

# Contemporary Art From Jordan:

## “An Artist’s Point Of View.”



The Royal Society of Fine Arts.

Jordan National Gallery.

Jordan.

1991



McIntosh Gallery.

University of Western Ontario.

Canada.

Text.  
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Director  
Curator Jordan National Gallery.

Photographs.  
**Aram Darakjian.**  
Registrar - Jordan National Gallery.

**Organized through the  
cultural exchange between  
the Royal Society of Fine Arts,  
Jordan National Galery of Fine Arts  
in cooperation with the McIntosh Gallery,  
University of Western Ontario  
Canada.**

# JORDAN.

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President of The Royal Society of Fine Arts.

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**H.E. Mr. Hani Khalifeh.**

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**Mr. Suhail Bisharat.**

Director of The Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts.

# CANADA.

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Canadian Ambassador in Jordan.

**Mr. Michael Chesson.**

First Secretary - Canadian Embassy.

**Arlene Kennedy.**

Director McIntosh Gallery.

**Jessie Amery.**

Educator

**Fern Bayer.**

Curator

**Jamelie Hassan.**

Curator Artist

**Mr. Maurice Stubbs.**

## INTRODUCTION.

The only hope for a better future of humanity is through a better cultural understanding among the different races on our planet. Politics and armament will not rid the world of bigotry, racism, fanaticism and the hegemony of the strong over the weak; nor will Esperanto bring people closer together through a common language. Art, in all its forms, remains the most logical and objective means of international communications.

The exhibition “Contemporary Art from Jordan: An Artist’s Point of View” is a vehicle by which a message of beauty is transmitted from our turbulent Arab world westward transcending all political and economic barriers that have mushroomed overnight between East and West, South and North. Each of the ten Jordanian artists, taking part in this exhibit, regards the world from a different angle and phrases this view through a unique style of artistic expression.

The international trait that tints western art is obvious in almost all of the paintings, yet, a very distinctive Islamic and Arab quality emanates from them: it could be a line, a hue, a form or a letter that asserts itself throughout the collection, trying to tinge the sensibilities of the Canadian public and creating a new opening in its artistic horizon.

Next year the Jordan National Gallery will host an exhibition of Canadian artists with a new message of peace and beauty carried eastwards from North America. Hopefully, through more such exchanges, the weak will inherit the earth in peace, and through art, harmony and love will prevail.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Wijdan Ali'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name 'Wijdan' is written in a larger, more prominent script, and 'Ali' is written in a smaller script to its right. A horizontal line is drawn under the entire signature.

H.R.H. Princess Wijdan Ali.

President of The Royal Society  
of Fine Arts.



## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT.**

The Royal Society of Fine Arts has organised many exhibitions abroad from the permanent collection of the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts. “Contemporary Art from Jordan: An Artist’s Point of View” is the first major exhibition to cross the Atlantic and be presented to the Canadian public.

His Majesty King Hussein’s visit to Canada in 1989 marked a milestone in Jordanian Canadian relationship. Under the Patronage of Her Majesty Queen Noor Al Hussein, The Royal Society of Fine Arts continues to strengthen cultural ties through artistic cooperation and exchange of exhibitions.



On behalf of the Royal Society of Fine Arts I extend my gratitude to the McIntosh Gallery and the University of Western Ontario for its generous assistance in making this exhibition possible. Thanks are due to Maurice Stubbs whose early contacts for this exchange were realized; and to Fern Bayer, Jamelie Hassan, Jessie Amery and Arlene Kennedy who significantly contributed to this exchange, and the staff of the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts.

Sincere appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Percy Sherwood, Ambassador of Canada in Jordan and His Excellency Mr. Hani Khalifeh, Ambassador of Jordan in Canada as well as the staff of the Canadian Embassy particularly Mr. Michael Chesson.

The Royal Society of Fine Arts is indebted to the following:-

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## **CONTEMPORARY ART FROM JORDAN.**

### **“An Artist’s Point of View”**

The Exhibition “Contemporary Art from Jordan: An Artist’s Point of View” comes from the collection of the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts. It presents the Canadian visitor with a unique opportunity to observe a selection of works by leading Jordanian artists of different generations.

The works included in the present exhibition by no means indicate a comprehensive survey of the overall artistic activity taking place today in Jordan. What is intended is an indication of the diversity of the stylistic tendencies, and the preoccupation of some artists, with exploring their immediate environment and transforming it into visual elements.

“An Artist’s Point of View” is a small selection from a broad spectrum of Jordanian artworks falling within the collection of the gallery. The works on show are indicative of different approaches, including geometric abstraction, lyrical abstraction, realism, calligraphic school and socio-political themes. The choice has been thought out carefully to avoid overselectivity on the one hand, and too much limitation on the other.

Many of the artists in the exhibition have spent periods of work or study abroad, but they have also maintained close contact with their native land. They have had extensive exposure to the West, but each artist shares a view from his or her own cultural background, manipulating techniques acquired after years of training to express the fragility of life on the fringe of the desert.

Painting, as a form of expression, is of a recent vintage in Jordan. Until four decades ago, Jordanian artistic expression was confined to rugs, tents, jewelry, embroidery and pottery. There was no place for easel and brush, stone and chisel in the life of the traditional Jordanian artist. In barely a generation, the country has been transformed, opening outwards to the Arab world and the West, while building an expansive urban culture where the whole international array of art forms in sculpture, ceramics and painting are being tested and manipulated.

The exhibition does not represent an historical survey, but reflects the richness and diversity of the collection at the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts.

The Gallery was inaugurated on February 12, 1980 by Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor. It was a national accomplishment made possible through the appreciation and support of the Jordanian public. It began with an idea, not a collection. Founded by the Royal Society of Fine Arts in 1979, it was Her Royal Highness Princess Wijdan Ali, President of the Royal Society of Fine Arts, who turned the idea into reality. The Jordan National Gallery has built a collection of works by contemporary Arab and Islamic artists which spans the full range of Islamic countries from Morocco to Brunei. The Gallery also houses a small but interesting and historically important collection of 19th century Orientalist paintings.

To the Canadian public the Jordan National Gallery is proud to present a selection of artists working in oil, watercolours and graphics, and we are pleased to share with the Canadian people this small but precious part of the collection in our care.

We hope that by means of this exhibition, close cultural links between Jordan and Canada will be nurtured and those who see the show on its Canadian tour will be encouraged to, one day, visit the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts in Amman.

Suhail Bisharat.

Director.

Curator Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts.

## **NAWAL ABDULLAH.**

“Rules and theories of art restrained me” said Nawal Abdullah of her years of study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence.

Born in Amman in 1951, Nawal Abdullah’s personal experience as a young girl was of seeing an Arab town grow into a modern city before going to the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence to study at the source of Western Art.

No wonder it is the individual, especially portraits of women, that first captured her imagination. Her urbane subjects at parties were as much a part of the Arab world, she claimed, as farmers or bedouins. Lately her work has moved from portraits and landscapes to the abstracts presented in this exhibition. Here, one senses the way she exercises her brush, unrestrained by rules and theories.





**Nawal Abdullah.**

**Untitled.**

Gouache on paper.  
30 x 46 cm.

## **AZIZ AMMOURA.**

“It is a human concern which arrests my attention, to create works determined by the timeless contradiction of human social conditions; thus, reality is my source and the immaculate form, which is best characterised as ‘abstraction’, is my aim”.

Born in Tira in 1944, Ammoura’s struggle to become the master he is today has not been an easy one. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad in 1970 and then followed by scholarship to study in the United States, where he obtained a degree of Master of Fine Arts from the Pratt Institute in 1983.

A strong painter as well as a patient teacher, Ammoura derives his inspiration from his immediate environment, which he can compose with minute exactitude, from retained visual images. His oils are executed with a masterful technique where precision of brushstroke and individuality in the selection of colours excel. His pen and ink drawings use a new form of pointillism to create smooth, sensuous compositions where the round lines and poetic illusions exude a strange peace, purity and sadness.





**Aziz Ammoura.**

**Manuscript.**

Watercolour on paper.

48 x 37 cm.

## **ALI JABRI.**

“There is a challenge now to people who want to be artists in the Arab world, to produce a more relevant art form, not one that is the superfluous copying of folk and Islamic art.”

Jabri is the only contemporary Jordanian painter to spend month after month in the rigors of the desert and the camps of archeological digs recording with his pencils and brushes while living the tradition of waterless treks and the shared companionship of the bedouin shepherd.

Born in Jerusalem in 1943, Jabri's family roots belong to ancient Aleppo, and his allegiance to the Jordanian highlands where he spent his early boyhood. His early schooling in Egypt, Switzerland and England, as well as his subsequent studies at Stanford University in the United States of America, gave him an unusually intimate knowledge of the “high” cultures of the period. He returned to Cairo and then to Amman to immerse himself totally in Arab culture and to paint full time. Responsible for new installations and display at the Jordan Museum of Popular Traditions, Jabri divides his time between periods of concentrated devotion to museography and painting. In both he expresses a sensitive, observant and skillful effort to capture a threatened heritage and record the light, colour and valor of ancient traditions undergoing transformation.



**Ali Jabri.**

**Pella 1.**

Collage and crayons on paper.  
85 x 115 cm.

## **AMMAR KHAMMASH.**

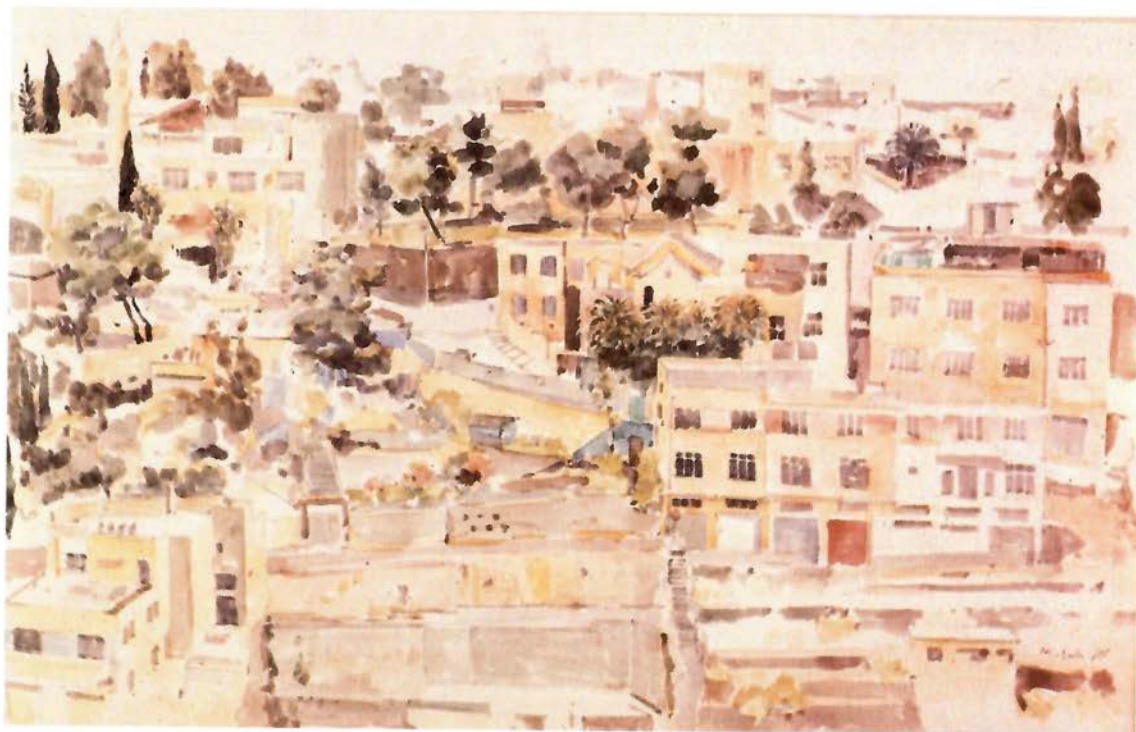
“I believe that art can be self taught and the individual is more productive if he is not supervised”.

Ammar Khammash, born in 1960, started drawing when he was ten and painting when he was fourteen. His boyhood love for Jordan's traditional built landscape and rural countryside drew him naturally to the study of architecture. At the University of Southwestern Louisiana, where he did his undergraduate work in architecture, he mounted an exhibition, accompanied by a publication on the traditional architecture of Jordan, complete with drawings and plans.

Upon his return to Jordan he continued to combine this deepseated interest in vernacular architecture and traditional culture with museum design. Khammash is among the few Jordanian artists who fully appreciates and paints the Jordanian landscape in a realistic style.

His watercolours are spontaneous and fresh, through the use of delicate brushstrokes and subtle hues, he has succeeded in depicting many captivating scenes of Jordan.





**Ammar khammash.**

**Lozmilla Hospital.**

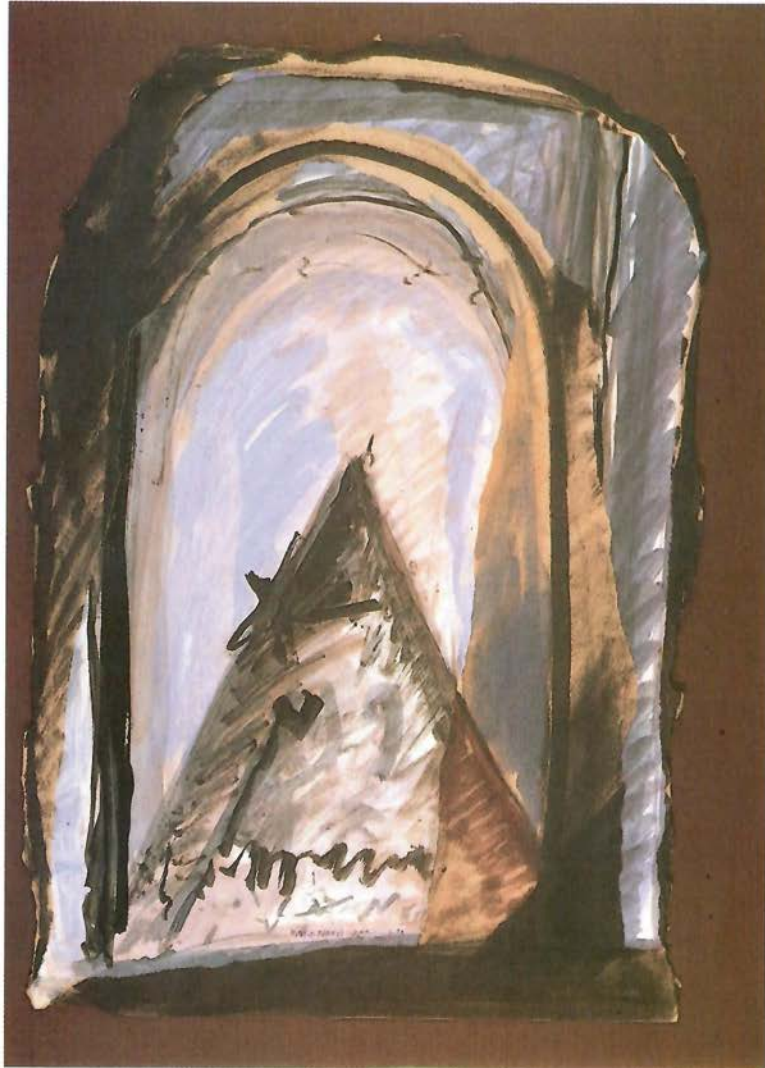
Watercolour on paper.  
30 x 45 cm.

## **KHALID KHREIS.**

Whether in inks, acrylics, or mixed media, Khreis has succeeded in using a number of techniques to express his innermost emotions. Although his imagery is non-representational, his works are evocative of nature through the use of colour, horizontal orientation and a sense of space and ground. Traces of Arabic letters can be detected among his abstract symbols.

The viewer scans a timeless range of arches or pyramids, and sometimes his figures are caught in a struggle which is equally arresting.

Born 1955 in Jordan's fortified town of Kerak, Khreis studied at Helwan University in Cairo before going on to the Academy of San Gorgo, in Barcelona, the Pietro Vanucci Institute-San Cugat and the Institute of Fine Arts of San Miquel de Allende in Mexico. Presently he is at San Gorgo in Barcelona working on his doctorate in History of art.



**Khalid Khreis.**

**Untitled.**

Mixed media on paper.  
70 x 50 cm.

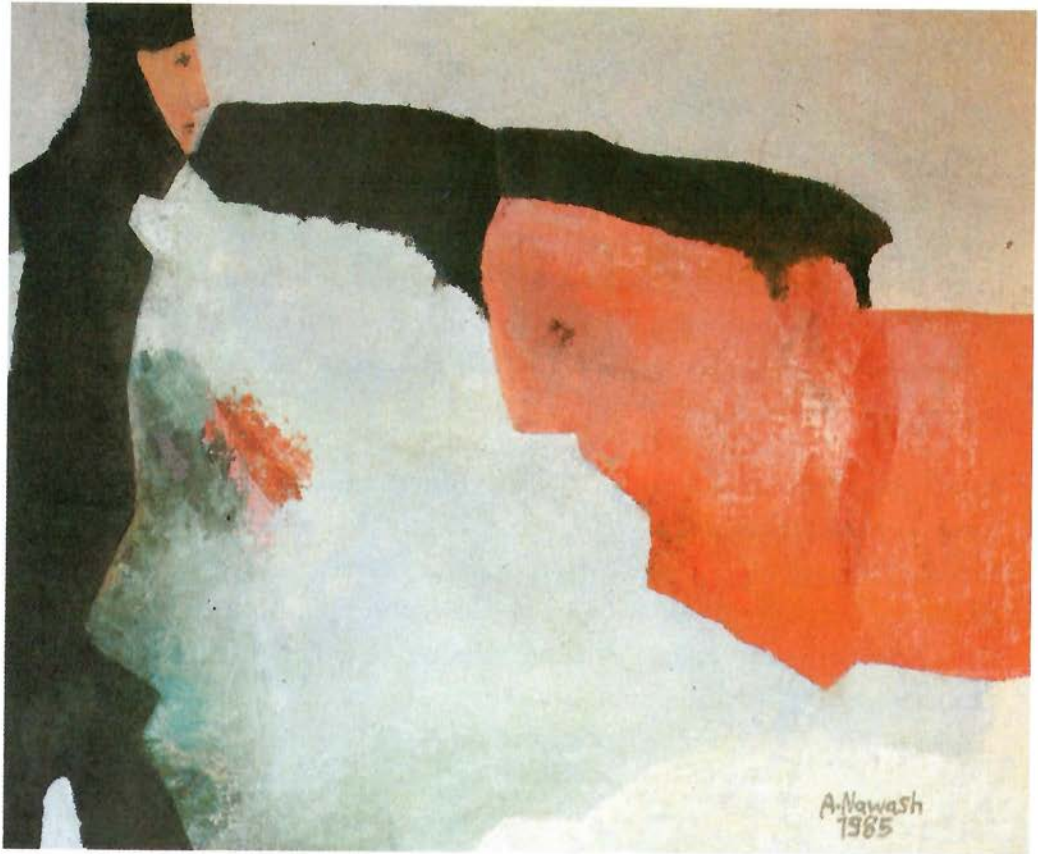


## AHMAD NAWASH.

Nawash is one of the leading figures in Jordanian contemporary art. His distinctive style in figuration expresses an involuted caricature of mankind's oppression by man. Nawash expresses his own tragic experience with a subtlety that embodies deep emotional suppression.

Born in Ein Karem, Jerusalem, in 1934, Nawash, received his diploma from the Fine Arts Academy in Rome. Subsequently he studied at the College of Fine Arts in Bordeaux, and later at the Beaux Arts in Paris. He also studied graphics in Florence, Italy. His works are about fusing method and image, the individual's visible public and private feelings. They cover a wide range of observation about places, people and emotions that he has experienced.

His mood can be cynical and sarcastic, but his message is clear: through painting it is possible to approach a common ground to share an experience without falling into crude generalizations.



**Ahmad Nawash.**

**Opposit Directions.**

Oil on Board.

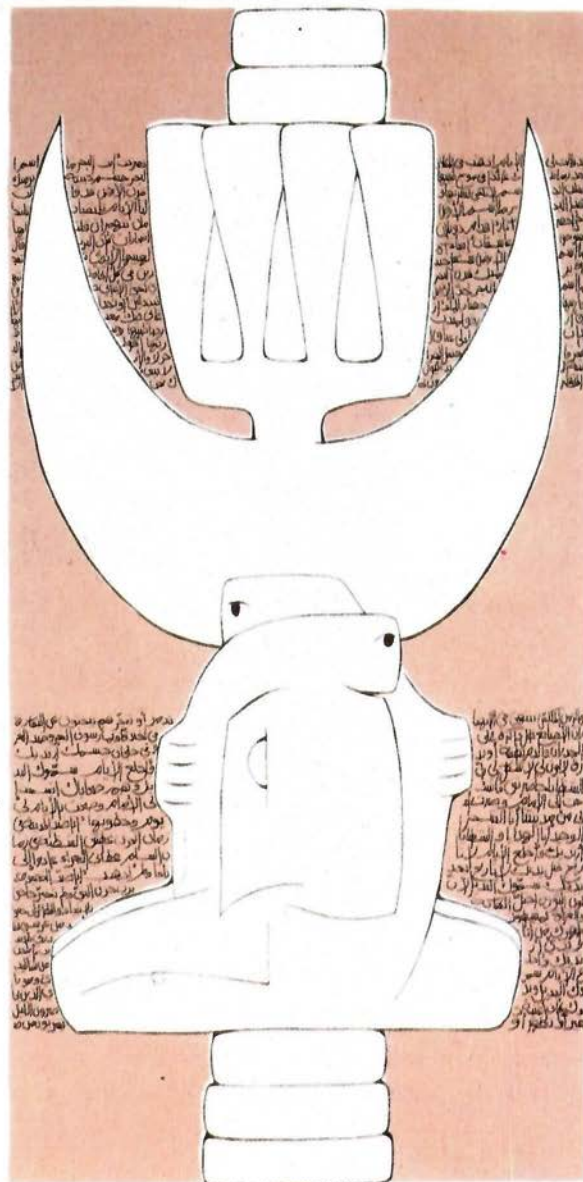
55 x 65 cm.

## **MONA SAUDI.**

“My primary intention is to express a unity between different human elements, the idea of two or three people joined together. The idea is the same in both sculpture and drawing. I am not interested in color; color is illusion, but there is no illusion in form or line. Sculpture fills the void in a very physical way, in it, a living dialogue occurs and is constantly changing through the play of light on the carved form.”

Mona Saudi, born in Amman 1945, is one of the few eminent Arab women artists who have devoted themselves to sculpture. Whether using white marble from Carrara, the limestone of Ma'an or the black basalt of Irbid, she has succeeded in carving these timeless sediments into an organic whole. She has produced some monumental sculptures displayed in public spaces in Jordan and at the Institute of the Arab World in Paris.

Mona Saudi graduated from the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts in sculpture, and subsequently went to Rome for further training before settling in Amman.



**Mona Saudi.**

**The Lovers Tree.**

Etching EA.

73 x 39 cm.

## **NABIL SHEHADEH.**

While highly skilled as a pointillist painter in watercolors, it is with his large abstract oils that Shehadeh achieves a distinctive collision of light and focus in layers of blue, brown and orange. His works explode with reflective energy of silent observation.

His detachment from his immediate surroundings and his early choice of the abstract may well represent an effort to transcend emotional ties to the human landscape. Born in Jerusalem in 1950, his formal training was first at the Institute of Painting and Music in Amman and then the Fine Arts and Design School at the Chelsea College of Art in London. He has translated his innermost volatile emotions into free flowing movement, and his artistic creativity is a journey through personal revelation where ideas have arisen out of discovery.





**Nabil Shehadeh.**

**Gin.**

Oil on paper.

70 x 100 cm.

## **SUHA SHOMAN.**

Nature has always been a point of departure for Suha Shoman's work. Whether in her landscapes or seascapes, she is attracted to rocks and rock formations as an endless source of inspiration. Multicolored sandstone layers, or alternate bands of rock cliffs dominate her works. Infinite varieties of colors from the reds, purples, blacks to shades of yellow and orange alternate and meander, shading into each other and sometimes converging into fantasies.

Her gradations create a sense of movement and depth; in spite of a deliberate absence of recognisable imagery, there is a strong suggestion in her abstracts of the legend of Petra, the rockhewn Nabatean city in the south of Jordan. Suha Shoman is among few Jordanian artists who have been inspired by the sandstone cliffs that provide the dramatic approach to one of the world's ancient cities of antiquity.

Born in Jerusalem in 1944, Shoman studied law at the Sorbonne in Paris before she began to develop her artistic talents under the guidance of the distinguished painter, Fahrelnissa Zeid.





**Suha Shoman.**

**Legend of Petra.**

Oil on paper.

75 x 55 cm.

## WIJDAN.

“International culture implies an acceptance of cultural co-existence and the ability to step out of one’s own cultural prejudice to see things from a different perspective”. Whether in her oils, watercolors or graphics, Wijdan’s work is deceptively straightforward.

In her new calligraphical series, the image represents a letter of the alphabet which gracefully floats among poetic graffiti against rich, volatile colours transmitting a two-fold message: aesthetic and moral. Form, colour and content vie with each other in animation to take over the composition.

Artist and art historian Wijdan, born in 1939, is the founder and President of the Royal Society of Fine Arts as well as a distinguished leader in promoting artistic expression in the Arab and Islamic world.



**Wijdan.**

**Karbalaá.**

Mixed media on paper.

65 x 86 cm.

