

## Fahrelnissa Zeid

### Portraits

10 DECEMBER 2021–30 JANUARY 2022

OPENING 10 DECEMBER 2021



**Fahrelnissa Zeid**

*Dalida, 2021*

Oil on canvas

100 x 80 cm

Deniz-Eray Kirmanlı Collection

Dirimart is pleased to present a selection of portraits by Fahrelnissa Zeid, a prominent figure of modernism in Turkey, from her youth to her last years in Amman where she moved in 1975 and embraced portraiture heavily. Representing various periods of the artist's life, these portraits invite the audience to discover her art practice spanning over the twentieth century.

Portraits of her family, close friends, and students appear in pages of sketchbooks she kept throughout eighty years. Two tendencies are observed in periods during which she intensely worked on portraits: Ones she painted in 1960–1972 have a character of touching psychological studies, whereas ones pertaining to her Amman period emphasize form and color, highlight details. In her Amman years which, according to her daughter Şirin Devrim, constitutes “the most creative, productive, and rewarding period of her life,” Fahrelnissa focuses on portraits in her practice while teaching art. She flows her innovative, intellectual energy to her students and she paints portraits “just for herself.”

Zeid's portraits dating to 1960–1972 fall into two categories: the bust and half-length social portraits of her gallerists, their families, and her casual friends; and the close-up, full-face psychological studies of people to whom she was closest. In the close-up portraits the skin becomes an abstract surface, faces are reconstructed with overlapping unexpected colors. Models resembling each other with big eyes, pensive looks, and simplified facial features bear a resemblance to Fahrelnissa as well. Thick paint layers and incisions made with palette knife are common characteristics of portraits of this period. Even Fahrelnissa's naturalistic approach harbors abstract qualities. With meticulously chosen background monochromatic colors and shades, lack of a certain light source, those are abstract portraits almost in a sculptural form. In those stylized portraits in which costume and archetypical symbols of the model are emphasized, the face is generally seen from the front and the surface itself becomes the object of painting.

In her Amman-period, Fahrelnissa adds some novelties to static compositions, stylized models, big eyes encircled by generic facial features of the 1960s portraits. She abandons nuanced shades and knife incisions she used in the skin, while adopting expressionistic cloisonnism approach. She starts applying this technique of encircling color patches with black lines that she used in her abstract paintings, to her portraits; she breaks the visual continuity in her portrait works, emphasizes her disregard of three-dimensionality. Those are pure painting studies in figurative expressionistic style with which she combines the character of her model and plain colors. While carrying memories of her former portraits, they bear traces of liberation from academic stance of her post-abstract paintings.



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The artist, believing in the “vitalizing” quality of the portrait rather than being mere imitation of an image, intentionally performs errors of perspective, volume, and retouch. She brings the dominance of color into the forefront with contrasted saturated colors, animates still faces.

According to Fahrelnissa the portrait is “[not] the form. It is much stronger and so much beyond that [...] with a portrait, you find yourself in a theatre with three characters: there is the human being posing—the model. There is the painter and the third character that one must create not only by looking at [the face][...] of the model. It is a matter of discovering the anterior life of the model, behind the forms, and his expressions, but by reaching so far, you also go to the depths of yourself, to arrive at understanding. You forget the hour, the day, the present minute. You go on a mysterious voyage” (*Painter of Inner Worlds*, p. 243).

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