

Turathuna Center for Palestinian Heritage

Welcome to e-turathuna

Know your Palestinian Heritage

Featuring Jabra Ibrahim Jabra



Jabra Ibrahim Jabra is Bethlehem's homegrown writer, artist and painter. Turathuna Centre at Bethlehem University has a collection of his books on a special shelf just dedicated for him. Some of his representative paintings were showcased by Turathuna Centre for Palestinian Heritage during the 40th Jubilee year of the foundation of Bethlehem University.

More Facts about Jabra Ibrahim Jabra

Born in Bethlehem in 1920, Jabra is a prolific writer and artist with works ranging from Palestinian novels, poetry, short stories, essays to paintings, literary and art criticism as well as Arabic translations of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets.



Photos of Jabra's parents' houses

He began his studies at the Syriac school where he learnt English and Assyrian, continuing later at the Bethlehem National School. When he was 12 years old, he went to the Ar-Rashdiyyah School in Jerusalem. There he met outstanding teachers such as Abdul-Karim Al-Karmi, Ibrahim Touqan, and Ishaq Mousa Al-Husseini. Upon completion of his high school education, he studied at the Arab College in Jerusalem.

Jabra was awarded a scholarship to study English literature in England and completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1943, then a master of arts in 1948 at Fitzwilliam House, Cambridge University.



Street named after Jabra behind Bethlehem Municipality building

Back in Palestine after his successful studies, he taught English Literature in Jerusalem for approximately five years, from 1943 till the end of the British mandate in 1948. Losing his home in 1948, he was forced into exile and went to Iraq, where he taught English Literature at the College of Arts of the University of Baghdad (1948-1952). Jabra played a key role in developing the art heritage in Palestine of the 1950s although he never returned to Bethlehem, which was truly a loss



Ar-Rashidiyyah School in Jerusalem

for the country.

While in Iraq, his literary career flourished. He contributed to the Iraqi art movement, and he became an active member of the Baghdad Modern Art Group established in 1951 under the direction of the preeminent Iraqi artist of the time, Jawad Salim. His western observers described Jabra as striving to integrate Western thought with local aesthetic perspectives which served both his political stance vis-a-vis the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and the role of modernist art in the era of post-World War II.



Jabra's home



"Self Portrait"
Oil on canvas, 1946

Jabra was appointed head of publications at the Iraq Petroleum Company in Baghdad in the years spanning from 1954 – 1977. Earlier he was given a research fellowship of two years at Harvard University (USA).

Jabra is better known as a writer and an art critic, but he will always remain as one of the pioneering Palestinian artists of the twentieth century. Jabra used oil colours to paint on the canvas of gunnysacks, wooden panels, and glass which were innovative and not very commonly-used media. Women and nudity repeatedly appear in Jabra's paintings. The inner side of the artist seem to be depicted clearly in his paintings, some of which are signed Gabriel Jabra.

The majority of what Jabra painted was done more as an amateur and most have been done using oil. Painting occupied him mentally and psychologically, especially in the years before his exile from home, between 1946 and 1948. Although Jabra never held any exhibitions during this period, his house in Bethlehem was nevertheless open to anyone who wanted to view his paintings.

Jabra produced about 60 literary works in Arabic and English over a period of forty years. He translated thirty books from English into Arabic, among which were several of Shakespeare's plays: Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, The Tempest, Twelfth Night, and Creolanius. Some of his own works in Arabic were translated into English, French, Spanish, Italian, Slovak and Serbo-Croatian. Professor Issa Boulata translated his autobiographical novel "The First Well."



Untitled. Oil on glass panel, 1947

Jabra died in Bagdad in 1994 leaving behind him an art inheritance that was unfortunately destroyed during the explosion of his house in April 2010. This tragic incident represented the loss of an important documentation of a stage in the Arab art movement in the mid-twentieth century which is now irreplaceable.



"The Girl and the Poppies"
Oil on canvas, 1945

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra received several tributes in recognition of his genius and achievements. Among these are included the Targa Europa Award for Culture (Italy, 1983); the Literature and Arts Award (Kuwait, 1987); the Literature Award for the Novel (Iraq, 1988); the Sultan Oweis Cultural Award for Literary Criticism (the United Arab Emirates, 1989), the Jerusalem Medal for Culture, Arts and Literature (Palestine, 1990), the First Class Recognition Medal (Tunisia, 1991), and the Thornton Wilder Award for Translation (Columbia University, USA, 1991). (Conference on "Jabra Ibrahim Jabra 1920-1994 edited by Dr. Mahmoud Abu Kattah, Dr. Aziz Khalil. Bethlehem University 28-29 August, 2004).

Bethlehem University Pays a Tribute

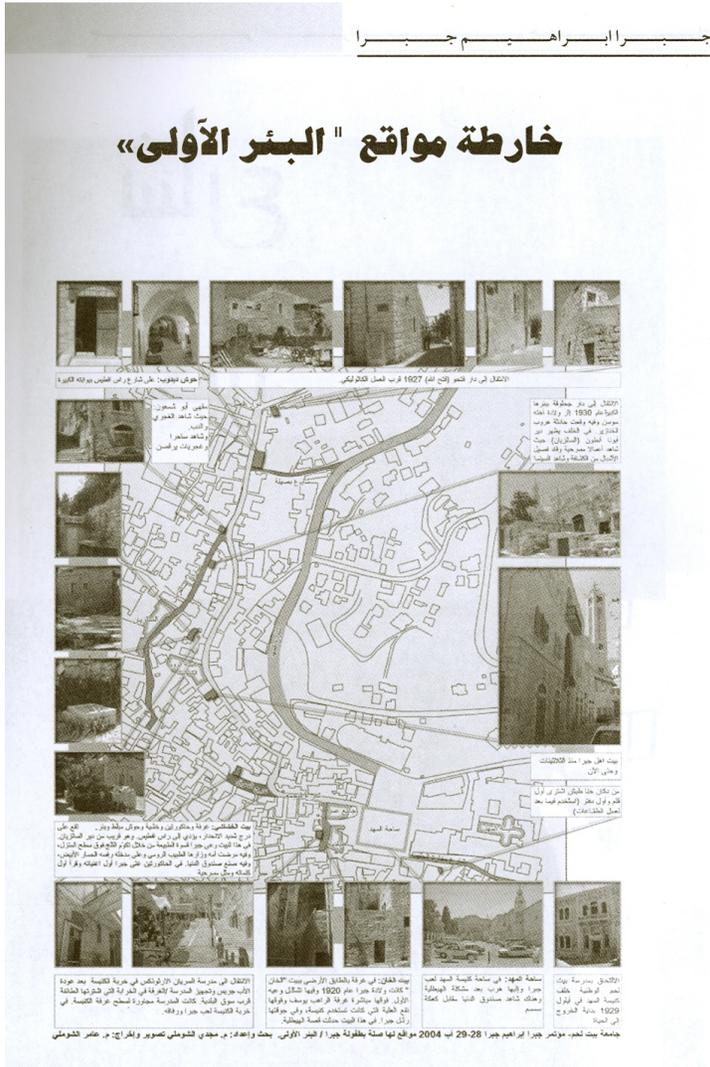


A two-day conference on “Jabra Ibrahim Jabra” from the 28-29 August 2004 was hosted at Bethlehem University. Nineteen papers on various aspects of Jabra’s literary works were presented and discussed by a number of Palestinian academicians and literary figures. The Prince Claus Fund (the Netherlands) sponsored this conference with some other foundations.



Ten years later, on the 7th of October 2014, on the occasion of the University’s Jubilee of 40 years, George Al-Ama (BU’04), also a Bethlehemite, generously loaned out Jabra’s five paintings from the family collection to be on display at the Turathuna Centre.

The opening of the exhibition was graced by Her Honor, Mayor Vera Baboun; Brother Peter Bray, Vice Chancellor; Dr. Irene Hazou, Vice President for Academic Affairs; present also were the Executive Council members, the PALICO member-librarians and other guests.



Map prepared by Mr. Majdi Shomali - Sites related to the childhood of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra

Opening of the Jabra Ibrahim Jabra Painting exhibition photos



Bethlehem University Library celebrated the 40th anniversary and the theme was about Jabra Ibrahim Jabra