

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Wassef Boutros-Ghali

Leila Heller Gallery is delighted to announce its participation in Art Basel Qatar 2026 (booth D215). The gallery's presentation will showcase a curated selection of works by Wassef Boutros-Ghali.

Boutros-Ghali's compositions are dynamic; they seem to breathe, their tensions and harmonies suggesting the shifting light, landscapes, and cultural forms that informed his vision. His work resonates with a timeless universality, yet carries the imprint of a life lived between continents. Architectural forms emerge, collide and reengineer themselves without a narrative in dazzling abstract compositions. With subjects based on mythology, on nuanced observations of daily life or stories conjured with the simplicity of dreams, Boutros-Ghali's artwork speaks to the pure and unrestricted physicality of painting. Each piece demonstrates his mastery in balancing architectural rigor with the sensibility of a painter, transforming pure geometry into a language of contemplation and a constant state of visual flux.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Cairo to a family of statesmen and politicians, Wassef Boutros-Ghali was drawn to the arts at an early age. As a teenager he demonstrated great natural skill as a draftsman. He joined the studio of Jaro Hilbert, a classically trained painter and inspirational teacher. Boutros-Ghali set aside the political legacy of his family and devoted himself to a career in architecture, and then turned to painting. Boutros-Ghali served as a technical consultant for the environment and urbanism with the United Nations and executed buildings in Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Sudan, in addition to growing his commitment to his artwork. Initially working in oil on canvas, Wassef Boutros-Ghali's practice was reshaped by political upheaval and his 1963 relocation, which led him to create a series of china-ink drawings. Their constraints offered refuge and introduced a free-flowing quality that would inform his later work and sustain his lifelong passion for drawing. A 1971 move to New York marked an awakening. Immersed in the city's vitality, abstract expressionism and minimalist design, his canvases grew larger, acrylics replaced oils, and figurative improvisations gave way to overt abstraction. In the spirit of Rothko and Reinhardt, surfaces drenched in singular color allowed his geometric forms to come alive. A return to Cairo in 1985 finally allowed Boutros-Ghali the freedom to pursue his practice without interruption. Increasingly the artist sought to harness vibrant color to articulate motion/energy within the box of the canvas. His later compositions reflect a meticulous yet openhearted response to the human condition; marvels of reason buoyed by a lifetime's worth of lyricism. Wassef Boutros-Ghali passed away on March 15, 2023 at 98 years old in Cairo. He painted every day until his death.

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ABOUT THE GALLERY

Since its establishment in New York City in 1982, Leila Heller Gallery has gained international recognition in fostering creative dialogue between Western and Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and Southeast Asian artists, and specializing in modern and contemporary masters. In 2015, the gallery expanded to Dubai, opening a 17,500 square foot space, the largest gallery in the Middle East. The gallery presents dynamic exhibition schedules in collaboration with world-renowned curators, often hosting panels and film screenings, as well as producing catalogues and books for each exhibition. Each year the gallery participates in major international art fairs and stages off-site projects. Gallery artists have consistently participated in international museum exhibitions and biennials, and are included in institutional collections such as The Metropolitan Museum, The Tate Museum, the Guggenheim Museum, Louvre Abu Dhabi, the Brooklyn Museum, LACMA, MOCA LA, the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, the British Museum, Centre Pompidou, S.M.A.K. in Ghent, and the Sharjah Art Museum, among many others.