it gradually took on shared responsibility for the development of the museum. Sheikh Hassan's vision has transformed the museum from a private collection to a public museum and educational facility fostering an understanding of and conversation in the arts.

Beyond acquisitions, he has proven himself to be a patron of the arts by offering assistance and residency to artists in need. He has also aspired to challenge himself creatively, working on canvas, exploring sculpture and photography alongside the artists he has fostered over the years. In his positions as Vice Chairperson of QMA, Advisor of Cultural Affairs at QF and founder of Mathaf, Sheikh Hassan continues to be highly involved in the arts as practitioner, collector and patron. He remains committed to developing the art movement in the Middle East and increasing awareness of it worldwide .

**Roger Mandle** - *Executive Director, Qatar Museums Authority*

Roger Mandle brings to the Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) more than four decades of experience as a senior museum executive and arts educator. He oversees all of the QMA's museum programs and building projects.

His responsibilities range from overseeing administration and finance to guiding the curatorial direction of the museums to developing a comprehensive educational program, which includes the creation of an international network of training opportunities for Qatari citizens who desire careers in the museum field.

Mr. Mandle came to the QMA in 2008 from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in Providence, Rhode Island, where he served as President since 1993. From 1988 to 1993, he was Deputy Director and Chief Curator at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Mr. Mandle was the Director of the Toledo Museum of Art in Toledo, Ohio from 1977 to 1988 and served as Associate Director of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts in Minneapolis, Minnesota from 1967 to 1974.

Mr. Mandle received a Bachelor of Arts degree in studio art and art history from Williams College, a Master of Arts degree with a certificate in museum training from New York University, and a Ph.D. in art history from Case Western Reserve University. He holds six honorary doctorates and served as a United States Ambassador for the Arts from 1996 to 2002.

**Wassan Al-Khudhairi** - *Acting Director and Chief Curator*

Wassan Al-Khudhairi joined Mathaf in 2007. Responsible for developing the newly established institution and managing the conversion of its new building, she also oversees policy development, acquisitions and collections management. As curator, her research interests are in modern art from the Arab world. She has presented on the role of Iraqi women artists in formulating modernism in Iraq.

Al-Khudhairi is of Iraqi origin and has lived in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the U.K. and the U.S., where she worked at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta and the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York. Al-Khudhairi received her B.A. in Art History from Georgia State University and M.A. with distinction in Islamic Art and Architecture from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London.

**Deena Chalabi** - *Head of Strategy for the new institution.*

Deena Chalabi is responsible for developing the public face of Mathaf. She oversees strategic planning and external communications, including public relations, publications, marketing and online activities. Long interested in the contemporary ramifications of late colonial and postcolonial history, she is also on the curatorial team for the inaugural exhibition of Mathaf's permanent collection.

Chalabi grew up in London and began her career in feature film development. She has served as a researcher for several non-profit organizations, concentrating on issues such as cultural diplomacy, international freedom of expression and cultural loss and hybridity.

Chalabi received her B.A. with honors in Social Studies from Harvard University and M.J. from the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley.



## Curators of the Inaugural Exhibitions

### Dr. Nada Shabout

Dr. Nada Shabout is an Associate Professor of Art History and the Director of the Contemporary Arab and Muslim Cultural Studies Institute (CAMCSI) at the University of North Texas. Her teaching and writing interests are in the area of Arab and Islamic visual culture, theory and history, imperialism, Orientalism and globalization. She is the author of *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (University of Florida Press, 2007); co-editor of *New Vision: Arab Art in the 21st Century* (Thames & Hudson, 2009); and the founding president of the Association for Modern and Contemporary Art from the Arab World, Iran and Turkey (AMCA). She has co-curated numerous shows worldwide. She has published numerous articles on modern and contemporary Iraqi art and the relationship of identity and visual representations in Iraq.

Since 2003, she has been working on the recovery, documentation and digitization of modern Iraqi heritage, particularly the collection previously held at the Iraqi Museum of Modern Art, which will soon be available on The Modern Art Iraq Archive website, supported by a National Endowment for the Humanities- Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant.

Shabout received her B.S. in Architecture, B.F.A. in Painting and Ph.D. in the Humanities from the University of Texas at Arlington. She has been a TAARII fellow (2006, 2007), MIT Visiting Assistant Professor (spring 2008) and Fulbright Senior Scholar for a lecture/research fellowship to Jordan (2008). She is a member of the Board of Governors of the Cultural Development Center of Qatar Foundation and the editorial committee of MERIP.

### Sam Bardaouil

Sam is a curator, art historian and performance practitioner who lives and works in New York, Munich and Beirut. He has lectured in art history, theater practice and Middle Eastern studies at a number of universities as well as curating numerous exhibitions worldwide.

Sam is also a theater practitioner with substantial experience as an actor, director and writer.

In his research, Sam has been advancing a notion of “Transmodernity” to outline an alternative art critical paradigm to postcolonial theory. Sam’s heightened awareness of issues relating to cultural stereotyping has constantly informed his curatorial practice. He steers away from the conventional repertoire of themes and forms that viewers might expect from artists coming out from the Arab world and the greater Middle East, and his approach to exhibition conception and design is very much enhanced by his wide-ranging experience as a theater practitioner. In 2009, he and Till Fellrath co-founded Art Reoriented, a curatorial platform that focuses on contemporary art from the Middle East.

### Till Fellrath

Till Fellrath has more than fifteen years of experience as an international consultant advising non-profit and cultural organizations worldwide. From 2005- 2009, he was the Managing Director of the Chelsea Art Museum in New York, overseeing the production of international exhibitions and curating several shows focusing on artists with roots in the Middle East. From 1995--2001, Till was a lecturer in Economics at the London School of Economics and the Singapore Institute of Management. He has degrees in economics and international relations from the University of St. Gallen/Switzerland and the London School of Economics, as well as an arts degree from Parsons the New School of Design in New York. In 2009, he and Sam Bardaouil co-founded Art Reoriented, a curatorial platform that focuses on contemporary art from the Middle East.

## The Building & Location

The Museum will temporarily occupy a former school building in Doha's Education City, which has been re-designed for Mathaf by noted French architect Jean- François Bodin in association with Burns and McDonnell.

The 5,500-square-meter (59,000-square-foot) facility includes galleries on two floors, a café, a museum shop, a research library and an education wing. Visitors will enter Mathaf through a terrace that features large sculptures by Ismail Fattah and Adam Henein, and a shaded outdoor seating area for the café. From the terrace, visitors will pass through a screen-wrapped scaffolding-style façade, upon which imagery and video can be projected at night. Inside Mathaf, the flexible space has an informal and contemporary aesthetic. Like the collection that it houses, this temporary home expresses a balance between the old and the new, as well as reflecting Mathaf's commitment to education.

Mathaf's exhibition galleries, which occupy a total of 2,180 square meters (23,450 square feet), feature high ceilings and moveable walls that can accommodate a wide range of work from the permanent collection or special exhibitions.

Mathaf is located on the west side of Doha, Qatar, approximately 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the Corniche. Situated in Education City, the Museum is surrounded by institutions including the Qatar branches of Carnegie-Mellon University, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, Texas A&M, Weill Cornell Medical College, Virginia Commonwealth University, Qatar Academy and Qatar Leadership Academy.

### Consultants

Design: Architect Jean-François Bodin and Associates

Project Manager: Lucie Hospital

Executive Architect: Burns & McDonnell.

Structural Engineer: Burns & McDonnell

Mechanical:

## About Qatar Museums Authority

Under the leadership of His Highness the Emir, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, and led by its Chairperson, Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) carries out a multi-faceted program that celebrates Qatari identity, builds understanding across borders and welcomes the world to Doha. In addition to Mathaf, QMA currently oversees the renowned Museum of Islamic Art designed by I.M. Pei (opened in 2008), the construction and development of the new National Museum of Qatar (designed by Jean Nouvel), archeological research projects throughout the nation, and the development of future projects.

## About Qatar Foundation and Education City

Qatar Foundation was established in 1995 by His Highness the Emir, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, with a threefold mission of education, scientific research and community development. Chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned, wife of the Emir, Qatar Foundation's flagship project is Education City, a 1,000-hectare (2,500-acre) campus on the western edge of Doha. Institutions operating in Education City include the Qatar Academy, the Qatar Leadership Academy and The Learning Center, all serving students from childhood through secondary school; the Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies; and branches of Weill Cornell Medical College, Texas A&M University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Carnegie-Mellon University, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, and Northwestern University.

During the “Mathaf” Initial Promoting campaign (*November 2010*), Contemporary Practices Art Journal Co-founder, Omar Donia, had the privilege of meeting His Excellency Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed bin Ali Al Thani to further have his vision about this massive project.

**OD:** Your Excellency, we have been hearing a lot about your collection. Can you insight us about it, when did you start collecting and the most important pieces in your collection?

**HE Sheikh Hassan:** Art represents the conscious of nations.

Personally, I started collecting since over 25 years at the time there was not much interest in the art of the Middle East. During the course of over two decades, I traveled throughout the region, met many artists and made my acquisitions at the time there was no market for these pieces of artworks.

My collection is not a country-based rather it is from all over the region, from east to west.

As for the most important piece, I believe that they are all equally important as they document the culture of each and every country.

**OD:** “Mathaf”: We know it is an offspring of your passion, when did you start to realize it?

**HE Sheikh Hassan:** “Mathaf” is to “document” our heritage for the coming generation.

In 2003 and to ensure the longevity of the collection, it was placed under the care of Qatar Foundation (QF) with the request to make it accessible to the public. After Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) was created in 2005, we started moving towards the development of the place. The current place, being an old school with the local architecture is a great place to start with, we expect to have the permanent building ready within 2 years.

We remain committed to developing the art movement in the Middle East and increasing awareness of Arab art throughout the world.

**OD:** Numbers: What is the number of pieces of such diversified collection?

**HE Sheikh Hassan:** Collectively I have given over 3,800 piece. I still hold almost 2,000 pieces in my private collection.

**OD:** Art & Artists: We have seen a lot of commercial activities in the art world recently with art prices of deceased as well as living artists rocketing sky high. What do you think of commercializing art?

**HE Sheikh Hassan:** Good art will survive. It is no secret that art has become a commodity, which lead to the birth of many artists. Only good art and real artists will survive.

**OD:** This makes me ask your Excellency about the choice of artists in your inauguration show. Can you give us more insight about the process and who is there?

**HE Sheikh Hassan:** The most important factor I thought of when setting the criteria for our curators, is the originality of works that are being included. We have a very rigid process of choosing that can be further discussed with the people responsible for the final choices.

**OD:** Future Plans: We can all witness the cultural movement in the region lead by the state of Qatar. We have seen the magnificent “Museum of Islamic Art” opening its doors in 2008 and currently the “Arab Museum of Modern Art”. What can we expect in the future?

**HE Sheikh Hassan:** The museums are there for people to see how rich culturally we are, we have great Islamic history we wanted to show to the world, we are currently opening a Museum of Contemporary art, I think the right direction is to start planning for a museum to hold pieces of art produced by the first Europeans who visited the region in the last few centuries.





© Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art