

For the Age of Lebanon, Farid Haddad

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For the Age of Lebanon

Sfeir Semler Gallery presents **Farid Haddad: For the Age of Lebanon, the artist's first solo show in Beirut in over forty years**. The exhibition presents an overview of Haddad's painting oeuvre and spans the last fifty years of his practice between Lebanon and the United States. **The exhibition features a unique series of works from the early 1970s, on view for the first time.**

Farid Haddad is a Lebanese-American artist who came of age in the years preceding the Civil War in Lebanon, and during a pivotal moment in Lebanese and Arab Modernism. This exhibition represents Haddad's work as a vital chapter in the story of abstraction and minimalism in the region. *For the Age of Lebanon* spans the artist's early works, 1971–1977, and his most recent works, 2017–2022.



Farid Haddad, “Ou veux-tu que je m’en aille?” , Mixed Media Collage on paper, Exhibition view, Pour l’âge du Liban 2023, © Sfeir Semler Gallery Beirut

The exhibition is named after the **painting-collage work** (in nine parts) “Où veux-tu que je m’en aille?” (pour l’âge du Liban) (2018-2019). Haddad’s collage works are a culmination of his lifelong exploration of abstraction, and his sustained conversation with colour, shapes and forms. Over the years, he has developed a strict process of painterly composition that comes together through extensive preparation. Each collage work starts out with a foundational painting using acrylics, oil, gouache, watercolour, graphite, among other media. The paintings form the basis of a stencil cut and paste technique.

Multi-shaped painting fragments are carefully reassembled into a new whole. The compositions themselves become a measure of time, each taking up to several months to complete.

The collage works are an intriguing time portal. Each work is an index of unique signs — shapes, colours, gestures—that have cumulatively developed throughout Haddad’s practice. The grammar of irregular shapes, arcs, zigzags, demonstrates a striking amalgam of memory and geometric sensibility.

When asked of his technique, Haddad will assert “I don’t have a formula, I don’t have a story.”



Farid Haddad, Summer series no.5, 1971, Gouache and pencil on paper, 65 x 50 cm, © Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut



Farid Haddad, Egyptian Window no.1, 1971, Gouache and pencil on paper, 65 x 50 cm, © Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut

The year before Haddad's 1972 residency in New York City on a Fulbright-Hays Foreign Grant, he produced **the Summer Series, bold and expressionistic gouache and pencil drawings**. Harsh brushstrokes and dynamic fields deliver works that are tumultuous and emotionally charged. These lyrical experiments in abstraction were originally shown at the Sultan Gallery in Kuwait in 1972 where they were observed to have been ahead of their time. The vital energy of the Summer Series bursts forth in Haddad's works from 1972, all of which are on view here for the first time.

Selections from multiple series of drawings (in graphite, gouache, pencil), and lithographs, prefigure his later works on colour and geometric abstraction. While Haddad's early works evince his interest in minimalism and constructivism, they also reveal his own reckoning with the political sentiment in Lebanon and the Arab world during that time, as expressed in the titles of his works:

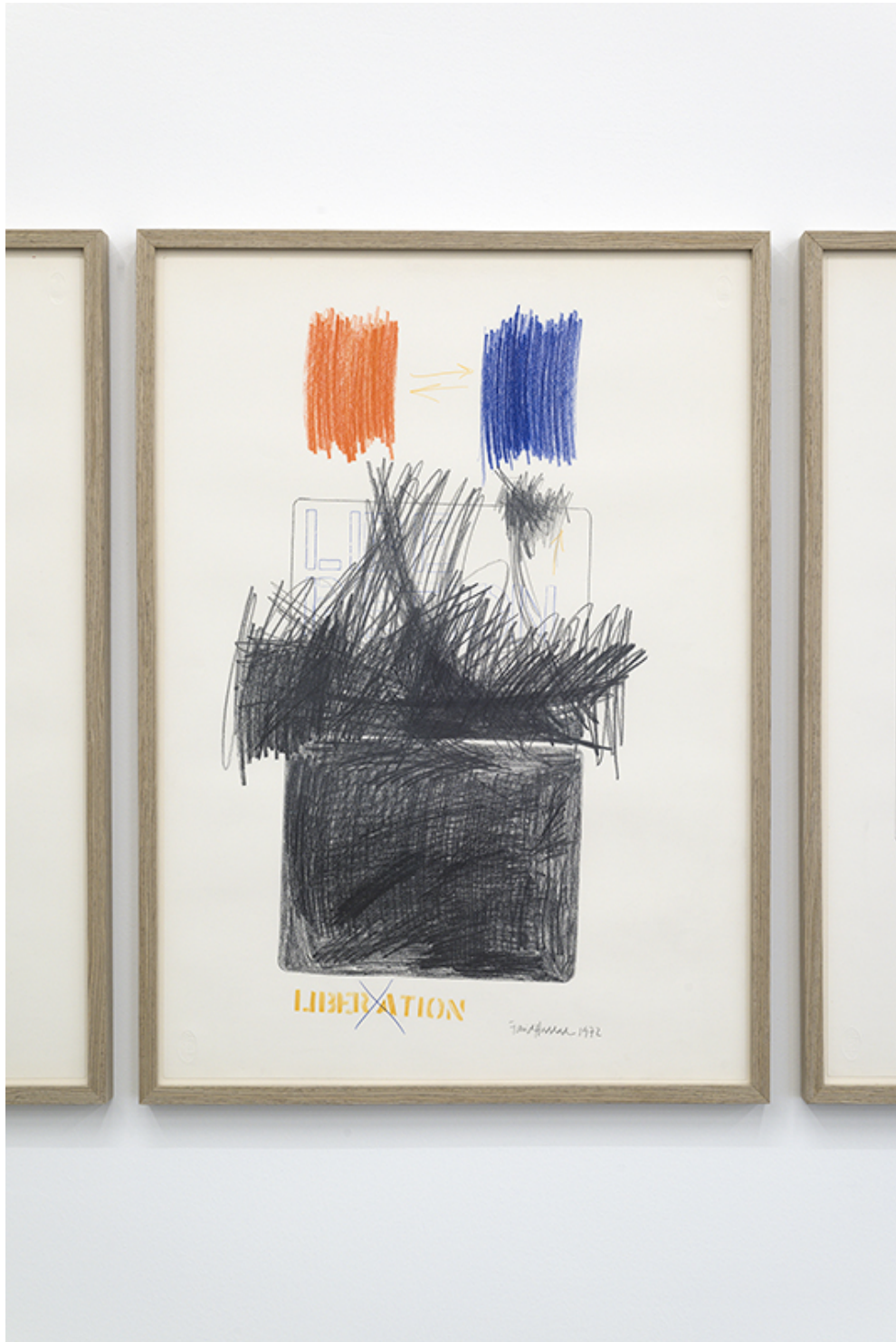
LIBERATION, OPPOSITION, FLAG, AFFILIATION, ... Those words are rendered typographically through stencilling, and are combined with symbols, e.g., a French flag, a black square, and rough gouache and graphite rendering. The lithographic drawings pick up from the previous series—one print is simply titled: **DEFEAT**.

The drawings take on a more Dadaesque spirit. Rhyming with the composition of DEFEAT, are Bag, Ball, and Stopping at One (all 1972).

Compositional elements migrate from the drawings to Haddad's large-scale "transitional" colour field paintings (all Untitled, 1977).

The elements include the horizons that break up the canvas, lines, cross grids, triangles. Eruditely painted, the gradient colour fields are reminiscent of Op Art, the brushwork of Impressionism, the works are structural, colours and shapes are manipulated with extreme precision. Haddad's sensibility for colour and composition lends his works an unparalleled poetic quality. The brilliance of the work is in the viewer's experience of it, the challenge it poses to one's perception and perspective.

– Sarah Rifky



Farid Haddad, LIBERATION LIBERATION 02, 1972, Gouache and color pencil on paper, 70 x 50 cm, © Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut

A note from Andrée Sfeir-Semler

Farid Haddad was my very first art teacher when I was still at school and used to attend his classes in a small art space close to Horseshoe café on Hamra street in Beirut in 1969-70. His minimalistic approach in art had a major influence on me. Our ways crossed by accident recently on a zoom conference in the beginning of the pandemic in the spring of 2020. I am

very proud to feature Farid's work in our Beirut space. I would like to thank Sarah Rifky for traveling to Concord where the artist lives today, and for selecting the works which we are exhibiting.

Farid Haddad (b. 1945, Beirut) is a Lebanese–American artist, who grew up in Beirut and has lived in the United States since 1975; he currently lives and works in Concord, New Hampshire. Haddad makes paintings, collages, and drawings, and develops techniques of composition rooted in geometry, shape play, and association. Haddad's work is an early example of Lebanese and Arab conceptualism and of experiments in modernist abstraction of the 1970s.

Among Haddad's most notable collaborations is the limited edition *Screens and Bugus* (1970), an artist book published together with artist Jay Zerbe, and the artist book collaborations with the poet Hoda Adib (1975, 2000).

Throughout the seventies and eighties Haddad has had solo exhibitions in cities including Beirut, Paris and Rome. In the US, his work has extensively been shown in New York, Milwaukee and New Hampshire. Haddad has participated in artist salons and group exhibitions since 1968. Most recently, Haddad's work has taken on renewed curatorial and art historical interest, with focus on Arab modernism. His work has been regionally featured in Beirut, Kuwait, and other cities, and most recently is part of the traveling exhibition *Manifesto of Fragility: Beirut and the Golden Sixties* (2022–2023), curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath. Haddad's work is held in private and public collections internationally, including Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, and major collections and museums in Beirut, including AUB Collections, Surssock Museum, Dalloul Art Foundation and the Saradar Collection.

Farid Haddad: For the Age of Lebanon