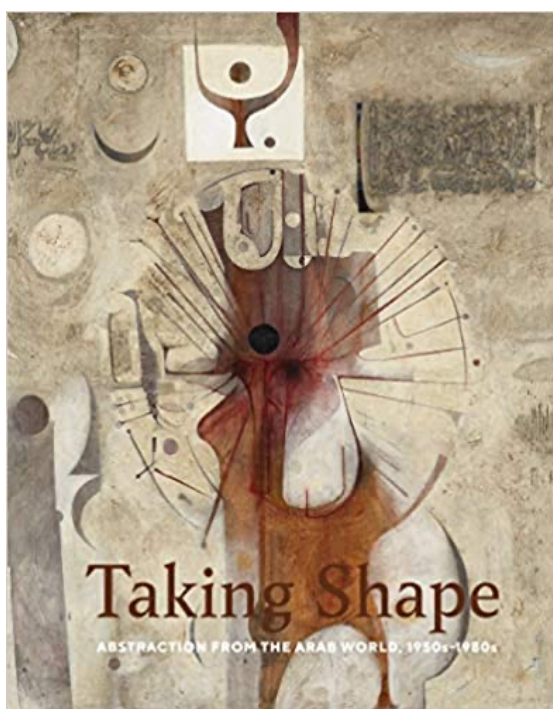


## Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950s-1980s

edited by Suheyla Takesh and Lynn Gumpert. Hirmer Publishers, March 2020. 240 p. ill. ISBN 9783777434285 (h/c), \$49.99.

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Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World was published as part of a collaborative exhibit between the Grey Art Gallery at New York University and the Barjeel Art Foundation, which holds an extensive collection of modern and contemporary Arab art. Taking Shape uses the term Arab as a geographic and ethnic descriptor for artists and works of North African or West Asian origin or descent. As such, the term will also appear in this review. Please note that the editors of Taking Shape acknowledge that this term is problematic.

The featured works were made during 1955-1987, which was a time of great upheaval in the Arab world. The text consists of essays written by scholars in the field, exploring the works in a variety of ways. The writers examine issues of decolonization and the problematic assignment of Western art historical terminology to works of

Arab abstraction. One essay is entirely devoted to women artists, and the author provides much needed historical context. Two chapters are dedicated to the use and influence of Arabic calligraphy in abstract works and the idea of non-objective abstract form. Other chapters examine the work from historical and geographical points of view. The book includes a section of artists' biographies, which will be very helpful for students writing about this topic. It also includes an index and selected bibliography that is limited to sources in English. Each chapter is followed up with a section of notes.

Taking Shape makes a valuable contribution to the study of Arab art during this period and will be useful to students and scholars alike. The volume is profusely illustrated with color images,

both adjacent to the text and in a large section of plates. The essays are relatively short but also dense and challenging. *Taking Shape* is recommended for libraries within colleges and universities that teach art history at the graduate level, but also for adv