

# LEILA HELLER GALLERY.



*Untitled*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 85 x 69.8 cm | 33.5 x 27.5 in.

New York, NY – Leila Heller Gallery is delighted to announce the solo exhibition *Wassef Boutros-Ghali: A Retrospective & Book Launch*, opening on 12 May 2026.

Wassef Boutros-Ghali's compositions convey a vivid sense of movement, their tensions and harmonies evoking shifting light, landscapes, and the cultural influences that informed his vision. Moving away from the conventions of figuration, he embraces abstraction as a modernist form of self-expression. Boutros-Ghali's paintings demonstrate a refined balance between architectural precision and painterly sensitivity, transforming geometry into a contemplative language marked by constant visual flux.

Spanning his distinct creative phases, the works in this exhibition reflect an enduring artistic legacy shaped across Cairo, Paris, and New York City. Boutros-Ghali's practice was informed by both cultural hybridity and political upheaval, and his paintings mirror this duality, balancing a sense of instability with the order of architectural form. By uniting these works, the exhibition presents a cohesive narrative of his artistic development. The artist's catalogue raisonné, prepared by Skira, was published in May 2026.

## 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 early as 12 years old 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.

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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. Though oil on canvas was initially the artist's preferred medium, political revolution and a necessary relocation in 1963 interrupted the evolution of his work as well as his choice of materials. Without the luxury of space and with a limited access to painting supplies, Boutros-Ghali produced a series of china ink drawings. The limitations of this new medium provided the artist a tremendous refuge. His experiments veered from abstract to surrealist to constructivist. The free-flowing aspect of the work from this period continues to inform later works and drawing remains a passion.

A move to New York in 1971 also served as a kind of awakening. The vivacity of the city, the art world buzz of abstract expressionism and the power of minimalist painting and design re-energized his artistic practice. Canvases became larger in scale. Acrylics replaced oils as the medium of choice. Figurative improvisations gave way to overtly abstract forms. In the spirit of Rothko and Reinhardt, his canvases sought equilibrium by way of surfaces drenched in singular color. Thus, his nuanced geometric forms became alive inside the field. 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 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 up until his death.

## 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.