

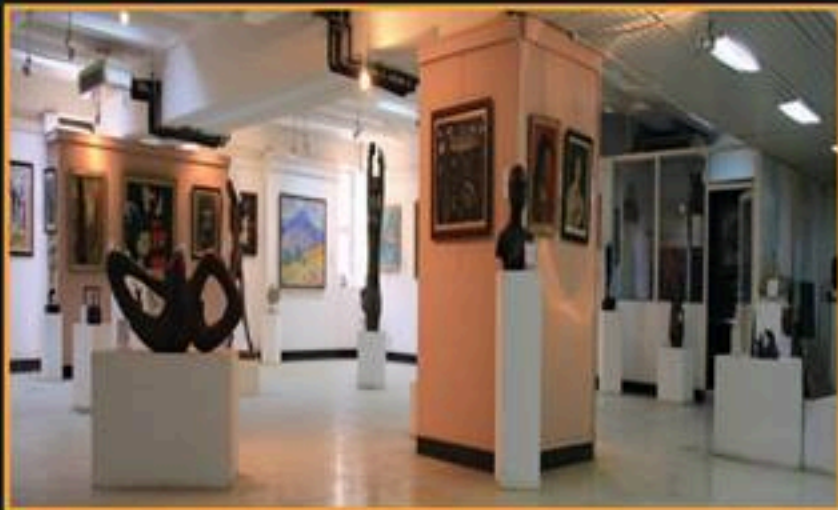
National Museum of Modern Art

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photographs: adham yusuf

part 1



rather, to the maintenance and restoration of artworks, the preparation of weekly evenings, and cultural seminars continued throughout the 1970s. In 1971, Al-Rawi proposed the establishment of the «Plastic Archives», which documents all kinds of newspapers, journalistic features and other articles in plastic art. Thus, the lighting equipment was introduced, and a store of artworks which the government acquired from artists was opened. International exhibitions began to exchange between Iraq and abroad, with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Arts, as well as organizing weeks and days for Iraqi art critics, and inviting Arab and foreign artists to hold their own exhibitions. By holding personal exhibitions, mass festivals, evenings and seminars specialized in art and other cultural events, the museum played active and significant role in the march of the Iraqi plastic movement, as well as storing of thousands of artworks. Does this activity calls for a bigger museum for art? Yes, it was necessary to establish a museum with a vast area, more sophisticated, and worthy of the achievements of Iraqi art, one that can absorb all this inventory of art, compatible with an international storage standard and exhibition halls are qualified to receive such creative works. The first contemporary gallery of Iraqi art was the opened, and even was most important art gallery in the Middle East in 1986, located in Haifa Street, and was equipped with all modern requirements for its success, and the rehabilitation of all its administrative and technical sections, like documentation and archive section which contains all the detailed information and documents about the art process and artists since the beginning of the twentieth century, and the library section, which includes hundreds of international art books and references in Arabic and English and other languages; the audio-visual section, maintenance section, and large halls for lectures and seminars. Full floors, containing selected collections of artworks were allocated, and two floors for artworks by Iraqi artists of different generations were allocated. Pioneers artworks were displayed in a separate floor called «Pioneer Museum», part of it to graphics, Arabic calligraphy and decoration, and other floors in which artworks by some prominent artists, such as sculptors Mohammed Ghani Hikmat, who dedicated all his works to the Arts Center, were displayed. Ground floor was allocated to exhibitions, periodical and continuous exhibitions, or what is called- mobile exhibitions. How were technical presentations coordinated? The process of coordinating the technical display has been characterized by the width of the area of the floors, with high walls and suitable floors, natural and electrical lighting, mobile railings of storage panels and central air conditioning, which are suitable for the safety of artworks and materials, and other services and requirements that complement the success and sustainability of the museum's message. The Arts Center has been a distinguished source of interaction and cultural and artistic landscape inside and outside Iraq over the past years. What is the image of the National Museum of Modern Art? The brutal and barbaric occupation of Baghdad carried hatred and hostility to humanity, civilization and culture. Precious artworks in the

museum were destroyed, looted or incinerated. Art Center and its huge library were also greatly inflicted and destroyed. Barbaric actions and looting also inflicted and damaged the museum's artworks, in addition to the eight thousand works of art, according to the basic administrative records, which I personally supervised and worked on, and which were also lost, including oil paintings, water, graffiti, Arabic calligraphy, sculptures and ceramics; works become outside the scope of the technical offer, and most of them are not suitable for any maintenance or preventive technical treatment. And worse, keys and water pipes of the basement of the museum, which contained inside the rarest works by late artists, were all broken or sabotaged. This led to the full destruction of paintings of pioneer artists. Once again, Iraq lost its solid national artistic wealth, which is rightly at the forefront of Arab art, and a prominent and distinctive landmark in the world's plastic scenery. And then? after the chaos that accompanied the US occupation to Iraq, and despite the very painful situation that happened, and humanitarian and cultural disaster that hit this giant museum, we did not stand idly by; rather, we exerted our efforts to rehabilitate and maintain the museum in its natural form, according to the potentialities available, and to restore its brilliance and educational mission, where we collected the remaining works scattered on the ground, in a very deplorable state, from which it is totally damaged and partially torn. It was really important for us, plastic art elites, to endeavor to follow up the museum artworks that were looted during the occupation. A specialized technical committee was formed to restore what can be returned from these lost works, headed by the late sculptor Mohamed Ghani Hikmat and the membership of: Ali Duleimi, Taha Wahib, Najem Al-Qaisi and Salah Abbas. A large group of artworks were returned, as well as artists and other citizens who handed over museum works to us, and in turn we presented them with appreciation books for their honorable national position. Many art exhibitions were held after restoring these artworks, the last of which was an exhibition where damaged artworks were displayed, in cooperation with the British Embassy in Baghdad and Kehrmana Arts Society.



he started organizing a collection of artworks to participate in Cairo exhibition in 1948, and another is the UNESCO exhibition in Beirut. After receiving his fellowship, he received a grant from Lisbon-based Gulbenkian International Foundation for the construction of the National Museum of Modern Art. He was the first director of the museum. When did the need to revive art movement in Iraq arise?

After the revolution of July 1958, the need arose to accommodate the growth of the artistic movement in the country. Concepts and aspirations to build such a project, were ended by the harsh circumstances of that period. Thus, the emergence of the National Museum of Modern Art was the cornerstone in the promotion and patronage of Iraqi art. The museum was called «Gulbenkian» in relation to the Armenian citizen Calouste Gulbenkian, who donated a sum to build the museum in cooperation with the government. Indeed, early in 1959, Baghdad's Municipality began to erect a building at the heart of the city in Bab Alsharqi (the Eastern Gate) district. When construction ended in late 1961, it later became an art center as it was supposed to be.

Deliberations, took place between the Directorate of General Antiquities and the Ministry of Guidance at that time, to receive the plastic artifacts that were housed in the Museum of Modern Art, were canceled by the Ministry and it was agreed to be displayed in a new museum. In July 1962, the museum was officially inaugurated along with the opening of the Iraqi Art Exhibition, held on the occasion of the 4th anniversary of the July 14 Revolution.

That was in the past, but would like to know the first nucleus of the National Museum of Modern Art? In 1960, the first nucleus of the National Museum of Modern Art was established by the Directorate of Art Exhibitions at the Ministry of Guidance, at the initiative of the pioneer artist, Nouri Al-Rawi. He persuaded the Minister to purchase the first collection of pioneering artists including Jewad Salim, Su'ad Salim, Nazih Salim, Atta Sabri, Faiq Hassan, Issa Hanna, Shaker Hassan Al-Said, Ismail Al Shaikhli and others. What are the other activities of the museum? The museum was not only confined to the establishment of plastic exhibitions, but,

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