

Kawkaba: Highlights from the Barjeel Art Foundation
July 20th – August 23rd

Curated by Dr. Ridha Mourni

"Kawkaba: *Highlights from the Barjeel Art Foundation*" is an immersive journey through the transformative epochs and powerful voices that have shaped the modern Arab art landscape. This exhibition bridges historical understanding and contemporary perspectives, revealing the vibrant cultural architecture of the Arab world.

The exhibition is an homage to the rich artistic diversity and dynamism of West Asia and North Africa. Assembled from geographies within the Arab world, *Kawkaba*, "Constellations," resonates with a myriad of artists and creators - some celebrated, others underrepresented. Drawn from the collection of the Barjeel Art Foundation dedicated to the art of the Arab World, every work in the exhibition is a testament to the talent and ingenuity of artists of the region, reflecting their unique visions and the profoundly ingrained essences of their cultures.

The exhibition traces a historical trajectory - from the echoes of the colonial era to the present epoch, focusing on the captivating spirit of post-independence movements when art unraveled from its Western-dominated discourse to engage with new paths of modernism and political modernities. The works presented reflect the socio-political realities of this era of nation-building. The exhibition illuminates the artist's place in sight of the historical and cultural transitions in the Arab World, addressing themes such as the rise of Pan-Arab nationalism, responses to globalization, and gender dynamics. It highlights the progressive and innovative quest for creative solutions between tradition and modernity, showcasing the syncretism of historical forms with contemporary techniques and ideas when Arab art and culture were shaping new identities.

As a celebration and an echo of the myriad of voices who partook in the process of decolonisation and the definition of new canons of Arab Art during the 20th and the 21st centuries, *Kawkaba* is as a gender-balanced exhibition that reflects the ingenious collecting practice of the Barjeel Art Foundation. The exhibition presents masterpieces of leading figures of the field, such as Huguette Caland, Ibrahim El-Salahi, Etel Adnan, Marwan Kassab-Bachi, Safia Farhat, Jewad Selim, Inji Efflatoun, and Mohamed Melehi. It concurrently sheds light on underrepresented artists - based in the region, from the diaspora, or exiled -, who have highly contributed to modern Arab Art and reflected on the heterogeneity and diversity of the art narratives.

Visitors are invited to contemplate, familiarise, engage, and learn from the stories, techniques, and themes on display. *Kawkaba* hopes to inspire renewed appreciation for West Asian and North African art, fostering cultural understanding of a dynamic and creative region in continuous transition and dialogue through its cultural production. *Kawkaba* is a window into the soul of the Arab world, an exploration of its complexities, and a tribute to its resilience and creativity to democratize art narratives and broaden visitors' viewpoints. Through this exhibition, they will be invited to traverse the artistic spirit of the Arab world and partake in its unrivaled transformative journey.