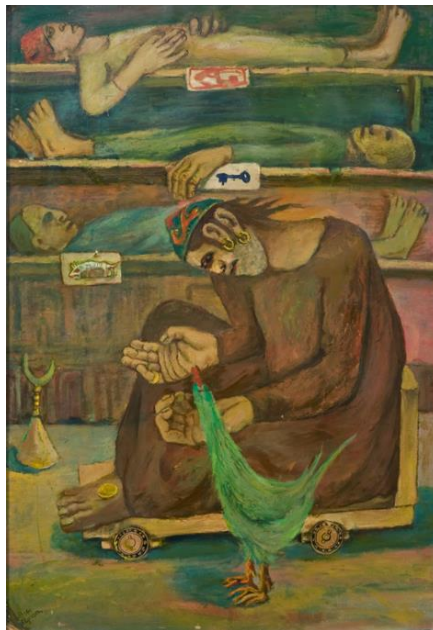


CHRISTIE'S

PRESS RELEASE | LONDON
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 18 JUNE 2018

MIDDLE EASTERN ART – SECOND LONDON AUCTION

UNSEEN FOR THE LAST 30 YEARS, EGYPTIAN MASTERPIECE LEADS SALE ON 24 OCTOBER 2018



Abdel Hadi El Gazzar
An Ear of Mud, an Ear of Paste, 1951
Estimate: £350,000-450,000
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Dubai / London – *An Ear of Mud, an Ear of Paste*, executed by one of the most sought after Modern Egyptian Masters, Abdel Hadi El Gazzar (1925-1966 / estimate: £350,000-450,000) will lead Christie's second auction of Middle Eastern Art in London, to take place on 24 October 2018. This is the second time Christie's has held its October sale in London.

Painted in 1951, *An Ear of Mud, an Ear of Paste* has been part of the Janna and George Laudato collection since 1986, when it was gifted to them by Janna's mother, whilst living in Cairo. Abdel Hadi El Gazzar will be the subject of Valérie Didier Hess and Dr. Hussam Rashwan's second catalogue raisonné when it is published later in 2019, with the help of the Abdel Hadi El Gazzar Foundation. In 2017, Hess and Dr. Rashwan published the first ever catalogue raisonné on any Middle Eastern artist on the work of Mahmoud Saïd.

El Gazzar is known to have only produced around 100 paintings in his short life, of which 30 are to be found in institutions or private collections and around 25 works are still in the

possession of the artist's family. El Gazzar completed only 14 paintings in 1951, of which *An Ear of Mud, an Ear of Paste* is the largest. Painted in the artist's so-called "popular or folk" period, where El Gazzar explored a wider range of subjects, symbols and pictorial means. This work refers to Egyptian history, heritage, tradition, beliefs, as well as being rich in terms of folkloric and Islamic symbols.

In 1949 El Gazzar was arrested and jailed by King Farouk's forces for his controversial painting "The Theater of Life", today exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art, Cairo. The fact of being silenced re-invigorated El Gazzar's wish to represent the realities of the poor and their life struggles and included magic symbols, folk beliefs and rituals in his works that these people believed in. Egypt was struck by disease and a severe food shortage during these years and in 1949 the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood was assassinated, leading to the military coup in 1952. A year before, the Buhut massacre had taken place, when peasants rebelled against the local landlords with regards to their appalling work conditions.

This was the environment to which El Gazzar reacted in 1951 with *An Ear of Mud, An Ear of Paste*. The title refers to a popular saying: a person refusing to listen to anyone and rejecting any type of discussion. El Gazzar provides a literal interpretation of this folkloric pun, which also alludes to ignorance, laziness and negativity, represented by the curled up central figure, closing himself to the external world, and whose two ears are placed on the same side of his head to emphasise his choice of isolation from any possible discussion.



Compositionally, El Gazzar emphasises the idea of this two-eared figure being stuck in his own world of misery by placing him at the centre of an oppressive space, filled up with shelves in the background on which appears to be dead bodies, recalling Ancient Egyptian tombs. Whether the bodies behind him are dead or asleep, the beggar is no different than them in terms of being deaf, mute and motionless, as if he is waiting to be neatly 'put away' on a similar shelf. The coin laid down on his foot may hint to his daily activity as a beggar but it could also allude, on a more metaphorical level, to his only belonging he will have when he dies, recalling the Ancient Egyptian rituals of the Journey of Death.



Behind him, the three lifeless bodies seem to be reduced to objects, given that three labels with three different drawings, a red motif, a key and a four-legged animal appear to differentiate them on the shelves. El Gazzar's painting can also be seen as a provocation to the elite and the regime, exposing the tragedies of the poor, and how they are excluded in their misery. El Gazzar gives the poor a voice through his paintbrush and puts them in the spotlight as he was genuinely fascinated by their personalities, their daily lives, their beliefs and their ways of thinking. Yet he does criticise the people such as the two-eared beggar, who shuts down any possibility of hope by not listening, and who therefore drown in their own despair, as represented in this painting.



The colour green is traditionally associated with Islam, and more specifically with paradise and in other cultures green symbolizes rebirth, life, freshness and fertility. The symbol of the key holds the future or at least the better future or in other words, paradise, is in the hands of the dead lying behind the central figure.



The incense burner with a crescent plays a central role in the painting. It represents the **past** with its traditional connotations, where the crescent refers to the Ottoman Empire as the centre of the glorious Islamic world; the **present** in its ability to perfume the air and absorb the smell of misery; as well as the **future**, pointing towards a better life for these beggars in paradise, through its essential means of communication with the divine. El Gazzar also depicts the good-hearted and generous nature of the Egyptian people, despite their poverty and miserable lives, through the beggar's open palms feeding the green cockerel, who could be understood as the symbol of the sun, a sign of illumination and light.



This masterpiece is a prime example of El Gazzar's aesthetic and how he depicted the struggles of the lower class in Egypt, confirming his seminal role in shaping authentic Egyptian painting in the 20th century.

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**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and are reported net of applicable fees.*

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Images available on request