

CULTURE

Kitab: Five Arab Art and Culture Books To Add To Your Library

Celebrating the region's creative genius through
the literary medium

BY RAWAA TALASS

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Photo: Nour Jarrar

As the new year begins, why not make some interesting additions to your library? Thankfully these days, there is an array of inspiring publications of art and culture from the Arab world and here are five recently published books, from meeting 20th century pioneers to remembering Palestine's past, to consider.

Alcove: Intimate Essays on Arab Modern Artists

Author: Myrna Ayad



Photo: Myrna Ayad

In this intimate book of short essays, the Lebanese art consultant and writer Myrna Ayad interviewed the relatives, friends, and students of late modern Arab artists, many of whom have been forgotten, with the aim of delving into their personal lives. Spanning across the Arab world, from North Africa to the Gulf region,

some of the discussed 20th century artists include Huguette Caland, Etel Adnan, Baya Mahieddine, Aref El Rayess, Fateh Moudarres, and Asim Abu Shakra. In the interviewees' own words, they share fascinating stories of how active, thriving, and resilient Arab modernists were, but also of how much they endured as a result of social restrictions and political instability in the region.

The State of Mind Palestine

Author: Nour Jarrar

Photo: Nour Jarrar

This plentiful picture book was sparked by a controversial statement made by the former friend of the book's author, Nour Jarrar, claiming that "there was never a country called Palestine." By using images collected from Palestinian family archives, Jarrar filled more than 200 pages with black-and-white images of former Palestinian life, prior to the Israeli occupation in 1948. Some images include charming wedding portraits, family gatherings, architectural landmarks, and everyday scenes.

Ultimately, this book has an important reminder. "I want the younger Palestinian generation to see how our ancestors lived

in their homeland – what they looked like, what they adorned, and their way of life," wrote Jarrar.

Manal AlDowayan–*Shifting Sands: A Battle Song*

**Contributors: Fawziyya Abu Khalid,
Ghada AlMuhanna Abalkhail, Ruba Al-
Sweel, Iwona Blazwick, Camille
Morraineau**

Photo: Manal AlDowayan

In 2024, the acclaimed Saudi artist Manal AlDowayan represented her country at the Venice Biennale, considered the art world's largest event. Through her 20-year practice, which has involved installation art, photography, and sculpture, AlDowayan has focused her attention on engaging with the local community of Saudi women, whose image has been misconstrued by the media, the artist believes. Following this line of thought, as documented in the book, AlDowayan placed the spotlight on women of all ages and backgrounds in Saudi Arabia at the Venice Biennale by presenting their telling drawings and

sound recordings that counter negative misconceptions about them.

**Jewad Selim: *Catalogue
Raisonné of Paintings and
Sculptures***

**Contributors: Zaineb Jewad Selim,
Nima Sagharchi**

Photo: Jewad Selim

Considered one of the pioneers of 20th century Arab art, the Iraqi artist Jewad Selim is the subject of a brand new catalogue raisonné, set to come out in

early 2025, listing his artworks which include painting and sculpture. Born in 1919, Selim has been known for his unique portrayal of local motifs and fellow countrymen in a modernised and bold manner. "He began painting at only thirteen. Despite his untimely death at 42, his small body of work (around 100 paintings and half as many sculptures) left an extraordinary legacy," wrote the director of Islamic and Middle Eastern Art at Bonhams, Nima Sagharchi, who collaborated with the artist's daughter to bring his comprehensive publication to life, on Instagram.

*Resurgent Nahda: The Arab
Exhibitions in Mandate
Jerusalem*

**Authors: Nadi Abusaada, Wesam Al
Asali, Nisa Ari, Nadine Nour el Din,
Sary Zananiri, Samira Badran, Kirsten
Scheid**

Photo: Kaph Books

Published by Kaph Books in Beirut, "Resurgent Nahda" digs deep into the history of the influential 1933 and 1934 Arab Exhibitions in Mandate Jerusalem. Through six insightful essays, paired with archival imagery, the book "highlights the city's role in asserting a regional Arab Nahda and fostering economic, cultural, and artistic exchange amid post-WWI geopolitical fragmentation," according to a text released by the publishing house. The exhibitions were held at the Palace Hotel in Jerusalem, representing an exciting meeting point of artists, craftspeople, and industrialists hailing from around the region, notably from the

major cities of Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, and Beirut. Such a historical, multifaceted event "showed that Arab economic and cultural progress was possible despite, and not because of, European colonialism," according to an Instagram post made by the book's editor, Professor Nadi Abusaada.

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