

Fann À Porter in collaboration with Zaat are pleased to present, *We The People*, a collective exhibition featuring the works of Abd Kasha, Abdallah Murad, Ahmad Kasha, Arda Aslanian, Bader Mahasneh, Basma Al Nimri, Dana Barqawi, Fadi Attoura, Fadi Balhawan, Fayek Dahdouh, Hasan Jouni, Houssam Ballan, Ibrahim Jalal, Jaber Alwan, Jamil Kasha, Karam Matouk, Leonardo Cremonini, Maath Alousi, Majd Kurdieh, Mayar Obeido, Mona Trad Dabaji, Rabee Kiwan, Wajih Wahba, Youssef Youssef, and Zena Assi.

شوارع المدينة مش لحدا  
شوارع المدينة لكل الناس  
رصيف البحر مش لحدا  
رصيف البحر لكل الناس  
نحن الناس  
نحن شجر الشوارع  
نحن حكايا الرصيف  
نحن الربيع  
نحن الشتى  
نحن الصيف  
و نحن الخريف  
نحن الناس

محمد العبدالله

Inspired by Mohamed AlAbdallah's poem of the same title, *We The People* celebrates the everyday person and the human aspect that gives life to cities and streets. In turn, this exhibition chooses to highlight the figure, whether it is anonymous or a distinct portrait, abstract or expressive. The figure reminds us of ourselves, someone we know, strangers we meet, or even simply, the body in which we inhabit.

Born in Lebanon, **Fadi Balhawan** (b. 1966) graduated from the American University of Beirut in business administration. After being injured in an explosion as a child, he began to write and draw during a seven-month convalescence. As a self-taught artist, he rediscovered that devotion that he had as a child with his time-intensive pieces. Balhawan has shown his work in Spain, Greece, and the UAE.

Using inks and pens, Balhawan fervently transcribes well-known books in Arab literature or spiritual writings such as the Confessions of St. Augustine. Creating lines that flow in all directions, the text forms shapes, patterns, and figures with highlighting washes. Akin to concrete poetry, the words and shapes reinforce each other in their meaning and symbolism.

Syrian artist **Fayek Dahdouh** (b. 1940) received his BFA from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus. Active in the arts community, he has exhibited in solo and group shows throughout Syria and is a member of the administrative committee of the Syndicate of Fine Arts. Dahdouh has also translated many books on art, philosophy and history while researching contemporary issues and managing the fine arts section of the Arabic Encyclopedia.

A recurring motif in Dahdouh's practice is the nude woman. The present work from 1984 was published in the journal, *Al Hayat al Tashkilia*, in a long form interview where Dahdouh speaks philosophically about aesthetics, imagination and gender. The painting is characteristic of his cool palette, vertical brushstrokes and female figures.

Lebanese artist, **Hassan Jouni** was born in Roumin, South Lebanon. He holds a diploma from the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (1964) and of the Foster Academy of Fine Arts (Spain, 1965) and taught drawing at the San Fernando Institute in Madrid. Known for the boldness in his work coupled with political and social commentary, Jouni's pieces depict subject matter that is both lyrical and narrative. His usage of color is expressive of inner emotions or possibly symbolic in meaning. The strong figure in the foreground raises his arm high while the sun rises behind him. Further evoking the idea of rebirth are the figures emerging from their tombs or rafts. Bathed in warm colors from the light of the sun, they feel as if they are stepping into the dawn of a new era.

Hassan Jouni has had numerous exhibitions in Lebanon and abroad, notably in Paris, London, US, Dubai, Switzerland, Jordan, Kuwait, Syria and Germany as well as in the Biennales of Sao Paulo, Alexandria, Latakia and Baghdad.

Syrian artist **Ibrahim Jalal** (1947) received his degree in Fine Arts from the Damascus University of the Arts and then continued his studies at the National Superior School of Fine Arts in Paris under the abstract painter Gustave Singier. Jalal has exhibited in France, Norway, Switzerland, Japan, China, UAE, Syria, Germany, Luxembourg and US.

Inspired by his family and events in his early childhood, Ibrahim Jalal grew up surrounded by his father's weaving loom, his older brother's portraits of women and the vibrant colors and atmosphere of the textile market. Jalal's paintings are based in abstraction, a bright palette and central compositions with square-like shapes. In "The Messiah is Crucified Anew", he includes the religious symbol of the crucifixion, small vignettes, figures and objects, that when they are combined together, they take on a narrative quality.

**Jaber Alwan's** work addresses the human condition, conflicts in his homeland and icons of Iraqi culture such as the late Dia Majeed, and the 20th-century poet, Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri. Typical of the artist's penetrating dark palette and surreal colors, "Untitled" displays the artist's characteristic thick, almost sculptural, brushwork which accentuates the drama of the figure inside the interior scene. The features on the face have a neutral expression, with the color symbolism, body motion and other elements inferring the work's intent.

Contemporary Iraqi artist, Jaber Alwan was born in Babylon, 1948. He was awarded a Diploma from the Academy of Fine Art/ Rome and has had solo exhibitions worldwide in Iraq, Italy, Syria, Austria, England, Jordan, UAE, France, Bahrain, Lebanon, Tunisia and Kuwait. He has works in the permanent collections of the Modern Art Museum, Baghdad; Colpinkian Museum, Lisbon; Dei Diameni Palace, Ferrara; The Modern Art Museum, Damascus; The Modern Art Museum, Qatar; Academy Museum, Ravenna; Opera Home, Cairo; and the Modern Art Museum, Kuwait.

Syrian artist **Karam Maatouk** was born in Homs in 1947, graduated from the Sobhi Shoib Art Center in 1965 and is a member of the Syndicate of Fine Arts and Union of Arab Fine Artists. He had many solo and group exhibitions inside Syria (Homs, Damascus and Aleppo) and abroad. After immigrating to Poland, he has participated in group shows at the National Museum, Warsaw; Asia and Pacific Museum, Warsaw; and at Depo Istanbul.

Working with abstracted figures in color fields, Karam Matouk has a nuanced way of painting with colors and textures. In “Two Dancers”, the light and shadow falls gracefully on the figures melting them together with the background. The areas of color evoke features and forms skillfully mastered.

Iraqi artist, architect and academic **Maath Alousi** paints dark and expressionist works with broad brushstrokes like in “Untitled.” This work of an almost obscured face, with blurred outlines has a bright red circular mouth as a focal point, popping through the dark wash of layers.

Born in Baghdad, Maath Al-Alousi (1938) is an Iraqi artist, architect and academic. He holds a Bachelor of Architecture from the Middle East Technical University in Turkey and the Architectural Association Diploma in the United Kingdom. Beginning in 1978, he exhibited regularly at various international galleries and continued through the early 2000s.

Known for both his art practice and architecture projects throughout the Middle East, he has exhibited in Iraq, Lebanon, Cyprus and Greece.

“Cana ou la conscience du monde” or “Cana where the conscious of the world” was made by **Mona Trad Dabaji** in memorial to the massacre that was committed by the Israeli army in Cana, Lebanon in 1996. Painted with her classic outlines and almost flat background, the work is emblematic of the artist while addressing the atrocity of the time. It was included in the benefit exhibition “Qana wedding” for the victims.

Depicting Lebanese traditions, cultures and histories, Mona Trad Dabaji’s work is primarily figurative, with stylized backgrounds. She graduated from the American University of Beirut, just as the civil war broke out in Lebanon. She currently lives and works in Beirut, where she has been teaching painting since 1993. She has exhibited in Lebanon, France, Jordan, the United States and The United Arab Emirates.

Known for his figurative works, **Wajih Wahba** paints with a gestural hand. Smooth flowing brush strokes of velvety colors give his work a rich tonality like in “Untitled.” His expressionist style imbues emotion and the figures look as if they are deep in conversation.

Egyptian artist Wajih Wahba studied fine arts in Italy from 1975 to 1978. He is a member of the Egyptian Association of Fine Arts Critics. He also served as Chairman of the Board of Directors of Cairo Atelier and has held solo exhibitions in Northern Italy, Atelier Cairo, Al Mashrabiya Gallery, Daroub Hall, Ibdaa Al Mohandeseen, Creativity of Zamalek, Espace Hall and Hanager Hall.

Born in Lebanon, **Zena Assi** (1974) graduated from l’Academie Libanaise des Beaux Arts (ALBA) and taught drawing and visual communication at different universities. Her work has been at auction at Christie’s, Sotheby’s, Bonhams and Phillips and is part of collections such as ALBA, Barjeel Art Foundation and Institut du Monde Arabe.

Although Zena Assi frequently depicts figures, portraiture, where she draws from life, like in this series, is unique to her oeuvre. Capturing an essence of the person from the background, posture, or expression, she also dresses them in a cityscape, as if they are wearing the city’s “urban fabric.”

"In art, I find the true meaning of my existence and the purpose of life. I practice painting in oil colors, watercolor and charcoal; however, I also practice ceramics making my fair share of sculptures, most of which are of faces and bodily figures. At the same time, I am a writer. I have a series of four short stories, a collection of three very short stories and then a novel. I focus on painting faces because humans sit on top of the universe, humans are the faces of the Earth and as I paint faces, I can see myself painting a whole universe. And when my faces exhaust me with all the pain that they have carried within us, I escape to my artistic atmosphere and create a vase, to realize when I finish my painting, that I am still in the presence, the gorgeous human presence; the vase is the body, the rose is the soul, and you will find me throughout my whole life panting and panting and panting behind the embodiment of the soul and the meaning through color."

Born in Jordan, **Basma Al Nimri** has exhibited in United Kingdom, Bangladesh, Sharjah, and Lebanon.

**Fadi Attoura** unifies the carefree, childlike spirit that he picks up on from his surrounding environments and the formalism of Op art, drawing influence from the geometric forms and motifs of early mosaic designs. He began his painting career at a very young age – painting for as long as he can remember.

After graduating from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Hama, Attoura began exploring abstraction depicting what he saw as happiness, joy, and human interaction. Following that, the artist decided to return to the study of color as well as portraiture, slowly moving towards minimalism and attempting to simplify the figures in his works, which brought him to his latest set of works. Drawing inspiration from the toys his own children play with and the drawings and art that they create, Attoura was able to unify all these aspects to create works that are very technically strong yet explore deeper emotions and concepts.

Recently, Attoura has featured in solo and group exhibitions at Hama Cultural Center (2018); Emergeast, Dubai (2016); Bahrain Biennial, Manama (2015); and Wadi Finan Art Gallery, Amman (2014). He was awarded the second prize for the Sketch for Syria competition at the IUAV University of Venice. His works are housed in private collections throughout the region. Attoura has also worked on numerous Arabic television series as a director and storyboard artist, including Nadour wa Nathour, Alhudhud wal Kalimat, and Rijal Sadaqu.

Born in Hama in 1978, Attoura lives and works in Hama.

Born in 1984 in Damascus, Syria, **Rabee Kiwan** studied at the painting department of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Damascus where he graduated from in 2008. He has lived and worked in Beirut and Paris and now divides his time between Dubai and Swaida, a city in southwestern Syria. The main element of his abstract figurative work is the human figure in its various emotional states. Earlier in his career he was inspired by observing reality and trying to imitate what he saw through his works. In recent years, he has preferred abstraction that lends itself better to portraying heightened states of emotional through facial expressions and the human body. He works primarily on canvas in acrylic and oil painting and in mixed media, incorporating various fabrics, paints and other items to create his work. Kiwan has shown his work at Lab 44 Gallery in Paris, France; Europa in Paris, France; Adiacenze Gallery in Bologna, Italy; Marc Hachem Gallery in Beirut, Lebanon; Kozah Gallery also in Damascus, Syria; World Bank exhibition in Washington DC, USA; the French Cultural Center in Damascus and the Arab Cultural Center in Abu Rumana, Syria.

**Ahmad Kasha** is a contemporary abstract painter and sculptor whose raw and visceral depiction of reality emanate movement and dynamism. Born to a notable family of artists, Kasha's early encounters of art and lived experiences has influenced his art practice.

Born in 1997 in Syria, Kasha graduated from Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus. With an strong interest in the various movements of Syrian and Arab art, Kasha has been an active promotor and organizer of art exhibitions from the region and has collaborated with institutions such as Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE, Atassi Foundation, Dubai, UAE, Mathaf, Arab Museum of Modern Art. Winning several art prizes from a young age, Kasha has participated in group exhibitions in Germany, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the UAE. His works are collected by public institutions and is included in private collections.

**Abd Kasha** is a contemporary painter who combines abstract and figurative imagery with vivid colors and emotive brushstrokes. Kasha belongs to a notable family of artists, and developed his own unique integration of abstract elements into figurative scenes.

Born in 1997 in Syria, Kasha graduated from Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus in 2020. Kasha has participated in group exhibitions in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. His works are collected widely in the region.

Simplicity engulfs **Youssef Youssef's** light brush lines, while the cycle of life can't be missed upon the round faces the artist depicts. A subtle humble atmosphere stands out through a solid pale face of women and children. Though without any expressions, their mysterious look has a lot to say towards what they run through. An earthly tint overwhelms the artist's paintings, draws you nearer to the dusty environment his characters live in. With a dominant color of the soil they step upon barefooted, and the foggy dreams they follow in their vague eyes. The artist enriched his art with secrets buried inside the depth of the personage; young prides staring at you with a still look, keeping the spectator's mind in full wonder, and kids gave up their childish gaze for a spirit of strange serenity. It simply drives you to contemplate their vague looks; trying to find out what's hidden behind their silence.

Youssef Youssef was born in 1978 in Al Qamishli, Syria and is a graduate of Adham Ismaiel Institute for Fine Arts, Damascus in 2004. Youssef has participated in several exhibitions across the region, including Syria Contemporary Art Fair, Beirut (2013, 2012), Beirut Art Fair (2013), Tajalliyat Beirut, (2012); and El-Shaer Open House, Kuwait (2011).

Featuring arabesque concepts, **Abdullah Murad's** paintings and drawings are deeply influenced by the fauvist colors and the abstract expressionist movement. His paintings expose layers of details varying from transparent to thick impasto while using the mixture of media textures: newspaper collages, and cut-outs, as seen in the "Orient of Ashes." This work is in the same series or possibly even created as a diptych to "The Master of Game".

Considered to be a pioneer of abstract expressionism in Syria, Abdullah Murad (1944) is a graduate of the Faculty of Fine Arts from the University of Damascus in 1970. Abdullah Murad 's work has been displayed in solo and group exhibitions in Syria, Lebanon, France, Turkey, Bulgaria, Switzerland, UK and the Gulf. His work is in private collections in France, Germany, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Turkey, Bahrain, Kuwait, and in the Sharjah Museum, UAE.

**Dana Barqawi** is a multidisciplinary artist and urban planner, based in Amman, Jordan. She holds a BSc in Architecture and a double MSc in International Cooperation, Urban Development & Emergency Architecture.

For Dana, the act of artistic creation is inseparable from notions of the real world. In times where socio-political changes compose an inherent part of our reality, Dana chooses to reflect the context within her work, consequently creating politically and socially engaged art. Dana's work challenges colonial narratives, explores indigenous identities, and aspects of womanhood and community. This approach unfolded as a result of her years of work with INGOs and Government bodies, and her International training spanning Europe, Africa & the Middle East focusing on community participation and development.

Growing up with women who painted, sewed, designed, and made art, Dana extends herself through artistry and has a long-standing fascination with detail. Working from a workshop studio in Jabal al Weibdeh - Amman, her work involves experimenting with material and is constantly evolving.

She participated in exhibitions in Amman, Washington and Connecticut, and she curated an exhibition in collaboration with an academic entity. Dana's work has been published in World Literature Today and Discontent magazines.

**Arda Aslanian** is an Armenian Jordanian architect and a visual artist, based in Amman. Much of her art explores the behavioral unwritten rules of beliefs, attitudes and influences in social groups or cultures. She also emphasizes the possibilities of the human body, with a particular prominence on the female form and the complexities of framing women within a patriarchal society. Her art is the outcome of her constant questions and exploration of her being and belonging to the local context and her subjects act as mirrors for her innermost feelings.

Born in 1981 finished her B.A. in Architecture in 2004. Currently practicing as a policy consultant. Since 2018 she participated in several local and international group exhibitions.

Artist **Majd Kurdieh's** practice incorporates painting, drawing, and literature using recurring figures that stand to tell a story, usually carrying a strong moral and positive reinforcement that the artist projects into the world.

Kurdieh turned to more childlike paintings in which he incorporates strong literary and story-telling techniques. He paints recurring whimsical characters that seem to narrate a story. Over the past four years, the artist has created a 'cast of characters', the two main ones being the *Fasaeen* (Arabic for 'tiny ones'). The stories told through the representation of these figures are not specific stories that the artist references but rather ones that could apply to any viewer, leaving room for personal interpretation. The *Fasaeen*, one boy (*Fasoon*) and one girl (*Fasoonah*), always smiling despite the fact their world is filled with hardships, are usually accompanied by other characters.

Recently, Kurdieh has featured in solo and group exhibitions at MADS Gallery, Milan, Italy (2021); Azad Art Gallery, Cairo (2021; 2020); Egypt Art Fair (2022; 2021; 2020); BBA Gallery, Berlin (2019), Fann A Porter, Jordan (2021; 2020, 2019); Fann-A-Porter, Dubai (2021; 2020, 2019, 2018, 2016), El-Sawy Culture Wheel, Cairo (2019), and Athar Al Farasheh, Aleppo (2011), Sikka Art Fair, Dubai (2018) and Art Bahrain, Manama (2019, 2018). His works are housed in public and private collections in the Middle East and abroad, including HE Dr. Zaki Nusseibeh's private collection and Atassi Foundation.

**Mayar Obeido** is a visual artist, born in Damascus, Syria 1995, he had a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts, Damascus University 2017. He has participated in a several collective exhibitions, workshops and symposiums in Syria, he exhibited his first solo exhibition entitled "Apple" at Zawayya Gallery in Damascus 2021, his artwork basically depends on the object "Apple" as he tries to create a relationship between the characters that he draws and the apple in attempt to present ideas about repetitions, observation and change. He uses the characters and apple as a tool to express a certain state of the mental image of himself and its reflection on the shape of the apple.

**Bader Mahasneh** is a polymath working in paint, photography and sculpture. This interdisciplinary approach has made Mahasneh one of Jordan's brightest young talents. A student of Heidegger, Mahasneh explores the 'problematic existence of the human beings' – his work speaks of the 'void', of man and machine, and of the connection between destruction and creation, or the 'building of form'.

In his recent work Bader Mahasneh has translated the complex three dimensional densities of painting into sculpture. The artist always believed that sculptural expression could create a stronger presence than painting; in painting the artist creates an illusion. In sculpture, the object exists.

The material Mahasneh uses is ancient. The sculpture work is the result of many years of research into the rich and largely unknown geology of Jordan; with the art sculpted into form using crystal edged blades from Italy, combined with a technical brilliance of a master.

Mahasneh's 'Chaos' sculptures are carved out of the Chaos from which the Earth and Heavens were first formed. They remain peaceful, beautiful and poetic.

Mahasneh was born in Jerash, Jordan in 1977. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in law from Yarmuk University in 2001, having spent much of the time at university 'reading about art and philosophy'. After graduation Mahasneh attended print making workshops at the national gallery in Amman.

Figurative painter **Houssam Ballan's** canvases are informed by his accomplished technical abilities and through his extensive academic and research endeavour. As an artist, Ballan's frequent experimentation informs the growth in his work as he works intuitively. In his earlier paintings, Ballan's young protagonists are executed with close attention to detail, a form of realism that relies on painterly effects and meticulous line work to create a sculptural sense of figuration. As the bodies of his subjects are given dimensionality, the artist renders their clothes as lines, patterns, and evident brushstrokes with a stylisation that alludes to the passage of time and the presence of an ongoing narrative.

Ballan is a tutor and member of the Teacher's Association at the University of Damascus since 2009. Between 1999 and 2007, he participated in workshops with artist J. Bradley Adams and painter Jose Friexanes, and trained in mural painting with Pierre Palas. The artist was part of the 13<sup>th</sup> Cairo Biennale, Cairo (2019). Ballan has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions including MADS Gallery, Milan, Italy (2021); Lighthouse Gallery, London, UK (2020); Egypt Int'l Art Fair (2022, 2021, 2020); BBA Gallery, Berlin, Germany (2019); Hafez Gallery, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (2019); Manara Arts & Culture, Jordan (2019); Atelier Stories, Paris, France (2018); Fann A Porter, Dubai, UAE (2020, 2019, 2018), Mark Hachem Gallery, Beirut,

Lebanon (2014); Arab Cultural Centre (2010, 2007, and 2005); Ayyam Gallery, Damascus, Syria (2006); French Cultural Centre, Damascus, Syria, (2004); among others. His works can be found in numerous private and public collections.

Houssam Ballan takes a large focus on research and the exploration of new ideas within his practice, providing his works with a strong theoretical base. His studies, black and white ink on paper miniature drawings, are also informed from this research. In order to reach his final larger canvas works, Ballan extensively explores through the creation of these drawings — he uses them to plan the elements to be incorporated in the finished works, such as light, colour, form, perspective, and composition. The viewer can find the same figures seen in his paintings in these studies, drawn with a freer hand.

Ballan was born in 1983 in Sweida, Syria where he currently lives and works.

Influenced by the natural elements around him, **Jamil Kasha** sculpts in tune to the organic form of the material itself. He explains: “My relationship with a stone could last many years and I cannot work on a piece of stone unless I love it. Then I start playing with it and reshaping it in my hands, trying to escalate its visual state to reach the result I want... I am not concerned about the way to deal with the material, but I work instinctively and interact with it without preconditions. Restrictions limit creativity, and the most important thing is to communicate with the sculptural work to reach the real value that gives it importance.”

Born in Jisr Al Shughour, Jamil Kasha (1958) graduated from the Department of Sculpture, Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus University in 1985. Using raw materials in his sculptures, Kasha sculpts busts of figures – mostly women and elements from his environment such as fish, birds and mountain beetles. Abstract and symbolic, the work takes on a primitive form reminiscent of a hybrid between artworks from early civilisations and abstract contemporary work.

Kasha has exhibited throughout Syria at venues such as the National Museum of Aleppo and Damascus National Museum, showing internationally in Lebanon, Kuwait and the Netherlands.

**Leonardo Cremonini's** poetic summertime figures and landscapes appear both timeless and yet like a photo, taken at a distinct moment. The colors and brushstrokes blend the bodies and the landscape together and the unique light-filled compositions have a geometric quality to them. In this black and white work, the sunbather melts into her surroundings which were created with points and hash marks.

Born in Italy, Leonardo Cremonini (1925-2010) attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna and began exhibiting his figurative works, gaining fame in the US and France. Many prominent cultural figures championed his work such as painter Francis Bacon, writers W. H. Auden, Umberto Eco and Italo Calvino as well as the Director of MoMa who described his canvases as having a “spirit of timeless monumentality.” Retrospectives of Cremonini's work have been held in museums of Basel, Brussels, Metz, Paris, Prague, Siena, Strasbourg, Tokyo, Monte Carlo, Grenoble, and Milan.