Darat al-Funun: the Khalid Shoman Foundation home for Arab contemporary art

Three restored 1920s villas on Jabal al-Lweibdeh — gallery, library, café, and a Byzantine church ruin in the garden. Free entry. The best contemporary-Arab-art programme in the country.

Anas Hu · May 5, 2026

Three early-20th-century stone villas on the slope of Jabal al-Lweibdeh, restored as galleries and exhibition spaces, with a small Byzantine church ruin in the garden between them and a café where you can drink Turkish coffee while looking down across the valley toward the Citadel. Darat al-Funun is the headquarters of the Khalid Shoman Foundation and the most consistent contemporary-Arab-art programme in Jordan. Entry is free. The exhibitions rotate every few months. The café is good.

If you have an afternoon free in Amman and you've already done the heritage walk, this is where you go.

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1Why visit Darat al-Funun

Darat al-Funun is operated by the Khalid Shoman Foundation, an Amman-based art foundation that has run the site as a home for the arts and artists from the Arab world since the late 1980s.[1] The programming includes:

- **Rotating exhibitions** of contemporary Arab artists — established names and emerging artists in equal measure.

- **An artist-in-residence programme** that hosts artists from across the region.
- **Public lectures** on art, architecture, and archaeology.
- **A library** of art books and exhibition catalogues, open to readers.

2What's on the site

Three restored stone houses on adjoining terraces, all dating to the 1920s — among the earliest residential architecture in modern Amman. Each holds a different function:

- **The Main House.** Primary exhibition gallery. The current major show is here.
- **The Blue House.** Smaller exhibition spaces and the foundation's offices.
- **The Café House.** Down a short flight of stairs in the back garden — coffee, pastries, and a sun-dappled patio.

3The Byzantine church ruin

In the garden between the houses, partly excavated, sits the foundation of a 6th-century Byzantine church. Mosaic floor fragments are visible. The juxtaposition is the point: contemporary Arab art being shown in 1920s villas built over a Byzantine sanctuary on a hill that Roman Philadelphia overlooked. Most visitors miss the church ruin entirely; ask for the diagram at the front desk.

> Contemporary Arab art in 1920s villas built over a Byzantine church on a hill the Romans overlooked. Read it as a single sentence.

4Getting there

Darat al-Funun is on the eastern slope of Jabal al-Lweibdeh — about a 10-minute walk uphill from Paris Circle (Jabal al-Lweibdeh's heart) or 15 minutes downhill from Jabal Amman's First Circle. Self-drive parking is limited; better by taxi or on foot. The main entrance is on Nimer Bin Adwan Street.

> **For solo travellers**
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> Best on a quiet weekday afternoon. Bring a notebook for the gallery and the café.

5Practical tips

- **Free entry.** No ticket required for the galleries.
- **Hours.** Open most days; closed Sundays. Check the official site before you go.
- **How long.** 60–90 minutes for the galleries; an additional hour at the café.
- **Combine with.** Jabal al-Lweibdeh's cafés (Paris Circle), the King Abdullah I Mosque, or the Roman Theatre downhill.
- **Photography.** Permitted in most galleries without flash; ask front desk on arrival.

References

1. Darat al-Funun — official site

Verified by locals: TBD — this article will be reviewed by a Khalid Shoman Foundation-affiliated curator before final publication. Drafted from the Darat al-Funun official site.