

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

'A Retrospective (1965-2016)'

By

Waseef Boutros Ghali



Egyptian Wedding, 1972, 22.5 x 28.5 ", Felt on Paper

Dubai, UAE – Leila Heller Gallery is delighted to announce the upcoming solo exhibition, a curated selection of paintings and works on paper by Waseef Boutros Ghali, titled **'A Retrospective (1965 - 2016)'** opening on 3rd October, 2025.

Spanning several decades, these works reveal Boutros-Ghali's distinctive balance between architectural order and painterly intuition. In both the large-scale canvases and intimate paper compositions, intersecting planes, subtle tonal shifts, and spatial rhythms evoke a meditative language that transcends geography, rooted in modernist ideals.

In both mediums, 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.

Boutros-Ghali challenges the traditional and leading convention of figuration with his commitment to abstraction as a modernist method of self-expression. 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, Wassif 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 devote 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.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Since its establishment over four decades ago in New York, Leila Heller Gallery has gained worldwide recognition as a pioneer in promoting a creative dialogue and exchange between Western artists and Middle Eastern, Central and Southeast Asian artists. It has garnered a reputation for identifying and cultivating the careers of artists leaving a lasting impact on contemporary art and culture. Currently representing a diverse roster of Western, Central Asian, Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern artists, the gallery is also active in the American, European, and Middle Eastern secondary art markets. In November 2015, Leila Heller Gallery opened its first international location in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. At 16,000 square feet, the state of the art gallery features three exhibition spaces, making it the largest gallery in the UAE. Showcasing leading regional and international artists, many of whom will be presenting their work in the Middle East. In addition to presenting a dynamic exhibition schedule, Leila Heller Gallery actively organizes shows with world renowned curators, hosts educational panels and film screenings, and produces catalogs and books with scholarly essays. Each year the gallery participates in major international art fairs and stages off-site projects as a platform for exploring new conversations within a wider context of galleries, artists and institutions. Gallery artists have consistently participated in international museum exhibitions and biennials, and are included in leading institutional collections worldwide.