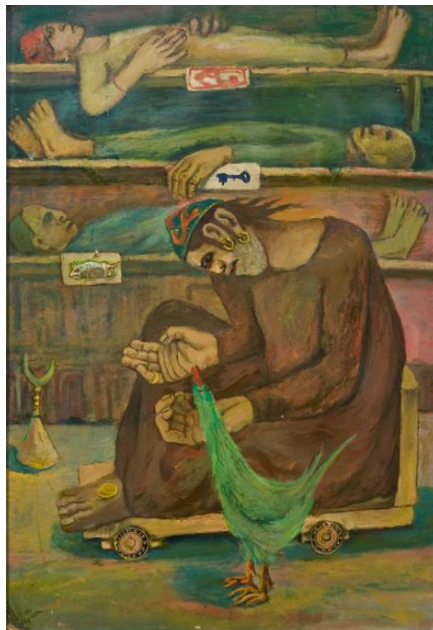


CHRISTIE'S

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MIDDLE EASTERN ART – SECOND LONDON AUCTION LED BY UNSEEN MASTERPIECE FOR THE PAST 30 YEARS TO BE SOLD ON 24 OCTOBER 2018



Abdel Hadi El Gazzar
An Ear of Mud, an Ear of Paste, 1951
Estimate: £350,000-450,000
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Dubai / London – *An Ear of Mud, an Ear of Paste*, executed by one of the most sought after Modern Egyptian Masters, Abdel Hadi El Gazzar's (1925-1966 / estimate: £350,000-450,000) will lead Christie's second auction of Middle Eastern Art in London, to take place on 24 October 2018. Market leader, Christie's has decided in early 2017 to transfer 1 of its 2 sale seasons from Dubai to London with acclaimed success.

Painted in 1951 *An Ear of Mud, an Ear of Paste* was part of the Janna and George Laudato collection since 1986, when it was gifted to them by Janna's mother, whilst living in Cairo. Abdel Hadi El Gazzar is also the artist of choice of Valérie Didier Hess and Dr. Hussam Rashwan, of their second catalogue raisonné due to be published later in 2019, with the help of the Abdel Hadi El Gazzar Foundation. The duo Hess / Rashwan published in 2017 the first ever catalogue raisonné of any Middle Eastern artist, Mahmoud Saïd.

El Gazzar is known to have only produced around 100 paintings in his short life, of which 30 are to be found in institutions or private collections and around 25 works are still in the possession of the artist's family. Also known, is that El Gazzar realized only 14 paintings in 1951 and of which *An Ear of Mud, an Ear of Paste* is the largest one. Painted in the artist's so-called "popular or folk" period, where El Gazzar explores a wider range of subjects, symbols and pictorial means. This work refers to Egyptian history, heritage, tradition, beliefs as well as uses a richness in terms of folkloric and Islamic symbols.

It is important to understand the political context surrounding the year of creation 1951. In 1949 El Gazzar was arrested and jailed by King Farouk's forces for his controversial painting "The Theater of Life", today part of the Museum of Modern Art, Cairo. The fact of being silenced re-invigorated El Gazzar's wish to represent the realities of poor people and their life struggles by including magic symbols, folk beliefs and rituals that these people innocently believed in. Egypt was struck by severe illnesses and a severe food shortage during these years and in 1949 the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood had been assassinated, leading up to the military coup in 1952. A year before, the Buhut massacre took place, when peasants rebelled against the local landlords with regards to their appalling work conditions and were subsequently shot by their superiors.

This was the environment to which El Gazzar reacted in 1951 with *An Ear of Mud, An Ear of Paste*, the title refers to a popular saying: a person refusing to listen to anyone and rejecting any type of discussion. El Gazzar provides a literal interpretation of this folkloric pun, which also alludes to ignorance, laziness and negativity, emblematised by the curled up central figure, closing himself to the external world, and whose two ears strangely and ironically placed on the same side of his head emphasise his choice of isolation from any possible discussion.



Compositionally, El Gazzar stresses the idea of this two-eared figure being stuck in his own world of misery by placing him at the centre of an oppressive space, filled up with shelves in the background on which appears to be dead bodies, recalling Ancient Egyptian tombs.



Whether the bodies behind him are dead or asleep, the beggar is no different than them in terms of being deaf, mute and motionless, as if he is waiting to be neatly 'put away' on a similar shelf. The coin laid down on his foot may hint to his daily activity as a beggar but it could also allude, on a more metaphorical level, to his only belonging he will have when he dies, recalling the Ancient Egyptian rituals of the Journey of Death.

Behind him, the three lifeless bodies seem to be reduced to objects, given that three labels with three different drawings, a red motif, a key and a four-legged animal appear to differentiate them on the shelves. To some extent, El Gazzar's painting can be seen as a provocation for the higher class of society and the regime, in his blunt way of exposing the tragedies of lower class people, and how they are shoved away in their misery to be kept aside

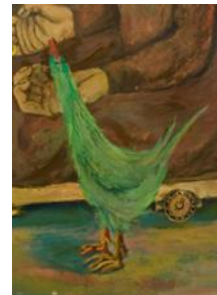


from bourgeois society and aristocracy. From that perspective, El Gazzar is not criticising or mocking these poor people, but rather gives them a voice through his paintbrush and puts them in the spotlight as he was genuinely fascinated by their personalities, their daily lives, their beliefs and their ways of thinking. Yet he does criticise the people such as the two-eared beggar, who shuts down any possibility of hope by not listening, and who therefore drown in their own despair just as presented in this painting.

The colour green is traditionally associated with Islam, and more specifically with paradise and in other cultures green symbolizes rebirth, life, freshness and fertility. The symbol of the key holds the future or at least the better future or in other words, paradise, is in the hands of the dead lying behind the central figure.



The incense burner with a crescent plays a central role in the painting. It represents the **past** with its traditional connotations, where the crescent refers to the Ottoman Empire as the centre of the glorious Islamic world; the **present** in its ability to perfume the air and absorb the smell of misery; as well as the **future**, pointing towards a better life for these beggars in paradise, through its essential means of communication with the divine. El Gazzar also depicts the good-hearted and generous nature of the Egyptian people, despite their poverty and miserable lives, through the beggar's open palms in view of feeding the green cockerel, who could be understood as the symbol of the sun, a sign of illumination and light.



This masterpiece is a prime example of how El Gazzar created entirely innovative aesthetic means and how he presented new approaches to depict the struggles of the lower class in Egypt, confirming El Gazzar's seminal role in shaping an authentic Egyptian painting in the 20th century.

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**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and are reported net of applicable fees.*

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Images available on request

