

LEILA NSEIR (SYRIA, B. 1941)

Pioneering modernist Leil Nseir is known for her superb draftsmanship in addition to her reinterpretation of historical forms as a means of depicting reality. Initially finding artistic inspiration in the region's ancient civilisations, Nseir often employed mythology as an allegory for life, and later worked in realism, expressionism, surrealism, and even abstraction, all while experimenting with various media and techniques. Today, her paintings have traces of these different stages of her oeuvre, indicating the journey of a seasoned artist who has frequently embarked on new creative paths.

Born in Latakia, Syria in 1941, Nseir graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cairo in 1963, and later taught at the University of Damascus. She began her artistic career during the height of Syrian modernism and developed a focus akin to the work of her friend the late Louay Kayyali, whose paintings depict the fragile nature of the human condition and the experiences of the disenfranchised. Although exploring similar themes, Nseir's female subjects added the question of gender norms and the status of women in Arab society. Nseir's bold attempt to broaden the social narrative of Syrian art quickly established her importance, serving as inspiration to aspiring women artists.

Possessing an extensive exhibition history, Nseir has participated in artistic events worldwide. A leading painter of her generation, she was honoured by the Syrian Ministry of Culture for her contributions to art in both 1968 and 1999. Nseir's work can be found in the National Museum of Damascus and numerous private collections throughout the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and North America. She has spent most of her life in her native Syria.