



بارجيل  
مؤسسة للفنون  
BARJEEL  
ART FOUNDATION

@BarjeelArt

**Barjeel Art Foundation presents *Hurufiyya: Art & Identity* at Bibliotheca Alexandrina, exploring the impact of this significant movement on the Arab world**

**30 November 2016 – 25 January 2017**

Barjeel Art Foundation announces details of *Hurufiyya: Art & Identity*, opening at Bibliotheca Alexandrina, a major library and cultural centre located on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, on 30 November 2016. The exhibition explores the impact that Hurufiyya, an art form that re-emerged in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, has had in the last century. Marking a break from a previous era of creative output, Hurufiyya (loosely translated as 'letterism') was one of the most significant movements in modern Arab art history. Through various aspects of the style and its expression throughout the region, the exhibition introduces different moments, approaches, and artists, and their concerns over the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Hurufiyya: Art & Identity* explores the origins of the movement and its route to the present, illustrated through snapshots by artists who pioneered the movement - Madiha Omar, Dia Azzawi, Kamal Boullata, Rafa Al Nasiri, Shakir Hassan Al Said, Rachid Koraichi and Omar El Nagdi - from across the modern world, including Palestine, Iraq, Algeria and Egypt.

Curated by Karim Sultan of the Barjeel Art Foundation, the exhibition aims to illustrate the break and change in art emerging from the Arab world from the mid-century. At first glance, Hurufiyya may be indistinguishable from calligraphy, but the two modes are very different: calligraphy carries with it a history of long-standing styles and relationships; whereas modern Hurufiyya was born in an era of modern conditions – with travel, exile, international life, conflict and identity – and is a result of it. The exhibited works at Bibliotheca Alexandrina were created at a turbulent and vibrant time with the birth of cities, decolonisation, political unrest, war, nationalism - and even the most distant, experimental, and abstract art bore a mark of this.

The exhibition marks the publication of *Hurufiyya: Art & Identity* in English - the first time these historic texts from the region have been published in English, and accessible to a non-Arabic speaking audience. Written by Professor Charbel Dagher, an active and prominent scholar on the Arab cultural scene, the work looks at the history of this modern art movement in the Arab world.

**Karim Sultan, Curator, Barjeel Art Foundation said:**

"One of our objectives is to investigate, develop, and exhibit various aspects of regional art history. Hurufiyya is an important 20<sup>th</sup> century movement that lies between the international modern art of the day and concerns of artists in the Arab world. It is a fascinating entry point to exploring works and styles from the 20<sup>th</sup> century to our present moment."

**Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi, Founder, Barjeel Art Foundation, said:**

"Alexandria Library is a beacon of knowledge and enlightenment in a region that is experiencing great uncertainty. We are proud to be associated with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and to bring to it a selection of Arabic Hurufiyya works by modern and contemporary artists."

**Gamal Hosni, Director of Art Exhibitions and Collections Department, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, said:**

"The Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) aims to promote modern and contemporary arts among its local and foreign visitors. One of our special points of interest is artistic creativity that is linked to literature, texts, alphabets, languages, or storytelling. This is why the BA holds a regular special event that is concerned with these ideas and applications. Within this context, the Hurufiyya exhibition is very relevant and appropriately highlights and gives depth to this particular line of creativity. We are glad and proud to collaborate with Barjeel Art Foundation on this enlightening project."

On the occasion of the opening, Barjeel founder Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi will give a talk at 1:00pm, followed by Dr. Salwa Mikdadi at 2:00pm and Dr. Charbel Dhager at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Conference Center at 3:00pm.

The Barjeel Art Foundation, an independent, UAE-based institution established to preserve and exhibit an extensive collection (over 1200 works) of Modern and Contemporary Arab Art internationally, works with institutions across the world to support cross-cultural education and knowledge exchange. The foundation strives to create an open-ended enquiry that responds to and conveys the nuances inherent to Arab histories beyond borders of culture and geography.

Works in the exhibition include:

- Madiha Omar (Iraq), *Untitled*, 1978
- Rafa Al Nasiri (Iraq), *Image (Amman)*, 1988
- Dia Azzawi (Iraq), *Al-Mua'alaqat* 1978
- Kamal Boullata (Palestine), *In The Beginning was the Word*, 1983
- Kamal Boullata (Palestine), *The Alif And The Ya*, 1983
- Shakir Hassan Al Said (Iraq), *Untitled*, 1963
- Rachid Koraichi (Algeria), *Without You Or Me of Nostalgic Hallucination*, 1986
- Omar El Nagdi (Egypt), *Untitled*, 1970

**For media enquiries, please contact:**

Victoria Mitchell  
SUTTON  
[Victoria@suttonpr.com](mailto:Victoria@suttonpr.com)  
+44 (0) 207 183 3577

**Notes to Editors**

Barjeel Art Foundation

Barjeel Art Foundation is an independent, UAE-based initiative established to manage, preserve and exhibit an extensive collection of Modern and Contemporary Arab Art. The foundation's guiding principle is to contribute to the intellectual development of the art scene in the Arab region by building a prominent, publicly accessible art collection in the UAE. Part of this objective involves developing a public platform to foster critical dialogue around contemporary art practices with a focus on artists with Arab heritage internationally. The foundation strives to create an open-ended enquiry that responds to and conveys the nuances inherent to Arab histories beyond borders of culture and geography.

By hosting in-house exhibitions, lending artwork to international forums, producing print and online publications, and fashioning interactive public programmes, the foundation strives to serve as an informative resource for contemporary art by Arab artists both locally and on the global stage.

In addition to building an informative database of artists, the foundation is seeking to develop an educational programme that both understands and involves the local community. By establishing partnerships with arts and cultural institutions internationally, the foundation looks to create opportunities to encourage public awareness of the importance of art to the community.

<http://www.barjeelartfoundation.org/>

Bibliotheca Alexandrina

The New Library of Alexandria, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina is dedicated to recapturing the spirit of openness and scholarship of the original Bibliotheca Alexandrina. In order to do this the library seeks to be a leading institution in the digital age and to be both Egypt's window to the world, and the world's window on Egypt. Bibliotheca Alexandrina aims to be a centre of excellence in the production and dissemination of knowledge and to be a place of dialogue, learning and understanding between cultures and peoples. It is more than a library, comprising of: the main library; six specialised libraries; a copy of the Internet Archive; four museums; thirteen academic research centres; fifteen permanent exhibitions; four art galleries for temporary exhibitions; the Conference Centre; the Planetarium Science Center (PSC); the ALEXploratorium, an Exploratorium for introducing children to science; The Culturama, a cultural panorama projected over nine screens; VISTA (The Virtual Immersive Science and Technology Applications system); and host to a number of institutions. Today, this vast complex receives about 1.5 million visitors a year.