



**Javier Guirado Alonso**

**Title: The painters of modern life. Family, family roles and space in the first generation of contemporary Qatari painters**

**Abstract:**

In the 1970s, a group of Qatari artists started to depict the changes in livelihoods in the country since the 1960s. These group of artists, better exemplified by the Three Friends (Youssef Ahmad, Mohammed Ali Abdullah, and Hassan al-Mulla), but also by the pioneer Jassim Zaini, and names like Mohammed al-Jaidah, Sultan al-Sulaiti or Essa al-Ghanem, constitutes some of the first artistic testimonies of Qatar by Qatari voices. This paper explores how the tensions between modernity and indigeneity defined and transformed ideas about the family, its members, and their relationship, usually in relation to concepts of space and labor. Recurring themes include labor and masculinity, the domestic space, femininity and nationhood, or technology and daily life, as shown in early works like Jassim Zaini's *The Bicycle Passenger* (ca. 1960s) and *Our Epic Tale* (1973) and later examples like Hassan al-Mulla's *Sleeping* or Salman al-Malik's *Modesty* (both 1981). Some preliminary conclusions suggest that gender and family roles, as perceived by the artists, were being negotiated across spaces and new labor dynamics in a way where the individual was at the center, and not just a witness and respondent to the socioeconomic and cultural transformations. Family and family members in the post oil era are not simply the inheritance of a traditional institution but the product of the will of individuals under new economic relations and technical advances. The analysis relies mostly on the works of the artists cited above, but also on other sources like Youssef Ahmad's book *al-funun al-tashkiliyyah al-mu'asira fi Qatar* (1986), the Mathaf exhibition *Swalif. Qatari Art between Memory and Modernity* (2011), in which most of these artists were featured, or the recent *Khaleej Modern* (2022) at the NYU Abu Dhabi art gallery curated by Aisha Stoby, as well as on secondary literature about the topic.

**Bio:**

*Javier Guirado Alonso is a PhD candidate at Georgia State University and a fellow at Project SEPAD (Lancaster University). His research focuses on social and labor movements in Qatar during the twentieth century, and more broadly on urbanism and narratives of modernity in the Middle East. He has previously been a doctoral fellow at the Orient-Institut Beirut and a guest researcher at the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo. He has also written for outlets like Foreign Affairs or the Georgetown Journal of International Affairs.*