

The logo for Whitechapel Gallery, consisting of two stacked blue rectangles. The top rectangle contains the text "Whitechapel Gallery" in white, and the bottom rectangle is empty.

Whitechapel
Gallery

Barjeel Art Foundation Collection
Imperfect Chronology:
Mapping the Contemporary I

26 April - 14 August 2016

Large print labels and interpretation

Gallery 7

Barjeel Art Foundation Collection:

Imperfect Chronology

An exhibition in four parts: 8 Sept 2015 – 8 Jan 2017

Part of the Whitechapel Gallery's programme opening up rarely seen art collections from around the world, a series of four chronological displays highlights works from the Barjeel Art Foundation's collection of Arab art. The theme of an 'imperfect chronology' is the series' starting point: how do we narrate the history of Arab art through the lens of one collection? Over 100 works of art by 60 artists from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day are brought together here to tell this story. The Barjeel Art Foundation is based in the United Arab Emirates and was founded by Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi in 2010. It holds one of the most extensive collections of art from the Arab world and its diaspora – a region that extends across North Africa and southwestern Asia encompassing the 22 countries of the Arab League. With a population of over 350 million of various ethnic and religious identities, Arabic (in its various dialects) is the dominant language of expression.

**Barjeel Art Foundation
collection:**

Debating Modernism I

8 September – 6 December
2015

The first display takes an expansive historical approach and explores the emergence and subsequent development of Arab art through drawings and paintings from the early twentieth century to 1967–68, an important historical period in the region, with landmark works by Munira Al-Kazi, Dia Azzawi, Inji Efflatoun, Kadhim Hayder and Hamed Ewais.

**Barjeel Art Foundation
collection:**

Debating Modernism II

15 December 2015 – 17
April 2016

The second display focuses on the relationship between abstract and figurative art produced between 1968 and 1987, focusing on pioneering figures including Kamal Boullata, Huguetta Caland, Marwan and Abdul Qader Al Rais.

Barjeel Art Foundation
collection:

Mapping the Contemporary
I

26 April – 14 August 2016

The third presentation includes photography and video made between 1990–2000. Focusing on the theme of mapping, Yto Barrada, Mohammed Kazem, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari amongst others explore territory and borders, utilising both documentary and performative techniques.

Barjeel Art Foundation
collection:

Mapping the Contemporary
II

23 August 2016 – 8 January
2017

The final display explores how artists using various media engage with urban transformation and architecture in landscapes where they either live or work. These artists include Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Etel Adnan, Marwa Arsanios, GCC and Iman Issa.

Imperfect Chronology: Mapping the Contemporary I

Works from Barjeel Art Foundation Collection

This presentation from the Barjeel Art Foundation's collection explores ideas of mapping recent history and migration in the Arab world; it also considers how artists have negotiated the politics of representation through film, video and photography since the 1990s.

The display includes the work of Moroccan artist Yto Barrada. *Rue de la Liberté, Tangier* (2000) is a large-format photograph of two men embracing in greeting or farewell with their backs to the camera. It is part of Barrada's wider series the Strait Project (1998–2004) which documented individuals waiting to escape from Morocco to Europe across the Strait of Gibraltar.

During the civil war in Lebanon (1975–1990), the streets of Beirut were lined with posters of men who died fighting for political and religious causes. In the series *Faces* (2009), Lebanese artist duo Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige document the decay of some of these posters and their own attempts to redraw faded features, exploring issues around image reconstruction and circulation.

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Also concerned with marking moments in history, Michael Rakowitz's project, *The Breakup* (2010–2012), uses materials related to the Beatles' disbanding in 1969 as an allegory for the collapse of Pan-Arabism happening at the same time, while Mona Hatoum's miniaturised public sculpture *Witness* (2009) bears the bullet hole scars of Lebanon's civil war.

Three major film works explore the politics of images in Egypt. Akram Zaatari's *Her + Him* (2001–2012) tells a semi-fictional story of studio photography in the Middle East during the 1940s and 50s, through the eyes of the legendary Armenian-Egyptian photographer Van Leo. In *Domestic Tourism II* (2008) Maha Maamoun appropriates footage from Egyptian satellite television to evoke how the Pyramids have historically been used as an emblem of 'progress' in popular culture. Basim Magdy tells a different story of Egyptian culture in *My Father Looks for an Honest City* (2010) as the audience follows the artist's father, Magdy El-Gohary, as he surveys the informal settlements of New Cairo, before their re-development.

Works from left, clockwise

Akram Zaatari

(b. Lebanon, 1966. Lives and works in Beirut)

Her + Him. Van Leo

2001-2011

HD video, colour, sound

33 minutes

Nadia Undressing in Twelve Poses

Wooden vitrine with 12 b/w photographs by Van Leo, Cairo, Egypt, 1957

Lambda prints mounted on aluminium

In 1997 Akram Zaatari co-founded the Arab Image Foundation devoted to the study of photography in the region and to the presentation of forgotten photographic archives. These included those of Levon Boyadjian later known as Van Leo (1921–2002). Born into an Armenian family, Van Leo's family moved to Egypt and he opened a studio in Cairo in 1947.

Recognised as one of the most important studio photographers in the Arab world, Van Leo began taking portraits of women in glamorous sometimes nude scenarios alongside over 400 staged self-portraits. Zaatari through his video portrait of Van Leo himself examines both contemporary approaches to the social role of photography and the creation of Arab and Egyptian identity in the 1940s and 50s.

Maha Maamoun

(b. California, USA, 1967. Lives and works in Egypt)

Domestic Tourism II

2008

Single channel video

60 minutes

In this major project Maha Maamoun creates a long-form film by interweaving footage from popular feature films and advertisements broadcast on satellite television in the Arab world that prominently feature the Pyramids of Giza.

Through careful editing of this material, Maamoun builds up a disenchanting view of a modern Egypt set against the backdrop of the Pyramids, challenging the mythology of an 'eternal' Egypt defined by its ancient past.

Mohammed Kazem

(b. United Arab Emirates. 1969. Lives and works in Dubai)

Tongue

1994

Silver gelatin prints

The conceptual practice of leading Emirati artist Mohammed Kazem encompasses video installations, photography and performance in which he explores the relationship between the body and its immediate environment. He places himself at the centre of his work and creates an often very intimate interaction between his everyday life and his art.

Yto Barrada

(b. Paris, 1971. Lives and works in New York and Tangier)

Rue de la Liberté, Tangier

2000

Pigmented inkjet print

The photographs by Yto Barrada in this display emerge from the artist's wider research for the Strait Project (1998–2004). In this multi-strand work, the artist examined the dreams of North African migrants hoping to cross the Strait of Gibraltar to reach Europe and also their influence on the cityscape of her native Tangier. (continues on next page)

Extending the debate around African migration to Europe, these photographs point to themes of absence and longing.

Rue de la Liberté, Tangier (2000) shows two men embracing with their backs to the camera, perhaps bidding each other a fond farewell. In Northern Provinces, Tangier (2009), on the adjacent wall, the artist photographed a map illustrating different exit routes from Morocco, trails leading to a new life. Collaged onto this map are mementoes and postcards, suggesting an imagined life on a new continent and also a life left behind.

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

(b. Lebanon, 1966. Live and work in Beirut and Paris)

Faces

2009

Lambda prints mounted on aluminium

In this photographic series, artistic partners Hadjithomas and Joreige seek to annotate a history of the figures whose faces in posters haunt the streets of the cities and villages of Lebanon (and the rest of the Arab world). These images tend to be headshots of mainly men who have died fighting for their country, religion or other personal causes and are considered martyrs in Lebanon.

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The posters are sometimes located high up on walls with a black mark across the corner of the image. Whilst photographing the posters, Hadjithomas and Joreige noticed their slow decay over time, often all that remains is the empty shell of an oval face, peculiar ghosts lingering and lining the streets. Working with a graphic designer the artists have attempted to reconstitute the features of these fallen figures before the printed images disappear.

Walid Raad

(b. Lebanon, 1967. Lives and works in Beirut and New York)

Notebook volume 38: Already Been in a

Lake of Fire (Plates 63–64)

1999–2002

Inkjet print

Walid Raad was part of the burgeoning art scene that emerged in Beirut during the 1990s. His research-based practice, including his 15-year project *The Atlas Group* (1999-2004), straddles fiction and the uncertainties of everyday life particularly in relation to the conflicts in Lebanon. Through performance, video and archival installations he constructs playful histories out of imagined archives.

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'Notebook volume 38: Already been in a lake of fire. This notebook contains 145 cut-out photographs of cars. They correspond to the exact make, model and colour of every car that was used as a car bomb, as well as text written in Arabic that details the place, time and date of the explosion, the number of casualties, the perimeter of destruction, the exploded car's engine and axle numbers and the weight and type of the explosives used.'

Miraculous Beginnings: Walid Raad (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010) p.31

Abdul Hay Mosallam Zarara

(b. Palestine, 1933. Lives and works in Amman, Jordan)

The Launch

1990

Sawdust and glue on wood panel

Documenting daily life in his homeland, Zarara translates his memories of growing up in Palestine before occupation in 1948 into colourful painted reliefs.

A self-taught artist, Zarara's reliefs are often made from materials at hand like glue and sawdust. These are cast in resin and depict scenes from traditional weddings and gatherings to the daily struggles of those living in refugee camps and more overt expressions of Palestinian resistance.

Khaled Hourani

(b. Palestine, 1965. Lives and works in Ramallah)

Untitled

1999

Acrylic and pencil on paper strips

Yto Barrada

(b. Paris, 1971. Lives and works in Paris and Tangier)

Northern Provinces, Tangier

2009

C-print

Basim Magdy

(b. Egypt, 1977. Lives and works in Basel and Cairo)

My Father Looks for an Honest City

2010

Super-8 film transferred to HD video.

5.28 minutes

Egyptian artist Basim Magdy uses innovative ways to wryly comment on political and social realities through film, slide installations, painting and photography. In this work looking at the rash of building projects outside Cairo, he films his father re-enacting ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes the Cynic's cryptic philosophical enquiry, in which he wanders around an arid landscape with a lit lamp in daytime, looking for an honest man.

The film is shot on an open building site with unfinished glass buildings, the insignia of new architectural prototypes emerging in New Cairo on the outskirts of the older city. Complete with archaeological finds, stray dogs and fake palm trees the surreal nature of this quest is amplified by the sound of a raging thunderstorm in clear bright sunlight.

Mona Hatoum

(b. Lebanon, 1952. Lives and works in London and Berlin)

Witness

2009

Porcelain biscuit

Mona Hatoum's practice includes performance, installation, sculpture and video. Her subjects range from the human body to global politics and her works often toy with a viewer's sense of familiarity in which everyday objects are transformed into encounters loaded with potential risk or disorientated by scale.

Witness is based on the monument that sits at the heart of Place des Martyrs (Martyrs' Square) in Beirut. The original sculpture by Youssef Hoyek represented two women, a Muslim and a Christian, holding hands in an emblematic gesture over a coffin and was commissioned in 1930 to commemorate Arab nationalists who died during World War I. The existing monument was created by Italian artist Marino Mazzacurati in 1960 but was badly damaged during the Civil Wars in Lebanon. The subsequent restoration intentionally preserved the marks of war damage which Hatoum has also preserved in her miniaturised version recalling domestic ornamental porcelain figurines.

Michael Rakowitz

(b. New York, USA, 1973. Lives and works in Chicago)

Study for the Breakup – Maps

(The Breakup Series)

2010–12

Beatles map of Liverpool, 1970s; Jerusalem map, 1950 printed in Israel printed in Palestine; Jerusalem map, 1936; Michael Rakowitz poster Al Ma'mal, 2010; Brick fragment from the Cavern Club, 1963; Stone from the Western Wall, 2010,

Michael Rakowitz's project *The Breakup* started as a 10-part radio series commissioned by Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem and broadcast by Radio Amwaj in Ramallah, Palestine. Rakowitz listened to over 150 hours of taped material recording the slow and acrimonious disbanding of the Beatles who eventually split up in 1969. He relates these arduous negotiations, promises and threats to the concurrent breakdown of relations between Israel and Palestine and to the end of the ideals of Pan-Arabism.

Resembling an archaeological display, the work (which forms part of a wider project) includes found objects and memorabilia of both Beatles fandom and the geography and politics of the Middle East, from maps and posters to stone fragments from the Cavern Club in Liverpool and the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

ACCESS INFORMATION

For details on parking, assistance dogs, adapted toilets, lifts, large print transcripts and free audio described tours or any other access facilities:

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