

Dala Nasser: Cemetery of Martyrs

* BUTRUS AL-BUSTANI, born in 1819 just south of Beirut in the village of Dibbiyeh, Lebanon, and died in 1883 in Beirut, was a pioneering Lebanese writer, educator, and lexicographer. He was a profound believer in the collective and transformative power of pedagogy, and its ties to ending systems of imperial injustice; a mode of thinking that led him to open a national school that was revolutionary for its time. His works, including Nafir Sūriyya, advanced ideas of civic patriotism and public-minded political authority. A leading figure of the Arab Nahda, he helped shape modern Arab education, cultural revival, and early discussions of collective self-determination.

* AHMAD FARIS AL-SHIDYAQ, born 1801 in Lebanon; died 1887 in Istanbul, was a seminal linguist, journalist, and a staunch critic of the social and cultural conditions of the 19th century, whose works – especially Al-saq Aala Al-saq (Leg Over Leg) and his later political writings in Al-Jawa'ib, helped articulate early Arab ideas of freedom, sovereignty, and collective self-determination. Shidyaq witnessed severe financial struggles throughout his life, yet still foregrounded many of the issues central for the Arab Nahda. He transformed modern Arabic prose, championed intellectual independence, and helped lay the foundations for emerging Arab political consciousness.

* GIBRAN KHALIL GIBRAN, born in 1883 in Bsharri, Lebanon, and died in 1931 in New York, USA, is buried today outside of his museum in his hometown. Gibran was a poet-artist, philosopher, and lover, whose works, especially The New Frontier and his later Arabic essays, championed human freedom, moral autonomy, and the dignity of peoples seeking self-determination. A defining voice of the Mahjar movement, he reshaped modern Arab and global literature, inspiring visions of spiritual and national renewal. In a letter to one of his lovers, Gibran proclaimed, 'Each and every one of us, dear Mary, must have a resting place somewhere. The resting place of my soul is a beautiful grove where my knowledge of you lives.'

MAY ZIADEH (born Mary), born in 1886 in Nazareth; died in 1941 in Beirut, was a pioneering Palestinian writer, critic, and leading feminist intellectual whose essays and salon debates advanced ideals of personal freedom, cultural renewal, and the intellectual self-determination of Arab society for women. Despite being a central figure of the Nahda's literary renaissance, there was something heart-wrenchingly tragic about May's life, having been falsely accused of insanity and thrown into a mental institution, which

stripped her of her freedom, money, and civil rights. Despite gaining a resounding reputation with the most important thinkers and writers of her time, when May passed away, no one who attended her cultural and literary salon attended her funeral.

* KHALIL SAKAKINI, born in 1878 in Jerusalem into a family of artisans, died in 1953 in Cairo, was a Palestinian educator, editor, poet, essayist, writer, and civil servant. He was an ardent political activist, with a life well documented, particularly because he left behind diaries that contained over three thousand pages. He founded the experimental, non-denominational school, Al-Dusturiyya, and co-organised a congress in Jerusalem that diligently looked at both local and global politics. Sakakini voiced powerful arguments for Arab freedom, dignity, and self-determination; he had an incredible private library that was a de facto resource for the entire region, which was later destroyed and robbed by the Haganah in 1948, when he was dispossessed of his home. Besides his political work, Sakakini wrote a plethora of love letters to his wife Sultana. In a letter he sent her from America, he said, '[...] I wait for slumber to overtake me. Not to sleep but to get rid of the pains of wakefulness, hoping to get rid of my heaviness, and hoping to get rid of my body – to leave it in America, and to fly in dreams to Jerusalem.'

* CONSTANTIN ZUREIQ, born in 1909 in Damascus, during the waning years of the Ottoman Empire's rule over Syria, died in 2000 in Beirut. He was a towering Syrian historian, professor, and thinker whose writings reshaped modern national consciousness. He introduced the term 'al-Nakba' in his 1948 book Ma'na al-Nakba, defining it as the profound collective 'disaster' following the flight of the Palestinians. Zureiq rejected all forms of historical determinism and all forms of dogmatic ideological reading of history. To him, Arab unity was not the objective of an inexorable ethnic or religious destiny, but a form of transgenerational, trans-communal, and transregional solidarity. In one of his early texts, Zureiq mentions that he had the privilege of working under the banner of a rural revitalisation project across the Arab region. 'It was a national project in both essence and spirit, and it illuminated the kind of bond a project like that should have with nationalist thought and its material realisation.' He concluded that Arab liberation is not only a matter of gaining external freedom and political independence, but also of breaking internal constraints. This euphoric socialist context escaped his later writings, perhaps due to the institutional isolation that marked his professional life.

* AJAJ NUWAYHID, born in 1896 in Ras Al-Metn; died there in 1982. Nuwayhid was a Lebanese-Palestinian historian, lawyer, journalist, and political activist who chronicled much of 20th-century Arab history through his writings and memoirs. He co-founded the Independence Party in Mandatory Palestine, having moved there in the wake of the battle of Maysalun in Syria. He directed radio broadcasting in Jerusalem and Ramallah, edited the weekly Al-Arab, shaping Arab nationalist discourse, and was arrested and incarcerated several times by the British forces due to his political stances and writings. After an era of directorial work between Jordan and Palestine, Nuwayhid returned to his hometown and devoted his time to freelance writing from 1959 till his death. Due to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and its concomitant clashes, Nuwayhid's body was buried five days after his passing. He now rests eternally in his family home's backyard in Ras El-Metn, surrounded by oaks, lavenders, and pines.

ANBARA SALAM KHALIDI was born in 1897 and died in 1986 in Beirut. She was a pioneering Lebanese feminist, translator, writer, and early women's rights activist whose life and work helped reshape Arab society's views on women's emancipation and national identity. Anbara wrote her first editorial at the age of 15, which appeared in Al-Mufid newspaper – whose editor, Abdelghani Al-Uraysi, she would later get engaged to. Al-Uraysi was among several nationalists who were publicly executed on the order of Jemal Pasha. A central figure in the first wave of Arab feminism and cultural renewal, Anbara and some of her female friends established a society called The Young Arab Woman's Awakening, which was one of the earliest women's societies in the Arab world. Even though Anbara was more of an intellectual than an agitator, on one fated Sunday, while speaking on her experience in London, she decided to take off her veil in full view of everyone. This act made her go down in history as the first Lebanese woman to publicly unveil herself. According to a recounting of her biography, King Faisal of Iraq infamously warned her father of her strong spirit, claiming that 'she carried rebellion in her heart'.

INJI AFLATOUN, born April 16, 1924; died April 17 1989, in Cairo, was an Egyptian socialist painter, author, feminist, journalist, teacher, and activist. Born to an upper-class family and raised by her celebrated dress-maker mother, Salha, she began painting from a young age and became a member of the anti-imperialist and anti-fascist Art et Liberté movement, a spokeswoman for the Marxist-progressive-nationalist-feminist movement in the 1950s, as well as a pioneer of modern Egyptian art. Inji looked at her life as one that was marked by two incarcerations, having received a strict Catholic education which she described as her 'first prison', and her imprisonment, along with 25 of her compatriot women activists, for four and a half years, serving her sentence across a series of women's prisons in the vast deserts surrounding Cairo. In her jail cell in 1963, Inji wrote, 'I still paint a lot, with determination and inspiration; the subjects are always the same but with a new vision, a purer and soberer vision; for me it's constantly about renewing myself in a world of the unrenowable and the complete banality in which we often find ourselves.'

RAIF KHOURY, born in 1913 in Ottoman-ruled Mount Lebanon; buried in his hometown in 1967, was a Lebanese writer, critic, poet, essayist, novelist, playwright, political activist, and staunch anti-fascist. He worked, wrote and taught in Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine, and helped draft the Arab general strike of 1936. Khoury helped shape Arab political and social thought in the early 20th century, especially in relation to ideas around reforming governance, liberating peoples, and building civil society. In the history of Arab literature and literary criticism, Khoury is known for his notion of 'responsible literature'. In 1955, he participated in a widely followed debate titled, For whom does the writer write? For the elite or for the laypeople? alongside the Egyptian liberal writer Taha Husayn in Beirut. Khoury vehemently argued in favour of a politically engaged form of literature that could reach a wider audience. He expressed open sarcasm toward romantic nationalist arguments that framed nationalism as devotion to a territorial homeland, maintaining instead that nationalism was a militant project aimed at 'Arab liberation from foreign domination, which we call colonialism.' Khoury wrote for influential Lebanese publications such as Al-Barg, Al-Adib and Al-Adab. He co-founded the Communist League Against Nazism and Fascism in Syria and Lebanon in 1939, and founded its literary magazine Al-Tariq.

* ETEL ADNAN, born in 1925 in Beirut, Lebanon, to a Syrian Muslim father and a Greek Christian mother from Turkey, and who died in 2021 in Paris, France, was a Lebanese poet, essayist, and painter whose work powerfully intertwined art, politics, and identity. Drawing on her heritage and experiences of exile, her writings like Sea and Fog, Journey to Mount Tamalpais, and In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country addressed queerness, war, and displacement, establishing her as a fearless voice for justice and personal freedom. Beyond her celebrated paintings, her literature leaves an enduring inspiration for generations confronting oppression and imagining new forms of civic and artistic expression. Both within and beyond her work, Etel was a faithful friend to the mountains; her ardent love for Mount Tam in Northern California took over much of her late life. Her deteriorating health bound her to France and separated her from her great mountain love – when friends would visit her with footage from Mount Tam, she would look at them with great passion, as if she was watching her own grandchildren. In a small publication of Notes for Documenta 13, she wrote, 'You might think that love of nature is harmless, but no love is harmless. It can compromise the whole of existence, and indeed it does.'

* GHASSAN KANAFANI, born in 1936 in Akka, Palestine, and assassinated in 1972 in Beirut, was a revolutionary Palestinian writer, journalist, and political activist whose literature gave voice to the Palestinian struggle and exile. His seminal works, including the novel Men in the Sun, the short story collection Returning to Haifa, and numerous essays, explored themes of displacement, resistance, and identity, blending literary artistry with political

urgency. Kanafani's life can only be spoken of as a practice in love. A love for the people, for freedom, for emancipation, and for Palestine. In one of his love letters to Ghada Al-Samman, he writes, 'Let's make ourselves something simpler and easier, let's join our arms and make a simple arc above the complexities that live and drain us. Let's try at least. [...] I believe in you, like the original believer in his homeland, and the mystic in the unseen.'

* HANI JAWHARIYYEH, born in 1939 in Jerusalem, Palestine, was a pioneering Palestinian cinematographer and a founding member of the Palestine Film Unit, a core arm of the visual resistance effort. He was killed while filming in 1976 in Southern Lebanon, a martyr of revolution whose final frames – including those shot moments before his death – were tragically preserved in the documentary Palestine in the Eye. In mourning him, his friend, artist Vladimir Tamari wrote: 'What remains with me and what I remember most of Hani is his penetrating, and perhaps one of his most endearing qualities was shown in his humility and in the pains he took in mastering the details of any work he undertook. [...] He dealt with people humanely and honestly, free of any selfishness or malice to a degree I rarely experienced in anyone. Following his death, I wrote a text that is now lost, but I remember that in it I described Hani's hand holding an egg which he had taken from the chicken coop behind his home in Jerusalem. I wrote how the egg appeared, brilliantly white, nestled in his hand, as if he was guarding it. Everybody loved him and still does.'

MAROUN BAGHDADI, born 1950; died 1993 in Beirut, was a pioneering Lebanese filmmaker whose cinema captured the complexities of Lebanese society and the human toll of war, and whose embodied approach to cinema rebirthed the medium as a practice that is aware of its production, and in constant relation with the community, the environment, and the people. His acclaimed films blended political engagement with cinematic artistry, portraying displacement, violence, and resilience with unflinching honesty. Maroun fell to his death at his parents' house in Beirut, just a few days before his wife, actress and dancer Souraya Baghdadi, gave birth to their third child, Kamal. Despite enquiring with the artist's friends and visiting multiple cemeteries, Baghdadi's grave could not be located, reflecting his sudden death that, in a way, evaded a standard course with the living. Perhaps Baghdadi only wished to make his presence felt to a few, for in remembering him, his wife said, 'I like to think that although Maroun is not with me now, he still introduces me to new opportunities. The re-appearance of his films gave me new chances to return to cinema exactly as he did three decades ago when he introduced me to the cinema for the first time. He is very generous even in his absence.'

* PAUL GUIRAGOSSIAN, born in 1926 in Jerusalem, Palestine, to Armenian parents who survived the Armenian Genocide; died in 1993 in Beirut, was a seminal Palestinian-Lebanese-Armenian painter

whose art powerfully conveyed the human condition, identity, and the struggles of exile. Being Palestinian-Armenian, Paul painted for both the Palestinian and Armenian Nakbas, while also tending, through his work, to the flux of the displaced, oppressed and exiled in the vibrant neighbourhoods around Jerusalem and Beirut. His vibrant canvases captured the joys, sorrows, and resilience of everyday life, transforming personal and collective memory into universal visual narratives. Paul lived quite a modest life; he grew up poor and only became wealthy posthumously. Even his grave exhibits signs of modesty, as one of the few around his burial site without a marble frame – only a slab of concrete. His grave was very well tended, with fresh flowers and a lot of different flower pots. When asked about them, the grave digger said that a man with a dog comes to visit him every single week, waters the plants, lights a candle, and leaves him fresh flowers. It's been over thirty years since Paul passed away.

* KHALIL HAWI, born in 1919 in Beirut, Lebanon, was a major Lebanese poet whose work reflected the hopes and struggles of post-independence Lebanon and the wider Arab world. His poetry, particularly in collections like River of Ashes, explored exile, identity, and the human impact of political turmoil, intertwining personal reflection with national awareness. He is buried in an unmarked grave in Beirut as a result of his death by suicide in 1982. Hawi held a gun to his temple and pulled the trigger the eve of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in protest of the government's inability to protect its people from the horrors of an invasion that would lead to the killing of 20,000 people, as a refusal of the position that some Arab regimes had taken against this occupation. His suicide was described in The Journal of Knowledge as 'an excess vitality which eliminates the body that can't crumble nor comprise it. It is a vitality that dominates him and breaks his structure.' Both Hawi's writing and his own body are a witness to imperial violence and the pathological accumulation of apathy that infects society.

IBRAHIM JABRA, born in 1919 in Adana and died in 1994 in Baghdad, was a distinguished Palestinian-Iraqi writer, translator, and intellectual. His novels, poetry, and translations, most notably of James Joyce into Arabic, explored themes of exile, identity, and cultural encounter, blending experimental narrative techniques with deep philosophical reflection. Jabra's parents were both witnesses and survivors of the Seyfo Genocide, and were expelled a second time during the 1948 Nakba, after which Jabra sought refuge in Iraq, where he spent most of his active years in a home that was later destroyed during the US invasion of Iraq. In a remembrance text, his friend, Ahmad Farhat, speaks intimately of Jabra's inner turmoil and political frustrations and quotes one of his profound lines: 'What is this unbearable shame, and have I been alone in carrying it? Is it my face alone that is covered in a shroud of ash?'

ABDUL HAY MOSALLAM ZARARA, born in 1933 in Al-Dawayima, Palestine, and who died on 1 August 2020 in Amman, Jordan, was a self-taught Palestinian artist whose life and work bore witness to the pains, joys, and cultural memories of Palestine. Zarara developed his own technique using sawdust, glue, and paint to create deeply expressive reliefs that captured everyday life in Palestine from before the Nakba – when Zarara and his family were forced to flee their home after the Al-Dawayima massacre – to scenes of exile, resistance, and the long struggle for liberation. In remembering him, the Palestinian culture minister Atef Abu Saif said that, 'He exemplified an epic of historical struggle, dedicating his work and life to freedom, liberation and independence, with his work as an exceptional archive of the Palestinian cause and folk heritage, and a strong attunement to land, suffering, and the lives of simple people.'

MUSTAFA AL-HALLAJ, born in 1938 in the village of Salama, Palestine, was a visual artist whose life and art became a vivid testament to loss. Originally trained as a sculptor, Hallaj threw all his works into the Jordan River in 1967 and moved to woodcut printmaking and painting, a medium he felt suited his life as a displaced artist. He later lost thousands of artworks during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. He died by suffocation in Damascus, a tragedy on which artist Samia A Halaby elucidated: 'The second US war against Iraq was about to begin, and most artists were angry and not particularly excited to be connected to "America." [...] Sadly, on 16 December 2003, Mustafa received a phone call misinforming him about who would represent his artwork for the US exhibition. His wife, Ibtissam, later told me that after receiving the call, he became very angry and accidentally kicked a heater that spilled fuel throughout the room and quickly caught fire. Ibtissam urged him to run out, but he insisted on saving his work.' Al-Hallaj transformed personal and collective trauma into a powerful artistic archive; his death can even be viewed as a final protest against loss.

JULIANA SERAPHIM, born 1934 in Yaffo, Palestine; died 2005 in Beirut, Lebanon, was a Palestinian-Lebanese painter whose dreamlike, surrealist canvases transformed personal memory and feminine subjectivity into universal images of longing, identity, and escape. Having been displaced by the Nakba, she carried the experience into her art, building worlds of fluid architecture, morphing figures, delicate florals, and ghostly cityscapes; her work also came from a fascination with Yafa's seaside and marine life, and the mystic life of her grandfather, a Jerusalem-based architect who lived in a former convent. Seraphim produced a surreal and deeply personal archive, not to be viewed away from her status as a middle-class Christian, which granted her Lebanese citizenship and enabled her assimilation into Beirut's commercial art scene. Her work was particularly pioneering in exploring female sexuality and identity within a conservative context.

JUMANA EL HUSSEINI, born in spring 1932 in Jerusalem and died in spring 2018 in Paris, was a Palestinian painter, sculptor and mixed-media artist. Her art, spanning painting, sculpture, ceramics, embroidery and mixed media, turned every canvas

into a tribute to her native Jerusalem as a quiet act of resistance. In describing her venture into art, El Hussein said, 'I found Palestine again on canvas. I live my youth, my early days there – all the memories, the birds, the flowers, the butterflies, the greenery, the Dead Sea, the windows, the doors, the skies of Palestine. This is where I found myself.' She viewed her paintings as a continuous archival practice, and upon returning to Palestine for the first time in 20 years, the artist began to laboriously sketch her native city as a response to a feeling she later described as a 'preservation of a way of life that was threatened.'

MONA SAUDI, born in 1945 in Amman, Jordan, and died in 2022 in Beirut, Lebanon, was a Jordanian modernist sculptor and a fierce supporter of Palestine, Arabism, and freedom, whose abstract stone carvings explored themes of growth, creation, and connection to the earth. She shaped hard stone to her will using her softness. She is remembered for opening her home and studio garden to all. Saudi remains known as a friend to nature and stones, as her work is deeply shaped by a childhood spent next to a Roman Nymphaeum. In describing her work, she said, 'I live among the stones; I scatter them around me until I have only a small space in my house that I keep to move around'. Notably, the late artist Paul Guiragossian helped Saudi organise her first exhibition.

* LAYLA AL-ATTAR, born 1944; died 1993 in Baghdad, was a prominent Iraqi painter and longtime director of the Iraqi National Art Museum whose art and public commissions sought to elevate women's dignity and express Iraqi cultural identity. She is widely credited with designing the floor mosaic at Al Rasheed Hotel depicting U.S. President George H. W. Bush's face beneath the inscription 'BUSH IS CRIMINAL'. She was killed in 1993 alongside her husband and housekeeper by an American missile strike on Baghdad, 10 years before the 2003 US invasion that claimed the lives of half a million people. Her funerary procession spread along a wide Baghdadi street, where a massive number of Iraqis – a large portion of them women – marched and wailed for her. And in mourning her, the Iraqi poet Hamid said of the night of her murder, 'That night, she stayed up in her studio, gathering moons, clouds, and butterflies from golden fingertips. And soon the colours would retire back to her kohl, and she would sleep in the coldness of oblivion or after a life of familiarity.'

* SALOUA RAOUDA CHOUCAIR, born 1916; died 2017, Beirut, was a Lebanese painter, jewellery and enamel designer, sculptor, and one of Lebanon's earliest abstractionists whose work fused modern abstraction with Islamic geometry. Her groundbreaking 1947 exhibition in Beirut and subsequent modular sculptures and interlocking poems established a uniquely Arab modernist language, blending mathematical precision with spiritual and cultural identity. She believed in the rejection of form as a possible gateway into the essence of expression, and as a fundamental way to understand Arab intellectual thought. Saloua was buried in the vicinity of the House of the Druze

community in Beirut, and despite an extensive search for her grave, only the gravestone of her father, Salim Raouda, was found – onto which the charcoal rubbing was made. Choucair's work remained largely unknown in global art circles up until recently. A recurring argument is that the artist never received the recognition she deserved because of the dismal social history of the Beirut art scene, which regularly succumbed to Lebanon's political matrix.

MAHMOUD DARWISH, born in 1941 in al-Birwa, Palestine, and who died in 2008 in Houston, USA, was a Palestinian poet and author. Through collections such as Unfortunately, It Was Paradise and Memory for Forgetfulness, he transformed personal and collective memory into poetry of profound political and emotional resonance. For Darwish, memory and catastrophe are not only about the absence and presence of geography and home, but they are also metaphorical in every way, and metaphors form a peculiar mode of geography and space. In mourning him, critic and writer John Berger described the following: 'We went to visit the grave. There's a headstone. The dug earth is still bare, and mourners have left on it little sheaves of green wheat – as he suggested in one of his poems. There are also red anemones, scraps of paper, photos. He wanted to be buried in Galilee where he was born and where his mother still lives, but the Israelis forbade it. [...] Darwish's grave has now been fenced off, and a glass pyramid has been constructed over it. It's no longer possible to squat beside him. His words, however, are audible to our ears and will remain so, and we can repeat them.'

NASRI HAJJAJ, born 1951 in the Ein el Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, was a documentary filmmaker. His most notable work, Shadow of Absence, tells the stories of Palestinians, famous or anonymous, born in Palestine before 1948 who died in exile across the world, yet longed to be buried in their home villages, now annexed to Israel. Hajjaj passed away in Beirut and was laid to rest in the graveyard of the camp where he was born. In one of his blog posts, titled I survived two civil wars in Lebanon, Nasri writes, 'I lived through two civil wars in Lebanon and escaped death, but did not escape damage to my soul. [...] We heard about the war through the night-time conversations of the adults who cursed President Camille Chamoun, the Baghdad Pact and the US with its Sixth Fleet, which was in the port of Beirut. [...] I did not know our enemies at that point, except for the pictures of Camille Chamoun surrounded by some Lebanese soldiers. Later I saw pictures of US Marines, with their strange haircuts, white skin and blond hair, and wondered how a seven-year-old could have all this number of powerful enemies.'

* KAMAL KHEIR BEIK, born 1936 in Damascus, was a Syrian poet and translator whose work bridged classical Arabic traditions with modernist experimentation. His poetry, marked by political engagement and lyrical intensity, explored exile, identity, and the human condition, reflecting both

personal and collective struggles. Kamal's later poetry was written on cardboard cutouts of Gitanes cigarette boxes that were collected and archived by the poet's friends and comrades to be published posthumously. Kamal spent his life in vigilant protest against reductionist thought, ignorance, and occupation until his assassination in 1980 in Beirut, Lebanon. In explaining his early retirement, his wife, Khuzama Kasouf said, 'He believed that which was taken by force can only be restored by force, so he set the burdens of his pen aside as it seemed to him that poetry no longer possessed what it takes to be a tool for Nahda.' Kamal Kheir Beik is buried alongside Ghassan Kanafani in the Cemetery of Martyrs in Beirut.

* SALVADOR ARNITA, born in 1914 in Jerusalem, Palestine, and died 1984 in Amman, Jordan, was a Palestinian composer, organist, conductor and long-time head of the Music Department at the American University of Beirut. He is a major figure amongst generations of musical and political expressions of Palestinian exile. His prolific output of over 200 compositions, including symphonies, concertos, choral works, and the groundbreaking cantata Identity (based on the poem Write down, I am an Arab by Mahmoud Darwish), fused classical and Palestinian musical traditions while nurturing a generation of Middle Eastern musicians. Arnita's work was influenced by the folk research of his wife, the renowned musicologist, Yusra Jawhariyyeh Arnita, who collected 100 Palestinian folk songs for the Research Centre of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. Salvador was exiled from his homeland during the 1948 Nakba, though he experienced an equally violent alienation upon his return from his education overseas, due to the British control over Palestine whereby Zionist settlers monopolised classical music, causing it to lose its liturgical heritage and become a tool for colonial hegemony.

* NIZAR QABBANI, born 1923 in Damascus; buried 1998 in Damascus, was a Syrian poet and lover whose lyrical works transformed modern Arabic poetry. Known for his passionate explorations of love, feminism, and political resistance, his poetry gave voice to both personal and collective struggles in the Arab world. Qabbani's poetry often contended with political anguish, restless loss and desire, having lost the love of his life, Balqis, to a tragic car bombing outside the Iraqi Embassy that resulted in the death of 61 people; as a result, Nizar lived in perpetual mourning for the rest of his life. He was living proof that a broken heart is political as much as it is full of love, and it was perhaps foreseeable, albeit unfortunate, that he died of a heart attack in London and is buried at the Bay el Saghir cemetery in Damascus – per a request that he wrote on his deathbed – in which he described the city as 'the womb that taught me poetry, taught me creativity and granted me the alphabet of Jasmine.'

* SONALLAH IBRAHIM, born in 1937 in Alexandria and died in 2025 in Cairo, was an Egyptian novelist and political writer whose work combines literary

innovation with sharp social critique. His legacy is that of iconoclastic political refusal, especially when it pertains to the 2003 'Opera incident' where he publicly rejected the award for Arab novelist of the year, claiming that there was no more culture, only a bin of lies and cited 'the oppression of the people by the Egyptian political system.' Notoriously known to have had his book The Smell banned, a book that speaks about his imprisonment due to his involvement with the communist party, and for novels such as Stealth, he explored themes of political oppression, corruption, and everyday life under authoritarian regimes, often blending realism with experimental narrative techniques. Ibrahim was a writer who did what he wanted, free of authoritative restraints and the illusions of bourgeois ambitions. After years of writing on political and class turmoil, he said, 'Enough of this... I want to write a love story.'

MUHAMMAD AL-MAGHOUT, born in 1934 in the Syrian village of Salamiyah and died in 2006 in Damascus, was a poet, playwright and essayist widely regarded as a pioneer of modern Arabic free verse and political theatre. As a playwright, critic and columnist, Maghout used satire and stark realism to critique authoritarianism, hypocrisy, and corruption – a fearless voice of dissent whose legacy continues to resonate across the Arab world as a symbol of literary courage and political conscience. Since his childhood, Maghout liked idling and the ecstasy of a life lived among the people; he left school and joined the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, which led to his incarceration twice in the same year. He wrote about the injustice of life, the daily needs of the poor, and occupation. In describing his work, researcher and artist Louay Adam declared, 'We often lose the typical hero character in Maghout's literary works, along with its associated tropes that highlight the role of the miraculous individual. The case with Maghout is quite different: the public is the typical hero, not the individual, which reflects the human dimension and the altruism it can carry. This model took precedence over all of his works.'

RAFIC CHARAF, born in 1932 in Baalbek, Lebanon, and died in 2003 in Beirut, was a Lebanese painter whose life and work drew on his origins, social consciousness, and passion for transforming memory and folklore into modern art. Over decades, he portrayed the struggles of ordinary people, social inequality, and political trauma – from bleak landscapes marked by barbed wire and destruction to symbolic, myth-inspired canvases celebrating heritage and resistance. As a teacher and later dean at the Lebanese University Faculty of Fine Arts, Charaf influenced generations of artists. Charaf passed away after a long battle with terminal cancer, which left quite a mark on his body, eating away at his lungs and severely damaging his lymphatic glands. During the last stages of his life, he had returned to the great fields of his hometown, Baalbek, to memories of childhood, teenage years, hunting trips, and wandering in the wild. Of his grey period, he said, 'The works of this period are not mere paintings. They reveal this place's secrets to its devastating realities in the domestic forests of predation, under the moonlight and under the sun.'

ISMAIL SHAMMOUT, born in 1930 in Lydda, Palestine, and died in 2006 in Amman, Jordan, was a Palestinian painter and cultural icon whose work captured the struggles, displacement, and resilience of the Palestinian people. His powerful murals and paintings, including the renowned Palestinian Exodus series, chronicled the Nakba and life in exile, including a documentation of his own family's march of death after the fall of Lydda, forced to leave on foot to Ramallah without being allowed to carry water – his young brother, Tawfik, died of thirst before they made it. Shammout was a co-founder of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's art department, and is one of the most notable painters who depicted Palestinian resistance in all its forms, along with being credited with holding the first contemporary art exhibition in Palestine's history by a Palestinian artist on Palestinian soil. Samia A Halaby writes, 'He lives in my memories as that tall young man with intense eyes whom I first met in 1979 on the streets of Beirut. An image of night, black hair flying in its own revolution, impressed his intense message on my thoughts. Now that he is gone, the burden of his legacy weighs on all Palestinian artists.'

CHRISTIAN GHAZI, born in 1934 in Antakya, Turkey, and who died in 2013 in Beirut, was a Lebanese filmmaker, poet, playwright, journalist, and committed political activist. Through documentaries such as One Hundred Faces for a Single Day and other works chronicling refugees, workers, and fighters, Ghazi exposed injustice, class exploitation and the Palestinian struggle – merging art and politics in a powerful call for social justice. Much of his archive was lost in the Lebanese civil war, and he is now buried in Beirut. In a recent remembrance post, Writers Against the War on Gaza wrote, 'In Christian Ghazi's "personal film manifesto", we watch bored intellectuals read Mao in bed or discuss the Palestinian cause from a comfortable distance while just a few hours south, a war-scape unfolds: bullet-ridden homes, fields assaulted from the sky, guerrillas fixing their rifles. The film is eerily reflective of Lebanese society today. Once again, a war rages on the southern border while the urban bourgeoisie observe from afar. Once again, the South is cast off as an underclass not worthy of mourning.'

SAMIH AL-QASIM, born in 1939 in az-Zarqa and died in 2014 in Safad, was a Palestinian poet. Writing in Arabic, his poetry, Poems from the Prison and The Night Will Pass, blended lyrical beauty with political urgency, addressing themes of identity, oppression, and steadfastness under occupation. Al-Qasim was among the first Arab Druze youth to defy the compulsory military service imposed by the Israeli authorities on his community in the framework of a 'divide and rule' policy. Inducted by force in 1960 into military service, he refused to carry arms and was subsequently put in jail. In an interview with Liam Brown, al-Qasim said that he doesn't care how he will be remembered: 'If the Palestinian people will be free, if the Arab world will be united, if social justice will be victorious in all the world, if there will be international peace. I don't care who will remember

me or my poems. I don't care.'

*SIHAM NASSER, born in 1950 in Bourj Al Barajneh, Lebanon; died in 2019 in Beirut, is buried alongside her parents in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Nasser was a playwright, theatre director, actress and professor of theatre whose lifetime commitment made her a passionate advocate for an independent, socially engaged Arab theatre. Her celebrated play The Secret Pocket, an adaptation of Rachid Boudjedra's novel, won first prize at the 1992 International Festival for Experimental Theater in Cairo and remains a landmark in experimental Arab drama. In mourning her, her niece smoked a cigarette with her by her grave, as the writer would have liked, and spoke robustly about Siham's amorous adventures and how life to her was marked by an abundance of passions and a relentless will to explore and to live. Siham's lively and thought provoking spirit continues to live on in many of her students' memories, and in the memory of all those that loved her.

BORHANE ALAOUIÉ, born in 1941 in Arnoun, Southern Lebanon; died in 2021 in Brussels, was a Lebanese film director. Throughout his career, he blended documentary realism and poetic storytelling to expose injustice, exile, and the scars of conflict. As a teacher and auteur alike, he inspired generations of filmmakers. In an essay published after Alaouié's death, his student, filmmaker Hadi Zaccak wrote, 'On the morning of September 9, 2021, my friend Naja al-Achkar, who had lost his father the night before, called me to tell me that Borhane Alaouié had also passed away. It felt as if all our fathers were gone [...] Borhane used to tell me, "Don't forget to tell your students about my films." For more than twenty years I have not stopped transmitting the experience of this pioneering generation. Borhane left us to reunite with Maroun, Jean, Jocelyne and Randa. It's as if the departure of this founding generation coincides with the demise of a homeland.'

LAILA SHAWA, born 1940 in Gaza and died in 2022 in London, was often described as the 'mother of Arab revolutionary art'. Together with her father and her ex-husband, Rasha Shawa, Laila founded Rashad Shawa Cultural Centre in Gaza in 1988 – a project that took them 12 years and was raised to the ground by the Israeli-led genocide in Gaza in 2024. Shawa's bold and intelligent curiosity is reflected in her extensive four-decade repertoire of work. As she points out, however, her need to comment on the conditions around her is also an intrinsically human one: 'The moment you open your mouth, and you say I do not accept what is happening to my country, you are called an activist. Why are you an activist? You are a normal person who does not accept – a normal person complaining bitterly and adamantly.'

*TALAL SALMAN, born in 1938 in Shmastar, Lebanon, and died in 2023 in Beirut, was a pioneering Lebanese journalist and founder of the influential Arabic daily As-Safir, which championed Arab unity, the Palestinian cause, and social justice. Despite censorship, conflict, and a near-fatal assassination attempt in 1984, he remained a steadfast advocate for independent journalism and freedom of expression. During his funerary procession, Allama Sheikh Ali al-Khatib said, 'How great a loss it is to

be deprived of your presence, but the causes that you gave your life to and fought for will not be swept away, nor will they die. Palestine, which you made your cause, will return as the cause of the nation, Abu Ahmad, and the consciousness of this land will grow and cast off the yoke of servitude. Our loss is too great today, and we are inconsolable. May you rest in peace in life and in death, for the likes of you never die.'

*BAYAN NUWAYHED AL-HOUT, born 1937 in Jerusalem and died in 2025 in Beirut, was a Palestinian-Lebanese historian, journalist, and professor. Her works, such as Sabra and Shatila: September 1982 and Political Leadership and Institutions in Palestine, 1917–1948, documented critical chapters of modern Palestinian history, blending rigorous scholarship with an unwavering commitment to memory and justice. Writing about Sabra and Shatila haunted al-Hout for the remainder of her life. She noted, 'In the history of massacres, the first speaker is death, then the murdered, and finally the murderer. Death has spoken, and so have the murdered, as the witnesses have spoken. Meanwhile, the living victims are still awaiting the murderer to speak.' Nuwayhed's father, Ajaj Nuwayhed, was a prominent figure in the Palestinian national movement; her mother was the poet Jamal Salim, and her maternal uncle was the fighter, Fouad Salim. Bayan was buried near her husband, the Palestinian-Lebanese activist Shafiq al-Hout, at the Martyrs of the Palestinian Revolution Cemetery near Shatila Refugee Camp.

*SKANDAR HABACHE, born 1963 in Beirut, Lebanon, and died in 2025 in Beirut, was a Palestinian-Lebanese poet, painter, translator, and cultural journalist. Beginning in the 1980s, he helped found several poetry magazines and later served as editor-in-chief of the culture section of As-Safir newspaper. He was a prolific translator, introducing Arab speaking masses to the works of Fernando Pessoa, Umberto Eco, Marguerite Duras and many others. In mourning him, writer Said Baaz wrote, 'The dearest of Lebanese poets has passed away, and his life, poetry, and journalistic work: colossal and steadfast. Illness overcame him, but memory did not. His inner strength and depth I only came to understand one fleeting night in Casablanca. He was rolling a cigarette and puffing as if banishing reality away. Now, I understand why you obfuscate your face, and turn the gaze toward the innermost depths of you. I am sad, but reassured that the days of those who grieve are not long, and that the remainder no longer possess enough awareness to understand what the death of a poet truly means.'

NAJI AL-ALI, born in 1936 in the village of Al-Shajara in northern Palestine, was a fiercely principled cartoonist whose stark lines and uncompromising voice made him one of the Arab world's most influential political artists. Al-Ali was forced into exile as a child during the Nakba, seeking refuge in Southern Lebanon at the Ein El Hilweh Palestinian Refugee Camp, a rupture that shaped every aspect of his work. Despite joining the Arab national

liberation movement alongside George Habache, he was excommunicated several times due to 'lacking the discipline to work within a political party'; this led him to release a political journal where his creation, Handala, became his signature: a stubborn, unyielding witness who refuses to grow up until his homeland is free. Through Handala's steadfast refusal, al-Ali shows that art, when honest, can be a form of resistance. Al-Ali was assassinated in London in 1987. He wished to be buried in Ein El Hilweh refugee camp in Lebanon alongside his father, but sadly it was not possible, and he is buried instead in Brookwood Cemetery in Surrey, UK.

* MAHDI AMEL (born Hassan Hamdan) was born in 1936 in the Jabal Amel region of southern Lebanon; assassinated in 1987, he was a Lebanese Marxist theorist, historian, lecturer, pedagogue, and leading figure of the Lebanese Communist Party. Hamdan's pen name and nom de guerre combine 'Amel' – both a geographic reference and the Arabic word for 'worker', and 'Mahdi' – the awaited messiah figure in Shia Islam. Amel was introduced to Marxism by his schoolteacher Shafiq Al-Hout. Amel's writings introduced Marxist thought to Arab politics. It explained the complexity of the Lebanese political, social and economic structure, and revolutionised thinking around sectarianism as a system that ensures the perpetuation of colonial bourgeois control. He travelled through cities and villages, lecturing, discussing and explaining causes, like nationality and liberation, to the people in a simple, clear language. His politics were produced in a context of disillusionment with national independence, which had expelled the colonisers through the front door only to see them return through the side window of neo-colonial economic structures.

WALID KHALIDI was a distinguished Palestinian historian and scholar who was born in Jerusalem in 1925 and passed away in Cambridge, MA, at 100 years old. Khalidi was raised by his father, Ahmad Samih Khalidi, a dedicated educationist, and his stepmother, the leading Lebanese feminist writer Anbara Salam. He was a mentor to myriad academics and the author of 40-plus publications, including All That Remains (1992), an exhaustively documented account of 400 villages destroyed or depopulated by Israel in 1948. He worked with the Arab League to present the case of Palestine before the international community, and co-founded the Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS) with Syrian intellectual, Constantin Zureiq. Khalidi remains one of the most synonymous names with the Palestinian struggle, and one of the most significant contributors to the preservation of Palestinian historical memory. His colossal work not only documents the history of Palestine and the larger Arab-Israeli conflict, but also lifts a vivid portrait of the Palestinian people, as parents, grandparents, children, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles; and as farmers, businessmen, publishers, politicians, and resistance fighters. His loved ones speak of how forbearing and profound he was, and how generous he was in his concern for the life and legacy of his colleagues. Khalidi is survived by his son, Ahmad, his daughter, Karma, and his half-brother, Tarif.

AHMAD KAABOUR, born in 1955 in Beirut and buried there at the age of 70, was a Lebanese resistance music icon, singer and composer. He was also an actor, director, playwright, and pioneer in children's theatre. His upbringing was marked by the Lebanese Civil War, which shaped both his career and political outlook. Moved by poetics and urgency, his music captured the emotional landscape of war, exile, and resistance with themes of grief, dispossession, and identity. What stands out is a moving theatrical and political work that reflected the wider traumas of Lebanese and Palestinian histories and tied them together, especially in works like Unadikom, I call on you, birthed by the Palestinian revolution and the revolutionary Palestinian presence in Lebanon. Kaabour's death was a defining moment in Bilad Al-Sham's national memory; he was mourned by thousands upon thousands, and his songs were heard playing from the cars and houses of Beirutis for weeks following. His death marked the loss of an artist who only sang for the people and, in turn, was carried through by them all. There are a thousand ways to remember him, and so we recall what he wrote in 1998, in Al-Safir newspaper, '[...] How blessed is movement, and how profane is habituation. I wish I was an arrow; I wish I was a breeze. Dancing and swaying, and dusting off the agonies of the days and the weight of impossible dreams.'

SLIMAN MANSOUR, born in Birzeit, Ramallah, in 1947, and buried there in 2026, was one of the most renowned artists in Palestine. His work exquisitely illustrates Palestinians' resolve against occupation and their unbreakable ties to their homeland. Since the early 1970s, he has translated his experiences of isolation, displacement, community, and rootedness using land-embedded imagery and symbols, iconising heroic Palestinian women, men and children. In 1987 Mansour, along with others, founded the New Visions Movement in response to the first intifada. The movement called on artists to boycott Israeli art supplies and utilise local natural materials such as coffee, henna, and clay. He also co-founded the League of Palestinian Artists and the al-Wasiti Art Centre in Jerusalem. Much like any Palestinian under occupation, his life was also tarnished by the occupation's arbitrary arrests, humiliation, and physical violence. There isn't any Palestinian camp that isn't adorned with his painting, Camel of Hardship (1973). Mansour has recalled that in 1980, an Israeli officer summoned him to his office and said, 'Why are you making political paintings? Why don't you paint a nice flower?' After which, he vowed to never make paintings of flowers again. In mourning him, Palestinian poet Hassan Khodr wrote, 'A star from our high and shining sky has now fallen; this land gives, and it takes away, in eternal glory to its name.'