Suad Al-Attar \*1942

Untitled

signed and dated 1992
oil on canvas laid down on board
79.5 x 59.5cm; 31⅞ by 23⅞in.

PROVENANCE
Private Collection, Italy (acquired directly from the artist)
Acquired directly from the above by the present owner

£30,000-50,000
€37,500-62,500  US$53,000-83,800

The renowned Iraqi artist Suad Al-Attar has a beautiful individual vision that awakens understanding in her viewers regardless of origin or sex. Her style and methodology is truly evocative of her ethnic and cultural origin.

Arguably the best known female artist of the Arab world, this particular painting illustrates Attar’s fine and graphic treatment of her medium through the means of a simplistic background emphasising the central figure. It suggests notions of freedom and liberation, an attempt to escape either the boundaries of home, society, or possibly even her body, her identity. The bowing animal depicted in a box in the corner also suggests an awakening, as though from a deep sleep the woman appears to the wild, but her flying in the strong winds that tear about the house. There is a sense of naked power as the woman comes to terms with her true nature and her own environment.

The question of identity which recurs frequently in Attar’s work is here indicated by the female figure whose pose in which she has been painted is one that can be read as simultaneously submissive and confrontational.

The artist remarks on the role of the woman in Arab society emerging into the face of modernity, yet maintains a sense of a traditional atmosphere. Attar once said that “bodies are not the point” of her work. “It is about the suffering and strength of women”, Suad Al-Attar, Suad Al-Attar: Myths and Reflections, London 2002, n.p.

Trees and nature have always been a vital component of Attar’s work, and this piece is no exception. Again in her stylised fashion, Attar paints an unusual tree which still remains connected with the scenery and tone of the whole painting. The colour used along with the surrealistic imagery, brings to mind a dream-like quality to this art work, a characteristic ever present in Attar’s oeuvre.

From an aesthetic point of view alone, this painting is overwhelming. Her imagery and palette convey spirituality, dreams, and pure emotion, but it is the very ambiguity of the work that makes the piece so intriguing. Attar herself is constantly pushing boundaries, exploring her own imagination, emotions and feelings, she invites the viewer to enter this romanticised, magical world with her.
Self Wany and his brother Adham were highly influential artists in the Egyptian art scene. One of the foremost Egyptian artists of his time, Self Wany was the first to open a practicing studio in 1952. Whilst Adham was preoccupied with daily life and the nature that surrounded him (see lot 209 in this sale), often painting the sea views which were a focal point for Alexandrians, Wany was arguably more inspired by the human figure.

Although his work ranges in subject from the still life to the landscape, to the figurative, a large proportion of Self Wany's work is devoted to the movement of the human body. Much like Edgar Degas (1834-1917), Self was fascinated by ballet dancers and could often be found backstage at the European productions of famous ballets in Alexandria, sketching the performers. Unlike Degas, who referred to himself as a realist, Self preferred to convey movement and emotion through expressionism, in painting the human body in this style, Self Wany communicates an impression of the energy of the dance, and the whirl of the dancer's body through the air. The swift movement of the figures blur their features, and the sharp treatment of their hands and feet suggest a speed and dynamism that is evocative of the event.
Hafiz Droubi 1914-1991

Dancing Girls

signed and dated 76
oil on canvas
70 by 50cm, 27½ by 19¾in.

PROVENANCE:
Private Collection, Italy

£ 20,000-30,000
# 24,800-37,100  US$ 35,200-53,000

Hafiz Droubi is one of the foremost artists of the modernist period in Iraq. The founding member of the Impressionists Group, that later included Elia Azzawi (see lots 218 & 265 in this sale), his work was highly influential on both his own, and the younger generation of Iraqi artists. Droubi's style and technique revolutionized the Iraqi modern art movement. His training at Goldsmiths College in London in the 1940s and his relationship with a number of Polish artists stationed with the Allied Forces in Baghdad after the Second World War, made him a great innovator and a radical in his own artistic milieu.

The influence of Cubism on Droubi's work is clear as geometric vortices, Objects and landscapes, even figures are broken up and abstracted. In the painting the dancers are depicted from apparently multiple viewpoints and in so doing, the artist shows the dancer's form in greater context, ironically providing a more accurate understanding of the reality thanks to its very abstraction. In depicting these women in this fashion, Droubi creates a highly dynamic and powerful scene. By intersecting the surfaces he effortlessly conveys the movement and energy of the dancers, their whirling skirts and the beat of the drum.

This superlative example of Hafiz Droubi's work shows him both at his Cubist and his national best. Iraq was going through great change at this time with the effects of industrialisation and the erosion of the rural lifestyle; many Iraqi artists chose to celebrate the disappearing traditions of their culture through paint. The belly dancer is a tradition synonymous with the Middle East, but rather than the louche provocateurs of fantasy, here Droubi depicts them with grace and composure - symbols of an honoured, fading heritage.
Jamil Hammoudi's work was a seminal point in modern Arab art. The first man to employ letters in painting, he was an entirely new approach to artistic compositions. Hammoudi combined the traditional artistic expression of his native culture with the artistic practice of the European art movement, as illustrated by the quotation above from his first exhibition with the One Dimension group.

His work is of huge importance both to the development of Iraqi art, and to the entire pan-Arab world. From this point forward the calligraphic line and the incorporation of the word became inherent to the work of many artists across the Middle East. This truly significant artist developed a methodology that would impact on the entire middle-eastern artistic community. An innovation that proved the point at which the Arab art movement had come into its own. When artists developed the confidence to break boundaries set by masters of a different culture, and to establish a manner of depiction unique to themselves.

He says of his work: "The very moment at which the idea came to me to seek inspiration in the Arabic letters in art was a kind of supplication and prayer for a soul intimidated by the emptiness which dominated European art. Fear from being lost in a culture, which did not relate to my intellectual and national experience... I did not find an expedient more suitable and sacred than the Arabic letter to which I resort to satisfy my thirst for expression and creativity." (The artist cited in: Nizar Salim, Iraq Contemporary Art, Iraq, p. 106)

This piece is a perfect example of Jamil Hammoudi's oeuvre, incorporating his painterly style with the calligraphy of his native culture. The Cubist elements of this work is undeniable, the broken planes, the alternative angles; however, the work seems not to include calligraphy at all. Yet upon close inspection the letters are revealed. This type of composition is truly peerless. The artist is so skilled and so intelligent as to combine his western training with his middle-eastern background. Simultaneously acknowledging both by creating a form of expression that can be read and appreciated, artistically and intellectually, by the products of both cultures.

Hammoudi's influence and innovation had such impact, that an entire movement came to be known as Hammoudi. A true intellectual, Jamil Hammoudi also published the magazine Modern Thought, al-Risalah al-Musawwirah, in Baghdad. The original lithographed template for the cover, designed by Jawad Salim, is lot 238 in this sale.
Naseer Chauka

(1) Untitled
(2) Untitled

(1) signed in Arabic and English and dated 1972
(2) signed in Arabic and English and dated 1973
(3-4) oil on canvas
each: 61 by 46cm; 24 by 18in.

€ 7,000-10,000
US$ 12,000-17,000

Dia Azzawi

Green Movement

signed and dated 1959; signed, titled and dated 2002 on the reverse
oil on canvas
diameter: 140cm; 55in.

PROVENANCE
Bassam Gallery, Dubai
Acquired directly from the above by the present owner

For a rare example of Dia Azzawi's work from the 1960s, please see lot 218 in this sale.

€ 12,000-18,000
US$ 21,000-31,000
Rafik El Kamel’s work is more than simply the transformation of matter into painting, of reality into an Abstraction; it is a Transfiguration. Appearing first in the work of this celebrated artist in 1987, the Transfiguration series characterizes the artist’s quest of the past forty years, in his attempt to transcend the opposition between figuration and abstraction. For Rafik El Kamel, to transfigure does not mean changing one figure into another, but rather to metamorphose the figure, to give it an undefined identity, becoming simultaneously a figure and a non-figure. The present work, Transfiguration demonstrates the consequences of accidents and catastrophes, modifying the surface of the painting. Windows of blinding colour that reveal this drawing technique are juxtaposed with blocks of dark paint, visual blocks holes empty of spirit of humanity. It is this tenuous dialectic between drawing and matter that delivers the artist’s canvas. There is an orchestrated interplay between lines and texture through collage and free drawing, which could be described as automatic writing.

Creating, crumpling, shifts and detachments energize the shapes alongside thin red and blue lines reminiscent of waves - a final reminder of the earlier cataclysm. Inescapable, undefined elements appear to exist in a state of perpetual transformation. Painting in its plasticity thus asserts its autonomy, not only from pictorial academic conventions but also from our own ego. Painting, therefore, is neither the real, nor interpreting it. Here it is the birth of what is real a primordial soup of colour, shape and dynamic.

To transfigure is to bring about a return to a primordial, to improve, to dazzle, through a glimmering new beauty, an unusual brightness. In the same way that these luminous shapes enhance the monochrome background of the canvas, so does a transfiguration transform the real into a fantastic beauty.

Rafik El Kamel belongs to the second generation of the École de Tunis. His expertise in both the figurative and abstract practice of painting, places him in the pantheon of other modern artists such as Mark Rothko and Nicolas De Staël.
Behjat Sadr b. 1934

Untitled

signed
tape and oil on steel
55 1/8 by 92 7/8 in.

£ 10,000-15,000
€ 12,400-18,600
US$ 17,600-26,400

Hamed Abdallah 1957-1985

Wafq (Harmony)

signed
acrylic on paper laid down on masonite
100 1/2 by 61 3/4 in.

Executed in 1969

PROVENANCE
Private Collection, Cairo (acquired directly from the artist)

£ 14,000-18,000
€ 17,300-22,300
US$ 24,700-31,700
"When I came to see a map of the Persian Empire 470 B.C., I was simply stunned by the extent of it and wanted to give some physicality to this blurred and forgotten abstract notion which has completely set to exist in today's consciousness, although the empire lasted for over two centuries."

Kamran Diba, 2000

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Kamran Diba b. 1937
The First Empire (Land of Persia)

signed and dated 07
oil on canvas
60 by 97cm; 57½ by 38½in.

£8,000-12,000
$9,900-14,900
US$14,100-21,200