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| Jabra, Jabra Ibrahim (1920-1994) |
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| Born in Bethlehem, Palestine, in 1920, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra was a distinguished intellectual whose literary writing, translation, and criticism played an important role in Arab cultural life in the second half of the twentieth century. A painter, art critic, and a founding member of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art in 1951 (together with the Iraqi artists Jewad Selim and Shakir Hassan Al Said), Jabra’s most significant contribution to modern art was perhaps his writings as an art critic, particularly his publications *Jawad Salim wa-nasb al-hurriyya* (*Jewad Selim and the Monument of* Freedom, Baghdad 1974) and *al-Fann al-‘iraqi al-muasir* (*Iraqi Art Today*, Baghdad 1970), with which he introduced modern art in Iraq to a broader public. Jabra also wrote about his first encounters with art, and more broadly visual culture, in his autobiography *al-Bi’r al-ula* (*The First Well*, 1987).  After graduating from the Arab College in Jerusalem, Jabra went on a scholarship to study English literature at Cambridge University (1939-43), and it was while in Briton that he first started painting with oils. On his return, he worked as a teacher and organised cultural activities at the Arts Club of the YMCA in Jerusalem. The creation of the state of Israel in 1948, referred to in Arabic as the *nakba* (catastrophe), forced him into exile. He found a job at Baghdad University and embarked on a new life in Iraq at a time of radical socio-political and cultural change. Apart from two years at Harvard University in the early 1950s, and occasional trips abroad, he remained in Baghdad, later as counsellor at the Iraqi Ministry of Culture and Information, until his death in 1994. In 2010, his house, and most of his paintings composed in Iraq, were destroyed in car bomb explosions that targeted foreign embassies in Baghdad, an event that was considered by some a deathblow to Baghdad’s cultural memory.  The Palestinian artist Jamal Badran, who had studied Islamic art in Cairo, was an influential important and influential teacher of Jabra’s. Some of his early paintings, dating back to before 1948, were rediscovered recently in Bethlehem and have triggered some research, placing him among the pioneers of modern art in Palestine. He also wrote for numerous cultural journals devoted to modern literature and art, such as *Shi’r* (Beirut), *Gilgamesh* (Baghdad), *Ishtar* (Paris), and *Ur* (London). As a founding member of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, he was especially interested in the relationship between past and present, reconfigured as modernity (*hadatha*) and heritage (*turath*). It was the quest for an Arab modernism that, for Jabra, held promises of individual freedom and political liberation. Selected Writings *al-Fann al-‘iraq al-mu’asir (Iraqi Art Today*) [1970  *Jawad Salim wa-nasb al-hurriyya: Dirasa fi atharihi wa-ara’ihi* (*Jewad Selim and the Monument of Freedom: A Study on his Works and Ideas*) [1974]  *The Grass Roots of Iraqi Art* (1983)  *Judhur al-fann al-‘iraqi* (*The Grass Roots of Iraqi Art*) [1986]  *A Celebration of Life: Essays on Literature and Art* (1988)  *al-Fann wal-fannan: Kitabat fi al-naqd al-tashkili* (*Art and Artist: Writings in Art Criticism*) [2000] |
| Further reading:  (Al Ama and Atrash)  (I. J. Boullata)  (I. Boullata)  (Boullata and Berger)  (Greenberg)  (Mejcher-Atassi)  (Munif) |