

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Sultan Sarwad Al-Khalsami is an Emirati columnist and researcher on social, political, and cultural affairs in the Arab Gulf states.

00:00:09 Speaker 1

He's also the founder of the Magdev Art Foundation, an independent initiative established in 2010 to contribute to the intellectual development of the art scene in the Arab region.

00:00:21 Speaker 1

He has taught politics of modern Middle Eastern art at NYU, at Yale,

00:00:28 Speaker 1

None of us is perfect.

00:00:29 Speaker 1

We'll allow you.

00:00:32 Speaker 1

Georgetown, Boston College, the American University of Paris, Brandeis.

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We like to steal talent from Brandeis.

00:00:42 Speaker 1

From the Harvard Kennedy School, from Columbia and Bard College, Berlin.

00:00:47 Speaker 1

You can understand why.

00:00:48 Speaker 1

It just feels odd that we haven't been able to say Oxford until tonight.

00:00:52 Speaker 1

This long list, now we're going to say Oxford.

00:00:55 Speaker 1

In 2023, Sultan completed a fellowship at the

00:00:59 Speaker 1

And in 2024, he was elected a research associate at SOAS's Middle East Institute in London.

00:01:06 Speaker 1

And he's currently an instructor at the American University of Sharjah.

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But more than that, Sultan is truly the go-to expert when one wants to look at the intersection between art, society, culture, and politics.

00:01:24 Speaker 1

And it comes from a lifelong engagement with

00:01:28 Speaker 1

not just art, but with the artists behind the art.

00:01:31 Speaker 1

You probably know more of the people behind the chisels of the paintbrushes than any of us have ever had the pleasure to meet before.

00:01:40 Speaker 1

And so when we were thinking about, and you've noticed this term, we've been trying to mix in more about literature and more, not the culture of the region, just to balance out the death spiral bad news.

00:01:51 Speaker 1

But, you know, the

00:01:54 Speaker 1

The vitality of the art world is one where I feel as though in the auction houses and in the museums of the world, the Middle East in general is really making its impact felt.

00:02:06 Speaker 1

And I was hoping that we could turn to Sultan to give us the backstory.

00:02:13 Speaker 1

So, Sultan, welcome to Oxford, welcome to the Middle Center at St.

00:02:16 Speaker 1

Andrews College.

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We are delighted to have you with us and look forward to hearing your speech.

00:02:21 Speaker 1

Seeds in the rubble.

00:02:23 Speaker 1

Cultural vitality in the airport.

00:02:34 Speaker 2

Thank you, Professor Eugene, for that very generous introduction.

00:02:38 Speaker 2

So the Oxford Dictionary defines vitality as the power of giving continuance of life.

00:02:44 Speaker 2

Notice I said the Oxford Dictionary.

00:02:49 Speaker 1

One point.

00:02:52 Speaker 2

So the Oxford Dictionary defines vitality as the power of giving continuance of life

00:02:58 Speaker 2

present in all living things.

00:03:00 Speaker 2

Readers of 20th century history will note that during World War II, European cities experienced devastation, rendering metropolises such as Rotterdam, Hamburg, Dresden, and Vienna unrecognizable.

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In fact, it is said that less than 2% of historic Warsaw survived the destruction.

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Yet many of these cities have over the past few decades emerged as major artistic and cultural hubs

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hosting performances, musical events, and demonstrating the possibility of rising from ashes.

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Since the fall of the Iron Wall, many of these cities have opted to rebuild historic landmarks that have disappeared, some from the ground up, including the recently inaugurated Humboldt Forum in Berlin.

00:03:46 Speaker 2

Today, we are more likely to read about the rejuvenation of downtown Warsaw than we are to read about the revitalization of Beirut, which has also seen its own share of cultural renovation projects.

00:03:57 Speaker 2

Nevertheless, this vitality, a decidedly human trait, is worthy of celebration by all humans.

00:04:04 Speaker 2

Similarly, other parts of the Middle East that have witnessed devastation have slowly tried to rebuild and rejuvenate.

00:04:12 Speaker 2

In this lecture, we shall discuss the impact of modernization and war on the cultural and urban fabric of the Middle East, and how some societies are reclaiming and restoring their lost heritage.

00:04:28 Speaker 2

Of course, I'm from Sharjah, so I'm going to begin with the Sharjah slide.

00:04:34 Speaker 2

The mention of the UAE conjures up images of last hours and urban development, an aspect of life that seems to have been omnipresent since the formation of the state in the 1970s.

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While these aspects of modernity have come with a lot of blessings and advantages, such as better health care and elimination of illiteracy,

00:04:54 Speaker 2

It has equally resulted in some cases of the erasure of what existed pre-1970s.

00:05:00 Speaker 2

Amongst the victims of this Rafi development was an early 19th century fort that held pride of place in the Emirate of Sharjah as the key site of the town square, looming over mud brick houses, mosques, and markets.

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However, as documented by the ruler of Sharjah himself, in the late 1960s, so modernization claimed the majority of this fort, leaving only one of its four towers standing

00:05:24 Speaker 2

with the rest reduced to rubble.

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However, 30 years after its destruction, the fort has risen once again, with plans based on aerial photography as well as first-hand accounts of Sharjah natives, including my own mother.

00:05:37 Speaker 2

She was called, and they said, could you please remind us which section was the women's section, which section was the men's section, which section weren't you allowed in?

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So oral history plays an important role in revitalization, not just in

00:05:51 Speaker 2

not just in Sharjah, but throughout the Middle East.

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Today, the fort is a major local tourist attraction and a landmark attempt at restoring the Emirates' cultural identity.

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The fort was particularly renowned across the UAE for its intricate motifs.

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Other forts that have been restored in the Emirates include the ones in Fujairah, which have been turned into a museum.

00:06:12 Speaker 2

You can see in the bottom right when what we call Bank Street came up, there was only this

00:06:19 Speaker 2

front right tower that remained, I believe it's this one.

00:06:26 Speaker 2

And then the other, everything else was destroyed and then it was rebuilt.

00:06:43 Speaker 2

Oh, this is one of those slides that's, hold on, continue, scroll, yes.

00:06:53 Speaker 2

In 2017, ISIS terrorists reduced to rubble the 13th century Al-Nuri mosque in Moscow, where their leader has once announced his demands for allegiance and submission

00:07:03 Speaker 2

to their new Islamic state.

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Alongside the mosque's famous Al-Habba, or the Hunchback Minaret, the terror group destroyed more than 100 important historical buildings, including the 19th century Al-Bahara Church and Our Lady of the Our Convert, which were also looted during ISIS's retreat.

00:07:21 Speaker 2

Only a year after the tragic destruction of Mosul, the UAE, the Iraqi government, and the EU with the UNESCO launched survived the Spirit of Mosul initiative.

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This project would see rubble reused

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and traditional building methods employed in the restoration of Mosul's historic neighborhood, with plans to expand the structure to modernize their use.

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In September 2025, the restored Al-Nuri Mosque was inaugurated with VIPs and town folks in attendance.

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All in all, 12,000 tons of debris were cleared, 124 historic houses rebuilt, 7,000 jobs created, and the city regained a significant part

00:08:02 Speaker 2

of its identity.

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Again, it's not just about rebuilding stone.

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It's also about giving the city its identity.

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People see the Chaba and the church as landmarks.

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It's an identity that connected them to the city.

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And now, thanks to this UNESCO initiative, they've been able to reclaim this identity once more.

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One of the most talking buildings in the old city of Hebron and Palestine was the Palestine Hotel.

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which was built in the early 1900s, constructed from local Tubzer limestone.

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It is an early 20th century triangular plan building, blending Palestinian and British Mandate era styles.

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Following the Nakba in 1948, when 700,000 Palestinians lost their homes upon the creation of the state of Israel, the hotel had fallen into disrepair due to constant Israeli attacks and sabotage attempts.

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In 2018, the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee

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worked hand in hand with UNESCO to restore the building to its former glory, and it was subsequently turned into a museum that has attracted school students as well as researchers and the general public, fostering a sense of pride among younger Palestinians.

00:09:12 Speaker 2

Projects such as these not only preserve local identity, especially in the face of occupation policies, but also encourage tourism and serve as a boost to the local economy, bringing cash flow and creating jobs.

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I want to add that there's an entire, there's a new generation of Palestinian architects and researchers, including Dr.

00:09:32 Speaker 2

Nedi Abu Sa'ada, who are researching the early 20th century architecture in Palestine.

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Many of the buildings were unidentifiable, and so this new generation is going through research, archives, and naming architects.

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It's very important to be able to identify the people who have created these buildings.

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Originally built as a caravan-ansarite,

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a sort of roadside inn in 1595 in the north of Syria, in the town of Marut in Narman, and converted into a museum in 1987.

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The Mosaic Museum houses one of the richest collections of late Roman and Byzantine floor mosaics on the region.

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Unfortunately, it suffered heavy damage and looting during the early days of the Civil War in Syria.

00:10:17 Speaker 2

A barrel bomb attack in June 2015 destroyed much of the eastern rules and weakened sections of the roof.

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Thankfully,

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The museum underwent a period of intense preservation and protection during an emergency protection project, a joint effort by multinational NGOs and even the town's locals.

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Thousands of sandbags were used and put up against mosaics.

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Glue and cloth were used as per the advice of mosaic experts, and the holes in the roof were repaired to prevent further damage.

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In 2017, the museum went

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above simple restoration and began upgrading its facilities, introducing new lighting, security, and display fixtures and systems.

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Now that the war is over and Syrian sectarian fractures healing, but still apparent, it's perhaps museums like this, ones that bring Syrians together under a singular, national, historically continuous identity.

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We're going to go to Cairo now.

00:11:13 Speaker 2

In the historic neighborhood of Al-Darb al-Akhmar in Cairo, Beitiya can stand as a rare example

00:11:19 Speaker 2

of a grand Mamluk-era courtyard, perhaps, layered with successive periods of Egyptian architectural districts.

00:11:26 Speaker 2

Originally built in the 1760s, the house was owned by Hassan Aghat or Kalyan, but only gained its current name, the Yekkan House, after it was bought by a prominent Yekkan family member, nephews of Muhammad Ali Pasha, although it's not clear who the house belonged to exactly.

00:11:44 Speaker 2

Despite its prestigious prominence and structure, the house's condition declined due to earthquakes and negligence, and by the early 21st century, it had fallen into severe disrepair and was even used as a butcher shop.

00:11:59 Speaker 2

In 2009, architect-conservator Ala Al-Hadashi purchased and initiated A phased restoration of Beit Yaqam with a dual aim, preserving its architectural heritage and repurposing it as a community-based cultural hub.

00:12:14 Speaker 2

The restoration effort, rehauling the interior and exterior of the house, had a profound effect on the local community as it integrated them, giving them a lost third space to congregate.

00:12:25 Speaker 2

In fact, the locals used to call the building Al-Kharaba, literally the ruins or the dump, and now they have renamed it to Al-Asr, Al-Qasr or the castle, from Al-Kharaba to Al-Asr.

00:12:38 Speaker 2

Today, Beit Yaqel is powered by solar panels.

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hosts a rare book library and serves as a venue for craft workshops, neighborhood meetings, and heritage training programs.

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The Beirut Grand Theater, originally completed in 1929, was designed by Lebanese architect Yusuf Aftmos and constructed by Jacques David.

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The building, despite being a theater, was a popular venue for cultural and literary events in Beirut.

00:13:09 Speaker 2

Its movable steel dome, marble staircases, and even its iconic stained glass lobby ceiling made it one of the most sophisticated cultural venues in Lebanon, hosting plays, operas, and films well into the 1970s.

00:13:24 Speaker 2

Unfortunately, the unique theater was severely damaged during the Lebanese Civil War and subsequently shattered for years despite multiple attempts at restoration.

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In 2025, an international collaboration between UNESCO and the Emirate of Sharjah

00:13:40 Speaker 2

started the restoration efforts once more, perhaps finally bringing the music back to the theater that had been silenced for decades.

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Again, this is not just a theater, but a place where you had literary readings, people congregated.

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So it's important to give this space back to Beirut and to Lebanon.

00:13:59 Speaker 2

Al-Ursheigal Heritage Village is one of the oldest preserved settlements in Saudiya, the central next region.

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Located up to 100 kilometers northwest of Riyaw, this village has been in continuous use ever since the pre-Islamic period, as its strategic location placed it alongside important Hajj and trade routes.

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However, as the 20th century progressed, the allure of nearby bigger cities drew many of the Ashseghar tribe, and the population stooped lower and lower.

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Many of its historic buildings began to erode away due to mud

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the month's fragile qualities.

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However, many families maintained ownership of their ancestral homes, leading to the eventual community-led restoration efforts that preserved the village's historic niche architecture.

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In fact, the locals were the main driving force behind the village's museum.

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These restoration efforts were primarily led by local artisans under government supervision and led to the most renovation being made or conducted with traditional

00:14:59 Speaker 2

material.

00:15:00 Speaker 2

Now the village has been revitalized as a major tourist destination and cultural space for events, festivities, and initiatives.

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Oh, this is my favorite part coming up.

00:15:11 Speaker 2

I'm excited.

00:15:12 Speaker 2

Behind these cultural initiatives are numerous individuals who are leading the way for cultural preservation in the region.

00:15:20 Speaker 2

Let's meet some of them.

00:15:25 Speaker 2

The National Museum of Beirut

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suffered untold losses, including the loss of the majority of historic artifacts, alongside its catalogs, card indices, and photographic archives during the Lebanese Civil War, which are slowly being restored today.

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However, this loss makes it difficult to understand the total size of the museum's pre-war collection.

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The museum was on the conflict's green line, literally between dividing East and West Bay.

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which meant it suffered an unusually high amount of damage.

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Emir Maurice Shahab, the director general and curator of the museum, and his wife Olga Aboud, relied on a lot of hard work and a little bit of trickery to save the country's national heritage.

00:16:11 Speaker 2

Shahab stored smaller items in the museum's basement or in the central bank's vault.

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And according to the Daily Star newspaper, he started a rumor that the museum's treasures

00:16:25 Speaker 2

have been sent abroad, thereby decreasing the chances of looters storming the .

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Furthermore, Shahab relied on barricading immovable objects, such as the Taqofaghai, with concrete cylinder blocks to protect them from explosions, gunfire, and rockets.

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You see this image.

00:16:46 Speaker 2

This was taken in the early '90s when they started removing the concrete blocks that saved the

00:16:54 Speaker 2

the sarcophagi.

00:16:54 Speaker 2

And these are some of the most important ancient sarcophagi anywhere in the world.

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And so you can imagine the weight of the responsibility on his-- thank you.

00:17:10 Speaker 2

On his shoulder, when he decided to barricade the museum's treasures using concrete, what could you do?

00:17:17 Speaker 2

Would you risk, especially when people were making little holes in the museum buildings, militants were making holes in order to shoot at other militants, and they were damaging the museum?

00:17:32 Speaker 2

No cultural revival can take place without individuals who hold keys to a city's cultural heritage.

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Some of these individuals have written books, while others have sacrificed their lives.

00:17:42 Speaker 2

Amongst them was the renowned Syrian archaeologist, Khalid al-Assad, who was the head of antiquities for the city of Palmyra, where he was born,

00:17:51 Speaker 2

In 1932, on August 18th, 2015, at the age of 83, Khaled was confronted by a group of ISIS terrorists who sat on destroying and looting the artifacts from the ancient site that were evacuated from the museum and hidden by Khaled and his team shortly before the arrival of the armed group.

00:18:12 Speaker 2

Unfortunately, Khaled's refusal to lead ISIS to the artifacts led to him being publicly executed.

00:18:19 Speaker 2

It's horrific.

00:18:21 Speaker 2

Today, the restoration of Palmyra is underway with the assistance of Syrian authorities and Russian Academy of Sciences.

00:18:27 Speaker 2

So this is an individual who was given a choice.

00:18:30 Speaker 2

You either tell us where you've hidden some of these antiquities, or we would kill you.

00:18:35 Speaker 2

And he refused.

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And by the way, ISIS terrorists didn't just want to destroy these items.

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Sometimes they wanted to sell them.

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And so this perpetuates a civil war, or perpetuates, not civil war, but really perpetuates the power of such militant groups.

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And so this is an individual who gave his life to save his country's national heritage.

00:18:58 Speaker 2

I can't imagine a braver individual.

00:19:02 Speaker 2

In 2003, the US launched an illegal war on Iraq, bypassing the international community and allies alike.

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In addition to the countless lives lost and infrastructure destroyed, much of Iraq's cultural heritage was either damaged or looted.

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Iraq's National Museum was founding

00:19:19 Speaker 2

as the Baghdad Archaeological Museum dates back to Gertrude Bell's initiative in 1922, was one of the many casualties of the US invasion.

00:19:28 Speaker 2

As a result, the museum lost over 15,000 artifacts dating to as early as the Mesopotamian era, including the famous Waraka vase and one of the earliest known Sumerian freestanding statues.

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Fortunately, an Iraqi Assyrian archaeologist by the name of Donny George

00:19:46 Speaker 2

who was then director general of the museum, spent the following years recovering looted artifacts.

00:19:52 Speaker 2

By the time he died in 2011, he had managed to recover more than half of the stolen items through diligent investigation, which he continued even after fleeing Iraq due to threats from militants.

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On the eve of the invasion, George had pleaded with American soldiers to protect the museum to no avail.

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We know the story, the Americans went straight.

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to the Ministry of Petroleum to protect it.

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So the Americans really didn't care about the country, of course, but they didn't care about the National Museum.

00:20:23 Speaker 2

And for me, I'm wearing my art hat now.

00:20:28 Speaker 2

In addition to this museum, the National Art Museum, which was known then as the Saddam Art Center, lost 7,000 paintings.

00:20:38 Speaker 2

So 7,000 paintings.

00:20:39 Speaker 2

We're going to see a couple of them in a minute or two.

00:20:47 Speaker 2

In the mid-1970s, Sheikha Hassa and her late husband, Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabah, established the Al-Sabah Collection that went on to be exhibited in 1983 in the repurposed American Missionary Hospital, a building that dates back to 1919, you see there on the right, under the banner of Dar al-Athar al-Islami.

00:21:07 Speaker 2

This collection would in a few years become renowned across the world as one of the most prominent collections of Islamic art in private hands.

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Seven years after it went on display, Saddam's forces invaded Kuwait, where its targets included the National Museum and Dar al-Athar, whose looted artifacts were shown on Iraqi television.

00:21:26 Speaker 2

Coincidentally, an important selection of the collection had already been shipped and traveled to the Hermitage Museum in St.

00:21:33 Speaker 2

Petersburg.

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Russia for an exhibition that was inaugurated the very week of the invasion.

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A few months after the liberation of Kuwait, the UN led a recovery mission for the artifacts, which one estimate numbered in the thousands.

00:21:50 Speaker 2

And all but 59 of the artifacts that belonged to Adar al-Athar were recovered.

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This certainly would not have happened without the dedication and the meticulous record-keeping of Sheikh Hasa and her passion for documentation and preservation.

00:22:05 Speaker 2

So thousands of works went missing, and over a decade or so, they were able to recover most of these works because of how well documented this woman's and this lady's collection was.

00:22:20 Speaker 2

Even though this is about the Arab world, but Iran is the extended paper

00:22:26 Speaker 2

and part of our larger family.

00:22:28 Speaker 2

One of the most renowned living film directors is Iran's Jafar Banahi.

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Banahi is the only living and fourth ever director who has won all three major European film awards.

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The Cannes Pandora, the Berlin Golden Bear, and the Venice Biennial's Golden Lion.

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Banahi's latest movie, It Was Just an Accident, was filmed in secret, in defiance of the Iranian regime.

00:22:54 Speaker 2

that had jailed him earlier in 2010 for six years and prevented him from receiving the Berlin Golden Bear Award for his film Taxi, which was also filmed in a taxi dashcam.

00:23:07 Speaker 2

In order to circumvent the Iranian government's restrictions for his latest film, which was France's, not Iran, submission to the Oscars, but now he had to take a few preemptive measures.

00:23:18 Speaker 2

He hired a crew composed mostly of amateur actors,

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just so that nobody follows the famous actors.

00:23:24 Speaker 2

He just got people from the streets, who were not on the government's radar, but gave them the script 24 hours prior to filming.

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And he even supplied a number of fake scripts at hand in case of a police bust.

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He literally had fake scripts of them, you know, just talking about something else, not the movie, on hand.

00:23:45 Speaker 2

Iran's cinema yesterday considered one of the most vibrant in the world.

00:23:48 Speaker 2

And the fact that some of its leading film directors are creating all this beauty, despite restrictions, add a further element of perseverance to their craft.

00:24:00 Speaker 2

We now go to Sudan.

00:24:02 Speaker 2

The ongoing conflict in Sudan has caused the death of tens of thousands and the displacement of 14 million.

00:24:09 Speaker 2

Another casualty of this conflict is Sudan's cultural heritage, including the National Museum, which was officially established in 1971,

00:24:18 Speaker 2

Although it dates earlier, the building itself was built in '71, the museum's idea, I think, was 20 years earlier.

00:24:24 Speaker 2

The museum houses over 100,000 objects from the country's ancient Nubian kingdoms to its Christian and Islamic periods.

00:24:32 Speaker 2

In the summer of 2022, the museum was raided by-- 2023, the museum was raided by the Rapid Support Forces, which is said to have looted and destroyed much of its content.

00:24:46 Speaker 2

Following the recapture of the capital, Khartoum, by Sudanese army this past May, a team led by Rehab Khidr al-Rashid-- I have a picture of her on the next slide-- head of a committee set up to evaluate damage and secure museums and archaeological sites, immediately started assessing the damage, repairing the site, and attempting to retrieve whatever was stolen.

00:25:07 Speaker 2

Notably, this recovery effort is headed by a number of leading women, including Ihlas Abdel-Labif,

00:25:14 Speaker 2

the head of museums at the Sudanese National Antiquities Authority, and Ghalia Jarunedi, the director of Sudan's National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums.

00:25:25 Speaker 2

So I think it's a very important testimony to the Sudanese perseverance and the fact that the men and women are working hand in hand in order to preserve their culture.

00:25:35 Speaker 2

I want you to meet Rihab al-Khalil on the next slide.

00:25:38 Speaker 2

She was supposed to be in the earlier slide, but this is such a beautiful photo of her standing in the fight.

00:25:45 Speaker 2

On the right, you see the pyramids of Malawi, which sits on the bank of the Nile in Sudan and dates back to two and a half thousand years.

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They were also threatened during the ongoing conflict.

00:25:58 Speaker 2

The site, which includes more than 200 pyramids, was deserted, save for its sole caretaker.

00:26:05 Speaker 2

A Sudanese woman by the name of Fawzi Khalid, who, according to newspaper reports, is said to be the last person standing between the looters

00:26:13 Speaker 2

and one of Sudan's prized UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

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The same sites now, more than ever, endangered, and there were efforts by Qatari and Sudanese authorities to preserve them with planned excavations and research projects.

00:26:32 Speaker 2

Sudanese authorities are making an effort to retrieve stolen Sudanese cultural artifacts in collaboration with the Institute of Oriental Studies

00:26:42 Speaker 2

of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

00:26:43 Speaker 2

This is one of my favorite stories.

00:26:48 Speaker 2

At the height of the Egyptian uprising of 2011, tens of thousands of individuals descended on Tahrir Square in the absence of security personnel and government employees.

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The situation left the historic Egyptian Museum in Tahrir in a vulnerable state.

00:27:04 Speaker 2

However, Egyptians took it upon themselves to protect their country's heritage.

00:27:10 Speaker 2

Civilians promptly formed human chains to protect the museum, which was founded in 1902 from not only looting, but from collateral damage.

00:27:20 Speaker 2

As a result of their efforts, only 18 items had disappeared from the ground, from the Egyptian museum.

00:27:36 Speaker 2

The Egyptian Jewish community had been led by a number of prominent women for decades.

00:27:41 Speaker 2

In fact, the last three leaders of the Egyptian

00:27:44 Speaker 2

Jewish community have all been women, and I want to stress on the role that women play in the preservation of cultural heritage in the region.

00:27:52 Speaker 2

Amongst the most prominent was the late Carmen Wiveside, who died in 2013 at the age of 82.

00:27:59 Speaker 2

Carmen championed the preservation of Jewish heritage in Egypt, especially its historic synagogues and cemeteries, such as the Belsatim, Arabic for gardens, which fell into disrepair, and part of it was even used as a garbage dump.

00:28:15 Speaker 2

In her capacity as head of the Jewish community of Egypt, Carmen was able to rally the remaining members of the Jewish community, which numbered in the 10s of thousands just a few decades ago, to once again congregate in the Synagogue.

00:28:34 Speaker 2

So there were about 60 to 80 Jews remaining in Egypt, and some of them were worshipping in different synagogues, and she

00:28:42 Speaker 2

Ask them to all worship in the same synagogue that you can visit in Cairo.

00:28:45 Speaker 2

In the 1990s, when a US-based Jewish group lobbied the Congress to help promote historic Jewish manuscripts and artifacts, she pushed back at what she called the society's insensitive letters, referring to our inevitable extinction.

00:29:05 Speaker 2

Instead, according to the New York Times in 1997, Carmen persuaded

00:29:10 Speaker 2

the government of Egypt to classify the Egyptian Jewish artifacts as Egyptian antiquities, preventing their sale or export.

00:29:19 Speaker 2

And I love this quote.

00:29:20 Speaker 2

She said, Taking the Jewish Sephirim books and records out of Egypt is tantamount to saying that Egypt should demolish the pyramids and the Temple of Luxor because there are no pharaohs left.

00:29:39 Speaker 2

the wrong direction.

00:29:42 Speaker 2

Artist Jabra Ibrahim Jabra was born in French-occupied Adana in 1919 to a Christian Palestinian family who had fled the Assyrian genocide in southern Anatolia.

00:29:55 Speaker 2

After moving to Bethlehem, Jabra would receive a scholarship to study in the UK, first in Exeter and then in Cambridge, not Oxford, unfortunately.

00:30:06 Speaker 2

Unfortunately, during the 1948

00:30:09 Speaker 2

Nakba, soldiers marched into Jabra's house and destroyed the works inside.

00:30:14 Speaker 2

However, Jabra had earlier placed some of his works at the renowned Uas of the Art Center in Jerusalem.

00:30:23 Speaker 2

In 2010, collector and researcher George El-Arma sought to find Jabra's lost works, and after an extensive search, uncovered 12 paintings in a humble car repair shop.

00:30:35 Speaker 2

These works, which had never been seen,

00:30:38 Speaker 2

are now in the collections of the University of Beer Zeit in Palestine, the Delur Art Foundation in Lebanon, Daab and Namr Collection, also in Lebanon, Barjeel Art Foundation, we're lucky to have this work on the left, having gone on display recently in New York's Hessel Museum this past summer.

00:30:56 Speaker 2

So before these votes were uncovered, his paintings had never been seen before.

00:31:02 Speaker 2

Another artist, also important, is Nikol Asay, a Palestinian artist from Jerusalem.

00:31:08 Speaker 2

whose work lay unseen for 46 years.

00:31:12 Speaker 2

The artist, whose works included some of the earliest secular Christian iconography and paintings in the region, died in 1942.

00:31:22 Speaker 2

His paintings, which he often made multiples of to sell, were given to his friend, Farah Zakariyeh, and were taken by Zakariyeh to Bethlehem when he fled Jerusalem in the 1940s.

00:31:36 Speaker 2

Unfortunately,

00:31:37 Speaker 2

Zakalia was killed in 1967 when an Israeli bomb ricocheted off a bell tower and hit him inside his souvenir shop.

00:31:45 Speaker 2

Talk about bad luck.

00:31:51 Speaker 2

Orphaning his six-year-old son, Rajahi.

00:31:53 Speaker 2

In 2013, George and Ahmed, the same George, visited Rajahi and recognized Sayer's paintings from Kamal Bullaba's book, Palestinian Art, 1850 to 2005.

00:32:05 Speaker 2

and followed the threads of the owner's life.

00:32:08 Speaker 2

These works, once forgotten in the back of Jerusalem souvenir shop, were now recovered and are now on display in numerous collections.

00:32:19 Speaker 2

After toppling of the Iraqi Hashemite monarchy in 1958, Iraq's then Prime Minister Abdul

00:32:26 Speaker 2

wanted to erect a symbol in Baghdad that would mark the country's independence and blend of historical cultures.

00:32:33 Speaker 2

Qasim commissioned the famous Iraqi sculptor, Jawad Saleem, to work on the monument.

00:32:39 Speaker 2

He worked with Rafat al-Jaderchi on this, although he did not live to see the monument's completion.

00:32:48 Speaker 2

The Freedom Monument, as it is known, which would henceforth become the place

00:32:52 Speaker 2

in Baghdad for the people to protest against injustice.

00:32:56 Speaker 2

In 2019, the monument became a beacon to Iraq's disgruntled youth who had suffered years of civil wars, large-scale corruption, and poverty.

00:33:05 Speaker 2

These protests eventually sparked nationwide parallel movements, all of which were met with similar levels of extreme violence, leaving hundreds dead and thousands injured.

00:33:15 Speaker 2

Through all this, the Freedom Monument maintained a special place for protesters, who was a victim of government negligence.

00:33:22 Speaker 2

Despite not having the necessary tools or appropriate technical know-how, protesters wanted to honor the monument and renovate it by adding backlights to the structure's relief.

00:33:32 Speaker 2

This movement a great deal to the protesters, adding to their morale and perhaps aiding their resolve.

00:33:40 Speaker 2

Yet it similarly faced criticism as the renovation efforts could have irreparably damaged the structure.

00:33:47 Speaker 2

What's really beautiful about this, I mean, I saw it, I was horrified,

00:33:50 Speaker 2

But there's something so beautiful about it, about Iraqis literally renting a forklift and going and taking rudimentary tools and trying to repair one of the most important and iconic monuments in the Arab world, maybe the most famous and the most recognizable public monument, modern monument in the Arab world.

00:34:13 Speaker 2

I can't think of another one, maybe it's just my brain, but so as you can see,

00:34:19 Speaker 2

The gentleman who shared the tweet is very proud of this, and he has a thumbs up icon, an emoji, but in reality, I think professionals should be doing this work.

00:34:35 Speaker 2

But there's something really beautiful about it.

00:34:42 Speaker 2

In 2006, Iraqi-American Jewish artist Michael Rakowitz

00:34:48 Speaker 2

launched, The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist, a long-term project dedicated to reconstructing the thousands of artifacts looted or destroyed from the Iraqi Museum in Baghdad following the 2003 invasion.

00:35:01 Speaker 2

Using everyday materials such as Arabic newspapers, food packaging, and cardboard, Rakowitz and his team set out to recreate these lost cultural treasures, preserving each object's original scale.

00:35:12 Speaker 2

Perhaps Rakowitz's most ambitious work is his recreation of the Lamassu,

00:35:17 Speaker 2

the winged bull that once guarded the Nergal Gate in Nineveh before it too was destroyed by ISIS in 2015.

00:35:26 Speaker 2

His version, constructed from over 10,000 empty date syrup cans, sourced from Iraqi brands, was installed in London's Ravalgar Square in 2018 as part of the fourth plinth series, simultaneously reviving what was lost and introducing it to a new generation.

00:35:47 Speaker 2

It also happens to be beautiful, to be honest.

00:35:51 Speaker 2

In 2014, only three years after the start of the Syrian Civil War, many in Syria had been displaced, forced to live in tent cities away from their homes, just across a mostly barren desert track and into Jordanian territory.

00:36:07 Speaker 2

The Zaatari refugee camp played host to 80,000 refugees, almost half of whom were children, after realizing that Syrian kids were growing up

00:36:16 Speaker 2

In a foreign land, never having seen Syria or experienced its culture, art from Zaatil, a group of Syrian engineers, teachers, artists, and others, was formed.

00:36:27 Speaker 2

This group set out to recreate or create miniature versions of Syria's most famous cultural landmarks, including the Umayyad Mosque, Aleppo's Citadel, Salahdin's statue, and even the UNHCR tents that they had been living in.

00:36:45 Speaker 2

Due to their difficult living conditions, the group's miniatures were built with whatever they could find, including kebab skewers.

00:36:54 Speaker 2

Yet, despite their modest resources, these groups worked on each project for weeks and even months.

00:37:00 Speaker 2

Eventually, they managed to recreate the city of Palmeira.

00:37:08 Speaker 2

In 1967, Iraqi artist Mehdi Mutashr moved to Paris at the age of 24.

00:37:14 Speaker 2

when he studied at the Ecole des Bosa.

00:37:17 Speaker 2

There, he was inspired by the work of Jean Ah.

00:37:21 Speaker 2

After getting married and settling in the town of Al, he established his studios in the city's heart, where he continued to not only create, but also correspond with colleagues and mentors, including Shakir Hassan Said, the co-founder of the Baghdad Modern Art Group.

00:37:37 Speaker 2

Sadly, in December 2003, the town of Al

00:37:41 Speaker 2

suffered a catastrophic flood that submerged Mehdi's studio for weeks on end, destroying the majority of his work, as well as much of his archive.

00:37:52 Speaker 2

I went to see him last year in Arab.

00:37:54 Speaker 2

He told me he lost all but 15 of his paintings.

00:37:58 Speaker 2

Everything else was gone.

00:37:59 Speaker 2

All the letters, all the correspondences, all the pictures, all the images, all the albums, all gone.

00:38:08 Speaker 2

Mehdi decided to focus his energy on the process of recreation.

00:38:13 Speaker 2

After a long, thought-out process, Mehdi selected certain works that he felt best reflected his philosophy in art and set out to recreate these works.

00:38:24 Speaker 2

This process was based on memory, archival photographs, and some sketches that survived.

00:38:30 Speaker 2

The resulted pieces, including this painting from our collection ,, titled Zone 3 AB,

00:38:36 Speaker 2

which he recreated in 2015, is based on a 1969 original.

00:38:42 Speaker 2

Although Mehndi spoke about highlighting slight discrepancies, perhaps in the size or shade of the color, the spirit of the work is retained.

00:38:50 Speaker 2

So Mehndi's work really thinks about dimensionality.

00:38:53 Speaker 2

So he's inspired by Islamic philosophy.

00:38:55 Speaker 2

So his work thinks about space, direction, and dimensionality.

00:39:01 Speaker 2

So he says that, for example, in Islam, when you pray,

00:39:04 Speaker 2

You think about, if you put the Sajjada, the prayer mat, you occupy that rectangular space.

00:39:10 Speaker 2

You have to be facing that direction.

00:39:13 Speaker 2

So all of this is integrated into his artworks.

00:39:19 Speaker 2

And he was devastated when he lost his art, when he lost his paintings.

00:39:22 Speaker 2

So he started looking for photographic, so images, for example, of openings.

00:39:28 Speaker 2

And he was zooming into them and he started recreating all his lost, not all, but some of his lost paintings.

00:39:34 Speaker 2

And I feel like that's such a beautiful reflection on rebuilding what was lost one day.

00:39:42 Speaker 2

In October 2024, the Khal Shoman Foundation, Dar al-Funim, exhibited the works of Palestinian artists who had been displaced among droves of civilians by Israel's genocide of the Gaza Strip.

00:39:55 Speaker 2

The works in this exhibition, titled Under Fire, were made by a handful of artists, such as Basil al-Maqousi,

00:40:03 Speaker 2

Majid Shala, Ra'ad Lisa, and Suhail Salem.

00:40:06 Speaker 2

With modest resources, instead of canvases, torn pages from the unruwa packages were used.

00:40:12 Speaker 2

Tea and even pomegranate seeds were used instead of color base.

00:40:18 Speaker 2

The scenes, despite their simplicity in production, are harrowing, evoking a sense of reality Gazans lived through every day.

00:40:26 Speaker 2

These works now represent not only the artist's own plight and struggle for survival in life,

00:40:32 Speaker 2

but their own journey out of Gaza to Egypt, carried by humanitarian workers, and on to Jordan.

00:40:38 Speaker 2

So I went to this exhibition, and I was so moved by these artworks.

00:40:45 Speaker 2

And the way that they were carried out of Gaza was one of the UNRWA workers agreed to carry them.

00:40:52 Speaker 2

They're very small.

00:40:53 Speaker 2

They're only A4 sizes, and so that's all that can be carried.

00:40:58 Speaker 2

But this is a testimony, I think, to the perseverance

00:41:01 Speaker 2

of the spirit of the people in Gaza.

00:41:09 Speaker 2

While some artworks in Gaza, like the ones whose works the afternoon displayed, managed to make their way out, others were not so fortunate.

00:41:16 Speaker 2

For instance, the artwork of , who was born in Gaza in 1947, are some of the most recognizable scenes from the territory.

00:41:25 Speaker 2

Despite never receiving formal training in art, Fatih's use of both colors and imagery alongside his talent gave him a steady stream of income.

00:41:34 Speaker 2

Unfortunately, mounting respiratory problems, which were compounded by the dust incurred by Hezza's bombings and the Israeli refusal to allow Fatih to leave the script for medical attention resulted in his demise in February of this year.

00:41:49 Speaker 2

After the ceasefire announcement, while searching amongst his once-home problem,

00:41:54 Speaker 2

that his son found his father's work, titled Identity, one of his father's most important works, caked in dust, but still in one piece.

00:42:04 Speaker 2

I had an image of it, it's not here, but I'm hoping that this video will work and I can show you what it looks like.

00:42:11 Speaker 1

It's a very moving image his son sent it to me a couple of months ago.

00:42:52 Speaker 2

So, again, there are many artists whose works were destroyed and are still under the bubble in Gaza.

00:43:02 Speaker 2

It's two entire studios of artists like Ahmed Al-Hawajri, Dina Matar, the entire collective that worked with all the works of Hazm Harbar Gone.

00:43:11 Speaker 2

And so these are individuals that we know and we interact with.

00:43:14 Speaker 2

And it was so, it was a very moving moment for the son to find his father's famous artwork.

00:43:21 Speaker 2

In 2006, an exhibition titled The Gaza at the Crossroads of Civilization opened in the Musee d'ar d'Estoire de Genin.

00:43:30 Speaker 2

where 529 artifacts went on display, showcasing 5,000 years of Gaza's history.

00:43:38 Speaker 2

Following Hamas's takeover of the territory in 2007, these artifacts became stranded for 17 years at the Geneva Freeport and created and ready to be shipped at any moment.

00:43:49 Speaker 2

So there was an exhibition called Gaza at the Crossroads of Civilization.

00:43:54 Speaker 2

It was in Geneva.

00:43:55 Speaker 2

It opened, it closed,

00:43:56 Speaker 2

And just as they were about to send it back to Gaza, Hamas took over and the Egyptians wouldn't allow any work to go through.

00:44:02 Speaker 2

And the whole thing, you know, all the access was closed to Gaza.

00:44:07 Speaker 2

And so the works have stayed in Geneva for 17 years.

00:44:12 Speaker 2

In a way, it's fortunate in one way.

00:44:16 Speaker 2

I don't know how to say that, but so they survived.

00:44:23 Speaker 2

Following the events of October, 2023,

00:44:26 Speaker 2

The Institut de Mont d'Arab in Paris mounted an exhibition that displayed a selection of 87 from the original show in order to spotlight Ghazal lost heritage.

00:44:38 Speaker 2

The artifacts include works from the collection of Jaud al-Khudari, a Gazan collector whose museum known as was targeted by the Israeli military and destroyed in December 2023.

00:44:49 Speaker 2

So the images you see here are from the latest exhibition.

00:44:54 Speaker 2

So in a way, there's over 500 artworks on Gaza that are in storage in Switzerland and in France that can go back one day when the museum is rebuilt.

00:45:07 Speaker 2

In 1973, the renowned Palestinian artist, Liman Nansour, who knows Liman Nansour's work?

00:45:12 Speaker 2

Hands up.

00:45:15 Speaker 2

So in 1973, the renowned Palestinian artist, Liman Nansour, created one of his most enduring paintings, the Camel of Burdens.

00:45:22 Speaker 2

The artwork depicts an elderly man, known as the or porter, carrying the likeness of Jerusalem on his back.

00:45:31 Speaker 2

These porters would carry goods, anything from bags of rice to refrigerators, on their back and roam the narrow streets of Jerusalem.

00:45:41 Speaker 2

The painting was reproduced by a printing house in Jerusalem, called Salah Haddin's Publishing, and turned into a poster in 1975

00:45:51 Speaker 2

becoming one of the most recognizable Palestinian artworks in history due to its dissemination.

00:45:56 Speaker 2

This is a true story.

00:45:59 Speaker 2

When the work was exhibited in London in 1973, the Libyan ambassador acquired it and gifted it to Qaddafi, who was understood to have put it on display in Bab al-Aziziyya compound, the White House of Libya.

00:46:20 Speaker 2

where he resided.

00:46:22 Speaker 2

However, in 1986, following accusations of Libyan involvement in a terror attack in Berlin, President Ronald Reagan ordered the bombing of the compound.

00:46:33 Speaker 2

Alongside human casualties in the attack, the painting was destroyed.

00:46:38 Speaker 2

In 2005, Fleman Mansour agreed to make a second version of the painting, which today sits in the Delul Art Foundation collection in Beirut.

00:46:47 Speaker 2

As a side note, the artist had created

00:46:49 Speaker 2

A third version, which is today in a private collection in London.

00:46:53 Speaker 2

Maybe I could just point out the differences between the first and the second version.

00:46:58 Speaker 2

This is the first version, this is the second version.

00:47:00 Speaker 2

The first version, the rope was made of a circular material, which is not feasible if you're carrying a lot of weight.

00:47:13 Speaker 2

So he changed it to the correct belt.

00:47:17 Speaker 2

type.

00:47:17 Speaker 2

So if you want to carry something heavy, you can't put a rope on your forehead, otherwise you bleed.

00:47:21 Speaker 2

The second thing is, despite this artist being of the Christian faith, he forgot to add churches in the original version and maybe added churches in the second one.

00:47:35 Speaker 2

So we're all the same.

00:47:38 Speaker 2

I like this section because this is more art.

00:47:42 Speaker 2

Okay, so

00:47:47 Speaker 2

In 2017, Christie's Auction House offered a painting by Fayed Hassan, one of the leading artists of the Iraqi modernist era, depicting the Battle of Hattin for sale.

00:47:59 Speaker 2

As I shared it on my Facebook account, it's caught the interest of an Iraqi, it's caught the eye of a veteran Iraqi art historian based in Amman.

00:48:12 Speaker 2

Dr.

00:48:13 Speaker 2

Ehsan Fatih, I did hide his e-mail.

00:48:19 Speaker 2

Dr.

00:48:19 Speaker 2

Ehsan Fatih informed me that the work had been stolen following the US invasion of Iraq.

00:48:25 Speaker 2

This is the original e-mail I got.

00:48:28 Speaker 2

I forwarded his comments to Christie's, which subsequently withdrew the painting from the auction.

00:48:35 Speaker 2

The artwork, instead of being returned to Iraq, however, was sent back to the collector.

00:48:41 Speaker 2

The good news

00:48:42 Speaker 2

is that the work has been located and found and was not destroyed in the post-2003 location, where, as I said, 7,000 works were destroyed.

00:48:52 Speaker 2

The not so good news is that it's not returned to the museum yet.

00:48:55 Speaker 2

It's worth considering that the current owner may have purchased this work in good faith, and therefore, a mechanism needs to be established to ensure that individuals who unwittingly acquire stolen works are partially or free

00:49:11 Speaker 2

compensated.

00:49:17 Speaker 2

In 2006, Christie's offered another painting by Iraq's Shaq al-Hassan al-Said titled Peasant.

00:49:25 Speaker 2

It was sold for \$31,000, despite being listed on the Interpol's database of stolen Iraqi artworks under the title Farmer.

00:49:35 Speaker 2

The discrepancy may have resulted from a translation error, as the two words are often used interchangeably.

00:49:42 Speaker 2

Instances like this make it clearer than ever that the global cooperation is essential to ensure that artworks and artifacts are returned to their rightful collections.

00:49:52 Speaker 2

Greater education and awareness are needed about the resources one can consult beyond the Interpol list, such as this list by ICOM's Emergency Red List for Black Use Pole and Archives.

00:50:09 Speaker 2

I just want to show you, let me see in the previous slide here.

00:50:12 Speaker 2

So this is the painting in the Interpol.

00:50:15 Speaker 2

But by the way, Interpol's website has some really cool stuff.

00:50:20 Speaker 2

So I would highly suggest if you have some time off, go on the Interpol website and check out their stolen artworks list.

00:50:28 Speaker 2

And maybe you see it in an auction and you can alert the auction houses.

00:50:31 Speaker 2

Auction houses don't want to sell stolen works.

00:50:34 Speaker 2

It really is a hassle for them.

00:50:36 Speaker 2

And this is the work

00:50:39 Speaker 2

that it was sold.

00:50:41 Speaker 2

But fortunately, these things are getting recovered one by one.

00:50:46 Speaker 2

And also, you can consult the ICOM website that has a lot of stolen artifacts listed on it.

00:51:01 Speaker 2

When dealing with stolen artifacts, there's often a third space between the original owner and the current holder.

00:51:08 Speaker 2

In some cases, these third spaces are museums.

00:51:11 Speaker 2

One such example is the Naboo Museum in Lebanon, founded in 2018 by a group of Lebanese and Syrian collectors.

00:51:20 Speaker 2

Soon after its opening, the museum faced criticisms from academics and historians who accused it of displaying looted artifacts from Lebanon and the wider region.

00:51:30 Speaker 2

In this instance, the museum's owners acknowledged the issue and promised to return the artifacts once conditions improved in their countries of origin.

00:51:39 Speaker 2

Four years later, in 2022, the museum partially fulfilled that promise by returning more than 300 artifacts to Iraq.

00:51:47 Speaker 2

And so it's very interesting that, you know, do you encourage this?

00:51:51 Speaker 2

Do you encourage the fact that some collectors are buying stolen artifacts if they promise to return them one day?

00:51:58 Speaker 2

And again, a mechanism should be thought of one day of how to compensate these individuals.

00:52:04 Speaker 2

Maybe they should just be given an award,

00:52:07 Speaker 2

or recognition and not given money, for example.

00:52:10 Speaker 2

Damascus rooms were reception chambers found in affluent Damasin homes from the late Ottoman period, particularly the 18th and 19th centuries, often decorated with poetry, carved into wood, Persian carpets, and ceramics.

00:52:25 Speaker 2

Many Damascus rooms were later dismantled and sold abroad during the 20th century, ending up in museums across Europe and North America.

00:52:35 Speaker 2

as rare surviving examples of Syrian domestic art and architecture.

00:52:40 Speaker 2

One such room was acquired by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, also known as the LACMA, in 2014, after it had been in a Lebanese family storage room for decades.

00:52:54 Speaker 2

The room was restored with Saudi help, particularly the King Abdul Aziz Center for World Culture, also called ISRA.

00:53:03 Speaker 2

As part of a partnership, LACMA agreed to lend the room and 130 artworks from its collection for Itha's opening in 2016, where it went on display for three years.

00:53:16 Speaker 2

So this is an interesting example of collaboration between an entity in the Arab world and the museum in the West for them to restore and lend the works.

00:53:24 Speaker 2

By the way, this room on the left here is a room

00:53:27 Speaker 2

I believe that Saudis ended up buying one.

00:53:30 Speaker 2

So unfortunately or fortunately, you could still buy Damascus rooms until today, and I hope they get protected and not exported anymore.

00:53:41 Speaker 2

Oh, this is my favorite part of the presentation.

00:53:47 Speaker 2

At the height of the 2023-2025 Ghazda genocide, the Israeli government imposed a debilitating food blockade

00:53:56 Speaker 2

on the civilian population of 2 million that lasted more than three months.

00:54:02 Speaker 2

Faced with the prospect of starvation, inhabitants took the initiative to grow basic foodstuffs such as spinach and green beans, even sharing what to them are little miracles on social media, both to raise morale and teach others how to farm with what few resources they had.

00:54:20 Speaker 2

So you know what's interesting that the Palestinians and Gaza were sharing?

00:54:24 Speaker 2

It wasn't only for us to view and like and feel good about ourselves, but honestly, they were also teaching each other on the other side, like this is how you cook, this is how you prepare meals using one specific plant that they called the hobbesa.

00:54:41 Speaker 2

Did I say if I had any Palestinians in the room, hobbesa?

00:54:43 Speaker 2

Is that what it is, hobbesa?

00:54:45 Speaker 2

Okay.

00:54:45 Speaker 2

It is similar to spinach or kale that naturally sprouts after rain.

00:54:51 Speaker 2

And this hobbesa plant made-up a significant part

00:54:54 Speaker 2

of their diet, even fashioning it into pies, soups, and porridges.

00:54:59 Speaker 2

I have a beautiful video that I hope works.

00:55:40 Speaker 2

It's very moving.

00:55:59 Speaker 2

The Palestinian tradition, the Palestinian song tradition, known as ,

00:56:05 Speaker 2

was sung by women to air their joys and grievances alike.

00:56:09 Speaker 2

In the early 20th century, under the British mandate, Palestinian women would encrypt their songs and speeches by adding the letter L into the middle of words to prevent the British soldiers from understanding what they were saying.

00:56:25 Speaker 2

These tarawids were often sung outside prisons, allowing women to speak to their prison family members, such as the occupiers,

00:56:33 Speaker 2

First, the British and then Israeli would consider it gibberish.

00:56:38 Speaker 2

Through this adaptive use of language and music, a culture of solidarity was able to emerge between Palestinian women.

00:56:45 Speaker 2

It's very interesting, you don't associate Talawid with men, you associate mostly with women.

00:56:50 Speaker 2

And I think I have a video here, or it's not a video, just an audio.

00:57:02 Speaker 2

Can you understand that this is Arabic?

00:57:26 Speaker 1

It's a secret language between women.

00:57:39 Speaker 2

Is that nice?

00:57:41 Speaker 2

Get to keep men out of their lives.

00:57:44 Speaker 2

Okay.

00:57:46 Speaker 2

In the early 1900s, National Geographic sent photographers into the Holy Land to document the people living there.

00:57:52 Speaker 2

Many of the people in these pictures would stay unidentified.

00:57:56 Speaker 2

However, in 2017, writer, researcher, and community archivist Yazam Upti, who was working with National Geographic, started an Instagram account called Imagining the Holi, where many of these photographs were shared and people were able to recognize their parents and grandparents in them, giving names to unknown figures.

00:58:17 Speaker 2

Amongst the people who were identified was Sara Johari's mother.

00:58:22 Speaker 2

This exercise is important because it turns these images from unknown anthropological depictions into stories of people and families.

00:58:30 Speaker 2

Furthermore, this project has also brought into life personal images of important Palestinian cultural figures, such as the artist Jumana Hosseini, seen here in her home drawing.

00:58:41 Speaker 2

By the way, I identified her for the project.

00:58:45 Speaker 2

But as you can see, people here identifying their mothers, their grandmothers,

00:58:49 Speaker 2

The 3D is a beautiful account on Instagram.

00:58:53 Speaker 2

I suggest you follow it.

00:58:57 Speaker 2

Kehab Jahirian, a Palestinian-Armenian from Gaza, stumbled on what remained of his paternal grandfather and namesake, photographic archive.

00:59:08 Speaker 2

Kehab Sr.

00:59:09 Speaker 2

had an extensive career as a photographer from 1944 to 1967 in Gaza.

00:59:16 Speaker 2

also a witness to some of the most important historical events in the territory, documenting not only daily life, but also turning points in the strip.

00:59:26 Speaker 2

These include the visits of Che Guevara, who visited in 1959, and President Gamal Abdel Nasser's visit in 1955.

00:59:34 Speaker 2

Similar to imagining the Holies account, Kaham shared his archive and allowed numerous individuals to recognize their family members, adding color to Gaza's history.

00:59:45 Speaker 2

In fact, Kirham's effort has inspired people to dig into Gaza's history and use it as an artistic inspiration for their intermediate work, like Krafik Balnan's The City before it was transformed.

00:59:57 Speaker 2

Can I have a picture of it?

00:59:58 Speaker 2

Oops, this is the archive here.

01:00:02 Speaker 2

Kirham's efforts, however, are not singular.

01:00:05 Speaker 2

as he utilizes a QR code that people can scan and use to send their own pictures to upload, turning it into a community effort to reclaim the history that was lost.

01:00:15 Speaker 2

So people are uploading pictures of Gaza and identifying areas.

01:00:19 Speaker 2

It's creating this beautiful community online.

01:00:22 Speaker 2

Not everything online is horrible, by the way.

01:00:24 Speaker 2

A lot of good things happen online.

01:00:26 Speaker 2

So these are pictures here on the left, people saying, oh, that's my dad, that's my mom.

01:00:32 Speaker 2

It really is incredible.

01:00:34 Speaker 2

the community that was formed.

01:00:36 Speaker 2

And I think I have a picture.

01:00:37 Speaker 2

Here, you see one of Karam Jarian's photographs in the middle that was later-- that basically inspired a painting by an artist called Ra'at Ba'lan, who's based in Utah, a Syrian artist.

01:00:53 Speaker 2

We're getting to the end of the presentation.

01:00:56 Speaker 2

During the latter years of the Syrian Civil War, the reality of many Syrian children constituted

01:01:04 Speaker 2

living in squalor conditions amongst Romans or dilapidated tent cities.

01:01:10 Speaker 2

Syrian musician Ghalia Shakir came across countless stories of children traumatized by scenes and sounds of death and destruction, giving them countless sleepers.

01:01:20 Speaker 2

Ghalia then took it upon herself to record a series of unique children's lullabies specifically for seriously traumatized children.

01:01:28 Speaker 2

These lullabies were collaborations with neuroscientists and music therapists

01:01:33 Speaker 2

with the aim of calming kids' nerves, allowing their minds to be occupied with pleasant imagery of birds, nature, and peace, as opposed to their stark reality.

01:01:45 Speaker 2

This particular lullaby goes, Close your eyes, your beautiful eyes, to see stars who shine only for you.

01:01:55 Speaker 2

This lullaby, amongst others, were broadcast across refugee camps

01:02:00 Speaker 2

on hijacked radio waves.

01:02:02 Speaker 2

Isn't that great?

01:02:03 Speaker 2

Allowing displaced Syrian children to drown out the noises of what they had gotten accustomed to.

01:02:09 Speaker 2

So we're going to listen to one of the Syrian lullabies now.

01:03:14 Speaker 2

So, over the past hour, we have encountered examples of vitality in the Arab world, a region that has seen more than its fair share of strife and conflict.

01:03:23 Speaker 2

We have seen examples of cross-border collaborations in order to safeguard cultural heritage.

01:03:28 Speaker 2

We have seen attempts to recreate what had been lost, whether in music, art, or architecture.

01:03:33 Speaker 2

We have seen examples of men and women risking and sometimes even losing their lives

01:03:37 Speaker 2

for the sake of their cultural heritage and ultimately their identity.

01:03:41 Speaker 2

This is not to whitewash the tragic events that have adversely affected the region, its people, and its cultural heritage from Yemen to Sudan, Libya to Syria, and of course, in Palestine.

01:03:53 Speaker 2

But we draw inspiration from Mustafa Yahic, who saved the priceless collection of Bosnia's National Library in 1992, from the Odessa Museum of Western and Eastern Art in Ukraine, whose breathtaking collection was moved to Germany

01:04:07 Speaker 2

following the Russian invasion in 2022, and shown at the Gimpel Gallery, and from Brazil's National Museum, which was destroyed in a fire in 2018 and reopened just this past summer, following a painstaking process of frustration and rebuilding.

01:04:24 Speaker 2

The Arab world is not unknown from natural and man-made disasters that have left much of its cultural heritage at risk or destroyed.

01:04:32 Speaker 2

However, it is equally a site of rehabilitation and ignore

01:04:36 Speaker 2

and cultural vitality.

01:04:37 Speaker 2

Thank you very much.