

ARAB NEWS

New York's Gray Art Gallery to explore Arab abstract art



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DUBAI: Artworks from the collection of Sharjah's Barjeel Art Foundation will be presented at New York University's Grey Art Gallery as part of the upcoming exhibition "Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950s–1980s," from Jan. 14 to April 4 in Manhattan. The exhibition is a collaborative project between the two institutions.

The four-month-long art show will feature nearly 90 works all drawn from the Emirati non-profit arts organization, including paintings, sculptures and a book of essays written by prominent personalities from the world of arts and culture, including three UAE-based authors — Salwa Mikdadi, Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi and Suheyla Takesh, who co-curated and organized the event.

Featured artists include Lebanese poet and visual artist Etel Adnan, late Iraqi painter and sculptor Shakir Hassan Al-Said, late Moroccan painter Ahmed Cherkaoui and late Emirati artist Hassan Sharif among others. Paintings from Saloua Raouda Choucair, the late Lebanese artist who is credited with pioneering the abstract art movement in the Middle East during the 1950s, will also be showcased for visitors to view.

The presented works hail from a diverse range of countries from the Middle East and North Africa, including Algeria, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Palestine, Tunisia and Syria.

The aim of the exhibition is to explore the development of abstract work in the Middle East, North Africa and the Arab diaspora via paintings, sculptures and works on paper dating from the 1950s through to the 1980s.

Though art has always been prominent in the Arab world, various modes of abstract art began spreading like wildfire through the region during the 20th century in the form of Islamic calligraphy, printmaking, sculptures and paintings.

After debuting at the Grey Art Gallery at New York University, "Taking Shape" will travel to the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University in Illinois, where it will be on view from April 28 through to July 26, before heading to the Johnson Museum at Cornell University in New York from August 22 to Dec. 13, 2020. "Taking Shape" aims to enlighten visitors about the lesser-known origins and influences of abstract art from the Arab world.