

mathaf

arab museum of  
modern art

who  
are  
you?

identity +  
modern arab art

**Sajjil: A Century of Modern Art**

## about this guide

Mathaf's first exhibition is called Sajjil, "to record". However, no record is set in stone.

Instead of looking for "the true meaning" in art, we try to let our questions take us to both familiar and unfamiliar destinations.

This guide offers questions and ideas which you might enjoy while exploring the art.

## who we are

At Mathaf, we believe that art is not one-sided. There are many possible interpretations that can be made from each artwork. Our mission is to create a welcoming space where people can have discussions about art in Qatar and beyond.

We are more than just a gallery space. You also have the choice of visiting our library, café, shop and education center.

Bring a friend or family member to Mathaf the next time you visit, and make art a social experience.

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## which modern arab artist are you?

sajjil: a century of modern art is overflowing with artistic inspiration from more than a century of painting, sculpture and work on paper. match your own personality with one of three artists featured in the exhibition by answering the following question:

how do you prefer to  
express your true self?

- by using all the different words, techniques and styles i know, including art.
- by revealing hints of my mysterious, maybe unknowable inner world.
- by communicating my pains and fears ... it's a tough world out there.

**If you answered a) ...**  
You are **Rachid Koraichi**.  
You have a lot on your mind and you express yourself freely to the world through all kinds of words and images. Find out more about your chosen artist in **Horoufiyah gallery**.

**If you answered b) ...**  
You are **Laila al-Attar**.  
Quiet, but not silent, you have plenty going on in your internal world which is only visible to a clever onlooker. Find out more about this artist in **Nature gallery**.

**If you answered c) ...**  
You are **Sami Mohammed**.  
You see that human beings are shaped by their suffering. You're not afraid to express raw and powerful emotions either. Find out more about your chosen artist in **Struggle gallery**.

this guide highlights the work of three artists represented in sajjil: a century of modern art. we chose these artists because we are excited by the ways they wrestle with the question,

## who are we in this complicated world?

each of these artists expresses their ideas in ways that are uniquely their own.

## taking a risk

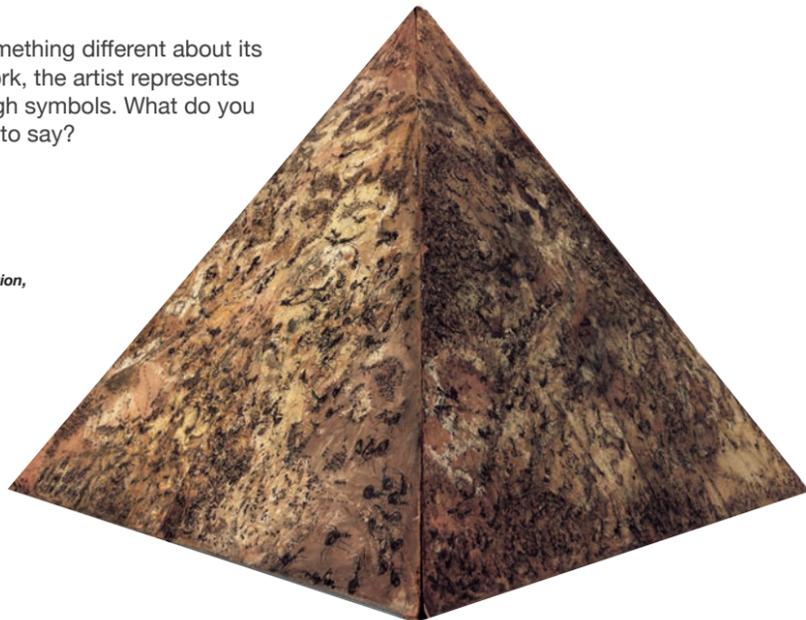
Modern art can sometimes be confusing or even seem ugly. For an artist, saying something new and different can be a risky choice. Will their work be appreciated? Will others understand it? The artist Taheya Halim is better-known for painting portraits of people living in Nubia, Egypt. However, she was unafraid of expressing her thoughts and emotions in more than one dimension.

You will find this unusual painted sculpture by Taheya Halim in the **Form and Abstraction gallery**. It is more than two meters high, and unlike many other paintings in the museum, it is multi-dimensional. Take in this large structure, by walking slowly round it. What are you reminded of when you see it?

You will notice something different about its surface. In this work, the artist represents her feelings through symbols. What do you think she is trying to say?

*The Pyramid, the Civilization, Symbolism Through Ants*

Taheya Halim  
ca. 1960s  
Mixed media on board,  
233 x 237 x 237 cm



## history or myth?

Find Abdullah al-Muharraqi's painting in the **History and Myth gallery**. Give yourself a few minutes to look at the painting. Do you find yourself looking at it straight on, or moving your eyes round it in a different direction? What is it about the painting that guides your eyes?

Abdullah al-Muharraqi is a Bahraini artist with a lifelong connection to the sea and the tradition of pearl-diving. The scenes he paints are often his memories of a way of life that has all but disappeared in the Gulf region. He also paints the myths and folktales of his childhood.

What do you think is the story behind this painting? Might there be some special reason why he chose to use abstract lines, shapes and colors instead of a more realistic style?



*A Man and the Fate or  
The Diver and the Shark*  
Abdullah al-Muharraqi  
1967  
Oil on canvas  
111.5 x 91 cm



*Majnun Layla (Temptation)*  
Dia Azzawi  
1995  
Acrylic on canvas  
161 x 200.7 cm

## a fractured tale

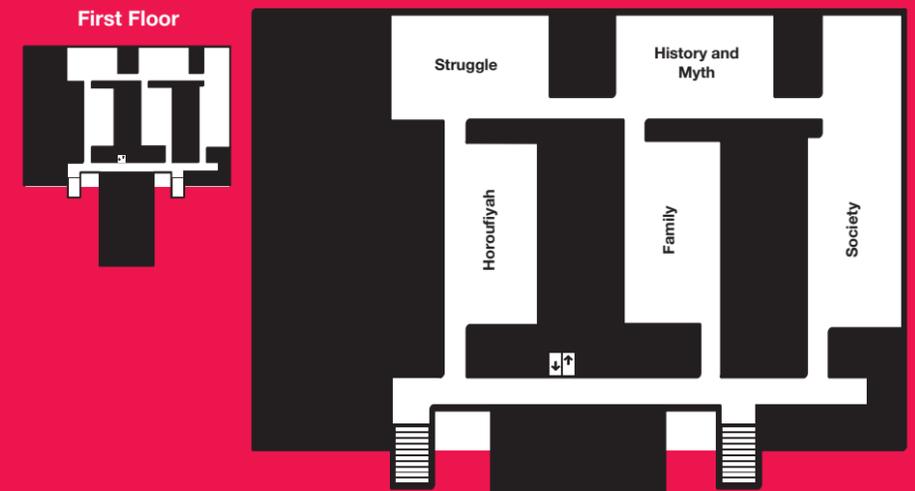
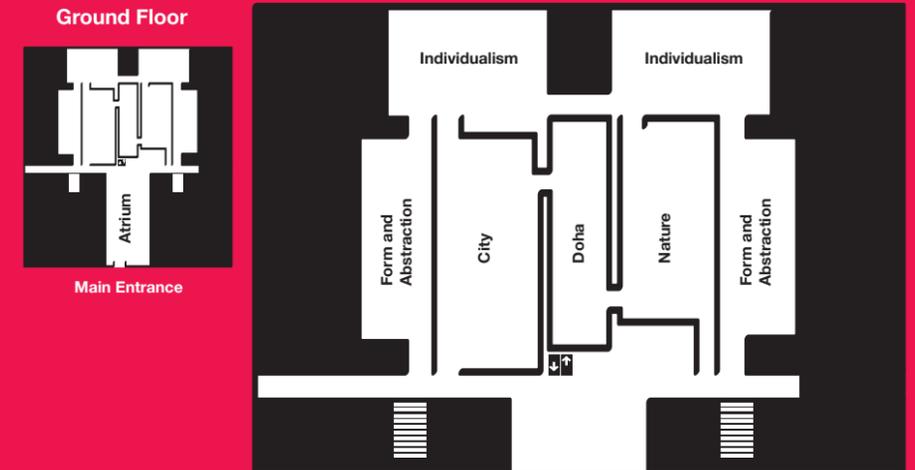
What would you do for love? Long before Romeo and Juliet, Persian and Arab storytellers told a different tale of star-crossed lovers. In the story of Layla and Majnun, the young man, Qays, eventually goes mad. He is renamed Majnun, literally 'crazy for love'. Iraqi artist Dia Azzawi remembers this tale in this colorful painting, which he calls *Majnun Layla (Temptation)*. You will find it in the **Doha gallery**.

Azzawi nearly fills the canvas with a deep blue background, in which we can see a looming red-faced figure. She looks into the distance, with large dark eyes showing behind a mask. To the right, a field of yellow divides her from a green face. If this woman is Layla, what might Azzawi be suggesting about her? What can we make of the relationship between the two figures?

The large dark eyes in this picture resemble eyes painted by the ancient Sumerians in the land where Iraq is now. Azzawi painted this work in Doha, and he was perhaps inspired by the clothing of Qatari women.

Why do you think he mixed and matched the ancient and the modern? Or Iraqi culture with Qatari culture? What do you think Dia Azzawi is trying to tell us about who and what we are?

## sajjil: a century of modern art gallery map



please ...  
if you're inspired to write or sketch in the galleries, use pencils to record your thoughts. pencils are available at the information desk for your use.