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**Zayyat, Elias (Born Damascus, Syria, 1935)**

The painter Elias Zayyat has played a leading role in developing a Syrian modern art pedagogy and analysis of Syrian visual culture — particularly traditions of icon painting. He first learned painting as a teenager in the studio of Michel Kurché in Damascus, followed by fellowship study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia, Bulgaria (1956-1960) and a final year at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cairo, Egypt. Upon his return to Syria, Zayyat took an assistant teaching position at the new College of Fine Arts in Damascus, where he worked with the core faculty to overhaul and update the curriculum to an international standard of open experimentation. He became involved in the Group of Ten in 1970, which was dedicated to encouraging the development of art outside the official ministry framework in Syria. His own art is influenced by religious and popular iconography and often makes use of allegory to express the social, economic, and political plight of Syrians. Zayyat has also worked as a restorer of icons as well as completing new icon commissions. In this work, he seeks to employ a modern visual style and to develop distinctively Syrian features.

**References and further reading**

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