

## MOUSTAFA FATHI (SYRIA, 1942-2009)

Moustafa Fathi was a pioneer of contemporary Syrian art who began painting during the latter half of Syria's modernist renaissance. An academic and practicing artist with a rich artistic life that spanned four decades and two continents, Fathi is recognised for establishing new formal and theoretical frontiers with a contemporary painting style rooted in the traditional visual culture of the Levant.

Fascinated by artisan printing materials, Fathi carved hundreds of woodblock stamps after several years of intensive research in the 1980s, and continued to adapt new techniques, materials, and forms late in his career by travelling across Syria to document local crafts and ancient sites. He also found inspiration in non-western forms of abstraction, which he studied while living and working between Syria and France.

Applying his templates as small cells of complex designs against flat colour fields, Fathi created elaborate mixed-media works that bring to mind the automatic brushwork of Abstract Expressionism and the sophisticated pictography of ancient hieroglyphs. Producing an inherent tension in compositional space, this symbolist approach reduces nature to its most organic state, as pockets of dynamic force are contained by infinite vastness.

Born in Daraa, Syria, Fathi (1942-2009) received a Diploma in Engraving from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Damascus in 1966—where he studied under influential Syrian modernists such as Mahmoud Hammad—and earned a Diploma in Engraving and Lithography from the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux Arts, Paris in 1978. Between 1966 and 1987, Fathi taught at the Faculty of Fine Arts, a position that furthered his contributions to the Syrian art scene.

Throughout his career, Fathi exhibited at home and abroad, most notably in a number of prominent European institutions, including the Picasso Museum in Antibes, which houses one of his works. The last exhibition held for the artist during his lifetime was organised by Syria's Latakia Museum of Modern Art in 2008. A posthumous retrospective of his work was held at Ayyam Gallery Al Quoz, Dubai in 2015, and was welcomed by regional art historians and critics as a reintroduction to one of the Arab world's foremost innovators of abstraction.