

MOROCCAN MODERNISM: THE CASABLANCA SCHOOL (1956-1978)

A Dissertation  
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by  
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August 2015

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MOROCCAN MODERNISM: THE CASABLANCA SCHOOL (1956-1978)  
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Cornell University 2015

This dissertation focuses on artistic modernism in Morocco. It articulates the local iteration of transnational discourses, considering how these broader movements played out in the confines of a local context and its exigencies. The nationalist movement and the struggle for decolonization in all areas of Moroccan life, especially culture and the arts, played a central part in the shaping of such modernist movements. I focus in this dissertation on artists of the Casablanca school during the period between 1956 (the year of Moroccan independence) and 1978. The artists at the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux Arts under the direction of Farid Belkahia (1962-1974), through their activism, engagement, and varied interventions brought energy to the movement of Moroccan modernism, and were at the center of these national discourses. The methodology used for this work relied heavily on interviews with artists and arts practitioners in Morocco, as well as archival work in personal archives throughout Morocco and in Lebanon, the media archive of the Bibliothèque Nationale du Royaume du Maroc (Rabat), the Centre Cinématographique Marocain (Rabat), the Bibliothèque Kandinsky (Paris), and The Khalid Shoman Foundation-Darat al Funun (Amman).

I argue that the pedagogy, structural engagements, and transnational solidarities of this generation of artists form an intrinsic part of their broader artistic projects and are grounded in the same ideology and stakes. The actual art objects only make up one part of multifaceted, consistent, and wide-ranging artistic projects, and must be analyzed in relation to these other activities as well as the network of institutions with which the artists engaged. Moreover, I argue for a reading of Moroccan modernism that is deeply rooted in a contemporaneous national context yet that arises from a cosmopolitan foundation in dialogue with transnational, anti-

colonial and pan-Arab intellectual movements and networks. This does not suggest that there was a center of global modernism that was being copied, but instead that global discourses were played out, staged and experienced within specific historic, political, and cultural contexts. Rather than explaining away these transnational connections, they are perceived to be at the crux of modernism itself, and particularly the Moroccan experience of modernism. To force a solely national narrative onto Moroccan modernism is to ignore the rich intersections and explorations fomented by the cosmopolitanism of these artists and their training.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jean Holiday Powers is an art historian whose research focuses on global modernisms and postcolonialism, with a particular concentration on Morocco and the Casablanca school. She has contributed to publications including *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, *Higher Atlas/Au-Delà de l'Atlas: The Marrakech Biennale [4] in Context*, and *The Journal of North African Studies*. She was a fellow at the American Institute for Maghrib Studies (Short-Term Research Grant) and the recipient of the Darat al Funun Dissertation Fellowship for the Study of Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World (Amman, Jordan). She was the Artistic Program Coordinator and in charge of Parallel Projects for the fifth edition of the Marrakech Biennale (2014).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first and biggest thanks to the chair of my doctoral dissertation committee Salah Hassan for his extraordinary support. I can see today how profoundly I have learned and been intellectually shaped by his feedback and his example, as well as by my incisive and encouraging committee members, Iftikhar Dadi and Natalie Melas. My committee members are also all board members of the Institute for Comparative Modernities. I benefited deeply from the thoughtfulness and generosity of all of the members, especially Susan Buck-Morss, and I am grateful to the entire board of the ICM.

Within the Department of the History of Art, I have found a community of scholars that have contributed in different ways to this project and to helping me think through its many stages. Thank you to all the faculty of the department, and especially to Maria Fernandez and Cheryl Finley. My deepest gratitude goes to Keeley Boerman and Jessica Smith for their endless help and kindness.

I was lucky to have a cohort that has supported, encouraged, and challenged me throughout my time at Cornell. Special gratitude to Victoria Ehrlich, Elvira Dyangani Ose, and Reem Fadda. Although not in art history, my deepest thanks goes to Thea Whitman, Rayna Bell, and Simona Subonj, without whom Ithaca would have been much less fun.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generous support of many people in Morocco. I had memorable interviews with Mohammed Chebaa and Farid Belkahia, and I am grateful to have been able to exchange so much with both artists before their untimely passing. The list of people that I have to thank in Morocco and in France extends far beyond the people that I could name here. For their thoughtful responses during my lengthy interviews, their willingness to open their personal archives, their insight and feedback, their friendship and

support, I thank the following: Maurice Arama, Mohammed Arejda, Mohammed Ataalah, Younes Baba-Ali, Yto Barrada, Fouad Bellamine, Mohammed Benaissa, Mustapha Boujemaoui, Cécile Bourne-Farrell, Aziz Daki, Florence Darsi, Hassan Darsi, Catherine David, Hassan Echair, Andre Elbaz, Safaa Erruas, Mohammed Fariji, Fatma Jellal, Mohammed Hamidi, Abdallah Al Hariri, Abdelatif Laabi, Jamila Lamrani, Salma Lahlou, Simohammed Laouli, Pauline de Mazières, Mohammed Melehi, Léa Morin, Hind Oudrhiri, Mohammed Rachdi, Younès Rahmoun, Alia Radman, Karim Rafi, Alya Sebti, Hassan Slaoui, Nawal Slaoui, and Abid Ziadi. Thank you to Vanessa Branson, because the Marrakech Biennale led me to this topic, and under her guidance, the biennale has pushed me to grow in many ways. My utmost gratitude goes to Abdellah Karroum for his early encouragement, and for being an interlocutor as I found my way.

I was warmly welcomed by the community of researchers working in Morocco and more broadly in the Arab world. For their generosity, contacts, and encouragement, I am grateful to Katarzyna Pieprzak, Kenza Sefrioui, Mary Vogel, Cynthia Becker, Kendra Salois, and Emma Chubb. Equally important was the support that I found in AMCA (Association for Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey), a research group that has been deeply influential to me and helped ground me when I was feeling lost in this research. Thanks especially to Jessica Gershultz and Anneka Lenssen for their generosity.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the Khalid Shoman Foundation-Darat al Funun, and the kindness of its founder, Suha Shoman. Having the time to write and think was invaluable, and my stay in Amman particularly pushed me to think differently about the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, the Palestinian question, and the questions of Pan-Arabism. My thanks also go to Yanal Janbek and Eline van der Vlist.

My deepest appreciate goes to my beloved family: My father, Jordan Powers, died before I began my graduate studies Cornell, and this work is a tribute to the ways in which he pushed me to think about the world. Thank you to my mother, Linda Powers, for everything under the sun, which is far too much to list. This is not limited to listening to me discussing every stage of this research, but also taking the time to visit me in every place I have ever lived, pushing me to take chances, and for her gentle and loving support throughout it all. My brother Max has always been deeply supportive. Thank you to my husband, Damien Tissot, for being so caring and selfless at every stage of my research and writing. He woke up early to Skype with me every morning when I was living in Casablanca, sent me emails every night, and sent text messages throughout the day, and accompanied me to Jordan and on many other trips related to my research. It is hard to imagine what this dissertation would be without the extraordinary support that he has provided behind the scenes.

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## INTRODUCTION

**The most compelling work in postcolonial studies does not take colonization to be an immutable, ahistorical structure or an abstract entity. Instead, colonization is apprehended as a complex process that generates frontiers and intervals, zones of passage, and interstitial spaces.**

**Achille Mbembe, “Provincializing France?” Trans. Janet Roitman<sup>1</sup>**

This dissertation focuses on modernism in Morocco. It articulates the local experience of transnational discourses, considering how these broader movements played out in the confines of a local context and its exigencies. The nationalist movement and the struggle for decolonization in all areas of Moroccan life, especially culture and the arts, played a central part in the shaping of such modernist movements. This dissertation focuses on artists of the Casablanca school during the period between 1956 (the year of Moroccan independence) and 1978. The artists at the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux Arts under the direction of the late Farid Belkahia (1962-1974), through their activism, engagement, and varied interventions brought energy to the movement of Moroccan modernism, and were at the center of these national discourses. It follows the artists that were a part of this group, highlighting Belkahia, Mohammed Chebaa, and Mohammed Melehi in particular, as well as artists that worked in the same circles (namely Ahmed Cherkaoui, Jilali Gharbaoui, and Andre Elbaz). Of particular interest is the long-term collaboration between these artists and the cultural journal *Souffles* (founded by Abdellatif Laabi,

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<sup>1</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Provincializing France?” Trans. Janet Roitman. *Public Culture* 23, no 1 (2011): 85-119.

1966-1971). The dissertation follows the period in Morocco immediately following independence and the role that artists took in working towards post-colonial national culture.

Casablanca School art historian Toni Maraini, looking back on the post-colonial period, writes about Morocco, “More than a style, ‘modernity,’ thus understood, was a spirit and an attitude. Far from being established like an academy of styles, modern art became the space of questioning and unveiling.”<sup>2</sup> I take this claim seriously, and this dissertation takes as its starting point a discursive construction of artistic modernism, that is, modernism as defined by the conscious claiming of modernism by this generation of artists, writers, and intellectuals.

There are two primary arguments that I make in this dissertation. First, I argue that the pedagogy, structural engagements, and transnational solidarities of this generation of artists form an intrinsic part of their broader artistic projects and are grounded in the same ideology and stakes. The actual art objects only make up one part of multifaceted, consistent, and wide-ranging artistic projects, and must be analyzed in relation to these other activities.

Second, I argue for a reading of Moroccan modernism that is deeply rooted in a contemporaneous national context yet that arises from a cosmopolitan foundation in dialogue with transnational anti-colonial intellectual movements. Rather than explaining away these transnational connections, I argue that they are at the crux of modernism – and particularly the Moroccan iteration of modernism – itself. To force a solely national narrative onto Moroccan modernism is to ignore the rich intersections and explorations fomented by the cosmopolitanism of these artists and their training. I argue that these international alliances can be read as alternative globalisms. The transnational relationships of the artists both mirror existing political formations while also creating and transforming these same routes of exchange and creation. I

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<sup>2</sup> Toni Maraini, *Ecrits sur l'Art: Choix de Textes Maroc 1967-1989* (Mohammedia, Morocco: Al Kalam, 1990), 122

use the terminology of alternative globalisms because I see these as precursors to what is termed globalization today. Rather than plotting a progression from the national to the global, these transnational alliances within configurations held together by political, economic, and ideological stakes, present a history of modernism that is fundamentally shaped by international flows of artists, artworks, and ideas. This dissertation therefore follows three of these transnational alignments or globalisms that the artists engage. While presented chronologically, these versions of globalism (the cosmopolitanism of Europe-based modernism, Third Worldism and its intersections with Pan-Africanism, and Pan-Arabism) all exist simultaneously and overlap in multiple configurations. I argue that these international networks and discourses that are then articulated within a local context are constitutive of the experience of modernism within Morocco, and maintain a constant tension between the two.

I situate this dissertation within the field of comparative and alternative modernisms. I believe that this direction of research is important in addressing the global scope of modernism, which has mostly been omitted from the often-Eurocentric narratives of art history, particularly of modern art. Beyond the rich body of work devoted to theorizing global modernisms, not least in relation to postcolonial theory, I see the work that I do as adding to the growing number of case studies of particular experiences of modernism outside of western Europe and the United States, such as Elizabeth Harney's work in Senegal, Jessica Winegar's work in Egypt, Chika Okeke-Agulu in Nigeria, and Iftikhar Dadi's work in South Asia.<sup>3</sup> These same ideas are increasingly informing new exhibition practices as well, that situate global modernisms both

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960-1995* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004); Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2006); Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2015); Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

within a particular intellectual and political context and within the broader networks of transnational modernism, notably in exhibitions such as “Tea With Nefertiti,” a traveling exhibition that originated at Mathaf in Doha and focused on Egyptian modernism, “Unedited History: Iran, 1960-2014” at the Paris Musée d’Art Moderne, and even the recent rehang of the permanent collection of the Centre Pompidou in Paris. I see the work that I do in dialogue with this growing field of art historical investigation, adding to it both the up to now unwritten art history of Moroccan modernism, and working to place that history within a transnational network.

This dissertation also builds on the valuable body of literature that exists about the recent art history of Morocco, particularly the recent scholarship of Katarzyna Pieprzak, Cynthia Becker, and Hamid Irbouh. It draws heavily as well on roughly contemporaneous art criticism and art historical writing by Toni Maraini, Khalil M’Rabet, Abdelkébir Khatibi, and Edmond Amran el Maleh. I have been influenced by the political histories of Susan Slyomovics, Abdellah Hammoudi, and Abdallah Laroui. The majority of this body of literature, however, is positioned differently than this dissertation. Recent scholarship has focused on different aspects of art history, namely Katarzyna Pieprzak’s focus on a structural and literary analysis of art history, Cynthia Becker’s focus on Amazigh art, and Hamid Irbouh’s focus on protectorate-era arts guilds. More foundational texts were closely implicated in these art historical movements and offer valuable insight and clear positions, but did not seek to write a broader history of artistic modernism in Morocco. M’Rabet’s work is the exception to this, as he gives a significant historical overview, focused on the interplay and overlap between so-called craft and fine arts. Nonetheless, his topic and writing seem constrained by the political expectations of what could be talked about at the time, and so I include this as a foundational and historically contingent

text. I feel this dissertation is most closely in dialogue with the scholarship of Kenza Sefrioui. Her book *Souffles (1966.1973), espoirs de révolution culturelle au Maroc*<sup>4</sup> focuses specifically on the experience of Souffles, which deeply overlaps with the history of the Casablanca artists. Sefrioui's perspective is literary and she takes a larger look at the history of the journal than my own intersection with the journal through the lens of art history. I am nonetheless deeply indebted to the research that she done.

### **“Tradition” and “Modernity” in Protectorate-Era Morocco**

The question of the dichotomy of “tradition” and “modernity” in post-colonial Morocco is complicated by the ambivalent way in which colonial North Africa was treated by the French as a laboratory of modernism, in terms of architecture, construction, urban planning, and social control.<sup>5</sup> This process of modernization, in its relationship to the lived experience and vernacular architecture of the colonized, was meant to create a new and other modernism.<sup>6</sup> There is a fundamental ambivalence to this proposal, particularly in light of the cultural policies of the French Moroccan Protectorate. Resident-General Hubert Lyautey, in control of the Protectorate from 1912 until 1925, aimed to emphasize difference, rather than bring the disparate

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<sup>4</sup> Kenza Sefrioui, *Souffles (1966.1973), espoirs de révolution culturelle au Maroc (Casablanca: Editions du Sirocco, 2013)*.

<sup>5</sup> The recent exhibition *In the Desert of Modernity* at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2008), Fabrique Culturelle, Anciens Abattoirs, Casablanca (2009), and its accompanying publication *Colonial Modern [Colonial Modern: Aesthetics of the Past, Rebellions for the Future]*. ed. Tom Avermate, Serhat Karakayali, and Marion von Osten (London: black dog publishing, 2010)] are a particularly valuable source of research about this topic. Gwyndolin Wright has additionally done significant research on this topic, as in the book *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Marion von Osten, Serhat Karakayali, Tom Avermaete, “Colonial Modern,” in *Colonial Modern: Aesthetics of the Past, Rebellions for the Future*. ed. Tom Avermate, Serhat Karakayali, and Marion von Osten (London: black dog publishing, 2010), 10

communities in Morocco (namely, European, Arab Moroccan, Berber/Amazigh, and Moroccan Jewish) together. Particularly from the 1920s on, the main mode of power was one of cultural separation.<sup>7</sup> In her book *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*, Gwyndolin Wright explores the simultaneous importance placed on modernism and the preservation of tradition, exemplified in the creation of *villes nouvelles* to house the Europeans either directly alongside the traditional medinas or, as in the case of Fes, a few kilometers away. As she writes, the goal of Lyautey and his associates, particularly at the Bureau of Fine Arts that he instituted for urbanist intervention, was

to protect certain aspects of cultural traditions while sponsoring other aspects of modernization and development, all in the interest of stabilizing colonial domination. The protectorate government aimed to introduce and appraise the latest concepts of contemporary city planning in the *villes nouvelles*, enabling these European centers to flourish economically. Simultaneously they tried to shield traditional Moroccan artistic and social life from the destructive impact of that modernization.<sup>8</sup>

The romantic, lyrical espousal of modernist urbanism by these French professionals is thus belied by the realities of the use of this separation to create unequal political and economic power.

Maurice Tranchant de Lunel presents an evocative concept of colonial cultural policy in Morocco. The first director of the Bureau of Fine Arts, Tranchant de Lunel was in charge of the preservation of historical monuments and crafts,<sup>9</sup> established in 1912 under Resident-General Hubert Lyautey. Tranchant de Lunel romanticized the exotic space he found himself in, and his

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<sup>7</sup> Serhat Karakayali, "Colonialism and the Critique of Modernity," *Colonial Modern: Aesthetics of the Past, Rebellions for the Future*. ed. Tom Avermate, Serhat Karakayali, and Marion von Osten (London: black dog publishing, 2010), 45

<sup>8</sup> Gwyndolin Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 85-86

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Louis Cohen and Monique Eleb, *Casablanca: Colonial Myths and Architectural Ventures* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2002), 97

designs reflect that. For example, his 1915 design for both the café and the Andalusian gardens of the Casbah des Oudayas in Rabat was, as Gwyndolin Wright points out, “far more scenographic than archaeological.”<sup>10</sup> His comments on Moroccan art and the goals of the Bureau of Fine Arts are equally swayed by an orientalist idea of the country. As he explained to an audience in Casablanca in 1916 that in order to save Moroccan art, which for him rested solidly on tradition, the staff of the Bureau of Fine Arts had to be “servants of art, the faithful guardians of Tradition.” As he summed it up, “Intervene everywhere, but change nothing.”<sup>11</sup> Similar to the rest of the French urban planners working in the Protectorate, Tranchant de Lunel did not just guard tradition but actively created it. Yet even in places that were not actively changed, what does this program of intervention do to the very notion of tradition?

The politicization of the nature of “tradition” in Protectorate-era (cultural) politics extended to the visual arts and arts education as well. Hamid Irbouh (2005) argues that the political climate was one in which Lyautey wanted not just to separate but to isolate the medinas, particularly from an economic standpoint in which the lower-level economy of the medinas could function separately from the high-level economy the French were dealing with in the *villes nouvelles*. Within this political climate, Irbouh considers the restructuring of the artisanal guilds, which implicated most families in the medinas, in order to centralize production. These guilds were powerful social institutions that created a sense of community and tradition. Up until the 1920s, this was deliberately kept distinct from the political arena, according to Irbouh, by the *laissez-faire* attitude of the leadership (the elite, termed the *Makhzen*).<sup>12</sup> The reforms undertaken by the Protectorate slowly restructured guilds to centralize production. This centralization was

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<sup>10</sup> Wright 131

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Wright 130

<sup>12</sup> Hamid Irbouh, *Art in the Service of Colonialism: French Art Education in Morocco, 1912-1956* (New York: Tauris, 2005), 51

carried out inconsistently, and there was significant flexibility within the rules sketched out by the Protectorate in the daily negotiations with the various trade regulations. Irbouh thus locates art production within a larger economic and political climate in which starting with Lyautey, the goal was to isolate and segregate the medinas, making sure that the intra-medina economy was functioning in order to leave the higher-level economy of political rule and exports to the French (rule and exports).<sup>13</sup> This centralization as well as the social organization enacted by education reforms was furthermore a means of ruling by persuasion and cooperation rather than by force. While Irbouh situates these policies within a socioeconomic setting, he maintains a distinction between social organization and politics. In contrast, I would argue that social organization especially when linked to trade is always political, even if it is not meant to intervene in elite politics.

Irbouh also considers the ramifications on this isolation of the medinas for arts training, modeled particularly on innovations in drawing training within Morocco. Drawing lessons were meant to be specific to the environment, and—recognizing the inconsistency of colonial implementation—for the most part, only teach design rooted in Morocco as opposed to design from Europe or the Middle East. The goal was to isolate Moroccan design from other international design in order to preserve authenticity. Many of the lessons were structured on repetition in order to develop skills within this constrained understanding of an isolated and static tradition. Locally, traditions were changing and adapting to the contemporaneous political climate, as Irbouh shows in the changes in the leadership of guilds as they were pulled between the *makhzen* and the Protectorate government. Nonetheless, despite the focus on tradition,

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<sup>13</sup> Irbouh 68

colonialism additionally brought a distinction of high and low arts, denigrating craft as underdeveloped.

In attempting to isolate Moroccan visual arts from international arts, traditional spaces from modern space, “tradition” within the Protectorate must necessarily have been fundamentally altered. The living practices that are constantly shifting, interacting with the contemporaneous social and political situation, are in this conception forced into a static and fixed body of ideas and aesthetics.<sup>14</sup> Moroccan people and artisans were forced to adapt to colonial policy, finding the limits and stopgaps of the institution of the policies, but they did not blindly accept every action. Despite the best efforts of the colonial bureaus, they did not, in fact, affect everything. I therefore do not mean to suggest that the colonial politicized framing of visual and cultural tradition wiped out every extant tradition, that all Moroccan traditions were a colonial imposition, or that there was no agency for the Moroccan people implicated by these policies. Instead, I want to suggest that we must read into the contemporaneous framing of tradition and traditional space the particular valence these terms took within the Protectorate, rather than accepting the terms at face value.

### **Early Exhibition and Art Histories**

Before turning to Moroccan artistic modernism and the anti-colonial discourse of Casablanca School artists, I want to briefly consider the paintings and painters that were

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<sup>14</sup> Cynthia Becker shows, for example, the way in which traditional Amazigh arts changed at different points based on the actual materials that were available on trade routes. *Amazigh Arts in Morocco: Women Shaping Berber Identity* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006)

displayed within the country to give context to what came next. The available art histories do not include Protectorate-era sculpture, and so this summary is medium-specific. While European painting was exhibited beginning in 1918, modernist Moroccan art was not exhibited until the late 1940s and 1950s. The first exhibition of easel painting (*peinture à chevalet*), a collective exhibition of European painters living in Morocco, took place in 1918 in Casablanca in the hall of the Hotel Excelsior.<sup>15</sup> There were certainly European painters working in Morocco throughout the Protectorate. In the interest of using art as a tool for cultural power, the Service des Monuments Historiques offered travelling artists free studios for a period of four months in Marrakech, Meknes, Safi, Fes, and Rabat. There were also exhibition halls attached to the latter two cities through this government office.<sup>16</sup> Well-known European artists like Albert Marquet, Henri Matisse, Paul Klee, Dirk Wouters, and Nicolas de Staël all spent time travelling in Morocco during the era of the Protectorate.<sup>17</sup>

While some viewers would therefore have been exposed to European painting, Moroccan painting was by and large not exhibited within the country. In 1967, the journal *Souffles* focused an issue on the situation of painting in post-colonial Morocco, which included a chronology of painting in Morocco since 1956. According to this chronology, the first touring exhibition of Moroccan artists within the country happened in 1956 (with other installments following in 1958 and 1959) and the first significant exhibition of “Jeune peinture marocaine” (Young Moroccan Painting) took place at the national Bab Rouah gallery in Rabat in October 1960.<sup>18</sup> The Institut

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<sup>15</sup> Khalil M’Rabet, *Peinture et identité: L’expérience marocaine* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1987), 26

<sup>16</sup> M’Rabet 29

<sup>17</sup> Maraini 42

<sup>18</sup> “Chronologie de la peinture marocaine depuis 1956.” *Souffles* 7-8 (3/4 trimestre 1967) 20-21.

du Monde Arabe catalog for the exhibitions *Peintres du Maroc*<sup>19</sup> lists for modernist artist Farid Belkahia an unspecified solo exhibition in Marrakech in 1953, as well as solo exhibitions at Galerie Momounia in Rabat starting in 1955.<sup>20</sup> Khalil M'Rabet in his book *Peinture et Identité* (1989) offers a slightly earlier date for the beginning of modern art in Morocco in the chronology he offers with the fifth Salon d'Hiver in Marrakech in 1953.<sup>21</sup>

Toni Maraini offers an earlier date still in her collected essays *Ecrits sur l'Art* (1990), noting that El Hamri had a personal exhibition in Tangier in 1948, and Mohammed Ben Allal also exhibited a few canvases the same year. She additionally notes that Moulay Ahmed Drissi had a personal exhibition in Lausanne in 1952, and Yaqoubi had a personal exhibition in New York that same year. As Maraini points out, however, these were all artists that were intertwined with well-established European figures. El Hamri and Yacoubi were both “discovered,” as she puts it with quotation marks intact, by Paul Bowles, Ben Allal by Jacques Azéma, and Drissi by a Swiss couple.<sup>22</sup> These artists all worked in a style to allow for immediate comprehensibility, and would mainly be considered “naïve” artists in Moroccan discourses. Mohamed Ben Allal, who was forced to leave Koranic school (the only school he was able to attend) as a young boy after the death of his father, focused on the realities of the public square Djemaa al-Fna in Marrakech, showing the actual life that he and his community lived.

Similar to Ben Allal, Mohammed Ben Ali Rbati (1861-1939) is considered a kind of precursor to modernist art in Morocco. Like the artists discussed above, Rbati's painting career

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<sup>19</sup> *Quatre Peintres du Maroc: Belkahia, Bellamine, Cherkaoui, Kacimi*. (exhibition catalogue) (Curated by Brahim Ben Hossain Alaoui. Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 25 June-15 September 1991)

<sup>20</sup> “Biographie: Belkahia.” *Quatre Peintres du Maroc: Belkahia, Bellamine, Cherkaoui, Kacimi*. (exhibition catalogue) (Curated by Brahim Ben Hossain Alaoui. Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 25 June-15 September 1991), 45.

<sup>21</sup> M'Rabet 157

<sup>22</sup> Maraini 114

was intricately intertwined with a well-established figure, Sir John Lavery, a royal portrait painter from England. Rbati was based in Tangier, which was, at that time, an international zone. In 1903, Rbati became the cook for Lavery, and he began painting at some point in the following years. Rbati had his first exhibition at the Goupil Gallery in London in 1916. Although Rbati had no formal arts training, his exposure to painting and the availability of watercolors in Tangier thanks particularly to the sizeable British population encouraged him to paint the scenes that he was surrounded by.<sup>23</sup> Very little research has been done on this early generation of painters, and it is difficult to get precise information.

Rbati's work includes figurative watercolors on paper that all focus on Tangier, its Kasbah, and its inhabitants. The paintings depict a an extensive cross-section of the local population, showing men gathered around musicians or snake charmers, *halqas* (story-telling circles) in the Kasbah, and people walking through the streets, as well as scenes in cafes, at festivals, and in lavish interiors. The untitled watercolor in Image 0.1, from the collection of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Art in Doha, is typical of Rbati's style. Here, as in much of Rbati's work, the figures, men that are watching musicians and a snake charmer in a street with recognizably Moroccan architecture behind them, are simplified and demarcated with clear strokes. The bodies are cloaked in djellabas, and the folds of the cloaks suggest bodies underneath. The pared-down style highlights both the brightness of the multiple colors as well as

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<sup>23</sup> M'Rabet 38

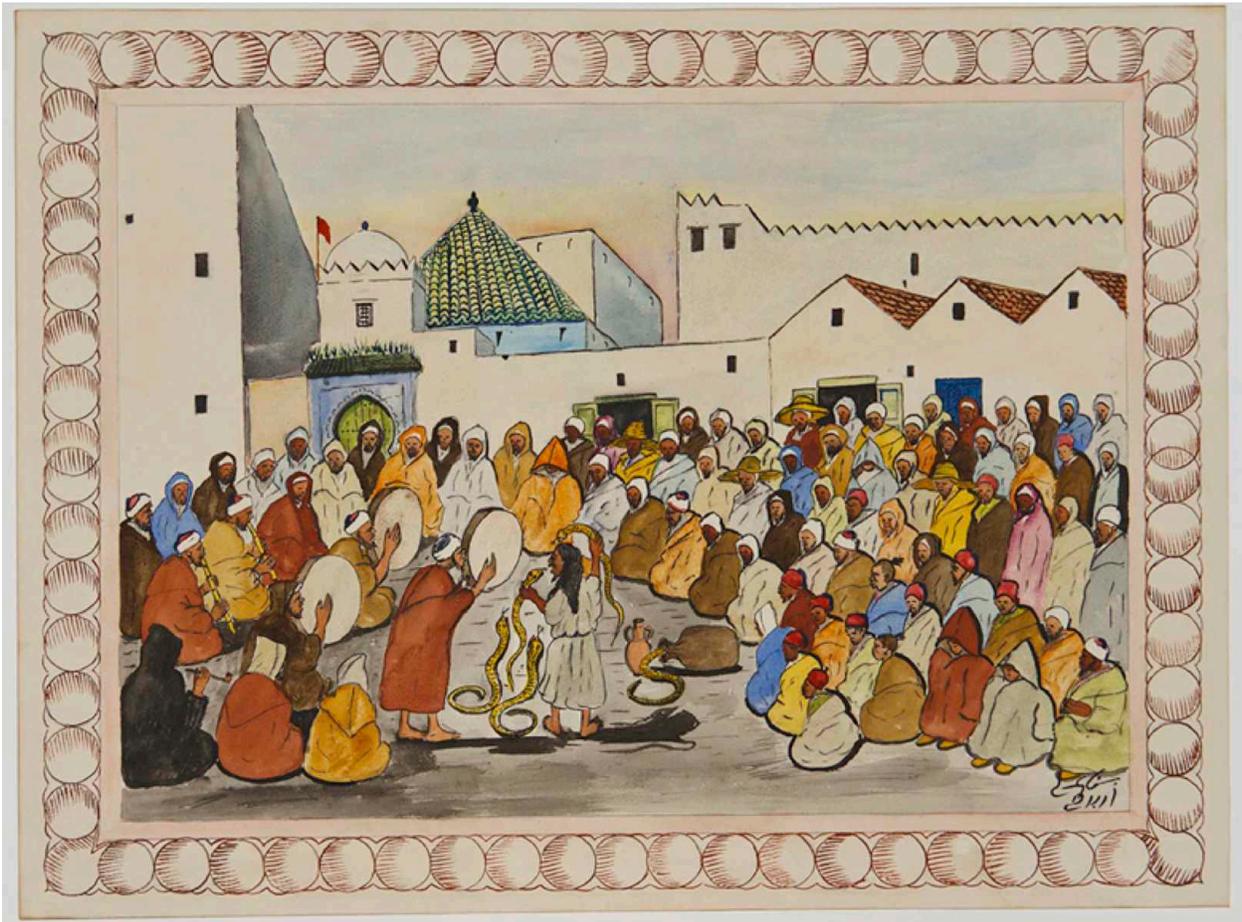


Image 0.1: Mohammed Ben Ali Rbati. Title unknown, date unknown.

Watercolor on paper, 46x62.5 cm. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.  
<http://www.encyclopedia.mathaf.org/en/bios/Pages/Mohammed-Ben-Ali-Rbati.aspx>

the collectivity of the street scene, more than any precise individual. It is framed by a decorative border that highlights the materiality of the artwork: this is an artistic rendition of the scene, in other words, and it does not pretend to be completely realistic. In many examples of Rbati's work, the plane of the picture is entirely flat, with no reference to dimensionality. However, there are also numerous examples of watercolors that go beyond a flat plane in order to document more closely the scenes the artist witnessed. In these, like in this watercolor, shadows are clearly placed under each figure, showing the artist's experimentation and study into ways of showing light and multi-dimensionality. While often described in terms of the spontaneity of his expression, the varied treatment of the picture plane suggests Rbati's interest in deliberately simplifying the forms as part of a style, not as a default. Despite ideas of Rbati as a 'naïve' and untrained artist under the tutelage of his European employer, this body of work was deliberate artistic production: Rbati consistently signed the front of his artworks, always in Arabic, as seen in the bottom right hand corner of this watercolor.

### **Non-Academic Artists, and the Debates of “Naïveté”**

These artists working in the early years of the protectorate were, I argue, the precursors to modernist artistic production within Morocco. However, stylistically, they overlap with a longer art history, particularly of artists such as Chaibia and Ahmed Louardiri, working in the 1960s and beyond. I do not mean to conflate these early practitioners with the larger history of non-academic art in post-colonial Morocco because it is a challenge to situate these painters because any writing creates a stance on a very sensitive set of issues. The terminology that is most often

used in Morocco, both in the writing by the Casablanca school artists and contemporaneous art critics and in conversation today, is to refer to these as “naïve” artists. This is a derogatory term and, although it is widely used, its assignment to precise people is continually up for debate. I use this term because it is the vocabulary employed within Morocco and by the Casablanca artists, and it is in relation to the Casablanca artists that I discuss this group. I keep it in quotation marks because it is not a term that I fully agree with, and my goal is to document the historical relationship between these artists and the Casablanca artists more than it is to take a position on how to describe non-academic artists.

There are two sides of the debate over the history of this loosely delineated group of artists. One side focuses on the colonial relationship that was exploited through ‘naïve’ artists. European curators and critics, both in foreign cultural institutions within Morocco and in arts institutions abroad, overwhelmingly supported ‘naïve’ artists above modernist artists. Artists within the Casablanca school, one of the major meeting points for the debates around post-colonial artistic modernism in Morocco and the focus of this dissertation, fought against the valorization of ‘naïve’ artists, feeling like it was a remnant of colonial cultural policy. The major modernist painter Mohammed Chebaa forcefully calls this a

desire and a colonial plan that was premeditated in the cultural domain. Schematically, after independence, there was a colonial politics that wanted to impose upon Morocco naïve art as the only artistic expression that corresponded to a local mentality and sensibility. What they wanted to affirm with this was that an underdeveloped country can only produce an underdeveloped art. They wanted to deny underdeveloped countries the right and capacity to be able to participate, to contribute to universal artistic movements, to deny the artist of these countries an intellectual baggage, modern aesthetic preoccupations.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, the European relationship to ‘naïve’ artists was seen from the perspective of artists of the Casablanca school, as ultimately linked to a colonial discourse of development,

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<sup>24</sup> “Position 2: Situation de la peinture naïve au Maroc.” *Souffles* 7-8 (3/4 trimestre 1967), 77-80.

which sought to publicize often illiterate and untrained (formally, within an academy) artists to maintain a discrepancy between the artistic scenes of France and the former colony.

The other side of this debate, and the other position, is a frequent charge of elitism for the Casablanca artists because of their attitude towards non-academic artists.<sup>25</sup> Artists can be trained outside of formal academies, loosely figurative work can still have a conceptual project attached to it, and women in particular were excluded from the training that would allow access to the more elite intellectual circles of the Casablanca school. This critique must be taken seriously, because the discursive exclusions are based on class, education, and a rural/urban divide. It is a particularly strong critique in light of the inclusive rhetoric of national culture that many of these artists espoused.

Yet I think that it is important to not mimic the colonial gesture in privileging the non-academic artists in later histories. Following an early history of untrained artists that were celebrated through their relationship to powerful European figures, the Casablanca artists were facing a situation in which ‘naïve’ artists were being celebrated for—and framed by—their very so-called ‘naïveté.’ This can particularly be seen in the way that Chaïbia is framed, a female artist that was supported by French curators and as part of CoBRA on the basis of her ‘spontaneous’ work and the way in which her art spoke to an ‘authentic’ Moroccan spirit. To be critical of post-colonial power dynamics exercised particularly through the French cultural centers is not to minimize the sometimes-patronizing attitude that the urban artists held towards rural artists. It is a legitimate question to pose, in terms of the politics of exhibitions and visibility, why ‘naïve’ artists were celebrated at the loss of ‘academic’ artists who had been

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<sup>25</sup> For example, this can be found in Irbouh, M’Rabet, and Katarzyna Pieprzak [*Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.]

trained in art schools and were working with the similar aesthetics of modernism as European artists. The focus in my dissertation will be on self-described modernist artists within the Casablanca school. This is not meant to exclude non-academic painters from the art history, but to focus my argument on the discourses of modernism within Morocco.

While I do differentiate the artists that were working during the protectorate from the artists working in independent Morocco, the dates of the beginning of modern art exhibition in Morocco always change based on a debate of who is considered modern, and particularly whether modern art began during the Protectorate era or if it was only post-colonial. It is not, however, the goal of this dissertation to make a case for the beginning, in part because of the limited topic of the artists linked to the Casablanca school. No matter the exact starting date, though, it is clear that there were few exhibitions of Moroccan painters, and exhibited easel paintings were mainly the domain of European artists. While community members and passers-by might have seen artists like Rbati and Ben Allal working, the main locally produced visual material people might see would be murals in cafes and graffiti in the streets. For example, Casablanca School artist Mohammed Hamidi recollected that he was pushed to study art within the formal setting of the academy because, up until that point, he had been doing graffiti in his neighborhood in Casablanca.<sup>26</sup>

### **Mural Paintings in the “Cafés Maures”**

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<sup>26</sup> Mohammed Hamidi, interview by author, Casablanca, 12 July 2012.

There is also a history of mural paintings in traditional cafes. Called “cafés maures” (Moorish cafes), the Protectorate-era public of these spaces was an Arab or Amazigh/Berber public, decidedly different than a *ville nouvelle* European public ones. These cafés exist as, at least hypothetically, an indigenous space that is traditional insofar as it predates the Protectorate. Some of these cafés included murals on the walls by anonymous artists that were oriented towards this public in this space. These café murals are not contained to the era of the Protectorate—they continue to be painted up to today and may have existed prior to colonialism. For the most part, they are profoundly undocumented and kept anonymous, although they were briefly discussed in Khalil M’Rabet’s foundational text on modern art in Morocco, *Peinture et identité: L’identité marocaine* (1989).

In fact, the images that exist from the 1930s of these paintings are not necessarily localized to Morocco. The only contemporaneous source that I am aware of, a 1938 article by Gabriel Audisio in the Parisian journal *Arts et métiers graphiques*, focuses on the broad trend of mural paintings within these cafés throughout French North Africa.<sup>27</sup> While we have the names of the photographers, there is no explanatory information attached to the images themselves with dates or locations. Despite the lack of clear information, including whether or not these murals were exclusive to urban cafes, the author references seeing such murals in two Tunisian cities (Sousse and Sfax, with no further information about their location than the names themselves). This article was the only text that M’Rabet was able to find during his research, in addition to his personal memory of café paintings picks up in the 1960s.<sup>28</sup> Relying on conversations with other people and his own knowledge of the verifiable foundations of popular imagery in Morocco,

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<sup>27</sup> Gabriel Audisio, “Les peintures murales dans les cafés maures,” *Arts et métiers graphiques* 63 (1938): 37-41.

<sup>28</sup> Khalil M’Rabet, email message to author, March 27, 2010.

M'Rabet follows Audisio in locating these murals (if not those that are imaged, then similar ones) within the national boundaries.

The *Arts et métiers graphiques* article contains a large number of photographs of the walls. Mainly, the photographs are of details of paintings, and there is only one image in which we see the tops of men's heads that are clustered nearby. The paintings are mainly quite flat, with no attempts at dimension, though ornate. On the first page of the article is a detail of a luscious bouquet of many kinds of flowers in a decorated vase with a small bird dwarfed on either side. There are fantastic pastoral scenes, as in one in which a large feline and a deer drink from a full stream. There are trees with full branches, and an oversized snake that is larger than the tree he is wrapped around [Image 0.2]. A later image shows a series of images that are unrelated and to different scales placed next to each other – there is a small girl, next to her is another vase full of flowers flanked by birds, nearby there is a cluster of palm trees again with birds. The paintings are rarely solely decorative, and instead are almost all representational. Sometimes there is Arabic text written nearby, though it seems to be more a larger version of someone's actual writing than calligraphy per se.

The author of the article, Gabriel Audisio writes that although indigenous art is “not very creative” and hemmed in by a “rigorous traditionalism,” the only place that one can find what he terms art (as opposed to this expression of traditionalism) is in the murals in the “cafés maures.” For Audisio, these murals can be read as emerging from decorative traditions of the Middle East and Iran, particularly Persian tapestries and miniatures, older Byzantine influences, as well as

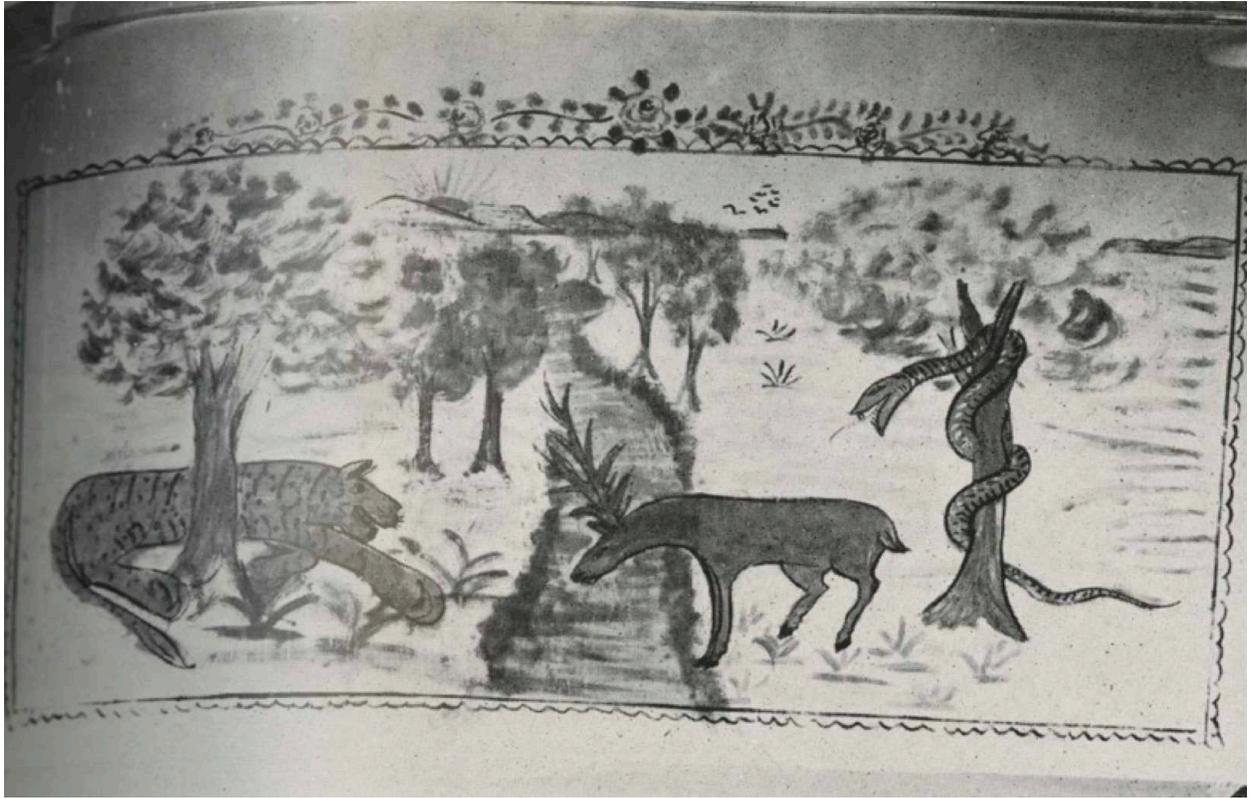


Image 0.2: Image of a pastoral scene from a “café maure.”

Gabriel Audisio. “Les peintures murales dans les cafés maures.” *Arts et métiers graphiques*. Paris, 63: 15 mai 1938. (37)

vernacular local culture.<sup>29</sup> The murals draw on subjects that evoke, for him, the Bible, the Koran, and the stories from the Thousand and One Nights.<sup>30</sup> Audisio celebrates the passion and sincerity of these ‘naïve’ images, suggesting that the future of art in North Africa must rest on this blending of cultures.

Most interesting in the article is the place that colonialism plays. The presence of outsiders here, for Audisio, brings technology and violence as well as invigorating possibilities for artists [Image 0.3]. He writes,

...I believe that the real sign of lived life is missing if indigenous artists are content to indefinitely repeat their ethnic themes without being influenced by the forms of European existence that colonization introduced to them. But [the muralists] are not missing anything. The realism of contemporary life marks them, invades them: soldiers, sailors, steamships, tri-color flags, automobiles, and airplanes are mixed with mythological animals, magic signs, kif [cannabis] smoke, fairy gardens, like in the imagination of our children, and we see them brought up to the composition of genre scenes and historical tableaux...<sup>31</sup>

The dynamic of power is not completely absent—colonialism is marked by soldiers, steamships, and flags—though Audisio does not suggest the repercussions of this suggested violence on the artists and viewers. Colonialism also brings prototypical modern technology (steamships, automobiles, airplanes) and culture. The forms of European existence and the realities of contemporary life do not provoke response for Audisio, but enrich local artistic practice. There seem to be two temporalities in this description: the fantastic, irrational, pre-modern time of Maghrebi people, and the modern, rational time brought by the colonists. If there is no real sense of a modern Maghreb, Audisio does hail the attempts to respond to the imported modern life.

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<sup>29</sup> Audisio actually writes “des thèmes décoratifs empruntés à l’Orient, et en particulier à la Perse,” that is, “decorative themes borrowed from the Orient, and particularly from Persia.” 38

<sup>30</sup> Audisio 37-39

<sup>31</sup> Audisio 40

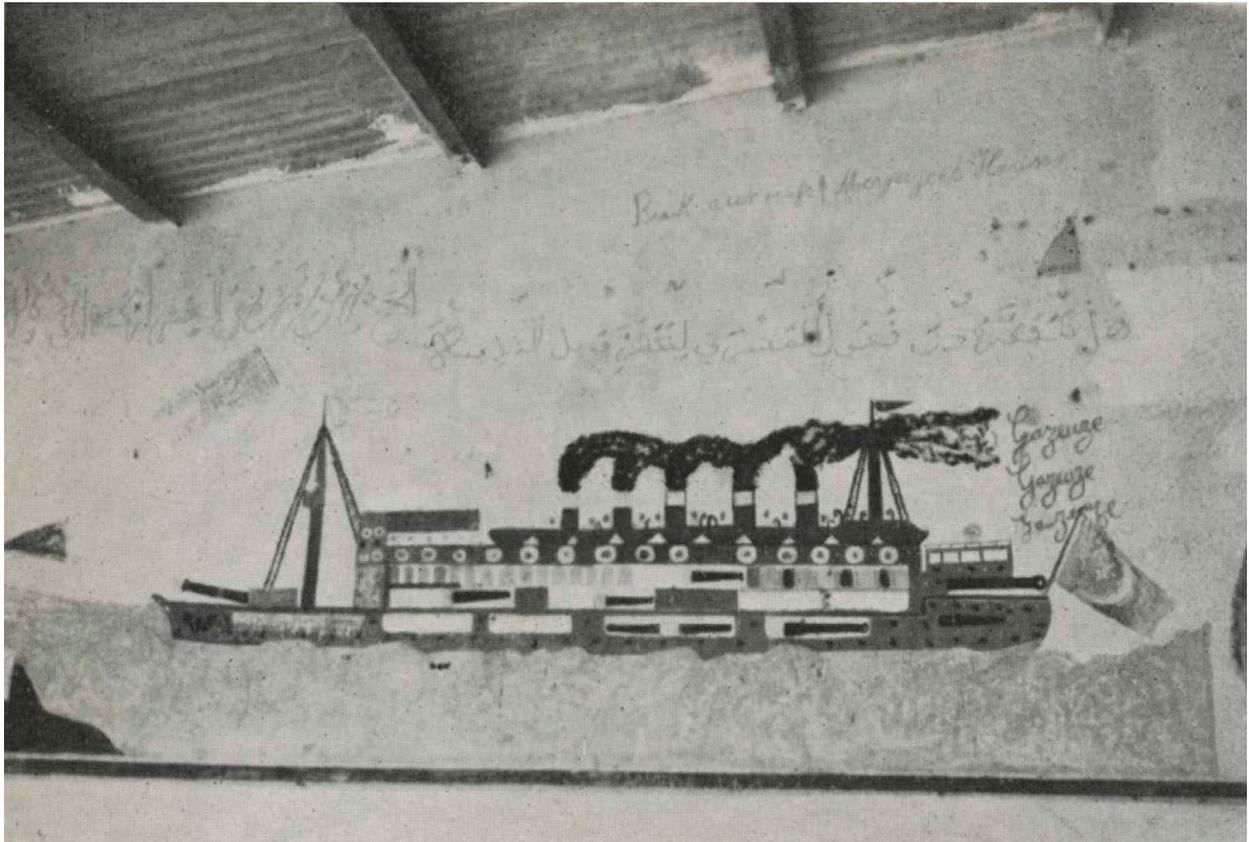


Image 0.3: Image of a steamship in a mural from a “café maure.”

Gabriel Audisio. “Les peintures murales dans les cafés maures.” *Arts et métiers graphiques*. Paris, 63: 15 mai 1938. (40)

Khalil M'Rabet, writing approximately fifty years later, reconfigures these relationships within these images. He suggests that in fact, we must read these murals as a local protest. For the most part, murals or other painting integrated into architecture were the only paintings by Moroccans that were seen within the country. Nonetheless, the paintings were not, as Audisio suggests, the only paintings—the only “high art”—being created. To the contrary, there is an important confluence between the style of these images and the style of the ‘naïve’ paintings by artists such as Ben Allal and Rbati.

This comprehensibility of images and scenes is an important aspect of the murals. For M'Rabet, these images proliferated at the same point that the system of Koranic schools declined or was destroyed by the incursion of colonialism and the educational system it brought along. As the foreign presence increased, so did the rate of illiteracy.<sup>32</sup> The legibility of popular images at this point created a possible space of resistance, and M'Rabet reads deliberate protest into the murals. For him, the images seem to “crystallize the reaction of the population against the occupant.” The popular imagery gives a sense of unity to the population, offering space to identify in contrast to the European presence with images recalling the past glories of Islam and victories of ancestors. M'Rabet is careful to consider the possibility that the Protectorate encouraged the proliferation of these images as a means of diverting the energies of the population, dissolving aggression in a circumscribed setting of protest where it would not overflow. Yet by the same token, these murals were done in protest, to be understood by viewers that knew the stories they called upon: “The image, up to this point abstract, archetypal, becomes a material support, real, that uses the pretext of a mythical and religiously rooted discourse,

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<sup>32</sup> M'Rabet 41

centered of the permanence of ideas shared by the whole community.”<sup>33</sup> Shared cultural tradition becomes a rallying point of identity.

It is alluring to read protest in these images, because of the history of political actions that people may have wanted to protest against. For all of the lyrical and romanticized musings on traditional Morocco, the Protectorate was most invested in creating and maintaining power. According to Susan Slyomovics, the framework of French power was a perpetual state of emergency. Lyautey pronounced an “état de siege” on 2 August 1914 and modified it on 7 February 1920. The state of emergency was pronounced again on 1 September 1939, yet nonetheless remained in full force for the forty-two years after 1914 until Moroccan independence.<sup>34</sup> While Oujda and Casablanca were occupied in 1907, and the military presence was felt long before the official proclamation of the Protectorate with the Treaty of Fez in 1912, rural areas were not fully controlled in French Morocco until the early 1930s.<sup>35</sup> Contemporaneous to the solidification of centralized power, the young elites that formed the core of the nationalists began working for reforms in the early to mid-1930s. They did not declare independence as an objective until 1944, with the founding of the Istiqlal party. The movement, such as it was, became stronger in 1936-1937 and following riots in Meknès, all nationalist activity was forced to be clandestine until 1945.<sup>36</sup> Two significant legal proclamations (dahirs) were pronounced in this same period. The dahir of 29 June 1935 mandated prison terms for demonstrations and actions that disturbed order, peace, and tranquility, and the dahir of 26 July

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<sup>33</sup> M'Rabet 40-41

<sup>34</sup> Susan Slyomovics, *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 95.

<sup>35</sup> John Waterbury, *The Commander of the Faithful: The Moroccan Political Elite—A Study in Segmented Politics* (New York: Columbia UP, 1970), 36.

<sup>36</sup> Waterbury 46

1939 added sentences for making or distributing tracts meant to disrupt order, tranquility, or security.<sup>37</sup>

However, the lack of documentation of these murals as well as the lack of precise historical information about their role in Morocco itself prevents us from having any solid reason to read protest as such into these images. However, bringing together multiple visual traditions with new technologies suggests clearly that artists were creating new kinds of relationships within this work. Visually, on a wall that would be seen by a large local public, artists were working through the vast number of visual cues they were receiving. Putting images inspired by the Koran next to images of colonial soldiers, artists were creating a visual record that put the Maghreb into a constellation of locales and traditions. More than a protest, we can read a crystallization of place in the paintings, showing the unique positioning of the Maghreb—and Morocco in particular—as a center between Africa, the Middle East and Arab world, and Europe.

### **Modernism in Morocco**

I am interested in the ways that artists are able to forge new relationships in their artwork, reflecting and creating new configurations of publics. For the Casablanca School artists that grew up during the Protectorate, the background I have given on colonial cultural policy and artistic production is by no means irrelevant. To the contrary, this is the system that the artists inherit, and try to challenge and shape within their own artistic practices, their collaborations with other

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<sup>37</sup> As Slyomovics writes, these dahirs would go on to provide the legal precedent for the incarceration of protesting intellectuals and students under King Hassan II. (99)

disciplines, and their actions to create or modify artistic structures. I will trace in this dissertation the ways in which artists acted locally and with regard to other places and groupings, both in Europe during their studies and with regard to Third Worldism, Pan-Africanism, and Pan-Arabism.

I want to point out three qualifications in order to clarify the ways in which I am using these terms. Much of my work is invested in understanding the interplay between the local (the city, the nation) and the global or transnational (the region, the world). If I continue to return to these ideas, it is not to create a Manichean polarity between local and global, but instead to consider them as intertwined concepts whose boundaries are not fixed but permeable and forever changing and being re-articulated. Rather than reading post-colonial national culture as solely about the nation, I am interested in considering it through the lens of localized interpretations of and interactions with different kinds of globalisms.

Secondly, I argue that the art history of modernism rests on a foundation of cosmopolitanism. Many strands of modern art have been influenced by objects from the colonies on display in the metropole, with Picasso and African masks as the most widely discussed example, though of course not the only one. European artists were often deeply influenced by their trips to the colonies. Examples within the Maghreb include Wassily Kandinsky in Tunisia starting in 1904, Henri Matisse in Morocco in 1912, Paul Klee in Tunisia in 1914,<sup>38</sup> as well as more obvious links through Orientalism, as in Eugène Delacroix in Algeria and Morocco. Moreover, artists from the colonies (during or after colonialism) came to the metropole to study and work; as early as 1911, the Egyptian artist Mahmoud Mukhtar graduated from the Ecole des

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<sup>38</sup> These dates are listed in the “Chronology of Significant Events in Arab Art since 1900,” *New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Ed. Hossein Amirsadeghi, Salwa Mikdadi, and Nada Shabout. (London: TransGlobe Publishing Ltd, 2009), 278-279.

Beaux-Arts in Paris, and in 1929, the Egyptian Academy was established in Rome.<sup>39</sup> Beyond the idea of comparative modernisms, in which case studies of modernisms from around the world are brought into dialogue with western modernism, I would additionally argue that it is both myopic and reductive to consider modernism as existing in Europe and the United States free from external influence and participation. As I consider modernism in Morocco and the importance of the early training in Europe and the United States, I want to be clear that I am not suggesting that these artists mimetically transplanted European modernism to Morocco, a charge that I have often heard leveled against this generation of artists in interviews and conversations within Morocco. To the contrary, it seems to me that global artistic modernism is profoundly shaped by these interactions between shared ideas and local circumstances. Within Morocco, these influences include art schools within European and American cities, Third Worldism and post-colonial theory as it intersects with Pan Africanism, and Pan-Arabism.

A final caveat is that entrance into globalized interactions, and to interactions with Europe, did not come with colonialism. While Morocco was not part of the Ottoman Empire, its unique proximity to Europe has facilitated a lengthy history of cultural and military interactions between Morocco and Europe (especially Spain and Portugal). Tarik Ibn Ziyad's 711 conquest of Andalusia<sup>40</sup> and the shared cultural history between Morocco and Spain up until the Inquisition is a recognized aspect of this long-standing cultural hybridity present within Morocco. Yet, as Zakya Daoud forcefully points out, this history of invasions in Morocco did not stop with the return from Andalusia. Beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish and Portuguese Reconquista pushed the Andalusians (Muslims and Jews) from Spain and followed them across the Strait,

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<sup>39</sup> Amirsadeghi, Mikdadi, and Shabout 278-279

<sup>40</sup> Zakya Daoud, *Abdelkrim. Une epopée d'or et de sang* (Casablanca: Editions Porte d'Anfa, 2010), 22

attacking consistently up until a provisory peace treaty between Morocco and Spain in 1799.<sup>41</sup> I point this out because I use the idea of traditional Moroccan visual culture throughout my work, following the ideas stated by Casablanca School artists themselves. Yet I do not believe in a pure traditional culture that existed solely within the boundaries of the modern nation-state. Many Amazigh (“Berber”) people are nomadic, and the Amazigh motifs that can be found in Moroccan modernism can be understood as symbols that have crossed national boundaries in the Maghreb and Sahel. Even in more grounded populations, both the trade route coming up through the Sahara and bringing ideas and objects to the storied plaza Djemaa al-Fna in Marrakech, one of many trade-related, cultural, and religious links to southern and western Africa, and this lengthy history of invasions primarily in the north on both sides of the Strait suggests that traditional (visual) culture would be affected by external cultures and influences.

The first chapter of this dissertation focuses on the period following independence in 1956 until Farid Belkahia’s return to Morocco as director of the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux Arts (1962). Belkahia is a foundational figure in Moroccan modernism, and it is under his direction that the school became known as a center of modernist discourse. The chapter argues that the foundations of Moroccan artistic modernism can be found in early experiences of study and travel abroad, where this generation of artists began first to elaborate their individual artistic projects.

I use the concept of cosmopolitanism here to consider personal alliances experienced outside of the framework of the nation-state within the highly mixed populations of certain major city-centers. Although cosmopolitanism suggests an ease of movement and exchange, I want to foreground in this chapter that cosmopolitanism and the desire for internationalism experienced

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<sup>41</sup> Daoud 25-27

by post-colonial Moroccan artists abroad was by no means effortless. Particularly for the artists that sought to establish themselves in European city-centers, and especially in Paris, the idea of cosmopolitanism was always partial, hard won, and intrinsically limited.

The artists highlighted in this dissertation were almost all studying and working abroad during this time period, and the chapter considers the importance of the internationalism on its own terms of this time, that is, internationalism for its own sake that was not only motivated by a lack of local resources. Many artists had scholarships primarily from abroad aimed towards newly independent nations, but also paid for by the Moroccan government itself. Most left for abroad before there was a distinct modernist artistic scene in Morocco. Even if these artists were framed by their national identity by scholarships, and, especially, in exhibitions, this era predates a distinct national art scene. The artists did not go abroad as representatives of a national cultural scene, or even necessarily with a precise plan to return to develop this scene, although this chronologically coincides with the period of de-colonization. In the interviews that I have conducted with artists about this time period, and in the brief writing that they did about this from the 1960s, this time period seems to predate the strongly nationalist and anti-colonial stances that many would go on to support, so that they went abroad instead as individuals trying to expand their personal horizons. This section will include a discussion of the role of Paris and Rome as colonial metropolises with a hybrid and cosmopolitan character that offered meeting-points for post-colonial intellectuals. I also highlight in particular the careers and work of artists Ahmed Cherkaoui and Jilali Gharbaoui.

The movement of artists, ideas, and artworks following independence up until 1963, the year of the “Rencontre Internationale” in Rabat, was decidedly extra-national, and events within the boundaries of Morocco were rare, and always leading towards or framed by experiences

abroad. The second chapter argues that an accrued discourse that is built up while the artists are abroad in exhibitions that take place abroad prior to the return of the artists to Casablanca and prior to significant exhibitions within Morocco. I particularly focus on two exhibitions in particular, “Deux Mille Ans d’Art au Maroc” and the “Rencontre Internationale”. I argue that these two exhibitions represent a turning point in the art history of Moroccan modernism as well as the crystallization of the contestations and aspirations undergirding arts discourse at this time.

A major part of the creation of the discourses of Moroccan modernism can be found in early international exhibitions. The exhibitions I note (including *Peintres marocains*” in Tunis (1957), an exhibition of Moroccan Artists at SFMoMA (1957), and early editions of the Alexandria and Paris Biennales) are culled primarily from the chronology of Moroccan art in leftist cultural journal *Souffles* that the artists themselves proposed in 1967.<sup>42</sup> As this was a chronology written by the artists that I am interested in, it is worth taking seriously the exhibitions that they themselves laid out as important a few years later. This does not mean that this chronology is the only possible chronology of exhibitions, but instead that for the artists, there were a number of international group exhibitions that they believed were formative in the history of the Casablanca School. International exhibitions created an idea of a national scene before these artists come together to work towards one themselves. I want to suggest that it is originally within this constellation of exhibitions that a distinctly national art movement was formed. In other words, I argue in this chapter that the very claim for a distinct Moroccan art arose in international exhibitions that took place while all of the artists were working and studying abroad. The national framing comes from outside, comes from international exhibitions, before it comes to be intranationally constituted. By the time there is a major exhibition in

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<sup>42</sup> “Chronologie de la peinture marocaine depuis 1956.”

Morocco, the “Rencontre Internationale” in Rabat in 1963, there was already an accumulated discourse, created in discussions that existed solely outside of Morocco, in exhibitions that were abroad, featuring artists that were almost exclusively abroad. Each exhibition made a claim for what Moroccan modernism was: where its networks were, and how it was constellated, how it fit into national youth movements as well as within the region.

The first exhibition that is highlighted in particular within the chapter, “Deux Mille Ans d’Art au Maroc” (“2000 Years of Art in Morocco”) took place at the Galerie Charpentier in Paris (1963). The exhibition was an official initiative, suggested by the Moroccan Ambassador in Paris to honor the first official visit to France of King Hassan II. The analysis will come in part from the gallery’s archive at the Kandinsky Library at the Centre Pompidou that includes a relatively full archive of this exhibition as told from the point of view of France.<sup>43</sup> It is a telling moment in a post-colonial history of Moroccan art. Rather than showcasing a long and glorious visual history within the discrete boundaries of Morocco, the exhibition happens in the metropole, in Paris, to celebrate the new king’s first official visit to the former colonizer. The archive shows a story of different expectations in France and in Morocco, and a series of miscommunications, which is in many ways an ideal case study of the stakes of cosmopolitanism as expressed through exhibition politics in the immediate post-colonial period.

The second exhibition that is highlighted in particular within the chapter is from the same year, the “Rencontre Internationale des Artistes.” This exhibition took place in Rabat and was openly at least in part a direct response to “2000 ans d’art au Maroc.” It was the first major exhibition that happened of modernist art within the boundaries of Morocco itself. The exhibition hosted major European and international modernists, including Picasso, Miro, and Papa Tall,

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<sup>43</sup> Fonds Galerie Charpentier, Kandinsky Library, Centre Pompidou, Paris. No page numbers.

alongside the Moroccan modernist artists. In the catalog essay by museum director Naima Khatib, while the artists had been working abroad, “according to the laws of Moroccan hospitality,” they wanted to invite colleagues to Morocco and welcome them there, an idea that took hold for Khatib during the exhibition at the Galerie Charpentier that she had collaborated on.<sup>44</sup> Bringing international artworks to Morocco both frames the Moroccan artists within a cosmopolitan international art world, and suggests that Morocco could be – like the metropole – a place of exchange, a place to host visiting artists from all over the world. It is at this point that artistic modernism begins to exist within the territorial boundaries of Morocco, and I discuss at length the stakes of presenting Moroccan modernism in terms of its dialogue with international modernism in this first major exhibition of modernist artwork within the geographic space of Morocco.

The third chapter focuses on the Ecole des Beaux Arts of Casablanca, and on the Casablanca school artists once they had returned from abroad. I focus in this chapter primarily on the creation of the school, its links to other local institutions, and the artists’ attempts to create national associations. Starting with Farid Belkahia’s return in 1962, the artists began creating a new kind of arts pedagogy for Morocco. I critically discuss contemporaneous arts education and structures, as well as the challenges that were faced by the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux-Arts, a small and underfunded municipal school. In the almost complete absence of infrastructures for the arts such as art galleries and other exhibition spaces, critical art journals, and artists networks, these artists were forced to take on multiple roles, working to create associations, collaborate across disciplines (particularly with the journal *Souffles*), and explore new possibilities for exhibitions and public engagement. I argue in this chapter that these multiple activities are

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<sup>44</sup> Naima Khatib. “Pourquoi cette rencontre?” *Rencontre internationale des artistes*. (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Musée des Oudayas, 1963.) No page numbers.

fundamental to their individual artists' projects, and that an analysis of the artwork is only possible in the context of the larger stakes of their actions.

The artists that were employed by the school often returned to Morocco specifically to take positions there. Personal commitments brought some artists back, although it is also important to equally pay tribute to the idealism of post-colonial national culture and a commitment to making things better in the home country for many that returned. It is this Third Worldist post-colonial commitment to national culture that I will focus on in this chapter, trying to tease out its iterations in pedagogy, artistic practice, and exhibitions, as well as its interdisciplinary connections and ultimate limits.

The school of fine arts under the direction of Belkahia became known for a pedagogy that reflected this ideological commitment. I am particularly interested in the school beginning in 1964, the year following the "Recontre Internationale," with the appointments of Mohammed Melehi and Mohammed Chebaa. Together, these artists worked towards a pedagogy that was in line with their individual artistic work, which was deeply rooted in creating a possibility of Moroccan modernism by grounding the international modernism that they had learned and developed abroad in local visual referents. I have discussed pedagogy, the breadth of the faculty (including Andre Elbaz, Mohammed Atalah, Mohammed Hamidi, Mustapha Hafid, Bert Flint, and Toni Maraini), the resources that were available, and student exhibitions, trying to paint overall as clear a picture of the school at this time as possible.

The teachers sought out interdisciplinary connections, the strongest of which was with *Souffles*, a francophone literary and cultural journal founded by poet Abdellatif Laâbi in 1966. It became bilingual with Arabic in 1971, then called *Anfas*. From the beginning, the journal was deeply involved in both cultural politics in Morocco, with issues focusing on cinema, national

culture, or fiction, and in Third Worldism, writing about Palestine in relationship to Vietnam, or covering the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar. This is where I will be looking at the impact of Pan-Africanism at the time. Responding to the needs of society, *Souffles* was meant to act as a site for intellectuals to rally in revolution against both post-colonial imperialist and lasting colonial cultural domination.

I take a look at the close relationship between the poets involved in *Souffles* with these artists including a shared conception of what modernism was, and consider at length the role that artworks played in early issues of the journal. In order to present the debates about modernism more clearly, I write about the individual aesthetics of Belkahia, Melehi, and Chebaa. Despite their divergent aesthetics, the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux-Arts became the Casablanca “group,” the artists held together more by their ideas of modernity than by shared aesthetics. As part of this, I discuss the 1966 Rabat exhibition “Belkahia-Melehi-Chebaa,” which led to the collaboration between *Souffles* and these artists. There is a particular focus on the issue of *Souffles* titled “Situation: Arts Plastiques Maroc,” which includes essays, artworks, the timeline referenced in Chapter 1, and surveys meant to take stock of the situation faced by artists at this time within Morocco.

The artists’ pedagogy and shared interests with the *Souffles* group were deeply rooted in debates on national culture and post-coloniality. This extended to attempts to create national associations for artists, including the Association Nationale des Beaux-Arts (ANBA) and the Association de Recherche Culturelle (ARC). I consider these associations in terms of the unionizing ideals that led these attempts to fight the remnants of colonial cultural policies and neo-colonial cultural institutions, taking into account the importance of the nation as an idea for

these artists as well as the limits of nationalized organizations. This includes a discussion of the position that this group of artists took with regard to so-called “naïve” artists.

The fourth chapter places the work of the Casablanca artists into the context of Third Worldism and transnational solidarity, as well as the political context of Morocco and the Years of Lead. I also consider theories of public-ness in order to clarify the positions that the artists were increasingly seeking out during this era, and argue that this conception of the artist as publically engaged was closely related to the movement of Third Worldist discourses.

Modernism for the Casablanca school as well as the *Souffles* group was located in the intersection of the local/national and the transnational. For this generation of intellectuals, Third Worldist theories and exhibitions shaped in significant theoretical and practical ways their work, despite the intense insistence on national culture and national structures. I trace the articulations of local/national and transnational with regard to specific Third Worldist cultural events. I am particularly interested in this chapter in the intersection of national culture and Third Worldism. At first glance it seems like an inherent contradiction, that a focus on national culture is developed by the broad transnational intellectual currents of Third Worldism. Yet I am interested in understanding the specificities of the iteration of Third Worldist ideology within Morocco at this point, particularly via the experience of *Souffles*, which claimed simultaneously a national, regional, and transnational ideological outlook. While the artists during this period did not claim the same transnational collaborations that the writers involved with *Souffles* did, their training and foundation was cosmopolitan (as shown in the first two chapters) and continued to be built internationally. In the intersection of Third Worldism and Pan-Africanism, there was a newly active framing of Morocco as distinctly African that nourished this transnational framework for Moroccan art production. I take as examples the participation of the Casablanca artists (as well

as the coverage of these events in *Souffles*) in the First Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar (1966), the Pan-African Festival in Algiers (1969), and the International Meeting of Sculptors in Mexico (1968). These ideals of Third Worldism in art arise from a national context, yet are elaborated in artistic events throughout the Third World, in collaboration with other Third World artists.

Similar to Frantz Fanon's theories about the colonized writers' responsibility to the nation, many artists and intellectuals in Morocco tried to foment a national culture by appealing to the nation at large, often via public events. I describe some of these engagements with the idea of the public, as well as try to analyze what exactly is meant by "the public" and how it is constituted. This is not a separate question from the nation, but a complication of the same issues at stake. For example: beyond attempting to explore the relationship of the transnational and the national when thinking about how post-colonial and Third Worldist ideas were articulated within one national context, how were these same ideas aimed towards local and national publics and translated for a non-professional art public? How is a national public created?

Given the centrality of the idea of the nation as well as the broader cultural currents lauding public engagement, art in the public sphere is an important element of post-colonial national culture. The most well known example of artists moving outside of elite spaces is the 1969 Casablanca school exhibition in Djemaa al-Fna in Marrakech, which I write extensively about: how and why it happened, what the exhibition looked like and included, what the documentation suggests, and contemporaneous criticism and response to the event. I rely theoretically on Miwon Kwon's discussion of public art and Michael Warner's theorizations of publics (including his response to Habermas), and consider both what "public" meant for these artists and the limits of Habermas's theorizations within Morocco. I approach these theories in relation to the statements that the artists released about the exhibition, and argue that the artists,

recognizing the exclusions of nationalist politics, still used a strategic employment of an idealized national public in their work. I want to suggest that there was more broadly at this point in Morocco a strong belief that change was possible, and that nation-based engagement was closely linked to both the notion of post-colonial national culture as well as to this belief in the possibility of change.

This movement towards public space was not limited to this exhibition, or even to professional artists. There are examples of Tayyeb Sadiki's moving theater TAK (Théâtre Ambulant Kheima) as well as the 1969 exhibition in Casablanca that was meant to be a continuation of the Marrakech exhibition. However, similar motions can be seen outside of professional artists, with many activities revolving around an attempt to move culture outside the hands of an elite and into daily life. At a certain moment around this same year, 1969, with exhibitions held all around the country in any sort of meeting space, culture seems to take on a new dimension, with newspapers celebrating the attempts of non-professional artists to express this post-colonial reality as they understood it.

Today, the discourse about this generation of artists working in Morocco often starts with whether this art was “political” or not. This language mirrors the artists' own discourse from this era, questioning the line between political and cultural engagement, questioning the grounds on which engagement was possible as well as the role art itself was meant to play. My own stance is that the line between politics and culture is thin and fluid, and that cultural questions—and especially the questions of national culture—can have major political ramifications. I therefore discuss at length the contemporaneous political context of Morocco and the growing repression of Hassan II's regime along with the regime's politics of “traditionalization” that shaped counter discourses on modernism. I consider in particular writings about modernism and Moroccan

political history by Zakya Daoud, Abdallah Laroui, and Abdellah Hammoudi. The broader history of the “Years of Lead,” which is what this era of political repression is called, forms the background to this art history, including the assassination of Mehdi Ben Barka and the growing fight against socialist parties within Morocco. I especially turn to Susan Slyomovics for her research on the Years of Lead. I consider as part of this the current critiques of the “complicity” of this generation of artists, and question the extent to which the action in Djemaa al Fna in 1969 is currently framed in Morocco by this critique.

Morocco is often left out of the broader discourse about Palestine and the effects of the war of 1967, or The Six Day War or “Naksa” as referred to from an Arab perspective, between Israel and a coalition led by Egypt, Jordan, and Syria lasted from June 5 to June 10, 1967. It is certainly true that Palestine has been left out of the art history of Morocco. There are, of course, reasons for both lapses. Unlike for the countries of the Levant that experienced the conflict and upheaval of political systems firsthand, the experience of this conflict for most Moroccans was from a distance and rooted in solidarity. In the visual arts, the responses were also limited, both in number of productions and in the brief time period in which they were made.

In the fifth chapter, I argue that the war of 1967 profoundly shaped both national identity and the nature of debates about national culture. I argue here that for many artists, the question of solidarity with Palestine pushed a moment of radicalization, and a rupture between artists interested in culture politics and politics tout court. The question of Palestine therefore affects Morocco by playing a significant role in a charged local context.

Of particular interest in this chapter is the form that solidarity with Palestine took for writers and artists. I compare the openly political stance of the writers’ union with the disavowal of politics by many visual artists. In this regard, the artists from the Casablanca school made a

striking artistic response to the war of 1967 with the series of posters published by in the special issue of *Souffles* on Palestine in 1969, images that are set apart from the rest of the work the artists did by virtue of the direct political engagement. The special issue on Palestine was published in the third trimester of 1969 in both French and Arabic, although it had been in the works for a year following a call for contributions. I consider this document at length as well as the politics and aesthetics of the set of posters. Part of this analysis includes a larger consideration of how Palestine is approached in the rest of *Souffles*, including the Third Worldist framework used to explain solidarity with Palestine.

Palestine ends up acting as a flashpoint issue for this generation of artists, as *Souffles* began to radicalize while other artists and intellectuals backed away. It is here that we can see the split that led to the end of the Casablanca school: the space between cultural engagement, and cultural-political engagement, or perhaps the space between individual art understood in a national context, and art aimed towards what *Souffles* termed a “social use” for that nation. My interest here is in considering the way in which support for Palestine played out in a local context, and the way in which this sense of transnational solidarity acted as a flashpoint to exacerbate existing local concerns. I therefore put these two positions (cultural engagement versus cultural-political engagement) into the contemporaneous political context discussed in the previous chapter.

Finally, 1967 marked a significant changing point for the demographics of Morocco as the majority of the Jewish population left the country following the war. I end the chapter by discussing the effects of the war on artist Andre Elbaz, a Moroccan Jewish artist that ceased to exhibit in Morocco following the war. Although the primary history that I am considering is that of the broader trend towards pan-Arabism and Palestinian solidarity, I want to highlight that one

of the particularities for Morocco in terms of the reverberations of the Six Days War across the Arab World had to do with the established Jewish community that existed within the country. The Six Days War profoundly changed the demographics of the country, beyond the changes that had already been set in place with the creation of Israel in 1948. Within a broader context of debates of national culture, I think that is important to consider the exclusions that were enacted. Solidarity with Palestine within the context of Morocco therefore had a second layer that did not exist in the same way in the Levant. I highlight the specific case of the Moroccan Jewish painter Andre Elbaz in order to approach these exclusions more precisely, as well as the treatment of the question of Moroccan Judaism in *Souffles*.

Beyond the immediate effects of the war of 1967, solidarity with Palestine also urged artists to increasingly assume an Arab identity, leading towards the pan-Arabist events, exhibitions, and associations of the 1970s. The sixth and final chapter of this dissertation considers these alliances in terms of the shifting character of alternative globalisms of this era, discussing what happened to this group of artists after the break-up of the Casablanca school.

For artists and within the intellectual discourse, the framework of a national culture became increasingly less popular. This change in focus on the nation was simultaneously a turn towards an increasing engagement with pan-Arabism. This included strengthening the relationship between Morocco and the rest of the Maghreb, as in the 1974 Maghrebi Exhibition in Algiers (“Exposition Maghrébine d’Alger”), organized by painters from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.<sup>45</sup> There had already been relationships between these groups of artists, yet what was new in the 1970s was the relationship created with the broader Arab world, and especially the Mashreq or the eastern part of the Arab world. Writing in 1985 for an exhibition of Moroccan

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<sup>45</sup> February 1974. Discussed at length in *Intégral* N 8, March/April 1974.

painting in Grenoble, Toni Maraini argues that the “opening towards the Orient was the huge event of the 70s.”<sup>46</sup> Starting with the support of the Union of Arab Artists (UAA) created in 1971, the Association Marocaine des Arts Plastiques (AMAP) was created in 1972. Unlike other national associations that were part of the UAA, the AMAP was an independent association that had legal standing but was not founded or organized by the Moroccan government.<sup>47</sup> The AMAP was primarily, for Maraini, “a platform for an artistic inter-Arab culture,” and thus exhibited in Algiers (1974), Tunis (1975), Baghdad (1972, the first Arab Biennial in 1974), Cairo, and Beirut.<sup>48</sup> The association also helped to organize the second Arab Biennial in Rabat in 1976. It is important to note that this was not a syndicated union, but an association that provided a legalized structure in order to organize action.<sup>49</sup> While these activities were still under the auspices of a nation-based association, the nation as such becomes less central to artistic discourse with this increased focus on pan-Arab artistic collaborations.

The most valuable resource for tracing these debates within Morocco is the journal *Intégral*. Founded and directed by Mohammed Melehi, the journal promoted itself as Morocco’s first cultural journal<sup>50</sup> and was active from 1971 to 1977. The journal was an important part of Melehi’s multi-faceted engagement, which included a publishing house (*Shoof*), as well as a production company devoted to documentary films. The journal reunites many of the artists and intellectuals that had been active in *Souffles*, but here, the debates are confined solely to

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<sup>46</sup> Maraini 119

<sup>47</sup> Toni Maraini, “La biennale panarabe de Rabat,” *Intégral* 12/13 (1976): 2.

<sup>48</sup> Maraini, “La biennale panarabe de Rabat”

<sup>49</sup> Toni Maraini, “Baghdad 1974: Première biennale arabe des arts plastiques: un compte-rendu,” *Intégral* 9 (1974): 14.

<sup>50</sup> This wording can be seen, for instance, in the biography included in the catalog *Melehi* (exhibition catalogue) (Rabat: Galerie Bab Rouah, 18-31 December 1997).

questions of art, literature, and culture. This chapter includes a discussion of the journal's special issues on the first and second Arab Biennales.

There is some confusion about whether or not the second Arab Biennale was dedicated to Palestine. However, in any case, Palestine remains a consistent thread throughout the 1970s for Moroccan artists, showing up in articles (particularly in the Baghdad biennale), playing a role in exhibitions that had an increasingly pan-Arab character. I also consider in this chapter other exhibitions that the artists were involved in for Palestine, including the 1978 "International art exhibition for Palestine," organized by the Plastic Arts Section of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

This solidarity with Palestine provoked a transnational alliance that pushed artists to work outside of the boundaries of a national culture. Yet this focus on broader solidarities also coincided with a less revolutionary stance with regard to public intervention and cultural politics in the aftermath of the "Years of Lead." Increasingly, the arts discourse in Morocco became less about public engagement and more linked to questions internal to the arts scene, between generations of artists and in dialogue with the arts infrastructures that were beginning to exist.

An exception to this, perhaps, or more accurately a blend between transnational relationships and local engagement can be seen in the Annual Cultural Moussem [season] of Asilah. The annual festival, established in 1978, is often framed as an expression of pan-Arabism, with the goal of fundamentally enhancing the city through culture beyond just giving superficial decoration. Founded by Mohammed Melehi and artist and politician Mohammed Benaïssa, the festival is known particularly for its public murals, and printing workshops, in addition to a theme focused symposium. I consider the history of this ongoing festival and suggest that it has over time changed from its original goals.

The annual nature of the *moussem* has made it into an artistic structure in its own right, in ways that the actions of the Casablanca school (outside of the art school itself) never were, because they were intermittent. One of the major critiques throughout the 1960s was the lack of artistic infrastructures in Morocco, and the *moussem* can also be interpreted in that light, as an artist-initiated institution.

The 1970s moreover saw the birth of two significant professional galleries, Galerie Nadar (Casablanca) and Galerie l'Atelier (Rabat). Both galleries were founded by women of European origin who lived in Morocco and were married to architects of significant stature in Morocco. I am particularly interested in l'Atelier, because of the focus not just on Moroccan, but also on Arab artists. The chapter ends with a discussion of l'Atelier and the role it played in both supporting artists and the new pan-Arab constellations of art.

The conclusion of the dissertation suggests that in the years following the break-up of the Casablanca school, the very conception of the role of the artist changed in Morocco. With some notable exceptions, for the most part, by the late 1970s the focus of the arts discourse in Morocco turned from public engagement the active use of arts and culture for the benefit of society to a more disengaged and personal art practice.

However, since the late 1990s, there has been a renewed interest in Morocco in both engaging a larger public with art and in siting art within physically public spaces. Yet the nature of this public has changed along with the radical formal change. The contemporary projects I address have moved away from the notion of national culture and identity in favor of interrogating particular spaces and in collaboration with specific, highly local communities. Noting the work of Younes Rahmoun, *la Source du Lion*, and *l'Appartement 22*, I point towards the connections with the 1960s and 1970s while suggesting work that still remains to be done.

## **Methodology**

The main challenge of the research for this dissertation project has been how incomplete the archives are. Research was done through interviews with artists and arts practitioners, and I was lucky to be able to do extensive interviews with both Farid Belkahia and Mohammed Chebaa and to speak with Edmond Amran el Maleh before their deaths. I did significant research in the available libraries and archives in Rabat (especially the media archive and the “Source” and Edmond Amran el Maleh collections that are held by the national library) and in Paris (particularly at the Kandinsky Library of the Centre Pompidou and the Institut national d’histoire de l’art). Some personal archives were available to me (including the archive of L’Atelier, held by Pauline de Mazières). I was not able to access or ascertain the state of the archive of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Casablanca. The media archive contains significant holes, and the existing storage system means that many of the newspapers are ripping or decomposing. They are not digitized, and there is therefore no available record of what precisely is available.

Field work and research for this dissertation has taken me to many archives and collections inside and outside Morocco, and I believe that a more sustained research in Morocco is necessary for further investigation of the contemporary scene is required to be fully analyzed. I have done research in Rabat and Tangier in summer 2010 with a grant from the American Institute of Maghrib Studies, in Paris in summer 2011, in Casablanca and Rabat during the academic year 2011-2012, and in Amman in 2013 with the support of the Darat al Funun Dissertation Fellowship for the Study of Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World at

The Khalid Shoman Foundation/Darat al Funun. My research has also been influenced by my experience of working for the Marrakech Biennale for the third edition in 2009 and the fifth edition in 2014, and I was based in Marrakech for most of the academic year 2013-2014.

I have worked throughout my research period for this dissertation to find enough information to fill the gaps as in Chapter Two and the early history of exhibitions. I also believe that the challenges of finding specific information about such movements (particularly in the late 1960s) also reveal the stakes of re-telling this history in the current political climate of Morocco. I was periodically asked to turn off my recording device (all interviews were otherwise recorded for my personal records on a small handheld recorder) because information still felt too politically sensitive to be documented. Interview subjects also often told me that they forgot the details: this was perhaps true, or perhaps because they did not want to talk about certain subjects.

The main questions that I believe are raised by this dissertation show the necessity for increased and ongoing sustained critical research in the history of modern art in Morocco. As this generation is getting older, it is important to get the oral histories that are still available given the lack of extensive written documentation. This same research is necessary on the artists that were working in Tétouan during this same time period, which were mostly outside the purview of this project. More research is necessary on the individual artists that were involved in the Casablanca school, as well as, more broadly, on the art production of the late 1970s into the 1990s. Slowly there is more attention being paid to this generation of artists in Morocco and in the broader Arab world, and this dissertation also leaves open questions about the possible comparative art histories of Morocco and the larger Maghreb, as well as in dialogue with other African and Arab art movements.

## CHAPTER ONE: MOROCCAN ARTISTIC MODERNISM: MAPPING THE FOUNDATIONS

**The stranger cannot claim the *right of a guest* to be entertained, for this would require a special friendly agreement whereby he might become a member of the native household for a certain time. He may only claim a *right of resort*, for all men are entitled to present themselves in the society of others by virtue of their right to communal possession of the earth's surface.**

**Immanuel Kant<sup>51</sup>**

The Ecole des Beaux Arts in Casablanca, during the twelve years from 1962 to 1974 under the directorship of artist Farid Belkahlia, was a primary center for the movement of artistic modernism in Morocco. The school, with artists on faculty including major modernists such as Mohammed Melehi, Mohammed Chebaa, Mohammed (Romain) Atallah, Mohammed Hamidi, Mustapha Hafid, and Andre Elbaz, has become known for advancing both a pedagogy and a personal artistic style that reflected a modernist engagement with postcolonial national culture, as I will further elaborate in chapter two. Yet by the time they began teaching at the school, all of the artists on faculty had already forged flourishing careers abroad. It is this experience abroad that will be the focus on in this chapter, considering the role of studies within the metropole, including the careers of two artists that forged their careers abroad but did not return to teach in Casablanca.

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<sup>51</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kant: Political Writings*. H.S. Reis, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991): 106.

At the time of independence in Morocco in 1956, the art schools in Casablanca and Tétouan were both colonial institutions, respectively French and Spanish. Morocco had been colonized by the French in 1912 and in the north, by the Spanish in 1913. It was treated as a protectorate, and independence was a much less violent struggle than in neighboring Algeria. With independence, in 1956, came the opportunity of scholarships for study abroad, though not all of the artists left with funding already secured. Instead, they arrived abroad – primarily to Paris, though not exclusively – to expand their horizons beyond the limited structural resources at home.

As Jean-Louis Cohen argued in the case of modernism in architecture of the twentieth century, it is not possible to tell a solely national story of modernism due to the movement and circulation of people and ideas, looking to cinema, telegraphs, aviation, and other technology as examples.<sup>52</sup> This is equally true of the art history of modernism. I am not interested in this dissertation in making an argument for the origins of postcolonial modernism in Morocco, or arguing for foundational figures. There are many possible “firsts,” and different writers have been invested in when and how modernism begins in Morocco. Hamid Irbouh, for example, argues forcefully for the importance of understanding the formation of crafts production in scholarship on art in Morocco, and criticizes writers Toni Maraini and Edmond Amran El Maleh for being elitist in looking only to European-influenced modern art.<sup>53</sup> In various places, some claims have included Mohammed Saghini as the first academically trained painter, Mohammed Ben Ali R’bati as the first easel painter, Ahmed Cherkaoui and Jilali Gharbaoui as the first

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<sup>52</sup> Jean-Louis Cohen. “L’architecture modern au Maroc et la scène mondiale entre 1920 et 1970.” (Paper presented at Casamémoire’s Journées du Patrimoine. 8 April 2012, La Casablancaise, Casablanca, Morocco.)

<sup>53</sup> Hamid Irbouh. *Art in the Service of Colonialism: French Art Education in Morocco: 1912-1956*. (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005)

modernists. To my mind, and for the purposes of this dissertation, I consider it less interesting to decide who was first than to analyze these multiple engagements and relationships.

I want to consider cosmopolitanism as a lens through which to discuss artistic modernism, and particularly the early experience of modernism for the artists of the Casablanca school. I use the concept of cosmopolitanism here to consider personal alliances experienced outside of the framework of the nation-state within the highly diverse populations of certain major city-centers. My focus in this chapter is on the period between 1956 to 1963 and the international movement of artists and circulations of ideas. These movements are decidedly extra-national, and events within the boundaries of Morocco are rare, and always leading towards or framed by experiences abroad. I am interested in the cosmopolitanism of the artists themselves, the cosmopolitanism of the cities in the metropole that they study in, focusing on the careers of two foundational figures in Moroccan modernism, Ahmed Cherkaoui and Jilali Gharbaoui. Despite my focus on cosmopolitanism, few of these artists and artworks were discussed on an individual basis, but instead were engaged with through a nation-based lens. While these may seem like contradictory concepts, I argue that this is actually characteristic of the post-colonial experience of cosmopolitanism and by extension artistic modernism.

As emphasized by Kant, this chapter takes seriously his proposition that cosmopolitanism precludes assimilation. If cosmopolitanism allows for the right of resort [*un droit de visite*], that is, a brief stay in the cosmopolitan spaces, it does not suggest that this guest can “become a member of the native household.” This guest will not be a resident, will not become the same as the other members of the household, but is welcomed as a visitor. I highlight this quotation because, for Moroccan artists at this time, the experience of cosmopolitanism was always partial, hard won, and intrinsically limited. This chapter will moreover consider what those limitations

were and how artists responded, paving the way for the experience of the Casablanca School in the 1960s and the turn to national culture.

To be clear, when focusing on the movement and cosmopolitanism of these artists, I am not suggesting that they are copying an external modernism. To the contrary, to force a solely national narrative onto Moroccan modernism is to ignore the rich intersections and explorations fomented by the globalism of these artists and their training. Rather than denying the ways in which these artists were formed by multiple influences, I want to consider that this is an intrinsic aspect of modernism overall and above all this particular experience of artistic modernism.

It is hard to imagine the modernism that was then developed in Casablanca outside the cosmopolitan experience of these artists and their training abroad. As my argument progresses in this dissertation, I will consider the alliances of Moroccan artists with Third World, Pan-African, and Pan-Arab artists. Although entry into these bloc alliances forms an alternative globalism in my argument, many of these alliances were experienced deliberately through the framework of the nation-state. That is, Third Worldism and Pan-Africanism was experienced through the transnational movement of ideas as localized in Morocco. Artistic Pan-Arabism was experienced as Moroccans – the Union of Arab Artists, for example, was an umbrella organization that included national unions (Union Marocain des Arts Plastiques, in Morocco), and the Arab Biennial was understood via national groupings. The artists themselves initiated the nation-based component of these alliances.

The training abroad, and its ramifications on this generation of artists, including those who then focused their careers abroad, is different, in terms of the way in which national identity was framed. Many artists had scholarships primarily from abroad aimed towards newly-independent nations, but also paid for by Morocco itself, as in one Rome fellowship, and

seemingly the fellowship for Polish-Moroccan exchange. Yet, most artists left before there was a distinct modernist artistic scene in Morocco. Even if artists were constrained by their national identity (particularly in exhibitions), this era predates a distinct national art scene. The artists do not go abroad as representatives of a national cultural scene, but as individuals trying to expand their personal horizons while gaining entry to the perceived international centers of artistic modernism. That is to say that they did not go abroad as representatives of Morocco, but as individuals seeking the wide possibilities of cross-cultural exchange in cities marked by an influx of international artists.

In using cosmopolitanism as a prism in reading the works of these early modernist I am apprehensive of its imitation as a possible or proscriptive utopia. That is not the way in which I am interested in using the concept here. This cultural and artistic mixing on the individual terms that I am considering here was on the one hand a rich aspect of this generation's training and early careers. Rather, my goal is not to tell a story hemmed in by national borders, but to consider the porous interstices and milieu these artists were working in. The cosmopolitanism of the late 1950s and early 1960s is an important part of that, and from which the debates of post-colonial national culture spring and gain force.

Yet I do not want the idea of cosmopolitanism to cover up the uncomfortable clashes or collisions that these artists faced. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the experiences of artists' studies abroad, and particularly the careers of Ahmed Cherkaoui and Jilali Gharbaoui. I highlight Cherkaoui and Gharbaoui because they are pioneers of Moroccan modernism whose work was in dialogue with and inspirational for the members of the Casablanca school, and yet they never taught within the structure. They are moreover often linked because they both died early on in this period, and have thus taken on a posthumous role as forefathers of the movement of

modernism. There are, however, a few caveats that structure the stakes of mid-century cosmopolitanism. The first is that the move abroad was not only reaching towards something new, but also leaving something else behind. In other words, artists went abroad not just because they wanted a new environment, but also because they wanted to leave behind the structural deficits within Morocco. There were not strong art schools or a developed art education. There were virtually no galleries, and the existing art spaces catered to a European public that sought romanticized, exotic scenes of Morocco, often painted by visiting Europeans, much less collectors interested in their work. There were no fine arts museums, and the national gallery did not show any of the young painters until 1960. The broader publics of Morocco were critical of abstract modernism, and art critics were rare. Artists left to pursue new ideas, meet new people, and to soak up all the art they could see abroad – but they also left because they could not find adequate support or structures in Morocco. The second caveat is that this cosmopolitanism was neither fully accepted, nor comfortably assumed. The artists had to confront racism abroad, sometimes connected to anti-Algerian sentiments that morphed into broad censure of the Maghreb, as well as fight to make themselves accepted by artistic structures that were not always open to non-Western modernism. Part of this is a question of belonging. Can we speak of cosmopolitanism without speaking of belonging? If an artist does not feel that he belongs in the context, can this still be understood through the lens of cosmopolitanism? In this chapter, I want to suggest that cosmopolitanism can and does encompass all of this, both the exciting exchange and the uncomfortable limits, the rejections and moments of collaboration.

## **Study Abroad**

A major factor for artists in their choice to study and work abroad had to do with the lack of opportunities and structures within Morocco. As discussed in the introduction, exhibitions were rare, exhibition spaces were hard to come by, and museums showing modern art were nonexistent. Artists in interviews describe their thirst for seeing international modernist artworks for themselves, and the wonder and excitement they had at being in places with museums and galleries where they could drink up modern art. This is not to say that there was no arts education in Morocco. The School of Fine Arts in Tétouan was founded by Don Mariano Bertuchi and opened 12 December 1945. After independence the school the school continue to be administered by the Secretary of Cultural Affairs or the Ministry of Culture, succeeding the Spanish “Inspection” of Fine Arts, which ran the school until then.<sup>54</sup> The Casablanca School of Fine Arts, on the other hand, was originally a preparatory municipal school, created in 1950.<sup>55</sup> It is at these schools that many artists started their training before studying abroad. Notable modernist artists such as Mohammed Serghini, Mohammed Benaïssa, Mekki Meghara, Mohammed Melehi, Mohamme Chebaa, Mohammed (Romain) Ataallah, Saad Ben Cheffaj, and Ahmed Ben Yessef all studied in Tétouan. Fewer studied in Casablanca, although Moahmmed Hamidi did start there (as, of course, did other artists later on in the mid-1960s).

Even those that began their artistic education for the most part still went abroad, and most went to France. Paris was the most important city for study abroad, though not the only one. Following independence in 1956, much of formerly French Morocco was still oriented culturally and politically towards France. The allure of Paris must be understood doubly: in part, by the lore of Parisian modernism, and the cosmopolitan Paris developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century into

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<sup>54</sup> Khalil M’Rabet. *Peinture et Identité: L’expérience marocaine*. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1989), 90.

<sup>55</sup> M’Rabet 107

the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was on the one hand a cultivated image of Paris as the center of artistic modernism by the artistic avant-garde. Yet, for African intellectuals this idea of modernism was further shaped by cosmopolitanism, and the changing structure of the city as well as its intellectual scene at the end of colonialism. Edward Said writes about this in *Culture and Imperialism*, considering the affects of people from the colonies coming into Paris. This presence, particularly in the interwar period, both challenged the “purity” of the metropole itself, while also questioning a Eurocentric concept of modernism and modernity itself. As Said writes, these artists and intellectuals “have laid claim to the space of the Western metropolis and reworked ideas of exile, nation, and citizenship in ways that defy any easy reading of ‘Otherness.’”<sup>56</sup> In other words, by the time the Moroccan artists arrived in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the shape of Paris had changed based on the role of artists and intellectuals from the colonies. In 1949, for example, Alioune Diop opened *Présence Africaine* in Paris, an important publishing house that went on to publish major anti-colonial works such as Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955). The city was moreover such an established center for intellectuals from the colonies that the year of Moroccan independence, 1956, also saw the Society of African Culture’s First Conference of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris.

Yet the lure of cosmopolitan Paris only tells half of the story. Part of the appeal of Paris was – and, arguably, still is— also the lingering cultural colonialism experienced between France and Morocco that set up a center/periphery mentality. This was on the one hand true, that Paris held museums, educational opportunities, and gallery structures that were utterly unavailable in Morocco. Yet this imbalanced perception of the former colonizer to the former colony is also the

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<sup>56</sup> Quoted by Salah Hassan. “Rethinking Cosmopolitanism: Is ‘Afropolitan’ the Answer?” *Prince Claus Funds: Reflections 2012*, Booklet #5. (Amsterdam: Prince Claus Funds, 2012.)

pernicious – and nurtured – reality of artistic scenes for artists that grew up experiencing viscerally a colonial hierarchy that dismissed local culture in favor of the metropole.

The Casablanca Ecole des Beaux Arts is an interesting example of how cultural colonialism lingered in Moroccan arts. The school's first Moroccan director was the Jewish Moroccan artist, Maurice Arama, who held the role from 1960 to 1962. Arama describes the school before 1960 as remaining a colonial institution, founded, funded, and directed by the French even after independence along the lines of French colonial policy on arts and artisanal work in Morocco.<sup>57</sup> Yet even when the school began to slowly shift towards Moroccan interests, under Arama's direction, it was foreign cultural institutions that provided pieces on loan for the school's exhibitions. Moreover, and perhaps more tellingly, diplomas were handed out via mailed in evaluations to France.<sup>58</sup> That is to say that the pedagogy remained primarily shaped by French prerogatives, so that when students were to graduate, dossiers that fulfilled the French imperatives were sent to France, and students were awarded French diplomas. This did not change until Farid Belkahia became director (discussed in chapter two). It is a telling example of the continued cultural relationship between France and Morocco that six years after independence, even when directed by a Moroccan artist, diplomas from the Casablanca school were still awarded by France, and helps ground the lingering relationship that helped to propel so many students to Paris.

Similarly, artists abroad needed to position their studies within their hopes for their individual professional futures. Within Paris, there was a split between the Ecole Nationale

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<sup>57</sup> This policy has been carefully discussed by Hamid Irbouh.

<sup>58</sup> Maurice Arama, interview by author, Paris, 23 April 2012.

Supérieure des Beaux-Arts and the Ecole des Arts et Métiers.<sup>59</sup> In one telling example, Ahmed Cherkaoui studied at the Ecole des Arts et Métiers (diploma 1959), and then went on to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. The former is an engineering school in which students could learn vocations linked to art, while the latter is a fine arts school. Artist Mohammed Hamidi recollects Cherkaoui's advice that he study at Arts et Métiers. Therefore, Hamidi, who had studied at the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux Arts, and then spent a year at the Paris Beaux Arts, then went to study for two years at Métiers d'Art. He ultimately returned to the Beaux Arts 1962-1966. I point this out because of Cherkaoui's rationale. As Hamidi explained to me, Cherkaoui's advice was based on the realities of the scene in Morocco. Cherkaoui believed that no one could support himself solely as an artist within Morocco, and therefore needed to learn a craft as well that could be used to bring in money.<sup>60</sup> Many artists did in fact need to supplement their incomes with posters or decorative work, including Chebaa and Melehi. Discussions of training therefore include questions of how that training might be able to be translated between the two contexts – whether for Arama, how a diploma issued in France and given in Morocco could be helpful to students that went abroad, or for artists, how a diploma showing craft skills granted abroad could help them once they got home.

Cosmopolitanism suggests an ease of movement and exchange, although I want to foreground that cosmopolitanism, as experienced by post-colonial Moroccan artists studying abroad, was by no means effortless. Nadine Gayet-Descendre, writing about Mohammed

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<sup>59</sup> In the biographical sketch offered in *Souffles* ["Ahmed Cherkaoui." *Souffles* 7-8 (3e/4e trimestre 1967). 44] this school is listed as "L'Ecole des Métiers d'Art, Paris." In more recent publications, such as the *Dictionnaire des Artistes Contemporains du Maroc* [Dounia Benqassem, (Casablanca: Editions AfricArts, 2010), 66] this school is listed as "L'Ecole des Arts et Métiers, Paris." Given that the latter is a significant school in Paris, I believe that this is the school that they meant to refer to.

<sup>60</sup>Mohammed Hamidi, interview by author, Casablanca, 12 July 2012.

Melehi's time in Paris describes his isolation there, emphasizing the challenges of this period for Maghrebi artists and intellectuals. She writes, "The France of this era was the France of the repression of Maghrebis (linked to the psychosis and to the wounds of the ambiguous and difficult relationship with Algeria) and of what we would call the 'ratonnades.'<sup>61</sup>,<sup>62</sup> This characterization of isolation and racism holds true for many artists recollecting their time in Paris in the late 1950s and early 1960s. When talking to these artists, stories about their studies in Paris often started with stories of racism, especially in the recollections of artists Farid Belkahia and Mohammed Hamidi. Hamidi, who had not received a scholarship, described taking a boat to Marseille, and, upon his departure, his well-meaning mother, concerned about the cold in Paris, pinned a thick wool Amazigh blanket to his shoulders. Arriving at the train station in Paris in about 1960, he was immediately stopped by French soldiers demanding his papers, destination, and artistic activities. Looking back, he described the blanket as a sort of flag that might connect him to Algeria in the eyes of authorities. This was in the thick of the Algerian war for independence, and Moroccans abroad still felt the cultural pressure on the Maghreb.<sup>63</sup> Jilali Gharbaoui, who had studied in Paris and Rome and had returned to live and work in Paris was equally affected on his return by French racism with regard to Algerians. He was arrested in

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<sup>61</sup> This term refers to anti-Maghrebi violence during the Algerian war, coming from the pejorative term "raton" (small rat) used to designate Maghrebi people at the time. This culminated in violence in October 1961 in Paris, which was classified at the time as a "ratonnade." As Vijay Prashad points out, this was also the term used to describe French policy within Algeria as early as 1945 to describe violence by French paratroopers and air force against Algerians [*The Darker Nations*. (New York: The New Press, 2007), 4-5].

<sup>62</sup> Nadine Gayet-Descendre. "Mohammed Melehi, une vie." *Melehi* (exhibition catalogue) (Rabat: Galerie Bab Rouah, 18-31 December 1997), 45.

<sup>63</sup> Mohammed Hamidi, interview by author, Casablanca, 12 July 2012.

Paris during a police raid triggered by events in Algeria in 1959-1960, and it was suggested that he was perhaps abused by the police while being held by them.<sup>64</sup>

These are not rare examples. To the contrary, in scholarly texts on this era, the image of cosmopolitanism in Paris is often belied by the challenges artists, especially from the (former) colonies, faced when arriving in France. In her article on South African painter Gerard Sekoto, Christine Eyene details the challenges the artist faced on arriving in Paris and the “closed shutters” of the art critics, as he described them. In a letter, Sekoto suggests about his time there that “the public was not enthusiastic about art that was not theirs . . . they would not have it, would not see because it did not belong to their race.” Eyene argues that this was not a singular case, but that many artists felt estranged from Paris and its art scene. She cites critic Julien Alvard, who said, “In reality, Paris is an open city, open to the state of indifference.”<sup>65</sup>

Eyene cites Edward Said on exile, a term that multiple Moroccan artists used in the 1960s to describe this period of their lives.<sup>66</sup> Said writes, “Paris may be a capital famous for cosmopolitan exiles, but it is also a city where unknown men and women have spent years of miserable loneliness.”<sup>67</sup> Although it is an alluring phrase within this discussion, the repeated use of the phrasing of ‘exile,’ both in terms of Eyene’s use of this phrase, taken out of the context of Said’s argument, as well as the terminology used by these artists, is arguably not entirely apt. Exile, in Said’s argument, is the exile of political punishment or pressing danger. In his article,

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<sup>64</sup> “Biographie, d’après Yasmina Filali.” Brahim Alaoui, ed. *Gharbaoui: oeuvres 1955-1971*. (exhibition catalogue) (Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 6 October – 14 November 1993), No page numbers in catalog.

<sup>65</sup> Christine Eyene. “Sekoto and Négritude: The Ante-room of French Culture.” *Third Text* 24, no. 4 (2010), 428-429.

<sup>66</sup> There are multiple instances of this term used by artists to describe being abroad, such as Mohammed Melehi and Jilali Gharbaoui in *Souffles* (issue 7/8).

<sup>67</sup> Edward Said. “Reflections on Exile.” *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000), 176.

Said makes a distinction between exiles, refugees, expatriates and émigrés, which I quote at length because it is worth using precision in this loaded language.

Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider. Refugees, on the other hand, are a creation of the twentieth-century state. The word “Refugee” has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas “exile” carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality. Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons. Hemingway and Fitzgerald were not forced to live in France. Expatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid proscriptions. Emigrés enjoy an ambiguous status. Technically, an émigré is anyone who emigrates to a new country. Choice in the matter is certainly a possibility. Colonial officials, missionaries, technical experts, mercenaries, and military advisers on loan may in a sense live in exile, but they have not been banished.<sup>68</sup>

I do not by any means deny the pain and estrangement that artists felt, leaving their homelands in search of greater artistic possibilities, education, and structures, only to find themselves in a space often hostile to them. Artists left Morocco because they did not have support within the country, socially or structurally. Yet I want to focus on this estrangement, or perhaps, on the experience of the limits of cosmopolitanism, rather than falling back on a facile use of the term ‘exile.’ This post-independence image of exile is quite different, for instance, for many of the leftist Moroccan intellectuals that were exiled after imprisonment during the years of lead and only allowed back into the country during the “années d’alternance” in the 1990s. Paris was deeply important to many artists of this generation, despite the deep challenges that many faced upon their arrival in the late 1950s and early 1960s. However, this was not exile.

Despite its centrality, Paris was not the only location where students pursued further training or residency. There was a clear preponderance towards Paris: artists that studied in the city from Morocco include Gharbaoui, Elbaz, Cherkaoui, Belkahia, Melehi, Cheffaj, and Hamidi.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

A number of artists studied in Rome, namely Gharbaoui, Melehi, Chebaa, and Ataalah, and throughout Spain, such as Melehi, Cheffaj, Meghara, Ataalah. A few individual artists also studied in other cities and countries: Gharbaoui in Holland, Belkahia in Prague, Cherkaoui in Warsaw, and Melehi in the United States.<sup>69</sup>

Interestingly, Rome also appears as an important center for Arab artists. Anneka Lenssen in particular has shown that at the time, Rome was positioning itself culturally with regard to the broader Mediterranean, actively seeking out visiting artists and intellectuals from the southern and eastern coasts of the Mediterranean as well as in Europe, as seen in the various academies as well as in popular media, as in radio broadcasts.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, numerous Arab artists from across the broader Arab world studied in Rome, and would therefore conceivably have met there. Rome had also been identified as a second significant cosmopolitan center by other African intellectuals; for instance, following the Paris conference (1956), the Second Conference of Negro Writers and Artists was held in Rome (Istituto Italiano per l’Africa, 1959). Despite its importance, Rome has been left out of many narratives of mid-century African and Arab cosmopolitanism. In future research, it will be important to consider why Rome has so often been excluded, and what this second major center meant in more detail from a transnational perspective.

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<sup>69</sup> Cheffaj and Meghara were both from Spanish northern Morocco, and played a major role in shaping the school of Tétouan. This dissertation focuses on the Casablanca school, though it would be an important counterpoint to consider the interplay between Casablanca and Tétouan as two major centers, and the different relationships of artists to Spain and to France. Ataalah is also absent from this discussion because he does not write about his experience abroad, and we did not discuss it in our 2010 interview.

<sup>70</sup> Anneka Lenssen, “The Plasticity of the Syrian Avant-Garde, 1964-1970” (paper presented at the conference “The Longevity of Rupture: 1967 in Art and its Histories,” American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon, June 2012).

From Morocco, Jilali Gharbaoui (1956-1957, a fellowship originally meant for Farid Belkahlia that was ceded to Gharbaoui), Mohammed Melehi (1957-1962), and Mohammed Chebaa (1962-1964) all studied in Rome. It is in Rome where Gharbaoui first met Melehi first met, and where Melehi also met Toni Maraini, his future wife. Maraini and Melehi married, and Maraini became the art historian at the Casablanca School of Fine Arts, as well as its most prolific critic. She went on to write many of the texts that accompanied exhibitions for the group. The Moroccan government funded a scholarship at one of the academies, and based on the successive dates of their stays, it suggests that this scholarship was given to all three of them.<sup>71</sup>

This is a particularly challenging point to research because, with the time distance of well over fifty years, many of the artists do not have precise memories of this era. In interviews, some artists recounted stories about different side jobs they had to have, or about places that they socialized, but not many seem to think this is an integral part of the narrative. Particularly following the experience in Casablanca and the focus on national culture, not to mention the desire to speak about more recent artistic work, artists were not interested in discussing what their study abroad experiences meant to them and their practice. However, in an issue of *Souffles* in 1967 (that is discussed at length in Chapter 3), artists responded to questionnaires about their training up until that point. Given the closer proximity to this time abroad, these interviews are particularly helpful in clarifying how, at the height of modernism in Morocco, artists adopted these experiences abroad into the narrative they were telling at that point in time. This also meant that the memories of studying abroad were told through a lens of artists deeply invested in the debates of national culture and Third Worldism, and therefore should be analyzed in light of such a framework.

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<sup>71</sup> Gharbaoui's study abroad, in particular, was specifically funded by the Moroccan state, although I do not have information on the source of the other fellowships.

Because the role of Rome for Arab and African artists has been less theorized than that of Paris, the testimonies about Italy in this issue are particularly interesting. For example, Melehi writes of his time in Rome,

We know that after the last war, it was in Italy that there was the largest renewal of taste on an aesthetic level. The country found itself in a period of fermentation that favored the development of new artistic movements.

This is not the narrative that has remained, that it was post-World War II Italy that was the center of avant-garde art (despite the importance of Futurism, whose influence can be seen especially in Chebaa's work). It is an interesting historical testimony to see that, from his perspective in primarily hispanophone northern Morocco, where the metropolitan city center of reference was not automatically Paris, the European city where things were happening was Rome. In his testimony, Melehi recounts that he began by "digesting" and exploring different styles (action painting, dripping, collage) and techniques but wanted something else, something more personal:

These techniques did not represent for me the same thing as for a westerner. They were, in the European context, an attempt at liberation by unblocking new forms and content. I personally had no complex about an artistic past, and these experiences for me were just possibilities. I felt like it wasn't my own culture that I was filtering, that I was organizing, or even putting into question. I was only there as an observer. My activity was the result of this observation. The advantage was that instead of following European conformism, static academism, I followed a path of revolutionary local re-assessment [démarche de remise en question locale révolutionnaire] in trying all of the most avant-gardist methods that the European artists wanted to impose on their society. This experience was possible in Italy more than it would have been in France or elsewhere because of the democracy that reigned between the artists in Rome and the spontaneity of contact.

According to Melehi, at this moment, Zen was fashionable in Italy, a Buddhist doctrine he found easy to understand based on what he saw as the similarities with Islam: "Thanks to Zen, I started

to rediscover as well my own culture all while being in the West.”<sup>72</sup> For Melehi, Rome was both the center of the avant-garde, as well as a place more open to innovation than Paris. He also provincializes modernist artistic styles not as universal but as pertaining to a particular art history that he did not feel he shared. He does not discuss any non-western people and artists, although research suggests that Rome was quite cosmopolitan at this point in time. Melehi identifies individually, as a person that is in some ways out of place and interacting with the avant-garde in a way that is different than everyone else. That is, his process of coming into his own style is not within a cosmopolitan network of non-European artists, as it was for many artists at the time in Paris, but an individual reckoning with a Europe-based avant-garde.

Chebaa describes his time in Rome somewhat differently. Melehi had arrived in Rome in 1957 and left for the United States in 1962, the year Chebaa joined the *Accademia di Belle Arti* (leaving in 1964). Chebaa describes his early schooling at the Tétouan art school as a “conformist” pedagogy that rested on European techniques and that did not whet the appetite for further research. Although early on he had been interested in impressionism as a break from what he had learned, Chebaa points to his major influences during this period as being Kandinsky for his abstraction and Picasso for suggesting that a physical reality can also be met with a new aesthetics and a relationship with a “moral and social engagement.” For Chebaa, Rome was a “new period,” that allowed him to come into contact with not European but “international painting.”

My stay in this country allowed me to enter into contact with international painting and to witness the development of the most remarkable movements of this era: Socialist Neo-Realism (Guttuso), spatial painting (Fontana, Turcato), gestural and sign painting (Kline, De Kooning).

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<sup>72</sup> Mohammed Melehi. “fiches et questionnaire.” *Souffles*, no. 7-8, 2/3/4 Trimester (1967): 56-68. (my translation)

Chebaa began working with gestural painting, especially in black and white:

This decision was not dictated by a need for renewal on the aesthetic level. It corresponded more to a deepening of my consciousness as a rebel [l'homme révolté]. The austerity and gravity of black and white allowed me to better represent a reality of conflicts, struggles, and social injustice. [...] Moreover my contact with the avant-garde intellectuals and artists of Rome made me more sensitive to the different problems appearing in art history in general, especially those about [art's] role in society.<sup>73</sup>

As opposed to Melehi's experience of being able to explore his own society from the perspective of Rome, for Chebaa, the people he met in Rome were deeply important to his trajectory. Chebaa considered himself to be an artist that was deeply invested in social injustice, and would go on to agitate for an increasingly pronounced (political) role for art in society. Despite the focus on the importance of his contact with the artists of Rome in this questionnaire from 1967, in my own interviews with Chebaa, forty five years later, he dismissed the artists in Rome at the time, saying that they were not interesting to him. Instead, Chebaa remembers spending all his time in Rome with the communists and the Communist Party.<sup>74</sup> Rather than pertaining to the globalism of artistic modernism, this becomes a vision of the globalism and the movement of global discourses of the Communist Party. Although many of the Moroccan artists of this generation were interested in communism and socialism, most of them later backed down from a distinct political position. Of this group, it was primarily Chebaa that would go on to work with the Marxist-Leninist movement Ilal Amam. His time in Rome was therefore important on both a political and artistic level, in part by bringing them together. Whether his testimony in *Souffles* or his 2012 interview is more accurate, for Chebaa, what was important in Rome was the possibility

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<sup>73</sup> Mohammed Chebaa. "fiches et questionnaire." *Souffles*, no. 7-8, 2/3/4 Trimester (1967): 35-43. (my translation)

<sup>74</sup> Mohammed Chebaa, interview by author, Casablanca, 5 March 2012.

of expressing social and political engagement in art, and in expanding the image of what role art might play in society.

Casablanca school art historian Toni Maraini suggests, if only in a circuitous way, that the communist ethos of the time allowed for a more open international image of modernism. In a 1995 essay about Melehi, she writes about Melehi's time in Rome, and the way in which he became part of a group of Italian artists and exposed at the gallery Topazia Alliata in Trastevere, an important center of activity. Her comments become more broadly about Italy in the late 1950s. As Maraini writes,

The world of modern art had not yet defined, by commercial and institutional barriers, what Frederic Jameson calls the enclosure of modernism; an enclosure that Jurgen Habermas accusing of ideological treason for the original project of modernity. We were still living the utopia of an “international of the arts [internationale des arts]” sketched out by the futurists (“desire to communicate with all the peoples of the world,” had written Marinetti in 1913) and programmed by the surrealists. We had not elaborated so many theories on the Other and on difference; and we talked even less – as we do today by a resurgence of old questions that were never calmed or rationalized – of “ethnicity” or of “ethnic art.”<sup>75</sup>

The “international of the arts” seems to be a clear reference to the Communist International (in French, the “Internationale Communiste” as opposed to here, the “internationale des arts”), which is all the more interesting for not being elaborated, for being treated as a component of prevailing thought and culture more than as a precise ideology. Maraini also framed Rome with a cosmopolitan utopianism that is never found in writings about contemporaneous Paris. Here, artistic cosmopolitanism is not only enacted via a mixture of multiple international movements, by transposing the maps of global Communism and global modernism, but is also a primary tenet of the very project of modernism.

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<sup>75</sup> Toni Maraini. “Melehi: un itinéraire d’action, une géométrie visionnaire.” *Melehi*. (exhibition catalogue) (Rabat: Galerie Bab Rouah 18-31 December 1997), 13. (my translation)

Finally, the movement to Soviet Bloc countries on the part of Farid Belkahia and Ahmed Cherkaoui provides an interesting example of a South-South movement that circumvents the traditional dichotomy of the metropole and the Outre Mer<sup>76</sup>, although it is important to point out that both artists were well established in Paris as well. Belkahia's path had been somewhat peripatetic, looking for a place from which to find, as he describes it, "roots, sources of my own personality." He therefore left to travel in the Middle East in 1956-7, traveling through Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, although he was quite critical of what he termed the "deteriorated and bastardized" situation of the visual arts in these countries. He then travelled in Czechoslovakia and Italy.<sup>77</sup> His time in Czechoslovakia ended up being quite important for him. Belkahia left for Prague in 1959, and had his first (and seemingly only) exhibition there that same year.<sup>78</sup> He arrived in Prague the same year that, in Morocco, the Union National des Forces Populaires (UNFP) split from Istiqlal, led by Mehdi Ben Barka. The UNFP was distinctly linked to socialism, and was made up especially of left-leaning and internationally mobile youth. Although they were not part of the UNFP, many artists, pertaining to this same left-leaning and internationally mobile population, dabbled in communism and socialism at this time.<sup>79</sup> Outside of Morocco, the Communist Party in France had significant power at this point, and intellectuals in Paris in the mid-1950s (Belkahia studied there 1954-1959) were also in the midst of major

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<sup>76</sup> The Outre Mer is literally overseas but refers to French colonies abroad.

<sup>77</sup> Farid Belkahia. "fiches et questionnaire." *Souffles*, no. 7-8, 2/3/4 Trimester (1967):25-31. (my translation)

<sup>78</sup> Based on the *Souffles* biography he gives in issue 7/8, he finished his time at the Ecole National des Beaux Arts of Paris (1954-1959) and that same year, had an exhibition at the Theater Institute in Prague. He told me in interviews that representatives of the Casablanca school came to Prague to meet him, and he returned to Casablanca directly from Prague. He was named Director of the School of Fine Arts in 1962, so it should follow that he was in Prague during this lapsus, although the dates are not listed, despite the very clear dates given for his time in Paris.

<sup>79</sup> Hamidi, for example, told me in personal interviews that he joined the Communist Party in Paris while he was abroad.

debates about the role of communism. Moreover, as mentioned above, communism created an international network, and encouraged transnational movement and solidarities, creating an alternative image of cosmopolitanism.

There is not a lot of written information about Belkahia's time in Prague, although in our interview he was quite passionate about the topic. A communist cosmopolitanism as well as the interest among young intellectuals in Morocco and France in communism would have been one factor influencing Belkahia's choice to go.<sup>80</sup> While there was a rapid influx of foreign students and journalists that came to Prague following the rapid liberalization of the Prague Spring in 1968, Belkahia's time in Prague comes earlier than that, during a period of slower liberalization and de-Stalinization. Following Stalin's death in 1953, Eastern Bloc countries all saw some level of liberalization efforts, which was particularly true in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, although Soviet forces ultimately crushed many of these attempts.

As Belkahia remembers this choice, it was primarily influenced by his conception of Third Worldism.

I wanted to go to a socialist country, and it was a choice on my part because [...] I have always defended the fact that I am an artist from the Third World, because there is a particular vision, and there are particular economic conditions that affect my country, and me personally. So my choice, my tendencies and everything, it's also based on who I am. [...] I was not a communist. When I came back from this country, I was not anti-communist. I say this because lots of students that came back from the Eastern countries became quite reactionary.

This seems to me to be a slippage between Third Worldism and anti-colonialism, as Eastern Bloc countries would have technically been considered Second World. Czechoslovakia was also not part of the Non Aligned Movement, formed in 1961, because they were officially aligned with the USSR due to the Warsaw Pact. The only Eastern European country in the NAM was

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<sup>80</sup> He also had personal and familial reasons, and wanted to be in a location from which he could easily return to Morocco, as he noted in personal interviews.

Yugoslavia, as Tito split with Stalin in 1948 and did not sign the pact. Although the USSR had often supported anti-colonial movements, radical youth leaders in Czechoslovakia saw the USSR as a colonial power, with the example of the Warsaw Pact being a mechanism for Soviet control over domestic affairs in socialist countries west of Moscow. Nonetheless, many intellectuals in Prague saw socialism as a path to salvation, although the Soviet ideology they were protesting was a Russian version of Marxism.<sup>81</sup> Socialism was a guiding force for many anti-colonial struggles, and, at this moment, an important force shaping the leftist discourse in independent Morocco. Belkahia values the rhetoric of Third Worldism.<sup>82</sup> I do not discount the importance of the project of Third Worldism for Belkahia, especially moving in to the mid- to late-1960s but instead want to suggest that this solidarity is more based in anti-colonialism and activist leftist intellectual movements (specifically international socialism) at the time than Third Worldism *per se*, despite his caveat distancing his own political opinions.

In any case, Belkahia felt like he was guided by a global re-alignment, and sought out a socialist (although here, distinctly Communist Party) country. As he went on to argue, the reactionary attitude that many came back with was against the lower standard of living found in the Eastern Bloc, yet this idea of the lower standard of living for him bypassed everything that was exciting about the Eastern Bloc at this time. In Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party took power in 1948 following a coup d'état. Belkahia's professors were, in his memory, old-line communists who had taken issue with the post-revolution of '48 party, and so his understanding of communism was framed by this education. In our interview, Belkahia gestured towards free

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<sup>81</sup> Information on Prague and Czechoslovakia comes in large part from Simona Subonj, e-mail message to author, 20 March 2013.

<sup>82</sup> For example, in his *Souffles* questionnaire, he writes that one of the major events of his artistic path was Moroccan decolonization. As he writes, "In 1950-52, I had witnessed the events of violence and repression for which Morocco was the theater." *Souffles*, no. 7-8, 2/3/4 Trimester (1967).

education and healthcare, focusing on the enormity of arts funding. In his memory, there were fifty separate theatres putting on daily productions, and—whether or not this memory is exact—it is this thirst for public and active structures that Belkahia remembers the most. He also focused on the powerful position that artists were able to hold, because they were listened to as long as they stayed only to cultural issues.

At the moment that you made a “hard” [sic – spoken in English in French interview] claim, the power also used equitable means to respond. But as long as you used the culture in a way that was very – very subtle, where you are not in illegality, you can live for a long time and you can make things evolve.<sup>83</sup>

This is similar to the position Belkahia himself takes in the late 1960s in Morocco itself (discussed in Chapter 4). Given Belkahia’s own ultimate equation between the situations in Czechoslovakia and Morocco, it suggests that Belkahia’s intellectual path and positioning was in important ways affected by his experience in Prague. He left Czechoslovakia in order to take the job as Director of the Casablanca School of Fine Arts.

The varied experiences abroad for this generation of artists left both aesthetic and theoretical traces. Paris, like other cities, was not only a place for these artists to mix with French and Third World artists, or to visit and soak up art found in museums, but was also a site of negotiation, imprinting on them the challenges of articulating a simultaneously modern and Moroccan cultural identity. Casablanca School art historian Toni Maraini describes the period between 1948 and 1964 based on similar moments that I have described in the section, and will continue to describe in this chapter:

There had already been, since 1957, a large number of exhibitions of Moroccan painting, both in Morocco and abroad... Moreover, in 1964, the principal painters

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<sup>83</sup> Farid Belkahia, interview by author, Marrakech, 18 July 2012.

had elaborated their personal research. They had already encountered Western painting, in the midst of their studies and before returning to Morocco.<sup>84</sup>

While I have elaborated a perspective that does not oppose “Western” and “non-Western” painting in the strict terms that Maraini does, I highlight this quotation to point out the importance of study abroad. The foundation of aesthetics and personal artistic projects was laid while abroad. Khalil M’Rabet, writing about this era in 1989, takes a different approach, drawing from language used by Melehi in his responses to the *Souffles* questionnaire in 1967:

These modern artists, given their truncated training, their higher or lower degree of depersonalization, and their ‘situation of non-identification,’ represented on foreign soil, in their own name, only an absence of culture. It is only upon their return, in a group, that they research with an urgency this rooted memory that became their default.<sup>85</sup>

In other words, the distinction between the two positions is that, for Maraini, this experience abroad made these artists known and exposed them to international modernisms, while also giving them the time to explore their own personal artistic projects. For M’Rabet, on the other hand, this time abroad was a time of non-identification, of cultural absence, after which the artists needed to go home in order to work in a group and elaborate their research. These are different ways of telling the same story. M’Rabet draws extensively here on Melehi’s words, written while Melehi was working in Casablanca – and also rationalizing his choice to return. I align myself more with Maraini’s synopsis here because it is at the loss of an intrinsic aspect of Moroccan modernism that we ignore the importance of the experience abroad, both in studies and in exhibitions.

When the artists began returning to Morocco in the early- to mid-1960s, their ideas had been elaborated abroad – that is, the foundation of the school as well as the outlines of a possible

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<sup>84</sup> Toni Maraini. *Ecrits dur L’art: Choix de Textes, Maroc 1967-1989*. (Rabat: Al Kalam, 1990), 116.

<sup>85</sup> M’Rabet 72, quotes Melehi from *Souffles*, no. 7-8, 2/3/4 Trimester (1967).

national culture were developed abroad. On an individual level, each artist's project is closely linked to their formative time and studies abroad. For all its challenges, these artists established themselves and their projects during this time, so that the debates of national culture in Morocco and the Casablanca school in particular must be understood through a cosmopolitan foundation.

### **Cherkaoui and Gharbaoui**

Two of the most prolific Moroccan artists working in the 1960s did not ever teach at the Casablanca school. Both Ahmed Cherkaoui and Jilali Gharbaoui forged careers that were primarily based abroad. The artists that ended up teaching in the Casablanca school needed to choose to return, and I will consider the ramifications of this choice in the third chapter. Yet not all artists – as in the case of Cherkaoui<sup>86</sup> – wanted to come back to Casablanca, to work in a city with so few opportunities in a job that was not prestigious or well-paid, especially given how difficult it was to establish themselves abroad.

Ahmed Cherkaoui and Jilali Gharbaoui were both active painters that died early, at the height of modernism, Cherkaoui in 1967 and Gharbaoui in 1971. As Brahim Alaoui writes of Cherkaoui, “It was him that, starting around the 1960s, inaugurated the dialogue with modernity; he is unanimously considered one of the founders – with Gharbaoui – of contemporary

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<sup>86</sup> Belkahia said that Cherkaoui chose not to return to the school because he was focusing on his personal career, (interview by author, Marrakech, 18 July 2012). It was not until just before his death in 1967 that Cherkaoui decided to return to work in Morocco.

Moroccan painting.”<sup>87</sup> The intertwining of Cherkaoui and Gharbaoui is typical within any writing about either of the painters, as they were working at about the same time period, both pushed the limits of painting, both forged careers and strong professional networks primarily abroad, and both died young. Yet they are both intertwined and often held up as opposites. For example, Abdelkébir Khatibi, writing in memory of Cherkaoui, compares him to Gharbaoui. He looks to their names as a starting point, and their meanings in Arabic: “Al-Gharbaoui means the Westerner, Cherkaoui, the Easterner.”<sup>88</sup> This duality is often repeated, that Cherkaoui connects and re-articulates Moroccan visual culture, while Gharbaoui is more connected to the West, to European expressionism.

In the period after colonialism, Moroccan painters were forced to consciously confront the relationship between formal European modernism and traditional Moroccan visual culture. This was not an idle or neutral exploration for painters trying to claim an identity and artistic practice that was both modern and Moroccan, and it is in the negotiations between these that we must situate the work of Ahmed Cherkaoui. Born in 1934 in Boujad, Morocco, Cherkaoui grew up in Beni-Mellal. After studying calligraphy in Koranic school and at an early apprenticeship with a calligrapher in Casablanca, he went to Paris to pursue his studies at the Ecole des Arts et Métiers and then in Aujame’s class at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, where he became affiliated with the Paris School. Cherkaoui completed his studies at the Ecole des Arts et Métiers in Paris in 1959, and first exhibited that same year, a small personal exhibition within the Paris workshop of Lucienne Thalheimer. Although he had studied graphic arts, Cherkaoui had been painting

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<sup>87</sup> Brahim Ben Hossain Alaoui, ed. “Présentation.” *Quatre Peintres du Maroc: Belkahia, Bellamine, Cherkaoui, Kacimi*. (exhibition catalogue) (Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 25 June-15 September 1991), 11.

<sup>88</sup> “Al-Gharbaoui signifie l’occidental, Cherkaoui l’oriental.” Abdelkébir Khatibi. “Rising from the Roots.” Trans. Firmin O’Sullivan in *La peinture de Ahmed Cherkaoui*, ed. Mohammed Melehi (Casablanca: SHOOF Publications, 1976), 104.

figurative compositions of Morocco up until graduation. Upon completing his studies, he began working with increasingly abstract work, inspired by the work of Paul Klee and Roger Bissière.<sup>89</sup> He then received a grant to study at the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw in 1961 within the framework of Moroccan-Polish exchanges. He became good friends with leading Polish avant-garde painter Henryk Stazewski, and was deeply influenced by Polish avant-garde art, working increasingly with burlap and mixed media.

Within Morocco, he was loosely affiliated with a small group of painters in Casablanca such as Houssein Tallal and Andre Elbaz,<sup>90</sup> although he was never part of the Casablanca School. He was quite influential to some Casablanca School artists, however: Mohammed Hamidi often referenced Cherkaoui's advice in our interviews.<sup>91</sup> For the most part, however, Cherkaoui's career was forged abroad, in a strong connection with the Paris School, and he deliberately chose to leave Morocco to live and work in France after his studies.<sup>92</sup> He was briefly professor of drawing at the technical college in Beaumont-sur-Oise, France. However, in the summer of 1967, he returned to Morocco, hoping to teach. As he said, "I was looking for fame in Paris, I'm giving up on that and going back to Morocco. I want to train the children back home; if we want to get out of under-development we have to set our hands to it."<sup>93</sup> He died suddenly before he was able to take a position, however, at age 32 in August 1967 in Casablanca from complications from appendicitis.

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<sup>89</sup> "Chronobiographie." *Cherkaoui: La Passion du Signe*. Ed. Brahim Alaoui. (Paris: Editions Revue Noir, 1996), 176.

<sup>90</sup> CEY. "Reflexions sur l'art et l'artiste." *Lamalif*, no. 7, (November 1966): 44.

<sup>91</sup> Mohammed Hamidi, interview by author, Casablanca, 11 July 2012.

<sup>92</sup> In the journal *L'Opinion*, there is an article that suggests that Cherkaoui had given his rationale to the newspaper to leave Morocco in order to live and work abroad after his studies. Apparently, they published this decision and rationale previously as an article, although I have been unable to locate the original article. "Après Cherkaoui... ANDRE ELBAZ quitte le Maroc pour l'Europe." *L'Opinion*. Thursday 21 October 1965, Number 194.

<sup>93</sup> "Chronobiographie." 183

Cherkaoui died prematurely, just as modernism was beginning to flourish in Morocco, and has therefore been called the precursor to Moroccan modern art.<sup>94</sup> Yet I would instead suggest that during his brief career, he acted more as an early instigator to a broader movement that came back repeatedly to questions Cherkaoui had begun to pose. Cherkaoui was one of the first artists to attempt to ground abstraction in signs and symbols, actively confronting the duality of and distance between Morocco and Europe. In Cherkaoui's words:

I am torn between France and Morocco. In France, my painting is integrated, understood, it flourishes without complications. In Morocco, I am integrated, it is my country. But my painting isn't. It is ignored, misunderstood. In Morocco, I dive back in, I am someone else. I need the light of Morocco, its sun to paint. But I have doubts. I try to liberate myself from this duality, from these two personalities that are in me and fight me.<sup>95</sup>

This duality was thus an active site of exploration for Cherkaoui, who during his brief career became increasingly invested in using colors meant to recall the light and earth of Morocco, multiple materials that could be found locally including burlap and leather, and signs consciously culled from local visual culture. Calligraphy, as well as signs from tattooing, weaving patterns, and architecture, become deconstructed and integrated into the gestural abstract canvases. Abdelkébir Khatibi reads in the canvases the enormity at stake in these multiple referents, seeing an attempt to make Cherkaoui's roots visible.<sup>96</sup>

In September In September 1965, the newspaper *L'Opinion* ran a lengthy profile of Cherkaoui. He was the first painter to be profiled with this length in the journal, which had opened as a francophone publication earlier that same year, directed by Aberrhaman Baddou. Linked to the Istiqlal party, the daily newspaper followed the program set by its Arabophone

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<sup>94</sup> Brahim Alaoui, "Decode his Memory" in *Cherkaoui: La Passion du Signe*, ed. Brahim Alaoui. (Paris: Editions Revue Noir, 1996), 12.

<sup>95</sup> Qtd. by Zakya Daoud. "Adieu Cherkaoui." *Lamalif*, no. 15 (October 1967): 6.

<sup>96</sup> Khatibi, 105.

sister paper, *Al 'Alam*, and increasingly featured socially and politically engaged artists and artworks, especially after Mohammed Berrada became director a few weeks after this article. Alongside a biography, the profile features brief articles by Gaston Diehl, Fatmi M Elfathemy, and Georges Boudaille. I consider this at length as one of the first significant profiles published of a living artist from this generation within Morocco. All emphasize the active way in which Cherkaoui's artistic project investigated the relationship between Morocco and France, and between Moroccan visual culture and European (or perhaps international) modernism. Diehl, a French art critic and curator that was quite influential for this generation of artists in Morocco, celebrates Cherkaoui for actively claiming his origins, because, to his mind, contemporary art, or perhaps contemporary artists, often seemed to be root-less. Not just a blend of cultures, Diehl sees "an osmosis between two civilizations, between two distinct modes of expression" in Cherkaoui's oeuvre. Diehl focuses on Cherkaoui's use of signs, not from his imagination, but from traditional visual culture.

The Maghrebi, or more specifically Berber [Amazigh], tradition, of the geometric and stripped down [dépouillé] sign – which is, for the artist, a mainly instinctive recourse – is at the same time found again and mainly overrun, so that it persists as a human, a far off echo that responds to a color with resonant multiple subtleties, strong in this way, by a sensibility that is singularly attentive.

In other words, Diehl suggests that the sign is an instinct more than a researched symbol. I do not know if this is true, and the extent to which Cherkaoui's signs were the work of memory and feeling as opposed to precise research. For all of the challenges of following some of Diehl's sometimes grandiloquent writing, I point to this quotation because it suggests that even in 1965, Cherkaoui's work was understood by the poetics of this blend more than as a sum of its parts.

Elfathemy, an art writer working in Morocco, similarly evokes this duality in Cherkaoui's work and his connection to the Atlas Mountains (standing in as the location of many Amazighen

in Morocco). Interestingly Elfathemy suggests that it was by looking to Bissière and Matisse that Cherkaoui returned to Arab visual culture. These artists “revealed to him [Cherkaoui] the secrets of the Muslim arabesque. From there is this admirable balance of tones and architecture of lines.” I would not make this argument in these terms, not least because Cherkaoui’s influences ranged from Koranic school to the Paris School to the Polish avant-garde. I nonetheless read Elfathemy’s argument not as the necessity of European involvement for Moroccan artists to see their own cultural riches, but as an interesting (if perhaps simplified) image of the flux that defines modernism. That is, the movement here between cultures, between visual traditions, is fluid as opposed to fixed. If Cherkaoui saw a duality between Morocco and France, he also saw bridges. His paintings create something new: a style, and to some degree a self-fashioning, that is not just placeless and “international” but simultaneously grounded and cosmopolitan.

Georges Boudaille also contributes to the article, although he takes a different tone than the other writers. Boudaille had written a monograph about Cherkaoui in Paris. He argues that Cherkaoui’s work is evidence of the dawn of a new era of painting in Morocco. He writes:

Cherkaoui understood that it would be dull and without interest to be one more anonymous artist in the Paris School. He ended with the ambition to be a great Moroccan painter, maybe the first of this century, and he attempted the difficult synthesis between the traditions of popular art from his country and the conquests of the west... This is why Cherkaoui’s oeuvre seems to me to have an exemplary value in both Paris and in Morocco. His painting should play the role of a hyphen between Maghrebi culture and European civilization. An original and modern art will develop only insofar as, in all countries, other artists would know to follow without imitating the example of Cherkaoui.<sup>97</sup>

While laudatory, Boudaille’s take on Cherkaoui suggests a great deal of self-serving ambition in Cherkaoui’s style. He argues that if the choice is between anonymous painter in Paris and great

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<sup>97</sup> Gaston Diehl, Fatmi M Elfathemy, and Georges Boudaille. “Ils Ont Dit du Peintre Ahmed Cherkaoui.” *L’Opinion*, no. 154, 5 September/6 September 1965.

painter in Morocco, it is better to be the great Moroccan painter. Moreover, unlike the other arguments, Cherkaoui's synthesis becomes a hyphen and modernist because the connection of "European civilization" to a local culture. This is of course a significantly different argument than I make about the idea and stakes of modernism in general, but especially about Cherkaoui. I do not doubt Cherkaoui's ambition, and his desire to have a career with international standing, yet this article leaves out both the multiplicity of Cherkaoui's influences as well as the artistry of the work itself. To my mind, part of the poetics of Cherkaoui's work and aesthetics is the ways in which his international training, including calligraphy during multiple years of apprenticeship in Morocco, as well as art schools in Paris and Warsaw, synthesizes these varied elements into something new.

As Moroccan art critic Edmond Amran El Maleh writes in 1976, Cherkaoui's work opens up alternatives beyond "the poles of tradition and modernity."<sup>98</sup> By that time, Cherkaoui had been dead for almost a decade. El Maleh's analysis is quite apt, pointing out the false dichotomy of tradition and modernity. I would add that many painters throughout the 1960s went on to work with similar ideas, yet part of the importance of Cherkaoui's art work is that he was one of the first to suggest that the question was not tradition or modernity but something else, something that could be modernist and simultaneously oriented towards the future and towards the past. Pieces from the early 1960s are more obviously oriented towards questions of signs. In a canvas completed not long after leaving Warsaw, "Les Rêves de la Princesse" (1962) [Image 1.1]<sup>99</sup> for example, Cherkaoui uses bright colors to fill in almost the entire canvas with a series of shapes

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<sup>98</sup> Edmond Amran El Maleh. "Ahmed Cherkaoui." Trans. Firmin O'Sullivan in *La peinture de Ahmed Cherkaoui*, ed. Mohammed Melehi (Casablanca: SHOOF Publications, 1976), 99.

<sup>99</sup> Oil on canvas, 200 x 50 cm, collection N Cherkaoui. Image from *Quatre Peintres du Maroc: Belkahia, Bellamine, Cherkaoui, Kacimi*. (exhibition catalogue) (Curated by Brahim Ben Hossain Alaoui. Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 25 June-15 September 1991) 65.



Image 1.1. Ahmed Cherkaoui. "Les Rêves de la Princesse" (1962)

Oil on canvas, 200 x 50 cm, collection N Cherkaoui. Image from *Quatre Peintres du Maroc: Belkahia, Bellamine, Cherkaoui, Kacimi*. (exhibition catalogue) (Curated by Brahim Ben Hossain Alaoui. Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 25 June-15 September 1991)

that look to be culled from tattoos and carpets. Many of the shapes have jagged, sharp edges, and they are organized into continuous sections. That is, there are discreet shapes that are separated off from each other: three zig-zag lines in red, orange, and slate blue form a section, and underneath on one side are three lines, underneath which is a pinwheel, underneath which are a series of angles. This continues for the length of the canvas, highlighted by different colors that still maintain one continuous sense of exaggerated earth tones found in Morocco. This series of shapes is corralled into one long oval that is framed by both an imperfect yellow-orange rectangle as well as within the deep purple border. Nonetheless, the canvas is a profusion of multiple interrelated signs, the sheer number of them more important than any of sign in particular. Part of my interest in this painting is its enormity. It is a long rectangle that vertically stretches for 200 centimeters, with a width of 50 centimeters. It is, in other words, just larger than life-size: a little taller, a little wider. The canvas blows up these motifs, recognizably linked to at least an imaginary of Amazigh symbolism, both claiming their right to exist on a modernist canvas, and making them monumental, overwhelming to a viewer that must stand and reckon with them.

A few years later, the canvases seem to be less full, relying more on individual shapes than on the accumulation and repetition of symbols piled up one next to another. For instance, “La ‘Porte Fath’” (1964)<sup>100</sup> [Image 1.2] seems to focus primarily on the large shape of a door. The door is outlined in the blue of Moroccan cities like Chefchaouen and emphasized with black. It is not a door exactly, in being a shape outside of representational space, yet the outline follows the mushroom-shape of doors that are often found in Morocco. It is imperfect – a line cuts into

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<sup>100</sup> Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm, Collection N Cherkaoui. *Quatre Peintres du Maroc: Belkahia, Bellamine, Cherkaoui, Kacimi*. (exhibition catalogue) (Curated by Brahim Ben Hossain Alaoui. Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 25 June-15 September 1991), 67.



Image 1.2. Ahmed Cherkaoui, “La Porte Fath” (1964).

Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm, Collection N Cherkaoui. *Quatre Peintres du Maroc: Belkahia, Bellamine, Cherkaoui, Kacimi.* (exhibition catalogue) (Curated by Brahim Ben Hossain Alaoui. Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 25 June-15 September 1991), 67.

this shape in the upper right hand corner, the blue peters out and gives way to purple in the lower left hand corner. Reading it as a door comes primarily from the title of the canvas. Its title is self-consciously in both French and Arabic, further heightening this focus by placing quotation marks around only part of it. “Fath” in Arabic means open. It therefore can be read literally – the “open door,” – or perhaps figuratively, given the history of the word in Islam.<sup>101</sup> Yet it is this play, this unwillingness to give up any clear answer that marks much of Cherkaoui’s work. The title is evocative (is it an open door between Morocco and France? Is the door not actually open, and therefore in quotation marks? Is this a reference to the Qur’an?) yet gives no answers. Instead, it constitutes a study into this history of visual culture, and its links into the present, and its possible connections to modernism. The point is the synthesis of multiple strands, not the exact origin of each individual part.

While Cherkaoui was devoted to an exploration of the signs and symbols of Moroccan visual culture, Gharbaoui assumed this cultural heritage in quite different ways. It is mainly non-Moroccan critics that saw some kind of “Moroccan-ness” in Gharbaoui’s paintings at the time. For instance, in 1963, critic Gaston Diehl (who wrote part of the *L’Opinion* profile of Cherkaoui) featured Gharbaoui in one of the short books he published with the help of the organization “les Amis de la Peinture Marocaine.” These brief books, including one that had been written about Cherkaoui, were published in Rabat with 1000 copies apiece, and were consecrated to individual artists.<sup>102</sup> Diehl was in charge of Cultural Exchanges at the French Cultural and University

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<sup>101</sup> Yasser Arafat would found the Palestinian liberation organization Fatah the next year, based on an acronym and with reference to uses of “Fath” (the same word transliterated in two ways) to mean victory in the history of Islam, as in the Surat al Fath.

<sup>102</sup> These books, all directed by Diehl, exist about Jilali Gharbaoui, Moulay Ahmed Drissi, Yacoubi, Aherdane, Ahmed Cherkaoui, Mohammed Ben Allal, Farid Belkahia, and Ahmed Louardiri.

Mission, and played an important role in the documentation of Moroccan artists.<sup>103</sup> He initiated numerous exhibitions of Moroccan artists within Morocco and France, though he (along with the French Institute) has been criticized for supporting primarily “naïve” artists and only allotting this visibility to them, or to artists deeply linked to Europeans.<sup>104</sup> Diehl writes of Gharbaoui in the 1963 edition that his use of explosive colors, striking dissonances, and violent graphics made him “one of the first, in his generation and in his country, to rejoin the sources of Islamic art and totally renovate them.”<sup>105</sup>

Jilali Gharbaoui was born in 1930 and committed suicide in 1971, suffering from severe schizophrenia. He was never part of the Casablanca School, too mentally ill to retain a teaching position, although he spent a lot of time with that group of artists.<sup>106</sup> He had studied art in Fes, then in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts on fellowship. He also received a fellowship in 1956 to go to Rome. His mental illness was well known and people within the limited arts structures within Morocco tried to protect him. After a suicide attempt, the minister of arts at the time suggested that Belkahia (who knew Gharbaoui from Rabat) cede to Gharbaoui a fellowship to Italy, an attempt to help Gharbaoui by changing his context. In Rome, Gharbaoui spent significant amounts of time with Casablanca school artist Mohammed Melehi, also on a similar fellowship at the time.<sup>107</sup> Gharbaoui also studied in the Netherlands, after he had met the Dutch

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<sup>103</sup> “chef du service des échanges culturels à la Mission universitaire et culturelle française.” Biographical notes by Azzouz Tnifass, *Jilali Gharbaoui: voyage au bout du rêve* (Rabat: Marsam, 2006), 32.

<sup>104</sup> Some people have argued in interviews with me that Gharbaoui became visible because of his links to Europeans, both art critics and at the monastery.

<sup>105</sup> Gaston Diehl. “Abstraction, lyrisme, éternelle fêrie de la lumière marocaine.” (repr. in *Jilali Gharbaoui: voyage au bout du rêve*. Azzouz Tnifass. Rabat: Marsam, 2006.)

<sup>106</sup> Belkahia, interview by author, Marrakech, 18 July 2012.

<sup>107</sup> Information is culled from the chronologies offered in the exhibition catalog *Gharbaoui: oeuvres 1955-1971* (Curated by Brahim Alaoui. Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 1993) and from

woman Thérèse Boersma in 1962, lived together with her for a year in the gardens of the Chellah in Rabat (a large site of ancient Roman and medieval ruins close to the palace) before travelling together to Amsterdam. Gharbaoui was particularly influenced by Flemish classical painting and the work of Karel Appel. Gharbaoui spent much of his time between Paris, Rabat-Salé<sup>108</sup>, where he underwent electroshock therapy, and a mountainous monastery at Toumliline in the Middle Atlas, where he was hosted by Father Denis Martin.

Gharbaoui moved around a great deal, and during his short lifetime, exhibited in Morocco and internationally, in Paris, Egypt, the Netherlands, the United States, Japan, Brazil, and Mexico. Like other artists, he was motivated by the lack of sufficient structures, and was outspoken about structural issues in print, as in the 1967 “fiches et questionnaires” in *Souffles*. While Khatibi writes of him as oriented towards the occident, and Diehl writes of him as renovating Islamic art, for Gharbaoui himself, the relationship between home and larger world is much less direct. In 1967, he wrote that while one can never escape his environment, he saw his work as a continual attempt to by-pass traditional aesthetics.<sup>109</sup> Yet he felt simultaneously marked by his homeland in a profound way. As he writes,

A painter always holds onto the marks of his origins: look at Picasso; but I carry above all in me my Moroccan earth (terre). You find it in my colors. When I exhibited with Michaux in the Musée d'art moderne, we were very different from one another. I was much closer to the earth than he was. Other people told me, ‘For those of us that are always enclosed in our studios, you bring something living.’<sup>110</sup>

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exhibition plaques from the retrospective “Regards sur l’oeuvre de Jilal Gharbaoui,” (Curated by Farid Zahi. Rabat: Bank al Maghrib, 17 May 2012-26 August 2012.)

<sup>108</sup> These two cities are directly next to each other, and are often referenced together. Rabat is the capitol of Morocco and holds the primary palace as well as the government buildings and embassies. Salé is a large city that is much lower class and more densely populated.

<sup>109</sup> Jilali Gharbaoui. “Fiches et questionnaire.” *Souffles*, no. 7-8, 2/3/4 Trimester (1967): 53-55.

<sup>110</sup> Gharbaoui, no date. Cited on wall plaque in the exhibition “Regards sur l’oeuvre de Jilali Gharbaoui.”

There is thus a significant difference between Gharbaoui's own commentary about his work, attempting to understand himself as an international artist that is all the same influenced by his home, by its colors and earth more than its traditional visual culture, and contemporaneous art critics that tried to situate him in one place or another.

From a visual perspective, it is true that one does not find recourse to or research in traditional symbols. In Cherkaoui's work, these symbols are re-worked and re-articulated as Cherkaoui sought to explore or create the intersection between international modernism and Moroccan-ness. That is not the case in Gharbaoui's oeuvre. Unlike Cherkaoui, Gharbaoui's work is not an exploration of traditional visual culture. There are not the exact and at least potentially traceable symbols in Gharbaoui's work that we can see in Cherkaoui's. Gharbaoui's friend from his time in Paris, French art critic Pierre Restany, wrote an essay in Gharbaoui's memory in 1990. Each time there is a chronology of Gharbaoui's life, his meeting with Restany (1952-1956) and Restany's role in introducing him to the "groupe des informels" at the Salon Comparaisons (1959) are highlighted, as is the fact that Gharbaoui was staying with Restany in 1971 when he was ultimately found dead on a public bench in Paris. Restany's brief text is an interesting counterpoint to this debate:

[Gharbaoui's] generation is that which knew the independence of their country and the major problem that confronted them was that of the linguistic dosage of expression. To what extent must it search for profound roots all while assuming the modernity of a normalized international language? Jilali Gharbaoui is without question that artist of the 1960s in whose work this contradiction is the least apparent.<sup>111</sup>

Restany goes on to focus on Gharbaoui's own vision and private world that pulled from the light and colors of the Maghreb. He then explains Gharbaoui as follows:

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<sup>111</sup> Pierre Restany in *Gharbaoui: oeuvres 1955-1971*, ed. Brahim Alaoui (exhibition catalogue) (Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 6 October – 14 November 1993), no page numbers in catalog.

His real motivations were neither within a geopolitical order, nor the order of some ethnic-cultural specificity. His real roots were his own problems, his difficulty in being and his aspiration to be better.<sup>112</sup>

For Restany, Gharbaoui was moved by a private relationship to God, and by an attempt at transcendence of both self and painting. Restany is careful to try to focus on Gharbaoui's artwork, although he ends by returning to a psychological question emphasized by his sadness and surprise about Gharbaoui's suicide.

Gharbaoui's painting has no other reference than what he discovered at the heart of the gestural undertaking. He wasn't a man of folklore or of national identity but a man of instinct and breath that pulls his energy from his native soil from which the urges lift up towards the sky, this sky without limit that is if not the other side of our dreams, then the sky that is all of ours. He tried to always see higher and farther and little by little he passed the point of no return. His sight became muddled, his senses vacillated, and we didn't know any longer if his cries were tears of joy or suffering.<sup>113</sup>

In other words, here the self and the artist – or perhaps, more precisely, the self and the art that is produced – are one and the same, and the progression of self (in depression, leading ultimately to suicide) is the progression of the artist that tries to see more and more.

Arts writer and gallerist Aziz Daki is more direct than Restany about the question of psychology. Daki writes of Gharbaoui, "His private life is inseparable from his art. The tension that emanates from his works maintains an important resonance with his unhappiness."<sup>114</sup> This desire to read this art as a window into psychosis is understandable, though I wonder if it loses an aspect of analysis. For example, Gharbaoui's gouaches from 1971 seem frenzied in ways that other works are not, to the same degree. The Bank al-Maghrib holds a large (71 x 110 cm) untitled 1971 gouache on paper in its collection.<sup>115</sup> It is made up of primary colors, mainly blue

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Azzouz Tnifass, *Jilali Gharbaoui: voyage au bout du rêve*, (Rabat: Marsam, 2006.)

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

and red. The red becomes diluted in the back, becoming a very light peach-brown that is incorporated into the swirling lines, while on the right hand it is used as a strong brick colored accent. There are shapes that are readily apparent in this gouache – six distinct circles, two triangles. The circles have centers to them – a middle point in some, a scribbled line in one, a starburst in another. These are not discrete shapes, though. They become part of the swirl of movement. This is a feeling of speed. The viewer can feel Gharbaoui in front of this paper because it is all covered with multiple layers of scribbled color. There is an overwhelming amount of separate strokes; covering the space not with color, but with the repetition of lines, gives this piece its wildness.

In many ways, the 1971 gouaches are frightening with their thick lines and wild strokes, although I wonder how much of the reception of these works is defined by the reality that he killed himself this same year. Would these primary colors seem bright instead of garish in another circumstance? In his book *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger makes a similar argument about a Van Gogh painting, that its interpretation is mediated by Van Gogh's biography.<sup>116</sup> Because the paintings are so intimate, so viscerally connected to Gharbaoui's own actions, it can be difficult in hindsight to analyze the images outside of the lens of Gharbaoui's mental illness and treatment. Yet Gharbaoui is distinct within Moroccan art history, and it is to the detriment of his memory that frequently, his biography is discussed more than his innovations in painting.

Gharbaoui fits uncomfortably into the narrative of modernism in Morocco. Unlike other painters, interested in direct connections between their shapes or abstractions and traditional visual culture or Islamic art, Gharbaoui's work is more elusive. This turn to an explanation by recourse to biography is one way of making it fit, by putting Gharbaoui definitely at the edge of

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<sup>116</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2009).

the progression of the leading narratives of modernism. I do not deny by any means that Gharbaoui had significant mental illnesses. The time during which he was active producing work coincided with increasing schizophrenia, electroshock therapy, multiple suicide attempts, and ultimately, suicide. Yet reading his oeuvre through the lens of cosmopolitanism also highlights a different aspect of his work, and brings him into important dialogue with the prevailing strands of art production at the time. Read in dialogue and confrontation with cosmopolitanism, we can read Gharbaoui's oeuvre in terms of the multiple ways in which Gharbaoui tried to understand the materiality of the art itself, as well as his relationship to the space of production and to the varied artistic groups he was involved with.

Looking to earlier works allows an entrance into the broader gestural research that Gharbaoui was undertaking. If the experience of seeing gestural abstractions like Gharbaoui's suggests unplanned immediacy, I disagree with Restany's take that Gharbaoui's work is defined by instinct divorced from a larger artistic project. Very early works by Gharbaoui are relatively representational, though later works are easily identified by a consistent style. A 1957 untitled gouache on paper<sup>117</sup> shows early research into abstraction. It differs sharply from Gharbaoui's looser abstractions, the work he is better known for. This gouache is quite deliberate. The abstraction is more geometric, picking apart shapes at clear angles, although the artist's brushstroke remains visible: these lines are clearly human made, and viewers can see gradations in their thickness and opacity. The colors are primarily a deep slate blue accented with black, although it includes other shades of light almost white-blue, sky blue, and a dustier blue over yellow, with differing intensities and opacities. At the center there is brick red, with a tiny accent

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<sup>117</sup> Gouche on paper, 1957. 44x57 cm, in the collection of Mme Thérèse Boersma. Reprinted in the catalog *Gharbaoui: oeuvres 1955-1971*. (exhibition catalogue) (Curated by Brahim Alaoui. Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 6 October – 14 November 1993), no page numbers in catalog.

of bright red peaking out from behind a thick shape of slate. It is a carefully construed work, with distinct spaces and a careful consideration of different shades of blue. Within a few years, this precision gives away to something else, to a gestural abstraction that becomes framed by psychosis. Yet this progression of abstractions suggests a long-standing project that moves away from the clear lines and shapes of geometric abstraction to something that increasingly focuses on the movement itself.

Gharbaoui's later work, after his experience with the "groupe des informels," after his time in Rome, and after his increasingly vocal role in Moroccan artistic discourse, becomes loose, almost entirely abstract, with violent brushstrokes and striking colors. The composition of an untitled painting from 1967 [Image 1.3] is centered on three black ovals, though much of the painting is devoted to the intimate traces of the process of painting, both the action of the strokes and the texture of building up layers. A number of oil paintings on canvas in 1968 and 1969 show an increasing interest in texture. They are heavily built up, heavily textured, using a palette of black, green, red, yellow, and turquoise blue. This 1967 work is less adamant in its texture, although Gharbaoui is clearly interested in the materials themselves. While this painting is on cardboard, Gharbaoui is inconsistent in his materials, using variously paper, canvas, and wood. He also uses a variety of media, including paint, gouache, and sometimes pencil drawing.

The focus of this painting is on the brushstrokes and the materiality of the paint itself, that is, on the action of painting more than the abstraction. In this work, the brushstrokes are especially visible in the central black paint, showing the action of the painting itself. The painting shows the beginning and end of each movement –where he put the brush down, where the movement ended. The lines are thick, and thickly applied at parts, though they also follow the natural span of a paint-stroke, leaving translucent areas in which the viewer can see all the



Image 1.3. Jilali Gharbaoui. Untitled (1967).

Mixed media on cardboard, 50 x 75cm, from the collection of Mohamed Tazi.

Farid Zahi, ed. *Regards sur l'oeuvre de Jilali Gharbaoui*. (exhibition catalogue) (Rabat: Bank al-Maghrib, 2012), 44.

way to the back. There is a yellow center to the left oval, and lines through the other two – lines that seem to skewer the ovals, as they extend beyond the edges. There are watery purples on the top and more thickly built up on the bottom, in wide, seemingly scribbled-on swathes. The purple sections form blocks of color, yet they equally highlight the strokes of the paint, and at certain places, the white background. In the center is a large swath of blue. It is applied in the center thickly enough that it is textured, built up in ridges (mixed with a bit of black at this point to achieve a depth to the color) but the blue dissipates out from the center. We see the blue and purple overlap at certain points, but even overlapped, the colors are loose enough to remain faint. The shapes are abstract yet, similar to a variety of his paintings seem almost eye-like. They are similar to distinct eyes he paints in other places. The shapes are loose, a bit wild, but often have something circular with a line through it, which suggests an eye or a pupil. Even when distinct shapes exist, though, there is a significant distance between the contained shapes and straight lines of the 1957 gouache and the exploration of texture and movement within later canvases.

Although many of his works feature a juxtaposition of colors, some of Gharbaoui's most striking images are done in black and white. For example, Gharbaoui spent a period of 1963 around Easter at the monastery in Toumliline, and created a series of sculptures as well as some drawings. One drawing, done entirely in black and white, is a good example of the frenzied gestural abstraction that Gharbaoui is known for [Image 1.4]. Here, there are two main sections of the paper that are marked, forming slightly ovular shapes, though they are connected with thick black lines. The impression is of an undulating black swath reaching horizontally across the middle of the page that violently shatters the blank white sheet. The drawing above all shows movement – each line is shaky, and Gharbaoui comes back over different lines, so that each becomes simultaneously spiky and sketched – almost as if the goal is to show them as

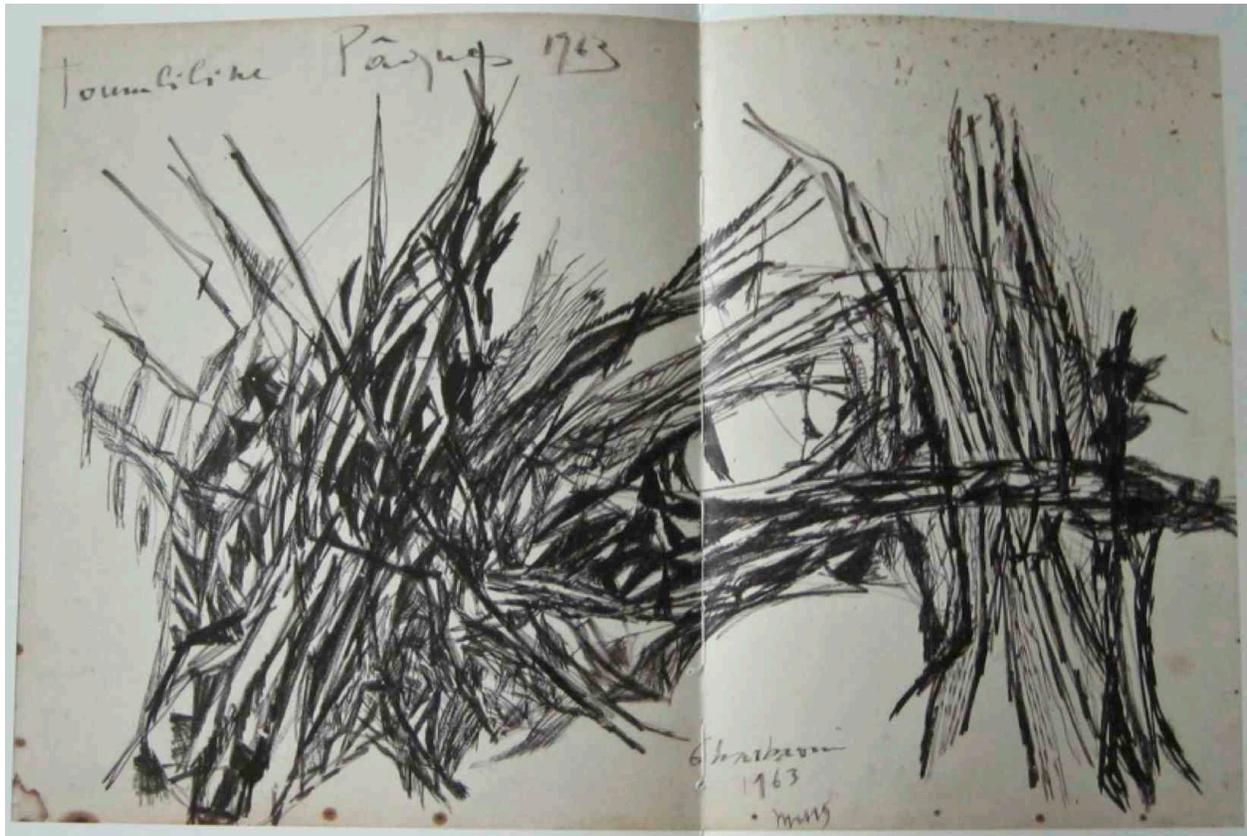


Image 1.4. Jilali Gharbaoui. Untitled (1963).

Drawing on paper. 65x100cm. ONA Foundation Collection.

Farid Zahi, ed. *Regards sur l'oeuvre de Jilali Gharbaoui*. Rabat: Bank al-Maghrib, 2012. 168-169.

unfinished, or perhaps rejecting any line that could be construed as constrained. The viewer is struck by the artist's visceral presence, the sense that this is almost a bloodletting onto the page, which again forms a moment within a lengthy exploration of gestural abstraction.

Particularly interesting is the text that becomes part of the image. Gharbaoui usually signed and dated his canvases in large block letters on top of the painting. His handwriting itself is different in this image, looser and less distinct. In part, comparing his signature and its careful lettering on other paintings, it is worth remembering that this is a faster drawing on paper and not a built up painting on canvas. Perhaps he just signed the paper quickly, ready to be done with the project; perhaps the letters are more connected because the ink was thicker, and more likely to drip. Yet this signature is noticeably different than others, whether done in paint or with pen (as in the signature in Image 1.5). Here, his signature becomes part of the unfinished aesthetic of the rest of the work. Across the top, in large letters that take up perhaps 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the paper, is scrawled "Toumliline Pâques 1963." He seems to have written Toumliline once, with ink that was running out and is almost transparent, then went back over only the section of the word "Toum." The letters of the first half are thus shadowed, and there are two distinct Ts, two distinct Os, and so on. "Pâques" (Easter in French) is central though not entirely legible: the circle of the "a" is separate from the bar that makes it into a letter. 1963 is written at the top, and repeated at the bottom, next to Gharbaoui's signature. These two bodies of text are actively separated by the black lines in the middle of the page. Underneath the central abstraction is written "Gharbaoui 1963 mars," that is "March" in French. These words are even less legible than the text at the top.

The text makes up such a significant part of the paper that I want to treat it as a major and deliberate part of the work itself that can be read alongside the abstraction. This double dating

works to locate the piece in time twice, and differently. For Toumliline, a monastery, it is Easter 1963. For Gharbaoui, it is March 1963. Easter Sunday itself in 1963 was April 14, but I want to suggest that Gharbaoui is deliberately making dual temporalities. Gharbaoui defines temporality of the monastery as Easter, although this would have been more specifically the time period of Lent; that is, focusing on the holiday celebrating Christ's resurrection, as opposed to the period of penance and self-denial leading up to it. I do not want to read too much into a Catholic symbolism of focusing on resurrection, as Gharbaoui himself was not to my knowledge Catholic and was never outspoken about his religious beliefs. I want to focus instead on the deliberate markers of temporality in the work. His own personal temporality here is different, and in some ways out of sync with that of the monastery, defined by other markers. These two temporalities are moreover violently separated by the central abstraction, not existing easily alongside one another. More than reading this as Gharbaoui feeling out of sync with the world around him, I want to suggest that this is a deliberate visualization of two temporalities that share one space. That is, this drawing – if understood as part of a deliberate project, with aspects that are thought out, as opposed to an instinctual connection between his mind (mental illness) and his art – can be read as an uncomfortable image of being out of place, of Gharbaoui situating himself at odds with his environment.

This gains another layer within an analysis based on cosmopolitanism. Treating cosmopolitanism as a personal idea, as a concept that refers to an individual within a mixture of – and actively moving between – spaces and social groupings, Gharbaoui himself was quite cosmopolitan. He moved in many circles abroad (with different artistic groups in Paris and in Rome) and within Morocco (in Rabat, Casablanca, and in Toumliline). Yet on a deeper level, how do we speak of cosmopolitanism in an image in which the artist sets himself in a separate

temporality? Is cosmopolitanism experienced, or must it be claimed? In other words, is cosmopolitanism the movement and mixture, or is it a multiple sense of belonging?

Gharbaoui was moreover working in the context of an artistic scene in Morocco, and was uncomfortably accepted there, if at all. The guestbook of one gallery, Venise Cadre, from 1960 helps put Gharbaoui's work into context by giving a response, showing that the work was not done in a vacuum. One of the two galleries in Casablanca, and arguably, the only active gallery, Venise Cadre was known for its orientalist exhibitions of artists such as Jacques Majorelle. The gallery's guestbook shows the immediate and visceral responses of viewers, who are perhaps surprisingly unfiltered, and give precise opinions. That is to say that the audience seems to have trusted their own opinions enough to believe that others might care about them. Comments for foreign orientalist artists capturing the light, architecture, and habits of Moroccans like Majorelle or José Cruz Herrera all revolve around congratulations. Viewers appreciate these romanticized images, and enjoy the image that is given of Morocco. Venise Cadre did, however, host a few modernist artists, starting with Jilali Gharbaoui. Gharbaoui was already working with loose, impassioned abstractions at this time, and showed this work at Venise Cadre in the winter of 1960 in an exhibition co-hosted by the French Cultural Mission. The comments in the guestbook suggest the intensity of the responses of both confusion and resentment against modernism that these artists – and particularly Gharbaoui – encountered at home, and are surprisingly unfiltered.<sup>118</sup>

It is not totally clear who the audience of the gallery is. Many of the comments throughout the book are in French, although a variety of them have spelling and grammar mistakes. There are very few comments in Arabic. In post-colonial Morocco, it is telling that the

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<sup>118</sup> These can all be found in the guest book at Venise Cadre, Casablanca. No page numbers.

audience preferred to write in broken French than in Arabic – up to today, especially with regard to the arts and culture, using French often connects to class and social status. The guestbook includes clippings of unnamed newspapers that cover the openings. At this time, many of the articles discuss the artist’s training and exhibitions, a brief comment about the work itself (almost always a blandly positive comment), a discussion of who was at the opening, and comments about the meal given after the event. The people that are noted by name usually hold government positions. Gaston Diehl, cultural director of the group that co-hosted Gharbaoui’s exhibition, the Mission universitaire et culturelle française, was in attendance in this instance. This exhibition preceded the book Diehl consecrated to Gharbaoui, and shows Diehl’s earlier support. It is worth considering whether the gallery would have shown any of the Moroccan modernists without the financial support of the Mission culturelle, and to what extent these exhibition choices were thereby dictated by French officials in Morocco. Also in attendance at the opening were other people from the Mission culturelle, according to one article, as were the French consul and the Casablanca cultural attaché.<sup>119</sup> Openings are usually populated by a cultural elite, and this seems no different, although it is hard to know who saw the exhibition after the opening.

Ahmed Cherkaoui is one of the few people to sign his comment within the guestbook. He writes one of the few kind notes in response to Gharbaoui: “Thank you for the joy that you give to Moroccan youth. Your friend, Cherkaoui.”<sup>120</sup> Beyond that, however, most comments read as a

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<sup>119</sup> D.D. “Chronique des arts: Vernissage de l’exposition Gharbaoui à la galerie Venise Cadre.” No date, no reference to the newspaper, clipping available pasted into the Venise Cadre guest book. A later article, also from a “Chronique des Arts” in the guestbook is by Denise Dyvorne, so we can guess she also wrote this article.

<sup>120</sup> “Merci pour la joie que tu donnes à la jeunesse marocaine. Ton ami, Cherkaoui.”

variation on “I didn’t understand!”<sup>121</sup> Many harsher comments follow, though: “Dirty Spaniard!! Pig!”<sup>122</sup> “Aren’t you ashamed?”<sup>123</sup> A person even wrote, “What an asshole!” on the page on which an interview with Gharbaoui by Denise Dyvorne is pasted.<sup>124</sup> The comment, though, is hardly visible anymore – Gharbaoui went back and doodled faces and spaces around that and the clipping pasted next to it, crossing out the comment and signing the page [Image 1.5].

The interview and article are an interesting counterpoint to Gharbaoui’s drawing and the anonymous comment. In the article, Dyvorne writes that she knows that it is difficult to see new kinds of art, and that the public will necessarily be wary of what they do not understand, but that she supports this new non-figurative art. Gharbaoui on the other hand, tells her that he feels like he did not push himself far enough with this group of canvases, saying that he would not show these canvases in Paris because some of them verge on being figurative. He tells Dyvorne that these are all part of his broader research, his attempt to make sense of his “own rhythm.” The page overall is a lovely image of rebellion, in many ways. Gharbaoui is not apologizing in any way, but is to the contrary reproaching himself for not pushing himself far enough. He goes back and claims the page as his own for a second time, drawing it and signing it, consciously superseding the unsigned “What an asshole!” to make a different narrative.

However, this image of the young man who lets the critiques slide off of him was tempered by the venom of the comments themselves. It is not hard to understand why Gharbaoui

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<sup>121</sup> For example: “On se lasse de tout excepté de comprendre!” “J’ai pas compris!!! - Mohammed” “J’aime beaucoup ‘peinture’ [sic] – même si je ne comprends très bien l’abstrait, j’ai subie [sic] l’influence des couleurs. –Aziza”

<sup>122</sup> “Sale Espagnol!! Cochon!”

<sup>123</sup> “Tu as pas honte”

<sup>124</sup> “¡Quel con!” next to the article “Chronique des Arts: Jilali Gharbaoui à la galerie Venise-Cadre sous les auspices de la Mission universitaire et culturelle française,” Denise Dyvorne.

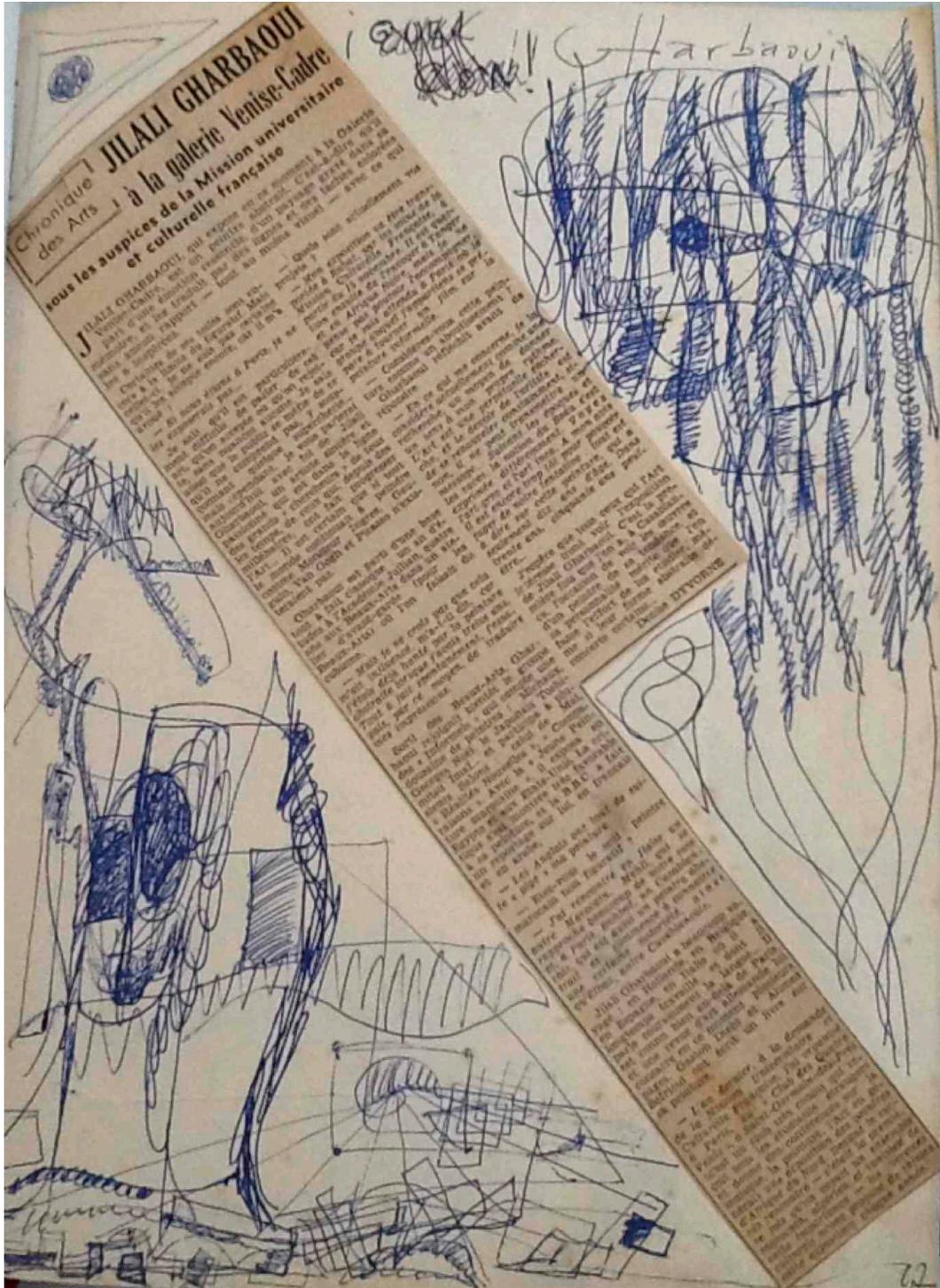


Image 1.5. Doodles by Jilali Gharbaoui in the guest book of Venice Cadre, 1960. My photograph.

[Note that it is written “Quel con!” (“What an asshole!”) in the top center, which Gharbaoui crossed out.]

and other artists of his generation would try to forge their careers elsewhere. In the absence of other galleries or local support – remembering that this exhibition was under the auspices of the French mission – it is understandable why artists tried to fit themselves into international structures as opposed to fighting for local structures. We can see this positioning in Gharbaoui’s own comments. In 1967, while based primarily in Morocco, Gharbaoui responded to a questionnaire published in the journal *Souffles* (referred to earlier in this chapter and discussed in more depth in chapter 3) at great length. I cite a large section here because, with the memory of the Venise Cadre exhibition, Gharbaoui’s writing takes on greater meaning, and puts into his own words why artists sought opportunities abroad.

Abroad, I can produce and advance much more than here. There is a whole context that allows it: a public that is already prepared, museums, critics, groups and movements one can situate oneself against.  
In Morocco, the battle is still to be fought to impose our painting, create a movement of interest around it. But this battle can only be slow because the general context is not dynamic. Moroccan painting developed enormously ten years ago. But since a few years, it’s being slowed down by a variety of obstacles. Teaching in Morocco is incomplete. Nothing has prepared the Moroccan to receive what we are doing in the arts.  
We’re not teaching young people to see in school.  
Moreover, the paintings that foreign missions are exhibiting in Morocco are a painting that has already been classified and is part of the past, a fragmentary past at that.  
This does not help the Moroccan public who will see this painting to understand modern painting and the current research happening in the world.  
By consequence, the public cannot communicate with our painting, which is inscribed within today’s art movements.  
We are handicapped in Morocco by the presence of an exotic painting that is often done by strangers (sometimes by Moroccans): paintings that were born in Morocco under the protectorate to feed the tastes of officers and others.  
This painting that is refused even in France dominates the scene here and challenges the development of Moroccan painting.  
Art cannot evolve in a country unless the social and economic structures allow it.  
We are at a stalemate in the current state of things.  
We live more or less in exile, and that is what our country reserves for us.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Gharbaoui, “fiches et questionnaires.” *Souffles*. (my translation. Line breaks follow original formatting.)

In this text, Gharbaoui lays out what we can read as his cosmopolitanism as a necessary response to a local context. In other words, he lists what he sees as the shortcomings of Morocco (factors that are often repeated throughout the artistic discourse during this era): lack of public/museums/critics, problems of teaching/education, retrograde cultural missions/exhibition politics, existing exoticizing/naïve painting, lack of social/economic structures. The response, for Gharbaoui, is simply to leave. As he says, it is abroad that his work advances and is received. Yet he points out the flip side to cosmopolitanism, which is exile – not a desire to leave, but a need to. Per my earlier argument, I will instead think of this in terms of estrangement, and the 1963 Toumliline drawing and its dual temporalities gains depth through this lens. As I have suggested in this chapter, this question of estrangement is not external to that of cosmopolitanism for this generation of artists, but implicit within the project itself, one of the multiple stakes that defined these cross-cultural movements.

## **Conclusion**

Up until 1962, the year that artist Farid Belkahia returns to Morocco to direct the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux-Arts, the activities of this generation of Moroccan artists were primarily abroad. I have used the idea of cosmopolitanism here in multiple ways, each of which defies an easy categorization of belonging or otherness. It is instead the “right of resort,” an experience of internationalism that is whole-hearted but intrinsically limited.

First, cosmopolitanism is used in terms of the peripatetic nature of the artists themselves, who were often moving not just to one location abroad, but moving from place to place during

their education. This was facilitated by fellowships in the immediate post-colonial era furnished by the Moroccan government as well as by foreign governments. The artists went abroad given the lack of local resources, as well as to consciously claim the international modernism they hoped to find in European city-centers.

Secondly, I have used the idea of cosmopolitanism for the major cities within the metropole. These cities – especially Paris and Rome – allowed Moroccan artists to visit museums and galleries, but also to meet international artists. These cities were cosmopolitan areas at this point, no longer spaces that were purely European, but spaces that were shared by international artists and intellectuals from the former colonies. The internationalism of these cities affected foreign artists as well as the local art scene, and the shared discourses of modernism became increasingly international, developed through this cosmopolitan mixture of ideas and aesthetics.

This cosmopolitanism was not effortless, though, within either the cities or the broader careers of the artists. I indicate the everyday racism that artists often faced. More broadly, these artists had to fight to be recognized on an equal plain, and some artists were not willing to give up this hard-won acclaim to return to Morocco, forging their careers primarily abroad. I end with a close look at two artists that forged their careers internationally rather than choosing to return to the home country, Ahmed Cherkaoui and Jilali Gharbaoui. I analyze the artworks of these two artists through the lens of cosmopolitanism, considering how Cherkaoui roots an international visual language of modernism in local visual symbols, as well as Gharbaoui's uncomfortable role in between multiple locations. Estrangement becomes a fundamental part of the experience of cosmopolitanism for these artists. By the time they return home, each artist has begun to

elaborate his individual artistic project while slowly building up the discourses of Moroccan modernism through international exhibitions.

## CHAPTER TWO: STAGING MODERNISM IN DEUX MILLE ANS D'ART AU MAROC AND THE RENCONTRE INTERNATIONALE

**“The modern is produced as the difference between space and its representation. It is not a particular representation of space that characterizes the production of the modern but the organization of reality as a space of representation.”**

**-Timothy Mitchell<sup>126</sup>**

In the absence of strong local structures like galleries or exhibition spaces, many Moroccan artists in the 1950s and 1960s began to receive recognition first with exhibitions abroad before having any significant exhibitions in Morocco. As I mentioned in the prior chapter, the 1950s and 1960s were marked by travel and study abroad, with artists forging individual careers abroad, in part via major exhibitions that placed these artists in dialogue with international artists. In this chapter, I will consider a number of exhibitions between 1957 (the year following independence) and 1963, focusing particularly on the two major exhibitions “Deux Mille Ans d’Art au Maroc” (Paris, 1963) and the “Rencontre Internationale” (Rabat, 1963). By the time that this generation of artists returns to Morocco and begins to forge a local modernist art movement, there was already an accumulated discourse about Moroccan modernism that had been built up in exhibitions that took place abroad while the artists themselves were abroad. These primarily international exhibitions frame a distinctly “Moroccan” scene, frame these artists as “Moroccan,” before they have been defined – or have worked to

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<sup>126</sup> Timothy Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity.” *Questions of Modernity*. Timothy Mitchell, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000. 1-34), 27

create this idea – in Morocco itself. That is, the national framing comes from outside via international exhibitions, before it comes intra-nationally. This chapter argues that Moroccan artistic modernism was originally framed extra-nationally, in ways that informed the foundation of the movement.

Timothy Mitchell's theorization of the "stage" of modernity is apt, given his focus on representation.<sup>127</sup> Mitchell argues that modernity is continually staged in different spaces, and created by the act of representation through difference. Although he uses representation broadly, to refer to the broader social and political architecture, his ideas take on a particular resonance within a discussion of exhibition history. It is for Mitchell this act of representation that makes modernity so vulnerable to disruption. There is on the one hand the possibility of misreading, but the staging of modernism is also the staging of the difference between the representation and the reality, and the potentially powerful lag between the two.

The disruption and displacement that threatens modernity arises from the universalizing logic of modernity. For Mitchell, the logic of western modernity is one that modernity is singular, representing a homogenous time and space. Anything outside of this logic becomes discounted and thus subordinated, paradoxically reinforcing the original logic by creating a constitutive difference. That which is modern can only exist in comparison with that which is not. The modern thus performs not just the difference between the staged and the real, but the difference between the modern and the non-modern continually. It is therefore also continually open to contamination from the non-modern. This is particularly true of the modern West and the non-modern non-West, represented as pertaining to different places and to different temporalities. As he writes,

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<sup>127</sup> Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity." *Questions of Modernity*. Timothy Mitchell, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000, 1-34)

Each staging of the modern must be arranged to produce the unified, global history of modernity, yet each requires those forms of difference that introduce the possibility of a discrepancy, that return to undermine its unity and identity. Modernity then becomes the unsuitable yet unavoidable name for all these discrepant histories.<sup>128</sup>

If modernity is continually being staged as one universal idea, it is within its own logic that it is undermined.

Yet one of the most powerful acts of the staging of modernity is that the act of representation makes the referent appear to be something that is material – that exists, in other words, prior to its representation and that is therefore unaffected by it. In Mitchell’s words, “It is this novel myth of immediate presence, of an original, material reality, a world prior to and apart from all work of replication, difference, antagonism, meaning, management, or imagination, that defines the peculiar metaphysic of modernity.”<sup>129</sup> Hence, I am interested in reading early exhibitions of Moroccan modern art as ways of staging Moroccan modernism. These exhibitions precede a unified modernist movement within the territorial boundaries of Morocco, and yet in representing a distinct “Moroccan modern art” the exhibitions suggest that there is a reality that corresponds to it. Within the shifting landscapes of global alliances and identities, the claims of modernism change and the performance of difference shifts accordingly. By the time of the “Rencontre Internationale,” the first major modernist exhibition within the territorial boundaries of Morocco, this continual staging of Moroccan modernism by suggesting that there is a concrete movement that exists within the country well before it does, creates a discursive foundation for the movement that comes.

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<sup>128</sup> Mitchell, 24.

<sup>129</sup> Mitchell 19.

Of particular interest in this chapter are the exhibitions that the artists chose to include in the chronology of Moroccan art in *Souffles* in 1967 [Table 1].<sup>130</sup> As this was a chronology written by the artists that were involved in the Casablanca School, it is worth taking seriously the exhibitions that they themselves laid out as important a few years later. This does not mean that this chronology is the only possible chronology of exhibitions, but instead that for the artists, there were certain international group exhibitions that they believed were formative in the history of the Casablanca School. My own choices differ slightly, but this chronology forms an important backbone to this chapter, leading up to differing visions of “Deux Mille Ans d’art au Maroc” and the “Rencontre Internationale.” However, this chronology is full of if not inaccuracies then at least incomplete information. Given the paucity of resources, the conflicting information, and the rarity of photographs of the exhibitions themselves, I approach many of these exhibitions via catalogues or, in their absence, by news articles, that is, by the framing of the artwork more than the artwork itself. I believe that this is an incomplete image of an exhibition and that art works in ways that are far less direct than within the umbrella ideas used to present it. However, when thinking of the role that these exhibitions played in creating a national scene within Morocco, it is important to consider the specificities of the framing of each individual exhibition as a way of clarifying the accumulation of discourses during this era, and opening up the nuances of this moment. Moreover, it is important to take seriously catalogs as the physical traces that are left, as the part of an exhibition that is meant to outlive its installation.

The exhibitions I discuss do not show a unified concept in different places, but to the contrary, they were widely divergent in their themes and scopes. By and large, these exhibitions frame the artists as distinctly Moroccan and pertaining to a national Moroccan scene, yet it is

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<sup>130</sup> “Chronologie de la peinture marocaine depuis 1956.” 7-8 (3e/4e trimestre 1967) 20-21.

## chronologie de la peinture marocaine depuis 1956

<b>1956</b>	1re exposition itinérante des artistes peintres marocains. Maroc.
<b>1957</b>	Exposition des artistes marocains au San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, U.S.A.
Décembre	Participation marocaine à la 2e Biennale d'Alexandrie (pays riverains de la Méditerranée).
<b>1958</b>	2e exposition itinérante des peintres marocains. Maroc.  Exposition collective au Pavillon du Maroc.  Exposition Internationale, Bruxelles.
<b>1959</b>	1re Biennale de Paris.  3e exposition itinérante des peintres marocains. Maroc.
Juillet	Exposition des artistes marocains à Vienne.  VIIe Festival Mondial de la Jeunesse.
Octobre	Participation à l'exposition des peintres arabes à Washington D.C.
Décembre	3e Biennale d'Alexandrie.
<b>1960</b>	
Octobre Novembre	Exposition de la « Jeune peinture marocaine », Bab Rouah, Rabat.
Novembre Décembre	Exposition des peintres marocains à Paris.
Janvier	Exposition des peintres marocains à Londres.
<b>1961</b>	2e Biennale de Paris.
<b>1962</b>	

Avril	Participation à l'exposition « Peintres de l'Ecole de Paris et Peintres marocains », Rabat.
<b>1963</b>	3e Biennale de Paris.
Juin	« 2.000 ans d'Art au Maroc », Galerie Charpentier, Paris.
Décembre	Rencontre Internationale des artistes, exposition itinérante, Maroc.
<b>1964</b>	Exposition internationale des peintres naïfs à la M.U.C.F., Rabat. (Maroc, Indonésie, Haïti, Pologne, Venezuela, Yougoslavie).  1er Congrès de l'A.N.B.A.  Exposition collective des peintres marocains à El Jadida.  Exposition des peintres marocains à Tunis.  « Dos mil años de arte en Marruecos », Madrid.
<b>1965</b>	
Juin	« Peinture naïve marocaine », Rabat.  « Pintura actual en Marruecos », Madrid.  « Panorama de la peinture marocaine actuelle », Bab Rouah, Rabat.  4e Biennale de Paris.
<b>1966</b>	Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres.
Janvier	Exposition groupe Belkahia-Chebaa-Melehi.
<b>1967</b>	Exposition Internationale de Montréal.

Table 1: “Chronologie de la peinture marocaine depuis 1956.” Souffles. N 7-8 (1967): 20-21

done towards different ends, for example, towards contributing to the multiplicity of art centers as shown by the SFMoMA exhibitions, the regionalism of the Alexandria biennale, the international youth culture of the Paris Biennale. What holds them together is that these exhibitions provide the basis for what comes next. They happen while these artists are all moving in different directions, studying in varied schools, making international alliances; they also happen before many of them return to Morocco to try to build structures within the country itself. I am therefore interested here in mapping a constellation of exhibitions that happened in quick succession, in and of itself an image of the cosmopolitanism of this moment. The exhibitions each build new relationships for the artists because they expose them to new publics, and put them in dialogue with multiple other local scenes. Rather than treating this as an aberrant aspect of Moroccan modernism, I am instead interested in treating it as characteristic of the network of factors at play that a national scene was built both by international exhibitions and while the artists were themselves abroad, and considering what this might reveal about modernism within Morocco.

These exhibitions did not treat the artists as cosmopolitans, as individuals that were abroad and continually moving, but always framed them by their national origin. It was through this constellation of international exhibitions that Moroccan artists first received recognition, and the Casablanca School begins with the weight of the accumulation of these curatorial texts that each try to define what Moroccan art is or could be. The 1963 Rabat “Rencontre Internationale” signaled a turning point, because it was a rallying cry for the physical boundaries of Morocco to be cosmopolitan in its own right. By welcoming international artists, calling for international exchange on Moroccan soil, and by locally recognizing a developed national scene, this

exhibition marks the end of one moment and the beginning of the next: the turn towards development of artistic structures within Morocco, and the discourse of national culture.

### **Exhibitions Abroad, 1957-1961**

At the beginning, even before there was a movement marked by a shared discourse in Morocco, there were early exhibitions abroad of Moroccan modern art. Although there was a nationalized discourse for traditional art and artisanal work, my focus here is on modernism. The first examples that I can find in which Moroccan modern art is exhibited not as individual artists but framed as distinctly “Moroccan” are in 1957.<sup>131</sup> In early-to mid-1957, there was an exhibition of “Peintres marocains” in Tunis (Tunisia) that included Farid Belkahia and Mohammed Chebaa, although this exhibition is neither linked to a specific institution, nor included in the *Souffles* chronology. While there were no terms for clear groupings in Morocco in 1957, in Tunisia, there was by the this point already a distinct (and named) group of the Ecole de Tunis, named as such in 1948/1949 by Pierre Boucherle. This group often showed at the Galerie des Arts (also called the Galerie Municipale des Arts), a municipal structure, and so it is possible that the exhibition was held there.<sup>132</sup>

Interestingly, it appears that the 1957 exhibition was something of an exchange, as the Musée des Oudayas in Rabat, a structure run by the Moroccan Ministry of Culture, showed the

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<sup>131</sup> The *Souffles* chronology says that in 1956 there was the “First travelling exhibition of Moroccan painters, Morocco” (“1re exposition itinérante des artistes peintres marocains. Maroc.”). However, I have been able to find no documentation of this exhibition, and no artist that I asked had any memory of what this referred to.

<sup>132</sup> Jessica Gershultz (Ph.D., specialist in Tunisian modernism), email message to author, 20 February 2013.

“Exposition de la Peinture Tunisienne” in October-November 1957. The preface in the catalog, written by Lamine Chabbi, comments on the “dépaysement” of art, that is the geographic displacement and positive and productive disorientation of being somewhere new. Chabbi, the National Education Secretary of the Tunisian Government, argues,

We like to repeat that there are no borders in Art. Without question, insofar as Art laughs at borders, insofar that they disappear before it. Not that it is not possible to be the art of this country more than of another – (no one can deny the nationality of Greek statues or of Byzantine painting). But this specificity does not at all make it incommunicable from one territory to another.

This is a brief but important expression of the argument that many people made and believed in during this era, because it suggests that a national focus and a universal intent (Chabbi goes on to write about what he terms the universality of art) are not mutually exclusive – that art can be deeply tied to and understood within a distinctly national framework, but still cross borders and connect to a broader audience. Chabbi continues, saying that this exhibition of Tunisian art is an example of this idea:

Today, it is the case for the Tunisian Painting invited to Morocco, who, yesterday, presented to Tunis the artworks of its best artists. ... The dialogue between the painting and its visitors, the dialogue with the visible, as we said, is mute. We would do better to not disturb this silence. However we can permit ourselves to say, despite the influences and beyond the encounters, it seems to us that the physiognomy of a Tunisian Art of painting appears clearly.<sup>133</sup>

What is interesting here is that the claim for a national art is coming through an exchange between two national art scenes (framed as national because this is an exhibition hosting the other country’s art as representative of its home country and exhibited within municipal or national structures). This was most likely the first exhibition of its kind in Morocco, focusing on a national art scene of a newly independent nation (Tunisia and Morocco both became

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<sup>133</sup> Lamine Chabbi. “Préface.” *Exposition de la Peinture Tunisienne*. Rabat: Musée des Oudayas, October-November 1957. No page numbers.

independent in 1956), and both countries were trying to simultaneously claim their movement, their influences, their cosmopolitanism, while still also claiming a national specificity. Although I have been able to locate the catalog for the Tunisian exhibition in Rabat, I have not found either the catalog or more precise details about the Moroccan exhibition in Tunis, and so this catalogue must do the work of suggesting the framing of the other exhibition.

Later that same year, from 5 December 1957 to 5 January 1958, there was an exhibition of Moroccan Artists at SFMoMA, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (USA). It seems that SFMoMA had a slowly shifting exhibition policy from early Orientalist/Primitivist exhibitions towards, increasingly, shows of modern art from various countries. I look here at the exhibition history to suggest that this early international recognition of the Moroccan scene was intertwined with a slowly growing international interest in non-Western modern art. At the time, this did not translate into mainstream exhibitions, sustained criticism, or a more universal narrative of modern art history. However, an interest in a possible international outlook allowed Moroccan artists at this point to gain an exhibition history, some amount of recognition, and a level of institutional support.

SFMOMA opened in 1934, and, alongside shows of Kandinsky abstractions and California mural artists, showed a few anthropological and decorative shows. In 1935, there was an exhibition of “African Negro Art” (7/26/1935-9/12/1935) and “African Negro Textiles” (8/4/1935-9/12/1935). There was also an exhibition of Oriental Rugs (9/4/1936-10/31/1936) and an exhibition of “Primitive Art” (3/20/1940-4/21/1940), as well as shows of decorative pieces from Oceania and China. In 1937, there is a reference to a “Contemporary Oriental Exhibition” (2/7/1937-2/16/1937), although I am unable to find further information about what was included. Starting in the early 1940s, alongside regional American shows and many individual shows, the

museum began to showcase nation-based artistic scenes, including Russia (1940, 1941), Argentina (1942), Mexico (1942), and Australia (1944). There are also many European shows (German, French, British, Spanish) and East Asian shows (China, Japan). Africa and the Middle East come up rarely. There was an exhibition “Contemporary Ethiopian Paintings” in 1945 (2/21/1945-3/18/1945), as well as “Folk Arts of the Far East” (9/9/1949-10/16/1949), and “Primitivism and Modern Art” (10/12/1954-11/14/1954). Beyond these, following the records up until 1967, three other countries are showcased: Morocco, “Paintings by Young Africans of South Rhodesia” (12/16/1957-1/5/1958), and, interestingly, four different shows of Israeli art (“Israeli Printmakers,” 3/8/1955-4/3/1955 and 1/4/1957-1/27/1957, “Forms from Israel,” 5/20/1960-6/12/1960, and “Art Israel: 26 Painters and Sculptors,” 7/14/1966-6/14/1966).<sup>134</sup> It is unclear how the Moroccan show came about. Despite the lengthy diplomatic and cultural relationship between the United States and Morocco<sup>135</sup>, the Moroccan visual artists that had relationships with Americans were primarily based in Tangier. The artists that would go on to form the Casablanca School had, for the most part, only tenuous relationships with the United States. The exception to this is Mohammed Melehi, who received a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship to study and work in New York (1962-1964), which included a brief stint in 1962 as Assistant Professor of Painting at the Minneapolis School of Art. Mohammed Chebaa was not to my knowledge in the SFMoMA exhibition, although there is a brief reference in his *Souffles* exhibition history<sup>136</sup> to an exhibition of Moroccan and American painting in Rabat a few years

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<sup>134</sup> Jessica Lemieux. “Finding Aid to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 1934-ongoing [bulk 1935-1975].” (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, April 2008.)

<sup>135</sup> A particularly interesting account of this relationship can be found in Brian T. Edwards. *Morocco Bound: Disorienting America’s Maghreb, from Casablanca to the Marrakech Express*. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005).

<sup>136</sup> In the same issue of *Souffles* as the larger chronology, there are individual exhibition histories that similarly have inaccuracies and contradictions. *Souffles* 7-8 (3e/4e trimestre 1967).

later (1962). However, in the absence of any institutional connection within the exhibition history, it is hard to follow this thread. It is moreover challenging to find a full list of artists that exhibited, but it is certain that Mohammed Ataalah and Saad Ben Cheffaj were involved. Both of these artists studied at the Ecole de Beaux-Arts in Tétouan in the mid 1950s, the art school in the north that is quite close to Tangier, where many Americans were (including Paul Bowles, William S Burroughs, etc). It is purely conjecture to suggest a causal relationship between the Americans in Tangier and the Tétouan artists in San Francisco, although, given the relationship of the Tangier beats to San Francisco, far from impossible. It would be interesting in future research to explore this connection more fully, although it is not currently possible while the SFMoMA Library and Archives are closed.<sup>137</sup>

It appears that Mahjoubi Aherdan was involved in SFMoMA exhibition as well. Aherdan is rarely written about, although he exhibited often with the artists that are the primary interest within this dissertation (including “2000 ans d’art au Maroc,” the Rencontre International, and at the Panafrican Festival in Algiers in 1969), and was supported by Gaston Diehl (see Chapter 1). While he would go on to receive an honorary doctorate in 1984 from the World Academy of Arts and Culture, he was primarily known for his political role, including ultimately Military Commander in Morocco. He had been Secretary (Minister) of National Defense, and went on to be named Secretary of Defense then Secretary of State. He had been Caïd of Oulmès (where he was born) from 1949 to 1953, then had gone into hiding to work for the National Resistance Council (Conseil National de la Résistance) during the anti-colonial fight. He was governor of Rabat at the time of independence, and was founder of the Mouvement Populaire, as well as

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<sup>137</sup> Projected to re-open in early 2016.

Secretary General.<sup>138</sup> While Aherdan as an artist does not figure into my dissertation in a primary way, it is interesting to consider that in 1957 such a well-known political figure would be exhibiting internationally under the banner of “Moroccan art.” It is also striking that many of the artists exhibiting at this time were not necessarily artists that would go on to achieve visibility, internationally or even necessarily in Morocco.

No matter how it came about, the SFMoMA exhibition is a landmark exhibition in the history of Moroccan painting, although many artists were not invited to participate. It is framed by *Souffles* as the second nation-based show exhibited internationally, and presents an interesting possibility to read how international modernisms were being simultaneously framed within particular museums. In 1958, there was additionally an exhibition of “Arab Painting” (or, perhaps, Moroccan art) in Washington, D.C. that many of the artists participated in, including Cheffaj, Chebaa, Belkahia, and Bennani. Unfortunately, the exhibition histories are hard to follow because the descriptions of this exhibition change (sometimes “Arab,” sometimes “Moroccan”), and are not linked to any specific space. (*Souffles* lists this exhibition as Arab Painters in October, 1959, although this is not consistent, even within the individual exhibition histories included later in the issue.)

There was an exhibition titled “Contemporary Arts of the Arab World” in 1960 in Washington, D.C., organized by a committee of cultural attaches from embassies in Washington. It is not clear if this is the same exhibition noted in artist-provided exhibition histories, particularly given that the only article that I have found about it includes such inaccuracies about participants as listing the Syrian artist Fateh Moudarres as a Moroccan artist. Each embassy, including Morocco, Sudan, Iraq, Jordan, and the United Arab Republic, was responsible for

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<sup>138</sup> “Aherdan.” Nicole de Pontcharra, Pierre Gaudibert, and Toni Maraini. *19 peintres du Maroc*. (exhibition catalog) (Grenoble: Centre national d’art contemporain, 1985). 30

supplying artworks from their countries, and then it was exhibited as one major show. It opened in May 1960 at the Middle East House, and was sponsored by the American Friends of the Middle East. The article from the *Washington Post* reads, “Primitive and medieval Arab art are familiar and much admired by those who know the Near East and Africa. Now, for the first time in Washington, a comprehensive exhibition of contemporary art of the Arab world has been presented.” The writer, Mary Van Rensselaer Thayer writes that the “largest, most fascinating exhibit” was from Sudan, including both Khartoum School artists (painting and sculpture) as well as carved ivory and bone from Omdurran. She describes the work of Fateh Moudarres, who, in Thayer’s opinion, “contributed the most intriguing painting—merely a woman’s eyes, heavily made-up, luminously shining above her veil,” and of the “well-established Moroccan” named Houcine, who “was represented by a Violinist and a Clown, each original in concept, yet reminiscent of Tchelitchev’s attenuated figures.” Thayer describes the Arab ambassadors and former United States ambassadors to the Middle East attending the opening, and concludes, “The exhibition is well worth seeing – and a surprise to those who think of camels, deserts, and mosques as being sole subject matter to Arab World artists.”<sup>139</sup> While this gives little information about the generation of this exhibition, or about the artists that I am particularly interested in, it is remarkable to note the continuing exhibition politics for Arab art, focusing on an image of a veiled woman, and the surprise that the art is more than “camels, deserts, and mosques.” With few changes, this could be an exhibition and exhibition review today in Washington, D.C.

Beyond the individual exhibitions cropping up at this point, biennials were also a major early platform for these artists, especially the Alexandria Biennale and Paris Biennale. The

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<sup>139</sup> Mary Van Rensselaer Thayer. “World of Arab Art’s on Exhibit.” *The Washington Post*, May 27, 1960. C3.

Alexandria Biennale began as the Biennale of the Mediterranean in 1955, and first included Moroccan artists in 1957 (listed as a major moment in the *Souffles* chronology, as is the third biennial in 1959). Participating Moroccan artists included Saad Ben Cheffaj (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>), Mohammed Chebaa (2<sup>nd</sup>), Farid Belkahia (2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>), and Mohammed Bennani (3<sup>rd</sup>).<sup>140</sup> Like Venice and Sao Paolo, the Alexandria Biennial divided artists into national pavilions, with artists selected by government officials. While the biennial was formed for numerous reasons and worked to reframe the city, I am particularly interested here in the focus on Mediterranean regionalism. The biennial was originally designed to commemorate the Egyptian Revolution that brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power, as Nasser was the biennial's major patron. The focus was primarily on presenting not an Arab but a Mediterranean regional focus. As Anthony Gardner writes, the focus was not on competition (as for prizes, like in Venice) but on overcoming difference to create what the biennale terms "artistic co-operation" among the countries involved, which included countries from all around the sea: the Maghreb, the Levant, and both Eastern and Western Europe. Gardner writes,

On one level, this "artistic co-operation" would – or so the biennale's organizers hoped – reveal a "common denominator [that] is properly Mediterranean," an aesthetic rapprochement that could cross different cultural traditions. But we should also remember that 1955 was the very height of the Cold War; bringing together artists from both sides of the Iron Curtain, as well as from countries subject to post-fascist dictatorships, isolationism, and despair, was no small feat. For [Biennale General Commissioner Hussein] Sobhi in particular, regionalism could be a way to break through those geopolitical divisions, ensuring that "the biennale will re-establish friendly relations between Mediterranean countries." And while it would be easy to perceive the biennale and its regionalist ambitions as little more than a pawn in Nasser's identity politics, such a view ignores the significance that regionalism can play in the development and wake of liberation and independence movements. Indeed, if the catalog for the second Biennale of the Mediterranean is anything to go by, with its frequent references to liberation and post-liberation nations along the Mediterranean's shores, it was precisely the cultural development of decolonizing states – of how to develop new regional

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<sup>140</sup> *Souffles* 7-8 (3e/4e trimestre 1967).

identities that challenged old colonial and new Cold War decrees—that was a primary concern.<sup>141</sup>

In other words, Gardner argues that the Alexandria (Mediterranean) Biennale can be read as a powerful regionalist outpouring that allowed artists to create new transnational relationships that crossed both the colonizer/colonized divide, as well as the East/West divide. That being said, it is interesting to consider these Moroccan artists forming a national pavilion as, of this admittedly partial list, only Bennani (who never studied abroad) was actually based in or working in Morocco at the time. If this can be read within the history of Third Worldism, especially given the emphasis on liberation movements that Gardner points out, it cannot be solely subsumed into a Third Worldist discourse. Despite Nasser's Third Worldist and Pan-Arab politics, this is a different kind of grouping, and a powerful moment of regional collaboration. The Moroccan artists were mainly working in Europe at the time, but the Alexandria Biennale creates an interesting tilt to the axis that had until that point focused primarily on the north/south connection to former colonizing countries (France and Spain).

The first Paris biennale, called the *Manifestation Biennale et Internationale des Jeunes Artistes*, focused not on a region, but on the idea of international youth. Organized by the *Association Française d'Action Artistique*, the biennale was under the patronage of and initiated by André Malraux, France's first Minister of Cultural Affairs. Malraux was appointed by President Charles de Gaulle, who came into office in early 1959 in the midst of mounting problems in Algeria. Given the background of its founder, it is particularly interesting to situate the founding of the Paris Biennale simultaneously within Malraux's anti-colonial background and his political interest in art as diplomacy in de Gaulle's government. Malraux was a well-

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<sup>141</sup> Anthony Gardner. "Biennales on the Edge, or, a View of Biennales from Southern Perspectives." *Higher Atlas: The Marrakech Biennale [4] in Context*. Ed. Carson Chan, Nadim Samman. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012.) 98-102

known author and art critic that had won the Prix Goncourt in 1933 for his novel *La Condition Humaine*, about the 1927 Communist revolt in Shanghai and its suppression. Beginning while in Indochina in the mid-1920s, Malraux had been involved in the anti-colonial struggle, including launching an opposition newspaper, *L'Indochine*. Malraux became increasingly politically involved and anti-fascist in the 1930s, including involvement in the Spanish Civil War. When Malraux was appointed, he became immediately active in French cultural structures, giving funding to Henri Langlois' Cinémathèque, commissioning paintings on ceilings of different buildings, and starting the biennale. During his time in office, Malraux became increasingly invested in both French national culture and the role of art and culture in diplomacy before leaving office when de Gaulle was ousted as a result of May '68.<sup>142</sup>

Similar to Gardner's argument that opposed the competition of Venice to Alexandria, the Paris biennale set itself in opposition to the established artists of Venice, working towards an end of connection for youth. In the catalog, Raymond Cogniat, General Delegate of the Biennale de Paris states, "Refusing all spirit of rivalry, our program inserts itself into the large inventory of contemporary culture." Unlike Venice and Sao Paolo, the biennale declared itself "a space of encounter and experience for the young, a space that is open to uncertainty and to hope." Cogniat ends his essay by clarifying the goals of having a biennale for youth:

We did not make this grouping in order to defend one aesthetic more than another, but instead to know those that are preparing themselves, to try to understand the problems that are important to the up and coming, to guess, if possible, the face of the world of tomorrow or, at least, the diverse propositions for this future that we wanted to help the present become.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Herman Lebovics. "Malraux's Mission." *The Wilson Quarterly*. Vol 21, No 1, Winter 1997. 78-87

<sup>143</sup> Raymond Cogniat. "Préface." *Première biennale de Paris: manifestation biennale et internationale des jeunes artistes*. (exhibition catalogue) (Paris: Musée national d'art moderne, 1959). VII-VIII

This is a very different way of framing a new biennale than in Alexandria. Rather than pulling together artists from across national boundaries to create strong regional ties, this biennale pulled from all over the world with the goal of supporting the young people that will make the future.

The biennale was open October 2-October 25 1959 in the Musée national d'art moderne, and each country was invited to select their country's young artists. The French selection included foreigners living in France, and beyond that, each country selected the artworks and was responsible for shipping and insuring the works, as well as paying for the curator's stay in Paris. The by-laws are all set out in minute detail in the first catalog, which includes a precise discussion of what the biennale was responsible for (including getting the pieces through customs, picking up country representatives at stations in Paris, and the unpacking and presentation of the work). All artists needed to be between 20 and 35 years old.<sup>144</sup> Forty countries participated in the first biennale from all over the world. Beyond Western European countries, participants included Cambodia, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Nicaragua, Peru, Cuba, and the United States. Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey all participated as well. France, however, is listed as "France et Communauté," a rarely-used word that seems to designate the colonies, as the biennale opened before much of sub-Saharan Africa achieved independence. There are a number of Arab or Middle Eastern countries, but no colonies, because they were of course not seen as nations but as parts of France. Therefore, Algeria, at that time a department of France, is not included, and there are more broadly no sub-Saharan African countries represented. Of the 158 artists and collectives invited by the Biennale administration as part of the "Communauté," there is one artist that was born in Morocco (Dominique Carré, called

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<sup>144</sup> Musée national d'art moderne. "Règlement." *Première biennale de Paris: manifestation biennale et internationale des jeunes artistes*. (exhibition catalog) (Paris: Musée national d'art moderne, 1959) IX-XIV.

Mideliti), and four Algerians (or at least artists born in Algeria: Richard Ascione, Lucienne Lévy, Fanny Acquart, and Lucien Favory as part of the Groupe des Informels organized by Georges Noël).

While overall the exhibition works to bring these young artists into dialogue, placing the different groups together to map out an image of contemporary interests and concerns, the groups are still separated into distinctly national groupings. Ahmed Sefrioui, Director of Historical Monuments, Arts, and Folklore, curated the Moroccan entry, and his selection and curatorial essay are meant to both claim respect for Moroccan artists, as well as clarify what was happening in Morocco (or at least, for Moroccan artists on foreign soil). Sefrioui selected six artists: Farid Belkahia, Mohammed Ben Allal, Karim Bennani, Moulay Ahmed Drissi, Jilali Gharbaoui, and Mohammed Melehi. It is an interesting selection, because it includes on the one hand self-professed modernist abstract artists, who (with the exception of Bennani) were all studying and working abroad (Belkahia, Melehi, Gharbaoui), as well as two of the painters that worked with realistic paintings of daily life, Ben Allal and Drissi (whose birth date is listed as 1923, making him 36 at this point, although he was still included). Sefrioui makes this distinction within his curatorial essay. He describes that, ten years earlier, no one would have imagined a painting scene in Morocco: “We heard about one or two young Moroccans that tried to reproduce on canvas a countryside or a figure; the cases were rare and the tries were not always convincing.” Slowly people began to take private classes in small studios, but it seemed that “the Moroccan, having no pictorial tradition, was not at all meant to play a predominant role in the vast domain of the plastic arts.” Arts experts attributed this lack to religious prohibitions on images within Islam and the lack of self-expression, to their eyes, in decorative work. Sefrioui contests this history, saying that slowly, the individuals he had invited were cancelling out the

theories that had been given in the past. This started, for Sefrioui, with autodidactic artists for whom “there is no pretension of artistic research, no desire to translate a state of the soul.” He sees all the same a superior poetry in the work of Ben Allal, “a simple and kind man of the small people [le petit peuple] of Marrakech, whose gouaches translate the happiness and charm of popular scenes.” In other words, in a distinction that would become increasingly outspoken in the 1960s, Sefrioui separates the autodidactic artists – using the condescending language of the implicit poetry of a simple man’s work – from the abstract artists (although he interestingly writes about Moulay Ahmed Drissi in the midst of these latter artists as the “leader of this school of spontaneous painting”).

In Sefrioui’s eyes, young modernist painters, that he defines by their sharp interest in research and strong opinions about materials and colors, started appearing only three to four years earlier – that is, in the days leading up to or following independence. What is particularly interesting at this early stage is the way in which Sefrioui framed their merits by their cosmopolitanism, and especially their dual pathways in Europe and in Morocco. He writes:

These young people, highly encouraged, visit the museums of Europe, take part in international exhibitions, diligently take classes in well-known academies and studios. They come back to re-immense themselves in the light of their country, to quickly pick up the baton of their pilgrimage again and continue this quest that, for a real artist, has no end.<sup>145</sup>

Sefrioui’s article is thus a precise testament to this moment in the art history of Morocco, in which it was both natural and important—celebrated, even – for artists to leave the country in order to be able to work, returning only to re-immense themselves in the light of the country.

This would change within a few years, as writers and intellectuals would expect more and more

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<sup>145</sup> Ahmed Sefrioui. “MAROC.” *Première biennale de Paris: manifestation biennale et internationale des jeunes artistes*. (exhibition catalog) (Paris: Musée national d’art moderne, 1959) 72-74.

for artists to come back and take an active role within the country's national structures. Yet at this point, in this first biennale of Paris, artists were working with curators to still try to declare to the (art) world that modernist and abstract painting existed in Morocco, and could be seen alongside and in conversation with young artists from any other country.

The second Paris Biennale (1961) re-stated its desire not to impose one style on the biennale, but to catalog the vast differences of contemporaneous artistic expression. More than fifty countries responded to the call for contributions, and the director of the biennale celebrated this the “universality of this collaboration,” a jarring phrasing given that the biennale opened approximately nine months before Algerian independence.<sup>146</sup> This edition included South Africa as the first sub-Saharan African country within the biennale. The 1961 edition featured a larger number of Moroccan participants: Maurice Arama, at that point director of the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Belkahia (listed as Belkaya), Ben Allal, Karim Bennani, Mohammed Bennani, Ben Sefraj, Ahmed Cherkaoui, Andre Elbaz, Jilali Gharbaoui, and Mohammed Melehi, as well as sculptors Brahim Mohamed Ben M'Bare and Ali Moha and engravings by Houcine. Ben M'Bare received an honorific mention in the sculpture prize. Again, it was curated by Sefrioui, who writes, “Moroccan painting can only be young in relation to that of other countries that have traditions in this domain and that have throughout all this time been cultivating that art.” He celebrates “pioneering” young Moroccan artists that left Morocco to “admire the works of the grand masters, to soak in the atmosphere of studios and museums, to tie friendships” in Europe. It is thanks to these pioneers that served for Sefrioui as an example for any painter that had

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<sup>146</sup> Raymond Cogniat. “Introduction.” *Biennale de Paris, Archives*.  
<http://www.archives.biennaledeparis.org/fr/1961/> (Accessed 6 October 2014)

stayed in Morocco, that Morocco “conquered” a place in world exhibitions.<sup>147</sup> Again, Sefrioui’s commentary retains a focus on the artists’ cosmopolitanism – apt, given that the majority of these artists were still abroad, and still had yet to forge careers in Morocco itself—while trying to argue for an international recognition of Moroccan modern art.

### **“Deux Mille Ans d’Art au Maroc”**

Moroccan art was showcased on its own in 1963 at the exhibition “Deux Mille Ans d’Art au Maroc” (“2000 Years of Art in Morocco”) at the Galerie Charpentier in Paris (76, Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré). Although the gallery had been established much earlier by Jean Charpentier, Raymond Nacenta had purchased the gallery in 1941 and began putting on regular exhibitions of the Ecole de Paris beginning in 1954, and showcased a number of thematic exhibitions.<sup>148</sup> The exhibition of Moroccan art was an official initiative, suggested by the Moroccan Ambassador in Paris to honor the first official visit to France of King Hassan II. While I do not know the rationale for this specific venue, it is clear that the gallery had an official connection, as they also hosted the president of Finland in 1962 with an official exhibition of Finnish art.<sup>149</sup> This official connection may be as simple as its location on the rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré (today the location of Sotheby’s), which is directly opposite the Elysée Palace, the official residence of the French president. Certainly, the physical geography of the exhibition

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<sup>147</sup> Ahmed Sefrioui. “Maroc” *Biennale de Paris, Archives*.

<http://www.archives.biennaledeparis.org/fr/1961/pays/maroc.htm> (Accessed 6 October 2014)

<sup>148</sup> “Galerie Charpentier.” *Archives Directory for the History of Collecting in America*. The Frick Collection. <http://research.frick.org/directoryweb/browserecord.php?-action=browse&-recid=6081> (Accessed 6 October 2014)

<sup>149</sup> Fonds Galerie Charpentier, Kandinsky Library, Centre Pompidou, Paris. No page numbers.

was therefore in the literal shadow of the French government. If its location was not the reason for the gallery's government connection, it nonetheless reinforces the political valences of the curatorial choices.

Unlike many of the exhibitions I discuss here, where information is piecemeal and full of holes, the Kandinsky Library at the Centre Pompidou has retained the gallery's archive, including a relatively full archive of this exhibition as told from the point of view of France. A similar archive on this exhibition within Morocco, if it existed (which it does not, although the Fonds de la Source in Rabat, part of the National Library, does hold a copy of the catalog), might tell a very different story. I am therefore able to write with far more detail about this exhibition. The danger is that this exhibition may appear unduly important within this chapter, gaining space and focus not because of its primacy within this narrative, but by virtue of traces left over and a different national relationship to archiving in France and in Morocco. However, this was not only a significant exhibition for this generation, it is also a telling moment in a post-colonial history of Moroccan art. Rather than showcasing a long and glorious visual history within the discrete boundaries of Morocco, the exhibition happens in the metropole, in Paris, to celebrate the new king's first official visit to the former colonizer. The archive shows a story of different expectations in France and in Morocco, and a series of miscommunications, which is in many ways an ideal case study of what staging modernism and difference in the immediate post-colonial period might mean.

Galerie Charpentier owner and director Raymond Nacenta writes the preface to the catalog, written in romanticized—and exoticizing—language. If much of the preface is respectful, trying to portray a glorified anthropological perspective of a lengthy history of art, the essay suggests a dual temporality for modern France and traditional Morocco that is all the more

glaring given the purpose of the exhibition. Timothy Mitchell, drawing on Homi Bhabha, argues that the staging of modernity requires this difference, making the non-West “the place of timelessness, a space without duration, in relation to which the temporal break of modernity can be marked out.”<sup>150</sup> Nacenta’s wording falls closely in line with this observation. He immediately sets out a distinction between the forward charge of France and the timelessness of Morocco:

But, if in France the arts and traditions have been in perpetual transformation, in Morocco one discovers the character, perhaps unique in the world, of a country where miraculously time has been erased. Only a few hours by plane from Paris, Moroccan society proposes the path that returns to the source and reaches the most ancient times.

Nacenta continues along this line, comparing the modernity of France – a time break of ‘perpetual transformation’— to the unchanging values and habits within Morocco.

Interestingly, early drafts of this essay show that originally, Nacenta had written this specific phrasing in terms of “Berber people,” not “Moroccan society.”<sup>151</sup> It is not clear what Nacenta was trying to accomplish with these edits. Early drafts include a longer discourse on the modern Arab Moroccans in cities, and the non-modern Berber (Amazigh) Moroccans in the mountains or in the desert, which Nacenta edits out of his text. On the one hand, Nacenta may have realized that, while in an exoticizing essay on Morocco “Berber people” had a more romantic ring to it, “Berber” (Amazigh) and “Moroccan” are not interchangeable terms. On the other hand, the all-encompassing “Moroccan society” also works to deny change and modernity to every group in Morocco, making this trait (timelessness) not just cultural but national.

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<sup>150</sup> Mitchell 16

<sup>151</sup> Raymond Nacenta. Multiple Proofs of “Préface,” handwritten and typed, both corrected with notes. Fonds Galerie Charpentier, Kandinsky Library, Centre Pompidou, Paris. No page numbers.

Nacenta's essay maneuvers selectively through two thousand years of Moroccan history. He discusses Fes and Moulay Idriss as cities that have not changed since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, references ancient civilizations that came into contact with Morocco (especially Punic and Roman civilizations), and goes quickly through a history of Islam and the caliphates in Morocco. From the eighth century, therefore, "[...] if the men have changed names, destinies, or locations, they have retained a physiognomy and a soul that seems eternal." All of the artworks reflect, for Nacenta, "whatever their era, this same permanence." Again, he reinforces a lack of temporal breaks even while covering a vast history. If details change, the art and the people (in both their looks and soul) do not, implicitly contrasting this with the ever-changing French people.

Nacenta then turns to questions of the relationship between France and Morocco:

Morocco, land of legend, where as Stendhal said "le voisinage de la mer détruit toute petitesse," Morocco, homeland of storytellers and poets, is faithful to its customs and habits. In an era that is entirely turned towards scientific research, the country adapts in its own way to contemporary evolution, and the contact with France during half of a century will not have been negligible in this. The whirlwind of conflicts over supremacy and interest, reason for so many dramas, has happily calmed itself.

In other words, colonialism is couched in the terms of a 'whirlwind of conflicts' that has 'calmed itself,' outside of any voluntary human action. While Nacenta creates a discourse that distinguishes French modernity as being of a different temporality than unchanging Morocco, here he suggests that Morocco is evolving "in its own way" [à sa manière]. For Nacenta, this evolution towards modernity is an evolution towards the rest of the world, which is again a temporal question more than a geographic one, because it is a question of an era as well as a location (the location of modernity, implicitly western Europe). This move towards modernity here is in many ways thanks to the "contact" with France, a softer euphemism for French colonization. His language seems to be trying for neutrality, for political correctness, and so the

uncomfortable positioning of France and Morocco in relation to one another is skipped over, if not erased. Timothy Mitchell writes that “colonial-modern involves creating an effect we recognize as reality, by organizing the world endlessly to represent it.”<sup>152</sup> Even within a post-colonial context, history is transformed to be organized by the logic of the colonial modern.

This positioning is reinforced by Nacenta in his letter to Malraux, still at this point Minister of Cultural Affairs. Nacenta explains the creation and stakes of this exhibition, and offers an overview of the exhibition itself.

Invited by the Moroccan [“Chérifien”] Government, my collaborators and I visited all of the museums of Morocco, multiple palaces and personal houses, to decide along with the Director of Fine Arts the art objects that are most representative of pre-history, the Phoenician era, the Roman era, and all the eras that during six dynasties were inspired by Islam. Sculptures, jewels, gold and silver [orfèvrerie], ceramics, furniture, arms and jewelry, embroidery and carpets from the tenth century to today, will, for the first time, be brought together, and I thought that the Moroccans, in asking us to do this exhibition in Paris, were paying homage to the France that has helped them so much to discover and present the beauties that we are now going to be able to show.<sup>153</sup>

If it is couched here in a lengthy description of the objects in the exhibition, the sentiment is to some degree the same. In the preface, Nacenta argues for the reader that part of this glory has to do with a relationship with France. Here, this relationship is even more complicated, because it is not just that the objects are made and renewed thanks to a relationship with France, but the objects are known and seen—given value—thanks to France. In other words, Nacenta contends in this preface that France not only helps to generate this work, but it is also France that cares about the work, France that finds (“discovers”) and presents the work that the Moroccans might

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<sup>152</sup> Mitchell 17

<sup>153</sup> Letter, 4 Juin 1963, Raymond Nacenta, Dir. Gén to André Malraux, Ministre d’Etat Chargé des Affaires Culturelles. Fonds Galerie Charpentier, Kandinsky Library, Centre Pompidou, Paris. No page numbers.

not have on their own. In this letter to Malraux, Nacenta explains the exhibition in and of itself as an acknowledgment of this on the part of the Moroccan government.

I do not wish to vilify Nacenta by any means, or to suggest that he alone was forcing this position. To the contrary, I want to suggest that the exhibition necessitated this kind of negotiation, that the staging of modernity here requires the staging of difference in order to maintain the homogenous unity of the time and space of modernity, even as it was slowly and uncomfortably shifting to allow even unwillingly for modernity in the former colonies. To mount this exhibition in France only 7 years after Morocco's independence from France based on an official initiative, everybody or group involved, from the Moroccan Ambassador to the Director of Museums, from the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs to Galerie Charpentier itself, had to negotiate their positioning with relation to the other – and to create a new narrative for a new political era.

At the end of the preface, Nacenta explains the exhibition itself. He explains the visit of Hassan II, and the organization of the exhibition with the Moroccan Ambassador, as well as the collaboration with the “Director of Chérifien Museums,” that is, with the Director of Museums of Morocco, Naima Khatib. The preface closes with Nacenta's comments on contemporaneous Moroccan art.

To the procession of spiritual testimonies of the past is added the freshness of the artworks of artists and artisans of today. In this region of the world where painting held in the past only a modest place, a pleiad of artists, pulling their aesthetic from Islamic tradition, are moving with happiness in a kind of metaphysical abstraction that awakens disinterested pleasures [qui éveille bien des plaisirs désintéressés]. In contact with our painters, but holding onto their personality, an essential characteristic of Art, they already constitute a very lively pictorial center, part of which is enriching this exhibition.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Pierre Nacenta. “Préface.” *Deux Mille Ans d'Art au Maroc*. (exhibition catalog) (Paris: Galerie Charpentier, 1963) No page numbers.

Again, as in other catalogs from this era, Moroccan painting is described as totally new. Nacenta's reference to the "pleiad" is particularly interesting. The pleiad is originally a constellation of seven stars, but it was also claimed as the name of a group of seven poets working in France in the seventeenth century. This group was revolutionary because they argued that the French language could be used as a literary language, not just Latin. They were also known for creating neologisms from ancient Greek and Latin, creating something new from ancient sources. In many ways, this moment was the entry of French language into modernity and marked a new era of artistic creation. Nacenta's argument is thus complex, because it suggests that the Moroccan artists were possibly creating something entirely new from European (especially French) and "Islamic" sources. It does, however, maintain a hierarchy between French and Moroccan arts, and suggests Moroccan art is in some way resulting from this contact with France.

The younger artists included in the exhibition were Mohammed Ben Allal, Ahmed Louardiri, Miloud Ben Mokhtar, Radia Ben Mokhtar, Taieb Lahlou, André Elbaz, Hazdai El Moznino, Ahmed Cherkaoui, Farid Belkahia, Moulay Ahmed Drissi, Mahjoubi Ahardan, and Moulay Ali. In the insurance document that lists the suggested value of each of the 25 paintings that they were sent, the gallery lists these artists as the "Modern Moroccan Painters," although they are called "Contemporary Moroccan Painters" in the catalog. Of these 25 paintings, 18 were supplied by the Moroccan Office of Tourism (not including André Elbaz).<sup>155</sup> Many of these are "naïve" (autodidactic) artists that did not study in an academic setting. Many of them as well have been lost in the annals of history.

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<sup>155</sup> Liste et valeur des Tableaux de peintres Marocains Modernes Envoyés à Paris. Fonds Galerie Charpentier, Kandinsky Library, Centre Pompidou, Paris. No page numbers.

The gallery was not, it seems, interested in distinguishing between the groups of artists with the deliberateness of Ahmed Sefrioui in the Paris Biennale, or even between artists and artisans. Nacenta says as much in his preface, but behind the scenes, telegrams suggest that this was a point of contention. Nacenta's collaborator Colette Ducluzeau had travelled alone to Morocco to visit museums and private collections. On May 29, 1963, she sent a telegram as "Urgent" to Nacenta saying, "DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY OBLIGATION HERE TO DISSOCIATE SO CALLED PRESTIGIOUS EXHIBITION AND SO CALLED ARTISINAL EXHIBITION STOP."<sup>156</sup> This is a telling communication gap – between artists trying to assert their right to a "prestigious" exhibition, framed in the same kinds of terms as any other modernist exhibition in Paris at the time, and a gallery trying to insert them into a historical continuum as an iteration of artisans. The exhibition itself contained 439 works, of which 39 were paintings. The catalog suggests that they recreated a "medina" (souk) within the gallery, and the images included of works focus on calligraphy, architecture, tiling, Roman sculptures [Image 2.1], embroidery, rugs, pottery, weapons [Image 2.2], money, jewelry, even a doorknocker in the shape of a Jewish star [Image 2.3]. Of the 53 images in the catalog, only 3 are by the "Modern Moroccan Painters" (Belkahia [Image 2.4], Cherkaoui, and Louardiri), a slightly lower percentage than in the actual exhibition. Each painter is given a brief biographical note. While there are notes written about a number of the works included in the exhibition, no individual creators are noted (beyond tribal provenance) except for with the paintings.

Many of the papers surrounding the exhibition suggest similar points of contention or misunderstanding, although I was only able to access papers held by the Galerie Charpentier.

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<sup>156</sup> Telegram, Colette Ducluzeau to Raymond Nacenta, Casablanca 29-5-1963. Fonds Galerie Charpentier, Kandinsky Library, Centre Pompidou, Paris. No page numbers.

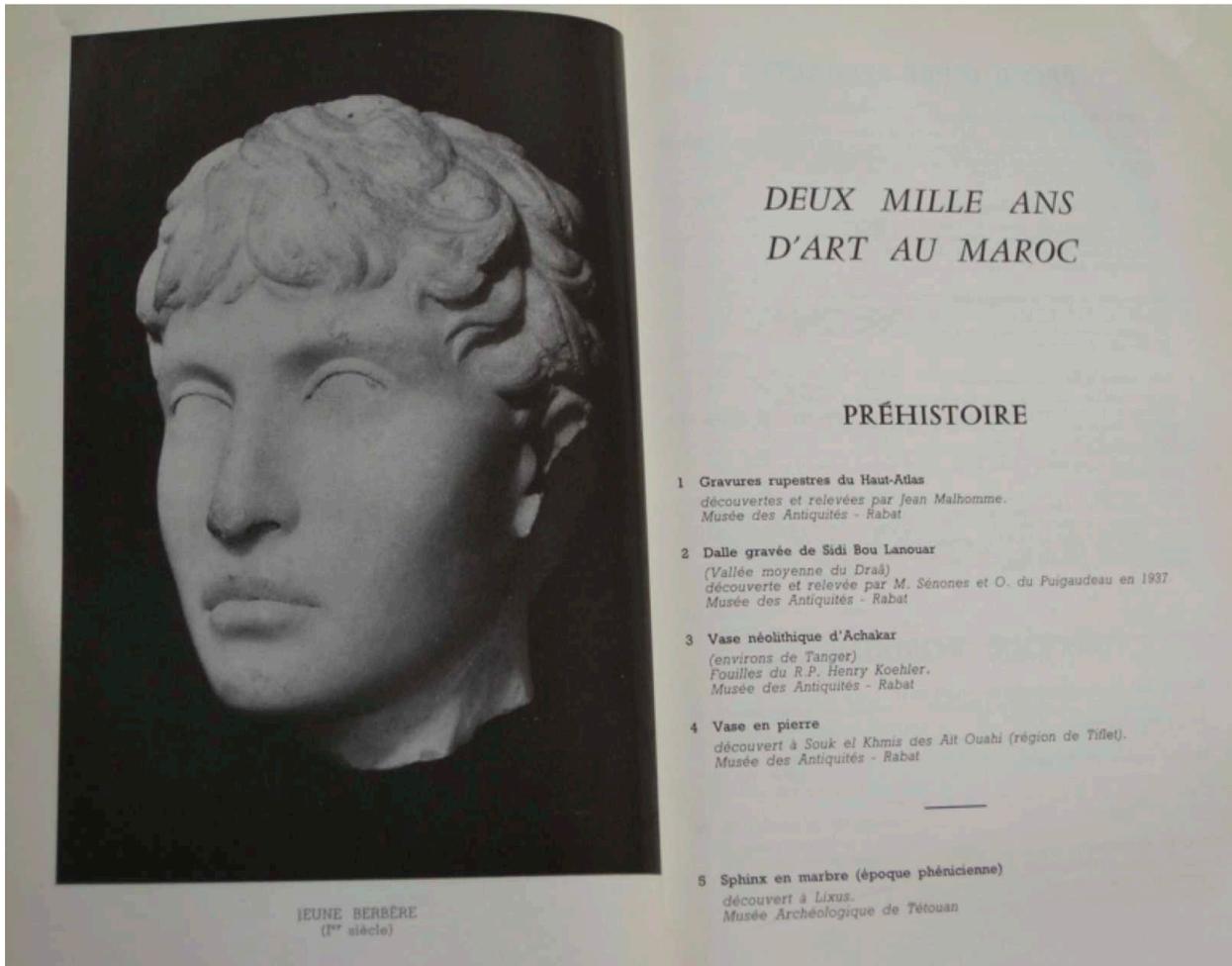


Image 2.1: Spread from *Deux Mille Ans d'Art au Maroc* (exhibition catalog)

Left image is of “Jeune Berbère (Ier siècle)”, right image is list of works included in the exhibition from the “Prehistory”



Image 2.2: Spread from *Deux Mille Ans d'Art au Maroc* (exhibition catalog)

Left image is end of list of works included in exhibition, right image is “Gladiateur (terre cuite découverte à Volubilis)



Image 2.3: Spread from *Deux Mille Ans d'Art au Maroc* (exhibition catalog)

Left image is “Mudd (portant une inscription mérinide)”, right image is “Heurtoir (provenant du sanctuaire de Moulay Idriss à Fès [XVIIIe])”

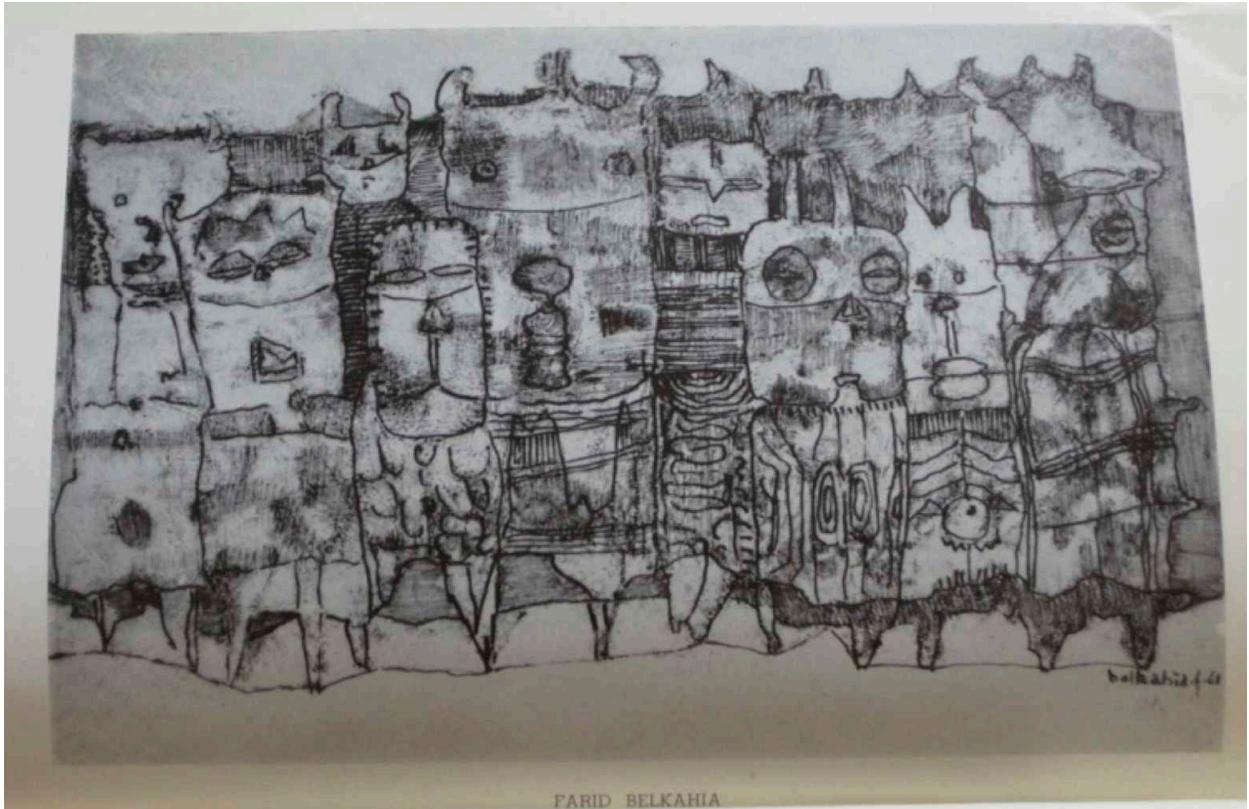


Image 2.4: Untitled artwork by Farid Belkahia, 1961 from *Deux Mille Ans d'Art au Maroc*  
(exhibition catalog)

While the exhibition did open on 18 June 1963, as late as 14 June 1963, Nacenta sent a letter to the Moroccan Ambassador threatening to cancel the exhibition. He writes,

This Exhibition, started with enthusiasm, has had to endure from the side of the Moroccans only delays. You know of course that I had to send a collaborator to Morocco and that despite all the affirmations that I had received before she left, it was in the end me that ended up paying to purchase the objects from the Maison de l'Artisan! We have made a huge effort, teams have worked day and night, but I fear that our ardor is not enough to fill in for the delays of your services. I must tell you honestly that we have to imagine cancelling the opening of the Exhibition. I regret this; I postponed a major Exhibition for you, which adds a bit of bitterness.<sup>157</sup>

Despite Nacenta's comments on paying the Maison de l'Artisan, in 1966, he received a letter from J. Santos of the Maison de l'Artisan, saying that they had received no word from the gallery about the 213,000FF still owed to the Maison de l'Artisan and were therefore sending the dossier to the Judiciary Agent of the government. Santos's letter ends, "We would never have thought that such a space as yours would leave 213,000FF unpaid for so long without even deigning to give us the slightest explanation."<sup>158</sup> Many exhibitions include disagreements about funding and timing. However, I point out this back and forth here because the language of these letters suggest questions of respect and especially of expectations from the other side. The letters use personal and emotional language. Nacenta is left "bitter" despite his "enthusiasm" and "ardor." Santos is slighted because of the lack of respect, shown by the gallery not "deigning" to explain. The individuals seem to consider themselves to be on two separate sides, on the French side or on the Moroccan side. This internal back and forth suggests the larger stakes, and invests the

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<sup>157</sup> Letter, 14 Juin 1963, Raymond Nacenta to SE Monsieur Mohamed Cherkaoui, Ambassadeur du Maroc. Fonds Galerie Charpentier, Kandinsky Library, Centre Pompidou, Paris. No page numbers.

<sup>158</sup> Letter, 28 juin 1966, L'Agent Comptable J Santos from Maison de l'Artisan to Galerie Charpentier. Fonds Galerie Charpentier, Kandinsky Library, Centre Pompidou, Paris. No page numbers.

exhibition within a social and political context of both French gallerists and Moroccan officials trying to navigate the reflexive post-colonial positioning with regard to one another.

### **The “Recontre Internationale”**

The final exhibition I will discuss here is from later in that same year, the 1963 “Rencontre internationale des artistes” (the International Artists’ Forum). The exhibition opened in December 1963 (and closed in January 1964) in Rabat, and was again an official venture, organized by the Ministry of Information, Tourism, Artisanat, and Art (a governmental configuration that no longer exists in this exact form). This exhibition is often referenced in various chronologies, both of Moroccan art (including in *Souffles*) and more broadly of Arab art (as in the chronology from *New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*<sup>159</sup>). Nada Shabout describes this as a singular event in a region of localized and isolated movement, allowing for “the initiation of a dialogue between Moroccan and European artists.” While, for her, artists such as Belkahia and Cherkaoui were “exposed to European art through their earlier training in Paris...[they] were nevertheless excluded from the international art scene.”<sup>160</sup> However, the exhibition history of Moroccan I have considered in depth here, paints a totally different picture and perspective on the issue. I think the importance is not that it was the beginning of a dialogue overall between Moroccan and European artists, but that it was the beginning of an international dialogue on Moroccan soil. Given the importance that it has been

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<sup>159</sup> Hossein Amirsadeghi, Salwa Mikdadi, and Nada Shabout, Ed. *New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London: TransGlobe Publishing Ltd, 2009) 280.

<sup>160</sup> Nada Shabout. “The Arabic Connection in Articulating North African Modernity in Art.” *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 109, no. 3 (2010): 529-543. 532

accorded, I will consider this exhibition and its documentation at some length. I will discuss here the two major sources of information I have about this exhibition, the exhibition catalog and a video released after the exhibition, “Peinture Marocaine,” directed by Ahmed Mesnaoui (1964).<sup>161</sup> I consider this exhibition as the first major exhibition within Morocco of this generation of artists, though not the first exhibition.<sup>162</sup> They had been presented once as a generation in a show at the national gallery, Bab Rouah, curated by Ahmed Sefrioui in 1960 called “Jeune Peinture Marocaine.” Gaston Diehl also organized in 1962 an exhibition called “Peintres contemporains de l’Ecole de Paris, Peintres Marocains” also in Rabat. Both of these earlier exhibition were on a smaller scale, although it is interesting to note the ways in which these exhibitions frame the idea of Moroccan art. In “Jeune Peinture Marocaine,” it is young painting that is distinctly Moroccan, but just as distinctly about youth. It occurred the year after the first Paris biennale. Sefrioui had curated that selection for a biennale about young artists, so the thematics seem closely in line. Diehl’s exhibition situates Moroccan painters in relation to Ecole de Paris painters, arguably a strategic move given that Diehl was in charge of Cultural Exchanges at the French Cultural and University Mission and played a decisive role in visibility for these artists. Finally, the “Rencontre Internationale” which does away with national framework at least in the title, instead reorients the goal of the exhibition towards an attempt to claim international standing by placing Moroccan artists in dialogue with major international works.

The cover of the catalog for the “Rencontre Internationale” is a print designed by Farid Belkahia, already the director of the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux-Arts and one of the artists that was exhibiting the most internationally [Image 2.5]. It is bold and graphic, created to make an

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<sup>161</sup> Available in the archive of the Centre Cinémathographique Marocain, Rabat

<sup>162</sup> Chronologies suggest, for example traveling exhibitions of Moroccan art in 1956, 1958 and 1959.

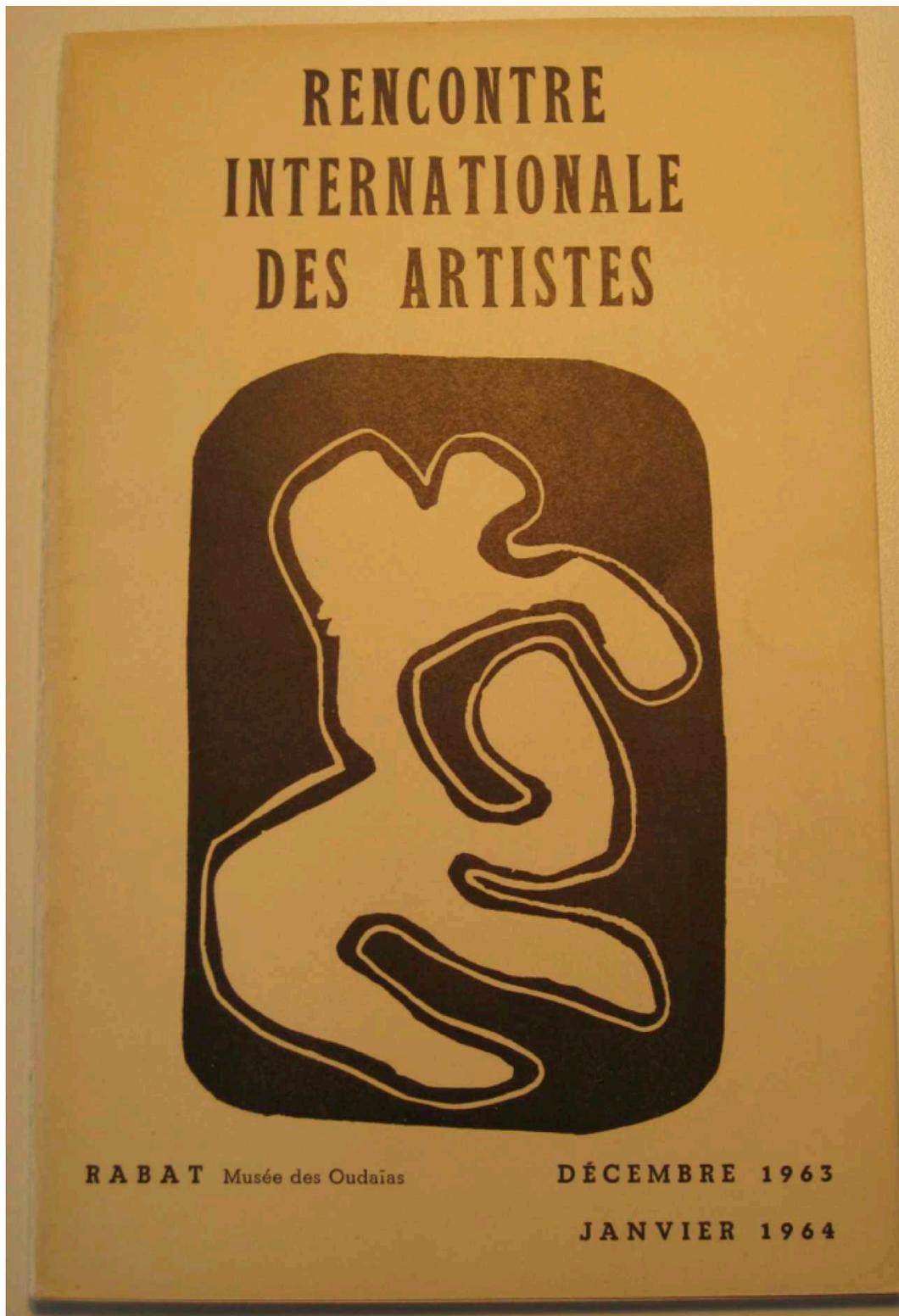


Image 2.5: Cover, Farid Belkahia. *Rencontre internationale des artistes*. (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Musée des Oudayas, 1963).

impact rather than for its details. It is an abstract shape on a black rounded rectangle, created by the inclusion of the negative space (the black ink) and outlined once. The shape seems almost human, contorting back on itself or throwing itself into the air, though there are too many ‘limbs’ for this to be directly human. Instead, it is an organic shape that is dynamic, that suggests movement even in its austere graphic print. It suggests something that is growing or spreading, yet guards its illegibility. This image might be a symbol, or it might not be, but much as it grabs the attention with its vitality, it is decidedly closed off to an easy reading.

The catalog essays are written by names that are familiar during this era, the major players of exhibitions of Moroccan arts, particularly Naima Khatib (director of museums that had also worked with “Deux mille ans d’art au Maroc”), Pierre Restany (the good friend of Jilali Gharbaoui), Fatmi El Fathemy (Cultural Advisor to the Moroccan Ambassador in Paris), and Gaston Diehl. Naima Khatib begins her essay by writing that by this time, Moroccan artists had received recognition for their work by art critics and audiences “notably abroad,” and had “proven themselves one after another”; she goes on to say more broadly that Moroccan painting had been “consecrated” abroad, in Paris, London, Rome, and New York. For Khatib, it is after this international recognition that the artists began to “recognize a certain unity of inspiration, common tendencies, that marked their art with an incontestable personality, in relation to foreign productions.”<sup>163</sup> Similar to what I argued in the first chapter, for Khatib the possibilities of creating a national movement began abroad. Therefore, for Khatib, this exhibition was originally meant to bring these artists together to clarify the possibility of a Moroccan art. In other words, she argues here what I have argued in this exhibition history: that Moroccan art as an idea was developed abroad and in relationship to artists’ experiences abroad, and that this international

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<sup>163</sup> Naima Khatib. “Pourquoi cette rencontre?” *Rencontre internationale des artistes*. (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Musée des Oudayas, 1963.) No page numbers.

recognition was an a priori to beginning an actual local scene within the borders of the country itself.

Similar to the way in which biennials were organized through a system of inviting representatives from different countries, this exhibition followed suit but on a smaller scale by including only approximately one piece per country, chosen by foreign art critics from the same country. This comparison is not for nothing – Khatib hoped that this exhibition would lead to a biennale (although it did not). These foreign critics selected one artist from their home country, then came to Morocco to explain their rationale to young artists and intellectuals and to justify their choice and its relevance.<sup>164</sup> Concerned by the idea of calling an exhibition of only European artists “international,” the organizers actively sought out a broader image of the world via the Cultural Service of the Moroccan Ambassador in Paris, who contacted directors of major Parisian galleries showing artists from different parts of the world. This framework highlights a number of interesting questions about this era. On the one hand, it may seem retrograde at this point to deliberately find non-European artists via their Parisian gallerists, rather than going to local art critics, as they did with European countries. The reality however was that the Parisian galleries structured international discourse via gallerists that represented a large selection of international artists, perhaps not that different than the role of Berlin today for international artists. It moreover highlights the importance of the cosmopolitanism of Paris, of Paris as a meeting ground for international artists, not just the hallowed space of solely European modernism. Secondly, this text points out the nascent discourse that would become a more active discourse of post-colonial Third Worldism in the coming years, as Khatib addresses the question: is it enough to look to Europe? Is Europe the world, or is the world larger, is the art world larger,

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<sup>164</sup> Pierre Restany. “L’art d’aujourd’hui et le Maroc de demain.” *Rencontre internationale des artistes*. (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Musée des Oudayas, 1963.) No page numbers.

is the world that is relevant to Morocco larger? Here, country affiliations are not necessarily country of origin but of residency: for example, Joàn Miro (from Barcelona) is listed as Jean Miro of France, and Picasso is also listed as a French representative. In the end, as well as two international architects (France and Switzerland), the exhibition included nine French artists (including Matisse [Image 2.6]), two English artists (including one painting by Stephan Knapp on loan from the collection of Hassan II [Image 2.6]), artists from throughout Europe (Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy), the United States, the Arab World (Lebanon, Jordan), East Asia (Japan, China [Image 2.6]), as well as Venezuela [Image 2.7], Poland, Senegal [Image 2.7], and India.<sup>165</sup> The spread of the countries, without self-evident connections that hold them together, and the similar respect paid to all of the artists, seems revolutionary.

With this exhibition, Khatib and her colleagues are trying to present an image of Morocco not just by the cosmopolitanism of its artists, but as a possible space of cosmopolitanism itself. The stated goal of the exhibition is on the one hand to affirm the existence of a distinctly Moroccan painting for an international audience [Image 2.8], and to invite well-known international artists to be exhibited alongside in order to make comparisons between the two. Bringing international artworks to Morocco both frames the Moroccan artists within a cosmopolitan international art world, and suggests that Morocco could be – like the metropole – a place of exchange, a place to host visiting artists from all over the world. Khatib reaffirms this idea, writing that, for Morocco, “it will be a joy to host in the next years and within the framework of future international cultural events the largest possible number of foreign

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<sup>165</sup> Lebanon, Abboud; Jordan, Abdellatif Aldine ; Spain, Delgado Alvaro; France, Arp, Bellegarde, Raoul Dufy, Fautrier, Hand Hartung, Henri Matisse, Jean Miro, Pablo Picasso, Jacques Vilon; Germany, Julius Bissier; Greece, John Christoforou; Italy, Lucio Fontana; Poland, Wojciech Fangor; United States, Joan Mitchell; Venezuela, Hector Poleo ; India, Sayed Haider Raza; England, William Scott, Stephen Knapp; Japan, Sougai; Senegal, Papa Tall; China, Zao-Wu-Ki

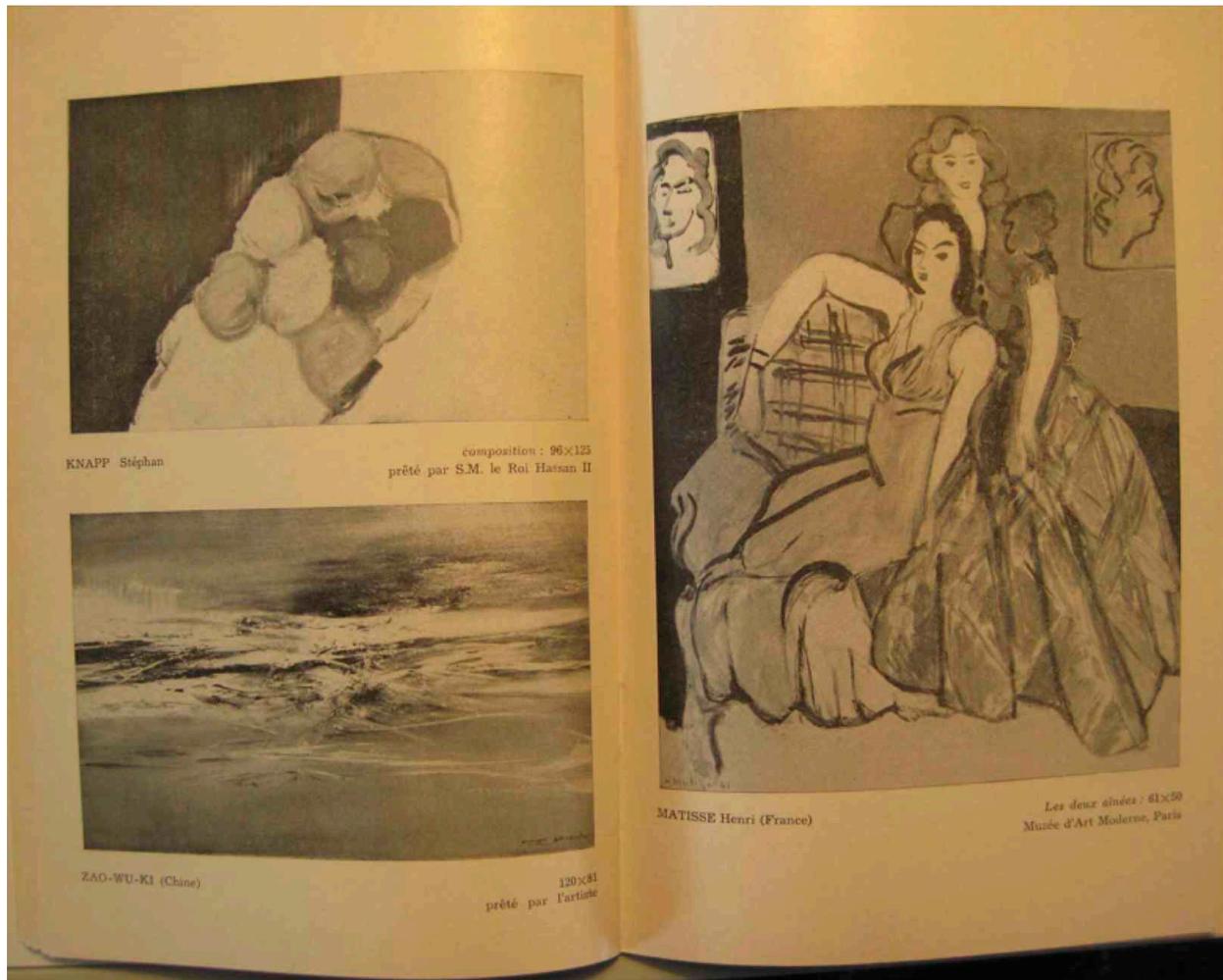


Image 2.6: Spread from the catalog showing artworks by Henri Matisse (France), Stephen Knapp (British, artwork from the collection of King Hassan II), and Zao Wu-Ki (China).

*Rencontre internationale des artistes.* (exhibition catalog)

(Rabat: Musée des Oudayas, 1963).

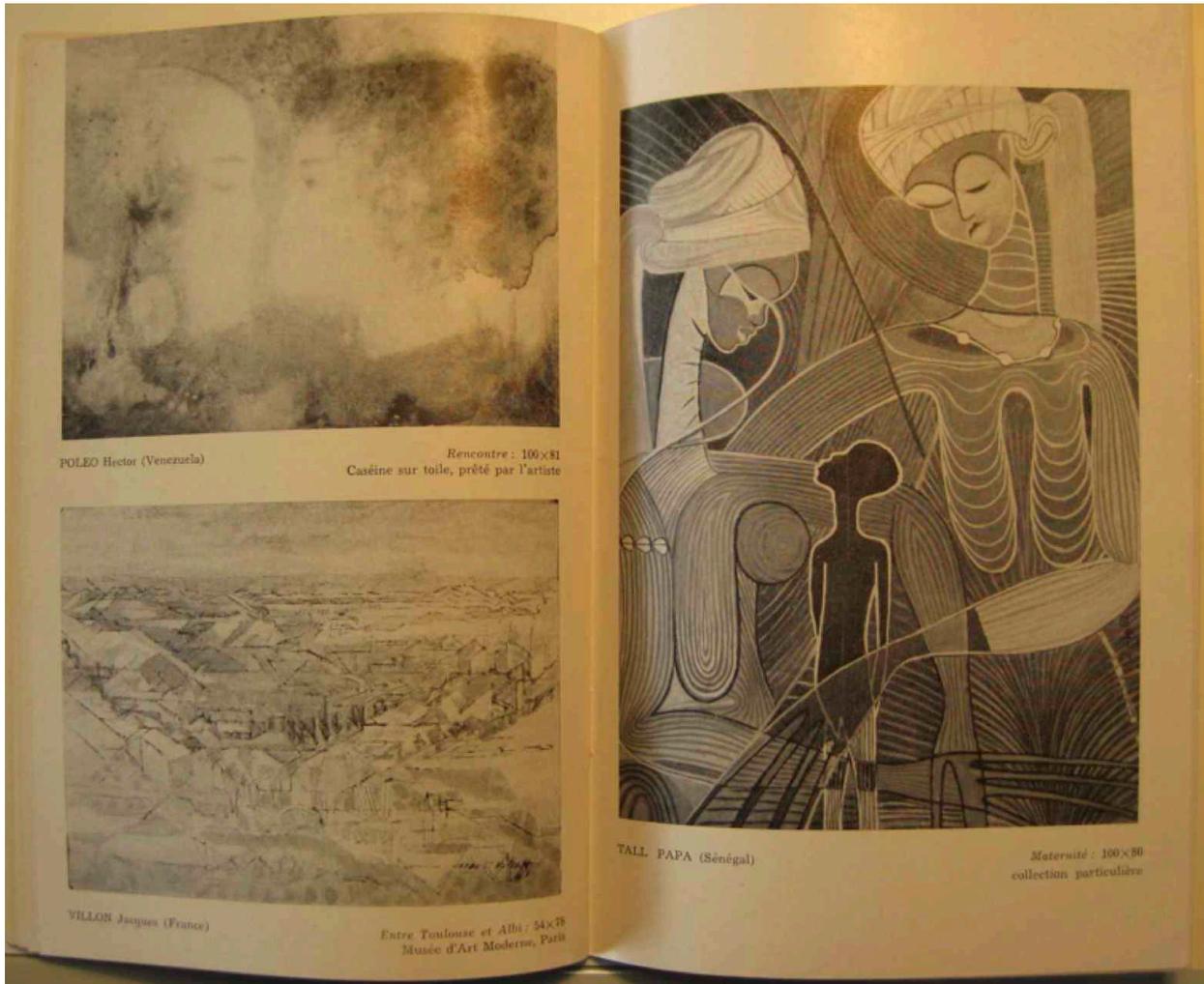


Image 2.7: Spread from the catalog showing artworks by Papa Tall (Senegal), Hector Poleo (Venezuela), and Jacques Villon (France). *Rencontre internationale des artistes*. (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Musée des Oudayas, 1963).

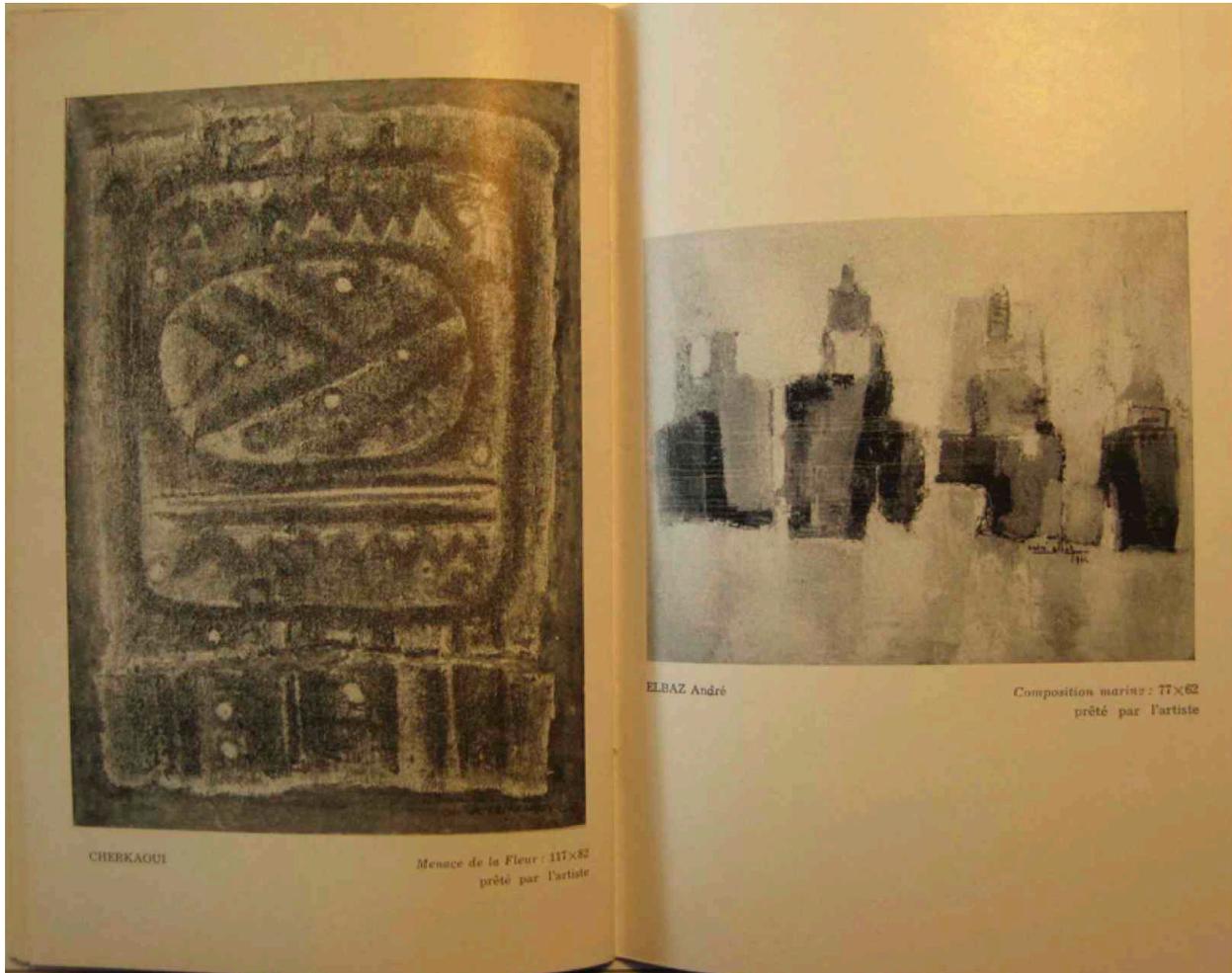


Image 2.8: Spread from the catalog showing artworks by Ahmed Cherkaoui and André Elbaz.

*Rencontre internationale des artistes.* (exhibition catalog)

(Rabat: Musée des Oudayas, 1963).

artists.” While the artists had been working abroad, “according to the laws of Moroccan hospitality,” they wanted to invite colleagues to Morocco and welcome them there, an idea that took hold for Khatib during the exhibition at the Galerie Charpentier.<sup>166</sup> This loop back to Galerie Charpentier’s exhibition, “Deux mille ans d’art au Maroc,” is meaningful, because it gestures towards the self-consciously international movement of ideas as well as artworks. Khatib suggests that they are bringing these numerous references back to Morocco for the first time, with the same structural recognition as artists’ have received individually, with the possibility of starting a new era in which Morocco is the space of hosting, as opposed to a place that people leave to be guests abroad.

The hat tip towards hospitality at this point moreover calls up a Derridean theorization of hospitality, particularly given the close relationship between cosmopolitanism and hospitality, as in Derrida’s reading of Kant’s idea “Cosmopolitan Right shall be limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality.” Derrida argues that hospitality is a contradictory or self-deconstructing term, that it suggests that the foreign stranger has a right to be greeted as a friend but only on the condition that the host maintains his own authority within his home(land). In other words, hospitality at its base for Derrida maintains its own authority, and this limitation of rights is the very condition of hospitality.<sup>167</sup> My interest here is not in taking on everything that Derrida argues about the politics of the idea of hospitality. However, this term can become enriched beyond an arguably self-exoticizing image of Moroccan hospitality, inserted into a curatorial text to rationalize an international exhibition within a local idiom. With eyes opened by Derrida, this brief parenthetical within the text suggests a larger claim of power, because it suggests the desire

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<sup>166</sup> Khatib. “Pourquoi cette rencontre?”

<sup>167</sup> Jacques Derrida. “Hostipitality.” Trans. Barry Stocker with Forbes Morlock. *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*. 5, no. 3. (2000) 3-4

to host—or perhaps, claims the right to host—beyond being forever a guest in the cosmopolitan metropole. That is, to host is not just to welcome, but also to maintain authority over the home(land), and claim the importance of the home(land) as a space to visit. This exhibition marks a significant turning point, because it gives both an explicit claim as well as the implicit claim through hosting the exhibition of bringing cosmopolitanism to Moroccan soil, suggesting that the space of authority to which international artists might want to come, in which international guests might want to mingle, and which could set international discourse could also be Moroccan.

To be clear, this exhibition was not the first time that international art was shown in Morocco. As referenced earlier, there were singular events such as the Tunisian art exhibition in 1957 in the same museum. There was also a history of European paintings (primarily orientalist) being shown within varied formats, with the first exhibition of European easel painting in 1918. Moreover, the director of the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux-Arts from 1960 to 1962, Maurice Arama described in an interview an active programming of international arts exhibitions (including locations outside of Europe) within the school using loans from foreign cultural institutions and embassies.<sup>168</sup>

Restany, in his essay, reiterates that this was not the first exhibition of modern art in Morocco, but was meant instead to be a site of exchange. Again, he focuses on the international aspect, that is, on the importance of artists meeting, of artworks being put into dialogue together, and, more precisely, placing Moroccan art into a global scene from a site in Rabat. As he writes,

An entire new generation of young Moroccan artists has awoken to its own consciousness, and to that of the world: [this generation] looks for itself, or more exactly, looks for the foundation of its own language, one that aspires to be universal in its repercussions as in its exigencies, one that is adapted to the

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<sup>168</sup> Maurice Arama, interview by author, Paris 23 April 2012.

problems of today's world. The Moroccan artist of today is totally engaged in the current world [dans le monde de son temps]; it is that modern dual quality of consciousness and engagement that the Rabat exhibition wants to underline.

In other words, Restany is suggesting here that Moroccan art is coming into its own, politically and artistically, and is aiming to be universal and more specifically, part of the contemporaneous world and its global artistic debates. Restany goes on to explain the curatorial choices he made with Michel Ragon to choose artists from the Ecole de Paris, pointing out a goal to cover in their choices the “elements of indispensable references for the progressive study of contemporary art.” Restany points out that his connection to Morocco is that it was the country of his childhood and is full of memories for him, that is, focuses on its role in his past, as a way of reaching his final point, that the Rencontre International is “the first chapter of a history that promises to be long and fruitful for the country.” He explains that Moulay Ahmed Alaoui (Minister of Tourism, Handicraft and Fine Art, the governing ministry of the exhibition) imagined that this exhibition would be the beginning of a larger cultural politics “based on the planning and systematic development of regular international relations between artists and creators from all countries.”<sup>169</sup> Restany's focus is similar to Khatib's, although his perspective is different as a major art critic based in Paris and not someone working in Morocco. He reiterates Khatib's main points: that Moroccan art must be inscribed into an international scene, that this is the beginning of something longer, that the focus is on a cultural politics of international exchange.

El Fathemy, Cultural Advisor to the Moroccan Ambassador in Paris, has a different perspective. He argues that modern art arises not from negating cultural heritage, but in a profound fidelity to tradition and history. The goal of modern art is then to combine transnational modernism with cultural traditions, a comment that presages the growing emphasis on this very

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<sup>169</sup> Restany. “L'art d'aujourd'hui et le Maroc de demain.”

idea. However, El Fathemy then suggests that the multiple Ecole de Paris artists, as well as, secondarily, other international artists, were invited as examples of artists that were able to be part of transnational modernism while still showing some continuity with their local traditions.<sup>170</sup> It is here that we can see the uncomfortable negotiations with regard to Moroccan art itself, which seems to revolve around a question of whether or not there was a fully “developed” local art scene as it had been staged abroad, whether this international exhibition was meant to provide an example for what to do or was meant to place Moroccan artists on an equal plain within an international scene.

In the final essay, Gaston Diehl attempts to provide a synopsis of modern Moroccan painting, focusing on putting modern Moroccan art into a broader history of Moroccan craft. He primarily expresses this history through what Moroccan painting is not, rather than trying to specify affirmatives. For instance, he says, Moroccan painting is not a “new” painting, dating the emergence of Moroccan modern painting to fifteen years earlier (that is, the late 1940s). It is also not a result of imitation of the West given the so-called lack of a modernist painting tradition in Islamic countries, because, for Diehl, painting is a universal order that touches not just individuals but more broadly all countries without distinction. If there is any mimetic aspect of art, for Diehl, it is only at the beginning, “at the time of apprenticeship” before quickly becoming autonomous. Diehl argues for an image of continuity as a way of arguing against painting being “new” in Morocco, saying that while perhaps the media and ideas have changed, there is a “fundamental” expression based on “authentic” motifs of man trying to understand his role in nature. Diehl traces this back, despite a multiplicity of expression, to a unity of Islam, a “collective unanimity” that the art seems always to be representative of. Diehl

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<sup>170</sup> El Fathemy. “Panorama international de la peinture contemporaine.” *Rencontre internationale des artistes*. (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Musée des Oudayas, 1963) No page numbers.

cites André Malraux's idea that abstraction and fantasy are the two poles of Islam (again looping back to someone that, as the person that initiated the Paris Biennale, was already in the discursive structure of international exhibitions of Moroccan painting). He goes on about the possibility of language and sincerity that is then possible in painting, concluding,

With such a perspective we will understand that Moroccan art has affirmed itself quite rapidly while discovering for itself endless unimaginable possibilities, insofar as it has practically all liberties to continue its traditional development outside of time, or perhaps better to say, in the midst of its own time.<sup>171</sup>

In other words, as he repeats multiple times in the final paragraphs of the essay, for Diehl, the importance of Moroccan art is as a continuity, especially of craft. For him the desire to be a painter is the same as the former desire to do zellij (tiling), or other traditional arts. Diehl's essay is interesting because it claims both maturity for the modernist scene, that is, a larger stake in transnational modernism, while also locating Moroccan art (and perhaps Morocco in general) outside of time, reiterating the image of multiple temporalities seen in earlier essays that structures the difference necessitated by staging modernity. This is perhaps symptomatic of the very idea of the exhibition: how do you simultaneously show a distinctly national scene and argue for some national exceptionalism while simultaneously claiming for a borderless transnational and cosmopolitan modernism?

Gaston Diehl was also involved in the 1964 film "Peinture Marocaine,"<sup>172</sup> directed by Ahmed Mesnaoui.<sup>173</sup> The 35 mm film is 18 minutes long and was filmed in color, and focuses on

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<sup>171</sup> Gaston Diehl. "Sources et ressources de la peinture marocaine." *Rencontre internationale des artistes*. (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Musée des Oudayas, 1963). No page numbers.

<sup>172</sup> Image: René Vezziez

Assistant: M'hamed Ziani

Montage: Abdallah R'mili, Latifa Souihli

Commentaire écrit et dit par Gaston Diehl

Musique: conservatoires de Rabat et Tétouan

Produced by CCM (Actualités Marocains)

a panorama of contemporaneous Moroccan modern art within the context of the Rencontre Internationale. The film was produced by the Centre Cinématographique Marocain (CCM) to be shown under the label “Actualités Marocains,” that is, Moroccan News, and most likely was broadcast on television. The CCM had begun producing short films only a few years earlier, in 1957.<sup>174</sup> Gaston Diehl contributed a commentary that he wrote and reads off camera, providing the only speech in the film. The international focus of the film is highlighted by a soundtrack of Andalusian music (calling to mind the long historical link between Morocco and Spain) played by the conservatories of Rabat and Tétouan.

The first section of the film tries to situate modern Moroccan art in relation to traditional art. The film opens with a scene of an artist looking at the Chellah, Roman ruins situated near the palace in Rabat. The artist’s blank canvas is oriented towards the ruins and the artist is preparing a palette with different blobs of paint, ready to begin. The film continues with Diehl’s voiceover, highlighting pieces of traditional arts, showing the formal patterns and ways of expression through zellij, ceramics, plaster, and carpets, as a way of suggesting that modern art is coming after but still looking to the ancient. Diehl says that it took an enormous amount of courage for artists to leave this and begin working in a new medium, here focusing on the courageous break more than on the continuity. As he says, “The Moroccan artists of today needed a lot of courage to pierce in one sole blow the stratification of centuries et engage in research where there is no end.” This break is contradicted in some ways by the way in which the pieces are filmed, because both traditional arts and modern art are filmed in the same way, thereby creating a visual

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Scenario et realization: Ahmed Mesnaoui

<sup>173</sup> This is the name given by the CCM. However, in *Souffles* (“Index des cineastes marocains, 2, 1966. 38-39), he is listed as “Larbi Mesnaoui.” His entry does not list biographical details, but states that the two short films he had done were “La Peinture Marocaine” and “La Rose du Sud.”

<sup>174</sup> “Dossier cinéma: pour un cinéma national.” *Souffles*. Number 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> trimestre, 1966. 21-23.

relationship and continuity between them. While there were a total of 18 Moroccan artists in the exhibition,<sup>175</sup> Diehl focuses on only seven of them,<sup>176</sup> giving a brief commentary on each artist. Diehl's language is romantic and somewhat extreme, discussing Louardiri as a visionary, Belkahia as "the man of the village," "the man of anguish and of hope," and "the man of the tent," Cherkaoui as an artist that gives power to materials through geometric signs, and finds his own liberation through abstraction, and Gharbaoui as showing the secret forms of past centuries, whose movements, gestures, and rips mount to tragedy. The camera pans slowly over one or more paintings by each artist, giving no names of works or dates. For both modern and traditional art, the camera focuses on small details and especially on texture.

The second section of the film focuses on international modernism, and specifically the image of international modernism offered at the *Rencontre Internationale*. There is, however, a confusion of terms here that is exemplary of some of the challenges of research on this era. In the film, the exhibition is never cited by the name given in the catalog, or that has gone down in history. Instead, it is called the first "Colloque des Arts Plastiques," that is, Arts Conference, organized by Morocco. Restany in his essay notes that the *Rencontre Internationale* coincided with the National Salon of Moroccan Artists. This is now three different terms referring to the same exhibition. While the catalog states that the exhibition takes place in the Musée des Oudayas, the video shows an image of the outside of the gallery Bab Rouah (the major national gallery in downtown Rabat). Despite the different names, given the same dates of the catalog and video and similar lists of international artists I feel confident that these are referring to the same

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<sup>175</sup> Mahjoubi Aherdan, Mohammed Atalah, Farid Belkahia, Ben Allal, Karim Bennani, Mohammed Bennani, Maxime Benaim, Ahmed Cherkaoui, A Demnati, Andre Elbaz, Jilali Gharbaoui, Hassan El Glaoui, Houcein, Hazdal El Moznino, Taieb Lahlou, Ahmed Louardiri, Mekki Meghara, and Yacoubi

<sup>176</sup> Louardiri, Ben Allal, Belkahia, Yacoubi, Bennani, Cherkaoui, Gharbaoui

event. It is worth noting, however, that even in a span of a few months, the name of this exhibition is given separately, which might suggest larger challenges for archival work during this era.

The transition to international modernism in the film connects to Diehl's catalog essay and his comments about the idea of trying to achieve universality. In the film, Diehl says that painting is not just of an individual, but is the language of both a generation and an era, ideally becoming a universal language. The exhibition at the Musée des Oudayas, to him, showed this universal language. This universal language "reunites in a brotherly way [fraternellement]" the countries that are shown [the spoken text lists this as eleven countries, while the catalog lists artists from 15 countries other than Morocco, as well as two international architects]. The images show canvases hung on the wall, sometimes cutting to images of people looking at paintings. The film stays close to each canvas, though, so that even when we see the audience, the film provides no shots that give us a broader image of the exhibition. That is, we see paintings hung on a wall, but we do not see how the paintings themselves interact in space, or the layout of the installation of the exhibition. There is also no information on these painters or paintings beyond the artist's name and country. There are a few inconsistencies in the filming – a Bennani canvas that had been shown earlier is shown again, but this time called a Yacoubi painting, while one of Yacoubi's paintings is shown as being a painting by Aherdan. Yet the style of the second half of the film, while less luxuriously slow and texture-oriented than the first half, maintains a consistent style, showing each painting in the same way. The Moroccan artists are interspersed with all of the international artists, visually situating Morocco on equal footing within the context of international modernism. This repeated image of Moroccan art on an international scene is all the more powerful, because a larger audience would have been exposed to the film

than to the catalog or, most likely, the exhibition itself. This video stands apart as the only exhibition-based film produced during this era by the CCM, which may attest to the importance accorded to this event at the time while reaffirming the ideas of both affirming a national movement and bringing cosmopolitanism to the territorial boundaries of Morocco that can be read within the exhibition.

## **Conclusion**

By the time of the “Rencontre Internationale” in Rabat, which corresponded roughly with the beginning of the movement of modernism within Morocco, there was already an accumulated discourse about what Moroccan modernism was. This discourse, however, was built before the movement itself existed, at least as a unified movement of artists working within the territorial boundaries of Morocco. Instead, Moroccan modernism was staged in a series of international exhibitions across the world, culminating in the significant exhibitions “Deux Mille Ans d’Art au Maroc” and the “Rencontre Internationale.” This staging, in suggesting an extant movement of distinctly “Moroccan” nation-based modern art, with definable similarities, goals, and ideas, also played a role in creating that same movement. In the words of Timothy Mitchell, whose theory has shaped this chapter:

[The] more profound effect [of the staging of modernity] is to generate another realm that appears to precede and stand unaffected by these proliferating signs: reality itself – what now appears as a material order that preexists the constitution of the social an order that is only reflected by the processes of signification, never shaped by them.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Mitchell 26

Artists that had been trained abroad, built their careers abroad, and exhibited primarily abroad were consistently identified by their nationality. The shared space of the movement of Moroccan modernism was created abroad, and it was up to the artists to reckon with this history when they began to move back to Morocco. As the artists began to enrich the artistic projects that they had first begun to articulate abroad and to reimagine the position of the artist within the context of Morocco, they already had a discursive history to negotiate in terms of Moroccan art history and the capacities of hospitality to create a space of cosmopolitanism within the boundaries of Morocco itself.

## CHAPTER THREE: LOCALIZING MODERNISM IN MOROCCO: THE CASABLANCA ECOLE DES BEAUX ARTS

**“The artists of the generation born between 1930 and 1940 had lived in the euphoria of the project of national edification. They felt themselves invested with a great responsibility. Indeed, it was starting from the artistic situation that in the mid 1960s a process of renovation started to develop on multiple audacious and decisive levels. During a few years, the Ecole des Beaux Arts of Casablanca was at the heart of this movement.”**  
-Toni Maraini<sup>178</sup>

Following the “Rencontre Internationale” in Rabat, more and more artists began returning from abroad to work in Morocco. A movement began to coalesce around the Ecole des Beaux Arts of Casablanca, held together by ideas more than aesthetics. Starting with Farid Belkahia’s return in 1962 to become director of the school, the artists at the Casablanca school began creating a new kind of arts pedagogy for Morocco. The pedagogy was closely in line with their individual artistic work, which was deeply rooted in creating a possibility of Moroccan modernism by grounding the international modernism that they had learned and developed abroad in local visual referents. This was linked to debates on national culture and post-coloniality. Artists began to take on multiple roles, working to push pedagogy farther, to collaborate across disciplines (particularly with the journal *Souffles*), and to create associations that would offer a national platform for artists. These artists value and claim the importance of distinctly Moroccan visual culture as a way of localizing modernism, and of claiming a

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<sup>178</sup> Toni Maraini, “Melehi: un itinéraire d’action, une géométrie visionnaire.” *Melehi* (exhibition catalog) (Rabat, Galerie Bab Rouah: December 1997). 13.

Moroccan modernism. I argue in this chapter that an analysis of the artwork is only possible in the context of the larger framework of their actions, which elucidate the stakes of the visual objects themselves. These actions are not secondary to their artwork, but constitutive to the artistic projects of the individual artists and the modernist movement.

### **L’Ecole des Beaux Arts de Casablanca: History and Pedagogy**

Farid Belkahia returned to Morocco in 1962 in order to become Director of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Casablanca. He was called back to replace Maurice Arama, who had been the first Moroccan director of the school between 1960 and 1962. Arama, a Jewish Moroccan artist, describes the school before 1960 as remaining a colonial institution, founded, funded, and directed by the French even after independence along the lines of French colonial policy on arts and artisanal work in Morocco.<sup>179</sup> That being said, even under Arama’s direction, it was foreign cultural institutions that provided pieces on loan for the school’s exhibitions, and, moreover, diplomas were handed out via mailed in evaluations to France.<sup>180</sup> That is to say that the pedagogy remained primarily shaped by a French plan, so that when students were to graduate, dossiers that fulfilled the French imperatives were sent to France, and students were awarded French diplomas. It is not clear why Arama was replaced, because there was no rationale offered publicly. As Arama recalls, he was removed from the position when the municipality called for a “real” [sic] Moroccan to take the position, suggesting that they were looking for a Muslim

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<sup>179</sup> French colonial policies on arts and artisanal work in Morocco have been carefully discussed by Hamid Irbouh in *Art in the Service of Colonialism: French Art Education in Morocco: 1912-1956*. (New York: Taurus Academic Studies, 2005.)

<sup>180</sup> Maurice Arama, interview by author, Paris, 23 April 2012.

Moroccan to fill the role.<sup>181</sup> This is disputed within Morocco,<sup>182</sup> and is something that is impossible to prove or disprove because the choice was made behind closed doors. The move to hire Belkahia, however, fundamentally changed the course of the school's pedagogy given his anti-colonial commitment to national culture.

The situation that Belkahia inherited was a challenging one. The school was a colonial institution, founded in 1950, that was still profoundly linked to French systems. The school was underfunded, and in a city with next to no artistic structures. A 1967 article in daily newspaper *L'Opinion* critiques the lack of funding given to the school by focusing on the run-down nature of the building itself, compared to the heavily funded development of buildings for the Prefecture of Casablanca. As the article asks, "Does this mean that this *maisonette* [little house] is the image of the importance that we give to culture and to art in this country? We do not wish to believe it despite this sad and head-spinning reality."<sup>183</sup> In Casablanca, there were no museums, and in neighboring Rabat (90 kilometers north along the coast from Casablanca), the national gallery rarely exhibited young painters. Given the lack of artistic structures in the city, it is interesting the extent to which the school comes up throughout contemporaneous news sources as not just a school, but as a structure that reflects on the city more broadly.

Casablanca was, moreover, a municipal school. The school of fine arts in Tétouan, in northern Morocco, is a national institution operated by the Ministry of Culture. Much as the ministry did not inspire great confidence, as in the 1966 quotation in *L'Opinion* of one of the

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Belkahia explained the decision as he understood it by the municipality off the record, but in his opinion, this decision had nothing to do with Judaism. Interview by author, Marrakech, 18 July 2012.

<sup>183</sup> "De l'art ... mais où sont les artistes?" *L'Opinion*, n. 813, 17-18 September 1967.

Ministry of Culture functionaries saying “I do what I can, but I can do very little,”<sup>184</sup> there was still a cultural body directing the school. The Casablanca school, on the other hand, was and remains separate – a municipal school, with appointments therefore coming from the municipal government. There were few educational opportunities for artists outside of these two schools. The exception to this was Jacqueline Brodskis’ studio in Rabat that catered to artists in Rabat and Salé. The studios were operated under the aegis of the Ministry of Youth and Sports starting in 1956. Many artists that studied with Brodskis went on to become well known, particularly artist Miloud Labied who in the 1970s collaborated with the artists that I focus on in this dissertation. So-called “naïve” artists, including Ahmed Louardiri, Fatima Hassan El Farrouj, and Ahmed Lagzouli also studied with Brodskis.<sup>185</sup> This atelier was located in a different governmental branch, though it was also under the national government. While a very important institution, it functioned in a different way than the two Ecoles des Beaux-Arts, and situated itself by a different pedagogy. In future work, more research is needed on the relationship of these multiple institutions.

When Belkahia became director of the school in Casablanca in 1962, a position he retained until 1974, immediately diplomas stopped being handed out. Belkahia, who had returned from his studies in Prague expressly for this position, was unwilling to maintain French diplomas, based on the anti-colonial stance he held as director, yet the city was also not able to find a way to decide on how diplomas would be awarded.<sup>186</sup> He arrived the year before the “Rencontre Internationale” in Rabat. As noted in the previous chapter, at this point, there had been some small traveling exhibitions of Moroccan art in 1956 and 1958, and that same year

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<sup>184</sup> Salim, “Raisons d’espérer?” *L’Opinion*, n. 326, 26 March 1966.

<sup>185</sup> Aziz Daki, “22: L’atelier de Jacqueline Brodskis à Rabat,” *Repères pour une Histoire de la peinture au Maroc* (Informational panels available in Rabat at the Institut Francais, no date.)

<sup>186</sup> Farid Belkahia, interview by author, Marrakech, 18 July 2012.

(1962), Gaston Diehl organized an exhibition in Rabat called “Peintres de l’Ecole de Paris et Peintres Marocains.” However, these exhibitions were few and far between, and success was primarily being found abroad, or at least was being defined on those terms. Given the lack of structures, as discussed in Chapter One, most working artists were at this point abroad. Most artists therefore had to choose to come back, or Belkahia had to convince them to come back, and so when Belkahia began, there were also scarce human resources to teach with the ideals Belkahia had in mind.

Not all artists – as in the case of Cherkaoui<sup>187</sup> – wanted to come back to Casablanca, to work in a city with so few opportunities in a job that was not prestigious or well-paid in a municipal school that did not give out diplomas, especially given how difficult it was to establish themselves abroad. Nadine Gayet-Descendre writes looking back on the school that in 1964, already two years into Belkahia’s tenure,

the situation of the school is pathetic. The majority of the students are extremely impoverished young proletariats that had arrived there (as in all art schools in the world) because they had not found their place anywhere else. A few girls from good families complete the battalion. The academic instruction about the figure is evidently giving only mediocre results. The plasters and the still-lives are immediately put back into the closet, and gradually, a new pedagogy is created on the ground.<sup>188</sup>

This is a telling description of the school, because it emphasizes both the profound disadvantages the school faced, as well as the way in which faculty took it upon themselves to work together to create a totally new model of arts education in Morocco. Personal commitments brought some artists back, although it is also important to equally pay tribute to the idealism of post-colonial

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<sup>187</sup> Belkahia said that Cherkaoui chose not to return to the school because he was focusing on his personal career (18 July 2012). It was not until just before his death in 1967 that Cherkaoui decided to return to work in Morocco.

<sup>188</sup> Nadine Gayet-Descendre. “Mohammed Melehi, une vie.” *Melehi* (exhibition catalog) (Rabat, Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997.) 51.

national culture and a commitment to making things better in the home country for many that returned. It is this Third Worldist post-colonial commitment to national culture that I will focus on in this chapter, trying to tease out its iterations in pedagogy, artistic practice, and exhibitions, as well as its interdisciplinary connections and ultimate limits.

The school of fine arts under the direction of Belkahia became known for a pedagogy that reflected this ideological commitment. The fine arts faculty was originally relatively traditional, and it was during this time that artist Andre Elbaz was on faculty (discussed at length in Chapter Five). However, the image of the school changed when Mohammed Melehi and Mohammed Chebaa were hired. It was at this point, in 1964, that, according to Toni Maraini, a distinct movement of painting within a globally inflected realm of reflection began to coalesce in Morocco.<sup>189</sup> Melehi and Chebaa together with Belkahia re-oriented the pedagogy, from a traditional art school (with easel paintings and still lifes) to a pedagogy focused on Moroccan visual culture. As Belkahia argued in 1967,

Teaching in fine arts schools needs to be, in my opinion, a field of experimentation above all, where the research supports specific domains. There had never been, for instance, a course in Arabic calligraphy in a fine arts school in Morocco (before 1964). Outside of a purely technical education, calligraphy could be a way of doing research as much on the artistic level as on the applications that it could have in the domain of publicity, or others. I cannot imagine either a school of fine arts in Morocco where the students would not be put into contact with the different techniques of modern painting (even the School of Fine Arts of Paris does not propose this). It seems to me that the essential task of a school of fine arts is *information*. [...] The way in which art history is taught is aberrant in many schools. We go too far into the past when we must start with the situation of art today. [...] Experimentation must remain our fundamental preoccupation.<sup>190</sup>

Following these ideas, of pushing towards modernism, experimentation, and local visual culture, the art school became known for a radical new pedagogy. In 1965, the faculty included

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<sup>189</sup> Toni Maraini, *Ecrits sur l'Art: Choix de Textes Maroc 1967-1989*. (Rabat: Al Kalam, 1990.) 223.

<sup>190</sup> Farid Belkahia, "fiches et questionnaire." *Souffles*, no. 7-8, 2/3/4 Trimester (1967): 25-31.

Mohammed Melehi, who taught painting, M. P. Duckert, who taught ceramics, Jacques Azema, who taught sculpture, Madame Bertrand and M. Bensalem, both of whom taught architecture, and Toni Maraini, who taught art history. At that point, all students studied for three years in one of three programs: the painting studio, the decorative arts studio, or the ceramics and sculpture studio. Architecture students came for two years.

These faculty members are featured in a small pamphlet that was edited by Melehi and printed in Tangier in June of 1965 in order to highlight the activities of the school between 1962 and 1965. The pamphlet is written in both French and Arabic, and includes photographs of traditional ceramics, as well as images of the faculty working with students and the 1963-1964 final project. Belkahia writes the introduction to the publication, and describes the school's goal to push students to create work more than teaching straightforward techniques ("The teacher can only struggle to transmit to his students his own creative model and his faith."), that students require a diversity of influences ("Diversity of viewpoints can only allow for a broadening of the spirit."), and given this diversity, that the teachers will no doubt disagree but that these contradictory viewpoints on the students' work allows the subject to go deeper. From these disagreements, "Teaching can only be enriched. This dialogue must be pursued at all levels. It implies the acceptance of a loyal, constructive, and reciprocal critique." The introduction suggests the complicity and collective work of the faculty. Belkahia's introduction seems to be less for a traditional art school than a studio in which teachers and students are working together, pushing each other to think and create in new ways.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Mohammed Melehi, ed. *Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Casablanca – Maroc*. (Informational pamphlet on the school's activities between 1962 and 1965) (Tangier: Editions Marocaines et Internationales, 1965)

The ideas suggested in the 1965 pamphlet continued to be refined by incoming faculty. Melehi and Chebaa, along with other professors including Mohammed Ataalah, Mohammed Hamidi, and Mustapha Hafid worked specifically to abolish the fearful relationship between student and teacher in order to push students towards their individual interests while developing collective work. They taught collage, gestural painting, and painting on existing structures, as well as photography. The faculty also used rugs and artisinal work as models, as opposed to focusing traditional European still-lifes, trying to highlight the history of art of Morocco as an equally valid reference to modern art. As Melehi says,

The big questions became this: does there exist in Morocco an art form that is inherent to our culture. . . and from there: can we open up an artistic tradition, like the Greco-Roman tradition, that could be susceptible to lending itself to instruction?<sup>192</sup>

Students would thus go on trips around Morocco to visit historical sites like Volubilis, a sprawling Roman ruin outside of Meknes, and were taught artisinal techniques like zellige.<sup>193</sup> Graphic design classes pushed students to experiment with Arabic script, much as the artistic discourse at that point was – and mainly, continues to be – primarily Francophone. The interest in calligraphy in part stemmed from pushing students to look at the environment they lived in, to bring artistic creation closer to the lived reality of contemporaneous Morocco.

Additionally, there were two art historians on faculty. Toni Maraini taught modern art history, although she also included information ranging from ancient art to contemporaneous avant-garde movements. In the 1965 handbook released by the school, she describes creating the

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<sup>192</sup> Quoted by Nadine Gayet-Descendre. “Mohammed Melehi, une vie.” *Melehi* (exhibition catalog) (Rabat, Galerie Bab Rouah: December 1997.) 51.

<sup>193</sup> Mohammed Chebaa had images of the class trip to Volubilis which he showed me in Casablanca. Interview by the author, Casablanca, 5 March 2012.

art history program as a way of engaging students to think about art within a social and historical context.

Teaching art history should not be based only on a series of dates, theories, and aesthetic formulas, but more so on the study of the profound reasons and consequences of artistic creation, via a historical and social perspective. This method allows the study of the artwork according to the society that gave birth to it, without isolating it in conventional formulas. Indeed, the very concept of the “beautiful” changes based on the culture and the era. I directed my program based on these principles.<sup>194</sup>

The handbook includes photographs of the faculty working with the students. In the photograph of Maraini, taken by Mohammed Melehi, she is gesturing to the blackboard while six male students sit in a semi-circle around her [Image 3.1]. The class is small and the chairs are situated in such a way as to suggest a discussion format. The image includes a projector that is set up. On the board, she has drawn the African continent twice, once shaded in by regions with the northern part listed as “Desert,” once focusing on the northern part of the continent with notes about Prehistoric African art. It is worth taking seriously that the faculty chose these images themselves, and the art history photograph is one for a class session that looks collaborative and in which the subject is not the history of European art, but the lengthy history of African art.

Later, Bert Flint joined the faculty. Flint is a Dutch man that moved to Morocco in the 1950s and began a large private collection of Moroccan artifacts and artisinal work.<sup>195</sup> At the

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<sup>194</sup> Mohammed Melehi, ed. *Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Casablanca – Maroc*. (Informational pamphlet on the school’s activities between 1962 and 1965) (Tangier: Editions Marocaines et Internationales, 1965)

<sup>195</sup> This collection has become the basis of the Tiskiwin Museum/Bert Flint Museum in Marrakech.

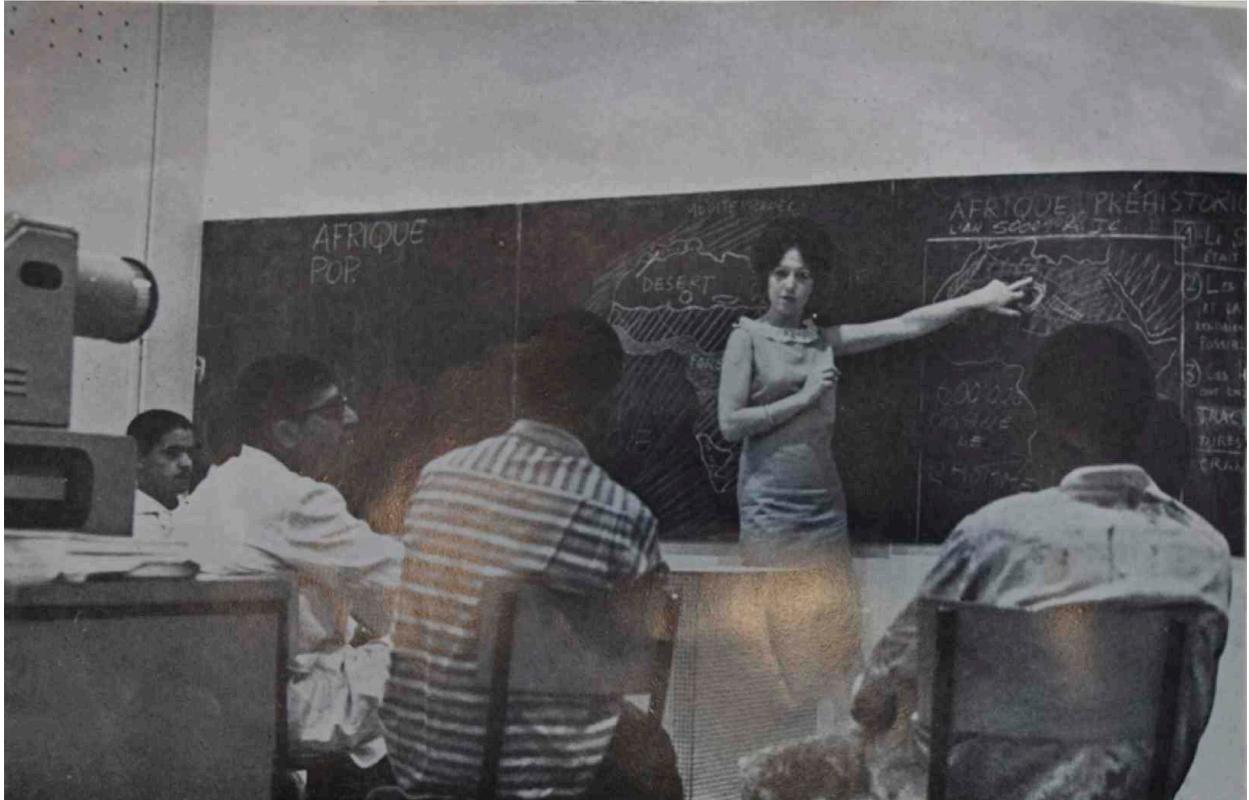


Image 3.1: Mohammed Melehi, “Vue du cours d’histoire de l’art dirigé par Mlle Maraini.”

Mohammed Melehi, ed. *Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Casablanca – Maroc*. (Informational pamphlet on the school’s activities between 1962 and 1965) (Tangier: Editions Marocaines et Internationales, 1965)

Casablanca school, he was responsible for teaching students the art history of Morocco. He was particularly interested in jewelry, ceramics, rugs, and painted wood. The art and art history faculty worked together closely. For example, Melehi looks back on his relationship to Flint as one of complicity in highlighting Moroccan and Maghrebi culture, focusing on the role of popular artistic creation in relation to spirituality. A photograph shows Melehi and Flint traveling together to seek out examples of this popular visual culture outside of city centers, in Tagoundaft in 1966 or 67 in the Atlas Mountains with local men in white djellabas, Flint with a camera around his neck.<sup>196</sup> The professors were friends with each other, pushing each other along in their individual research while exploring different ways of expressing these ideas about modern Morocco within an art school.

According to information from a 1969 article in newspaper *l'Opinion*, students gained entry for three years based on a competition (a “conours”) to show aptitude in artistic disciplines. There were not scholarships, although entry fees were low and the school provided students with all artistic materials. At that point, there were 40 students, with 9 female students.<sup>197</sup> Students received training in painting, decorative arts, and ceramics. They were required to be at least 15 years old, and have reached the fourth year of a secondary school in either a high school or technical school.<sup>198</sup>

The pedagogy that the professors employed is highlighted in the images and descriptions of the 1968 student-faculty exhibition that the professors published in the cultural journal *Souffles*. Each year, for a final project, the students would work together on an urban space that

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<sup>196</sup> Nadine Gayet-Descendre. “Mohammed Melehi, une vie.” *Melehi* (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997.) 51-52.

<sup>197</sup> “Entretien avec ... un apprenti-peintre de l’Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Casablanca, [L’opinion des Jeunes],” *L’Opinion*, n. 1346, 25 avril, 1969.

<sup>198</sup> “De l’art ... mais où sont les artistes?” *L’Opinion*, n. 813, 17-18 September 1967.

would stay open for three months for public visits.<sup>199</sup> For example, the 1965 pamphlet shows images of students working together on a mural of abstracted figures in a geometric architectural setting, as well as a final installation that included sculpted pots [Image 3.2]. In the final project for 1968, rather than a typical art school showcase, as the faculty described it, the students were asked to treat the architecture of the gallery that they had chosen in such a way as to highlight the broader materials, plasticity, and space of the gallery itself, trying to integrate and synthesize arts of multiple disciplines and techniques [Image 3.3]. As the faculty write in their statement, this was not a traditional final-year exhibition with projects tacked to the walls.

The students tried to treat the architecture of the gallery in such a way as to make it participate in the broader artistic [plastic] effect and to resolve the architectural space of this gallery with the goal of attaining integration and the organic synthesis of the arts and different techniques.<sup>200</sup>

The professors, pulling inspiration from traditional art in Morocco, in terms of both ideas of the integration of visual art into architecture as well as a visual language, hoped to push their students to explore diverse art forms and to develop their ability to express themselves through varied media. They particularly encouraged students to explore integrated and applied forms of art. Although it is not connected to Bauhaus in this statement, many of the Casablanca artists were broadly and explicitly inspired by Bauhaus functionalism. This theory of integrating art into life, of making functional objects that were still aesthetic and socially relevant was important to individual artists' practice<sup>201</sup> and to arts education within the school.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Nadine Gayet-Descendre. "Mohammed Melehi, une vie." *Melehi* (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997.) 52.

<sup>200</sup> *Souffles*. "Elèves de l'école des beaux-arts de Casablanca: exposition annuelle juin 1968." N 10-11, 2/3 trimestre 1968. 57

<sup>201</sup> For example, Mohamed Chebaâ. "Fiches et questionnaire." *Souffles*, no. 7-8, 2/3/4 Trimester (1967): 35-43

<sup>202</sup> Abdallah Hariri, interview by author, Rabat, 22 July 2010.

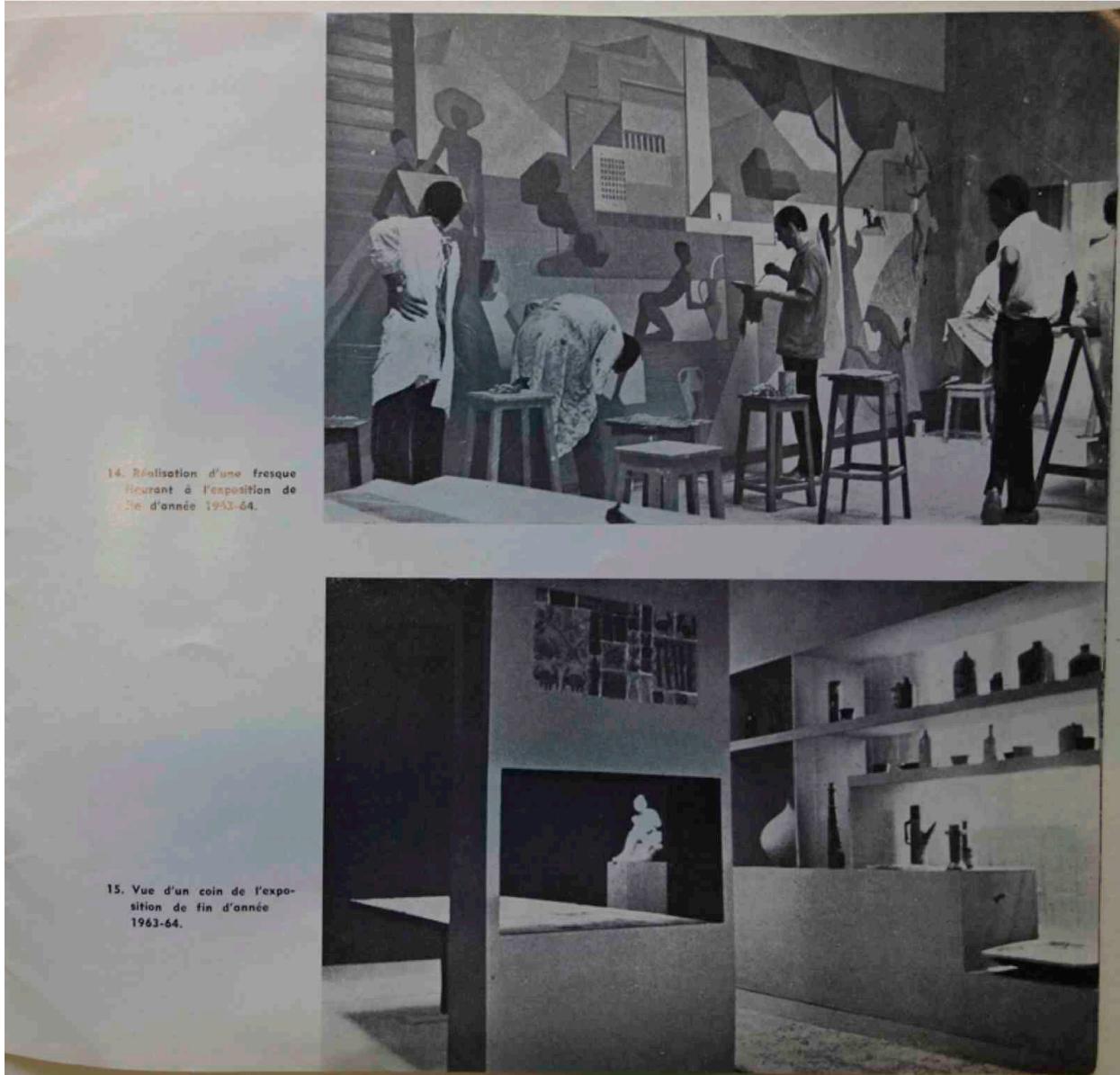


Image 3.2: Page from *Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Casablanca – Maroc*. Image 14 by S Cohen, Image 15 by an unknown photographer.

Mohammed Melehi, ed. *Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Casablanca – Maroc*. (Informational pamphlet on the school's activities between 1962 and 1965) (Tangier: Editions Marocaines et Internationales, 1965)

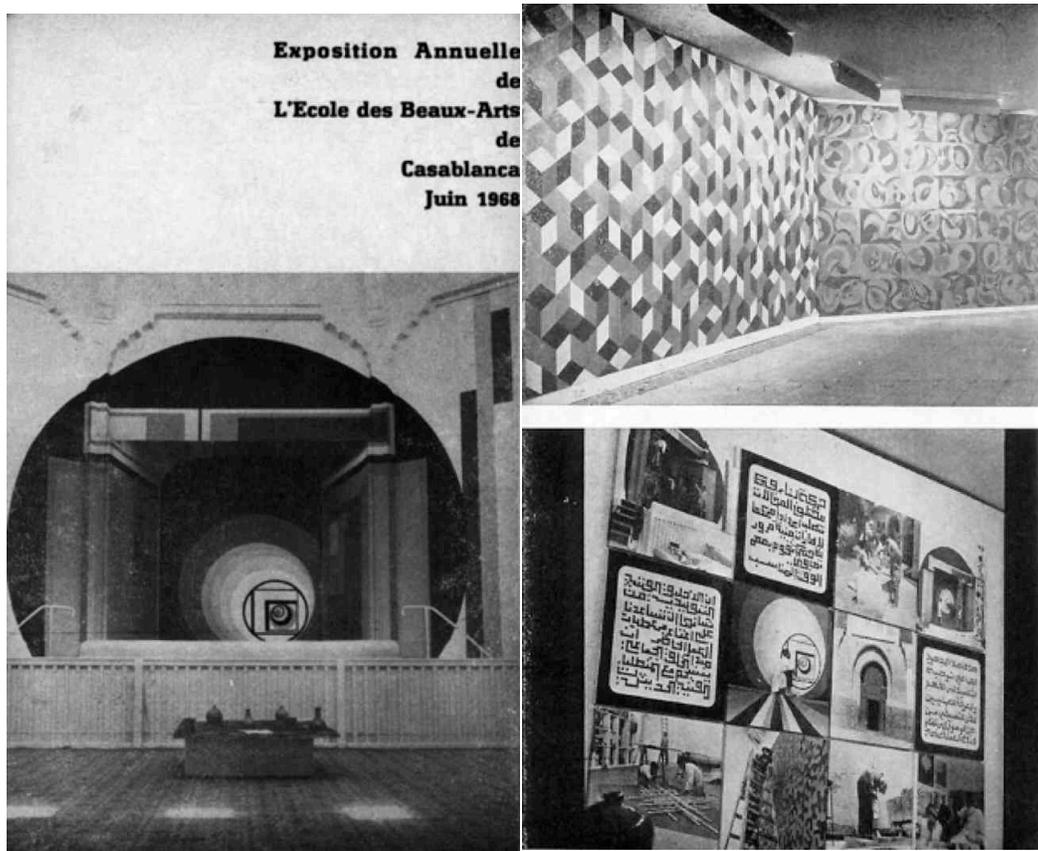


Image 3.3: “Elèves de l’école des beaux-arts de Casablanca: exposition annuelle juin 1968”

*Souffles*, n. 10-11, Trimester 2/3 (1968): 55-56.

The images of the exhibition highlight not the connection to traditional art but to similar kinds of abstractions that are in the faculty's individual artistic projects, both the graphic abstraction of Melehi and Chebaa as well as the more sinuous and organic shapes found in Belkahia's copper work. The students play with the space, and in one image, are able to put the architectural details of the gallery itself into dialogue with these clear-edged abstractions and geometric shapes. There is also an image of the walls covered in painted motifs: one section shows recurring squares that create an illusion of cubes and space, while the next wall seems to have tiles of organic shapes that reject dimensionality. The exhibition included documentation of the project, with images of the gallery before it was painted, photographs of students working together to create structures and to paint the space, and examples of different forms of Arabic calligraphy.

The statement they include along with these images in *Souffles* is quite revealing of their broader ideas. As a "truly modern institution," as they describe themselves, the goal was to push students to work with respect towards other disciplines and in groups, accomplishing collective instead of individual work. As they continue in their statement,

There are lessons from the traditional artistic past that we need to remember. [...] There is also a moral from the past that leads us to understand the extent to which it can enrich the given situation of present action. It is the idea of collective and anonymous creation of socialized work that must result in the totality of an artwork. This notion seems far more modern and coherent vis-à-vis the actual artistic exigencies. Traditional artistic heritage was the anonymous enriching expression of a collective soul that allowed at the same time a glimmer of the role of individual creation. [...] This exhibition inscribes itself in the context of a future perspective. Indeed, given the expected evolution in the realm of national construction and artistic production, the youth are called upon to play a decisive role in this evolution. The major concern of the school is to prepare them for this task.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> *Souffles*. "Elèves de l'école des beaux-arts de Casablanca: exposition annuelle juin 1968." N 10-11, 2/3 trimestre 1968. 57

Part of what is fascinating about this pedagogy is the way in which the stakes of the artists' own personal artistic projects are articulated equally through their pedagogy. Here, they clarify that they look to the traditions of Moroccan visual arts in order to express a truly "modern" idea. This period was also marked by collective work, an echo perhaps of the prevalence of socialism in political discourses of the time, as discussed in chapters one and four. The faculty did not only urge their students to work collectively, but put much of their own energy not just into their personal advancement but their work in groups. This chapter considers these collective activities in detail (the Casablanca School, *Souffles*, the National Association of Fine Arts, etc.). Yet it is interesting to see the way in which this ideal of collective work is translated into pedagogy and into their activities with their students. Moreover, the professors make the importance of this shared work clear by explaining that this is a perspective for the future, in order to prepare their students for the work of engaging with the construction of a national culture by artistic engagement.

This interest in interdisciplinary collaboration expressed in the artists' pedagogy and this assignment in particular extended in multiple ways, as students were also pushed to explore other disciplines. For example, Belkahia forged an agreement with the director of the municipal theater in Casablanca, Tayeb Saddiki, so that the art school students could, for a nominal fee, attend all of the theatrical productions. The entire school would gather as a group on Monday mornings to discuss the weekend's cultural events. The theater also held a café in which the Casablanca school artists would all exhibit their work.<sup>204</sup> In the absence of a strong artistic community and the necessary structures, the history of the Casablanca school suggests an interesting pathway of interdisciplinary alliances, and a broader cultural push towards a valorization in the arts of

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<sup>204</sup> Farid Belkahia, interview by author, Marrakech, 18 July 2012.

Moroccan pride and national culture. Among these were the establishments of non-conventional exhibitions, conferences, and writing platforms, which played a fundamental role in shaping and articulating the modernist vision of the Casablanca School.

### ***Souffles*: Writing Postcolonial Modernism**

The clearest interdisciplinary intersection with the Casablanca School was *Souffles*, the francophone literary and cultural journal founded by poet Abdellatif Laâbi in 1966. It became bilingual with Arabic in 1971, which was then called *Anfas*. From the beginning, the journal was deeply involved in both cultural politics in Morocco, with issues focusing on cinema, national culture, or fiction, and in Third Worldism, writing about Palestine in relationship to Vietnam, or covering the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar. Responding to the needs of society, *Souffles* was meant to act as a site for intellectuals to rally in revolution against both post-colonial imperialist and lasting colonial cultural domination. In the prologue to the first issue, Laâbi outlines his goals. He explains that literature has become unable to touch readers due to the lack of connection to social and political conditions. In contemporaneous literature, for Laâbi, this writing in its linguistic, cultural, and sociological implications could only serve as an illustration in the cultural domain of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Therefore, it no longer had a role to play in independent Morocco, as it did not carry the weight of experienced reality or address the new problems society faced. The writers in the review were meant to push their literary heritage to its limits, becoming “less people continuing than people starting.” The importance for Laâbi was in finding a way to deal with the emergencies of the

moment, and doing away with prevailing models that led to surface communication and official art.<sup>205</sup> Artistic practice becomes thus staked in the lived reality of people's lives, taking writing away from the realm of the elite so that all can find strength in the resonance of creative writing within the social and political context. Open to all submissions, *Souffles* in its ideal form could be a space where all people could have the possibility of making their voices public. The prologue is helpful to consider here because it lays out the simultaneously national and transnational nature of the journal—invested in *marocanité* (Moroccan-ness), Laâbi simultaneously sought to connect the journal to the Third World, particularly the Maghreb and to some degree the larger Arab world. At this early stage, by claiming no particular point of view or border, the review invited all people to participate, particularly opening the dialogue across cultures within the Third World, though its political and cultural positioning was deeply rooted within Morocco.

*Souffles* – which means “Breaths” – is often discussed in terms of a group, consisting both of poets, writers, theorists, journalists, and of artists, film directors, and other cultural workers. It was a group both because it was the point of departure for a community of like-minded artists, and because many of the decisions were collectively made. When people describe the meetings, which were held at both the school of fine arts in Casablanca and at Laâbi's own house on rue Pasteur in Rabat, as well as in parks and forests throughout Morocco, the stories depict a group of like-minded individuals, collaborating to create dialogue around issues they

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<sup>205</sup> Abdellatif Laâbi. “Prologue.” *Souffles*, n. 1, Trimester 1 (1966): 3-6.

cared about. During interviews when I ask participants about who had what idea, people rarely individually claim anything, deferring instead to the idea of the committee working together.<sup>206</sup>

The school of fine arts in Casablanca became involved in *Souffles* somewhat by chance – Laabi was preparing the first issue with poets Mostafa Nissaboury and Mohamed Khair-Eddine, when they saw the 1966 exhibition in Rabat of three of the visual artists, Belkahia, Chebaa, and Melehi. It was, in fact, with this exhibition at the national theater in Rabat that the Casablanca school began identifying as a school. With the support of art historian Toni Maraini, the artists organized the exhibition themselves, and Melehi designed the poster. He was invested in graphic design at this time. He had designed posters for other exhibitions, and went on to design the first cover of *Souffles*. The Rabat exhibition is infamous, although it is quite challenging to track down photographs of it<sup>207</sup> – Chebaa, however, described people’s surprise at the huge abstract paintings, at the physical realities of this canvas – or, in Belkahia’s case, copper – taking up space.<sup>208</sup>

If there are some notable formal similarities between the artists, they were held together more by their ideas than by a style. Art historian Toni Maraini, looking back on the post-colonial period for a 1985 exhibition of Moroccan painting at the Musée de Peinture in Grenoble, writes about Morocco, “More than a style, ‘modernity,’ thus understood, was a spirit and an attitude. Far from being established like an academy of styles, modern art became the space of

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<sup>206</sup> For example, while Hamidi told me that Laabi himself initiated the posters done for *Souffles* in 1969 (Casablanca, 12 July 2012), Laabi himself deferred to the idea of a committee proposal (Interview by author, Email, August 17, 2012).

<sup>207</sup> Toni Maraini notes in *Ecrits sur l’Art* (213) that she wrote an essay for a catalog that was therefore published of the exhibition. I have never found a catalog, or any further information.

<sup>208</sup> Mohammed Chebaa, interview by author, Casablanca: 5 March 2012.

questioning and unveiling.”<sup>209</sup> The 1966 exhibition in Rabat is a strong example of this understanding of Moroccan modernism as an attitude more than a formal style. These artists were deeply invested in questions of modernity and Moroccan artistic heritage, and the way in which that heritage could be employed to assert a local modernity. As critic Pierre Restany writes, “The Moroccan artists asked themselves the real questions: how to be Moroccan and modern at the same time.”<sup>210</sup> This is a similar theoretical foundation to Cherkaoui, as discussed in Chapter One. Yet unlike Cherkaoui, Belkahia, Melehi, and Chebaa were all at this time based in Morocco, working in Morocco, and seeking out and creating structural possibilities for Morocco. I argue that it is not possible to separate their own personal artistic work from their broader activities in the Ecole des Beaux Arts, their relationship to *Souffles*, their associations, their statements and manifestos, and their interests in exhibitions. Here, I will briefly describe the aesthetic ideas that informed their personal artistic production at this time.

Belkahia is now best known for the work that he had done using leather and henna, and the lengthy artisinal process he uses to treat then stretch the leather onto wooden supports before using natural materials to dye it. He is well known for incorporating into this work designs and symbols culled from traditional Moroccan visual culture, including rugs and tattoos, as well as Tifinagh letters (the letters of the Amazigh alphabet). Many of his works use triangles, arrows, and hands, and often come back to questions of sexuality. In the catalog of his 2010 retrospective for Casablanca based gallery Venise Cadre,<sup>211</sup> with his wife, Rajae Benchemsi, Belkahia created a taxonomy of the symbols, materials, and themes of his body of work, all of which are precisely

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<sup>209</sup> Toni Maraini. *Ecrits sur l'Art: Choix de Textes Maroc 1967-1989*. Rabat: Al Kalam, 1990. 122

<sup>210</sup> Quoted by Toni Maraini in “Melehi: un itinéraire d'action, une géométrie visionnaire.” *Melehi* (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997.) 19.

<sup>211</sup> Rajae Benchemsi and Farid Belkahia. *Farid Belkahia*. (Casablanca: Venise Cadre, 2010.)

thought out and theorized as they continue to reappear. In the early 1960s, Belkahia was using oil paint and drawings. One painting from 1963, “Jemâa al Fna, Marrakech,”<sup>212</sup> marks the transition away from the more representative drawings he had been doing towards the increasing abstraction of his later work. This painting is done in washed out colors that are layered with some transparency as if over a long period of time the colors had been built up and worn off. The figures seem to be people, yet they are connected in such a way as to become simultaneously a moving mass and a series of abstract shapes. The limbs are elongated and inconsistent, and the bodies are made up of similar geometric shapes, like squares and triangles. Unlike earlier work, devoted to individuals and connected to ideas of representation, here it is more a sense of a historic Djemaa al-Fna, the storied public square in Marrakech that would later hold the artists’ “exposition manifeste.” A locally inflected aesthetic begins to play an increasing role at this point, when he had just moved back to Morocco.

Throughout his tenure at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Belkahia consistently used similarly organic shapes but was focused primarily on bas-reliefs made out of copper, embraced because of the material’s “hardness, its resilience, its duality in between sacred and profane. In between light and darkness.”<sup>213</sup> In the late 1960s, the pieces are often minimal, focusing in closely on few shapes rather than a profusion of signs. While the focus is in many ways on the creation of these shapes, all rooted in Moroccan culture and then abstracted for the large-scale copper works, the texture and dimensionality of the works themselves are just as important. For instance, in an untitled relief from 1967 a sinuous shape is created in a relief on an ovular piece of copper [Image 3.4]. The organic shape is matte and flat, almost going green in some places, while the background is made from bright, shining, blistered copper. The work both creates a sculptural

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<sup>212</sup> Oil on canvas. 161x221cm.

<sup>213</sup> Rajae Benchemsi and Farid Belkahia. *Farid Belkahia*. (Casablanca: Venise Cadre, 2010.)



Image 3.4: Farid Belkahlia, untitled, 1967. Copper.

wall hanging, in which the shape of the copper creates a distinct object, and is interested in the formal characteristics of copper, of this multiplicity of what can be created using the material and fire to manipulate it. It is therefore invested in material and traditional techniques, as well as more broadly in the history of visual culture in Morocco that is built upon to create a visual vocabulary for his work.

Melehi had returned to Morocco in 1964. In the late 1950s, Melehi experimented with burlap collages, making similarly hard-edged abstractions out of multiple colors and grains of color-blocked pieces of burlap. Pieces from the early 1960s move to oil on canvas, again with minimal shapes with bright colors. During this time, Melehi was in the United States, where he became interested in the relationship between man and science, and had been working with squares and tiles, which for him connected to scientific and technological forms of communication (he links this, in the 1965 catalogue for his first exhibition at the national gallery in Rabat, Bab Rouah, to IBM and Cybernetics). It was at this point that he became interested in the motif of the wave, which has become a trademark in his painting since then. Early works do not have a wave motif, in which waving lines are placed one next to the other, but rather include a single wave in the bright, cleanly delineated canvases. He introduces the wave in the 1965 catalogue,

My research with squares was soon oriented towards the motif of the wave, which I have just used for the first time. The wave gives me music, movement. It is vibration, and it is also communication in space (sound waves, visual waves, videotage [sic], etc). It represents continuity, the sky, the woman, sensuality, water, the rhythm of pulsations. It is calm.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Quoted by Mohammed Melehi. "Préface: Melehi par Melehi." *Melehi*. (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997.) 9.

For Melehi, the period of 1964 to 1974 was marked by a new orientation in his research.<sup>215</sup>

These waves are often reconfigured, turned vertically to become flames, or cutting across the canvas on an angle. The canvases are consistently hard-edged and optic abstractions – the lines are clean, the colors are clearly delineated, the brushstrokes and movements of the paintbrush are not visible. Different writers have written about these waves in different ways. For Toni Maraini and Pierre Restany, these waves are closely connected to the image of waves on the beaches of Asilah (Melehi's hometown). They are therefore grounded in an image of nature, and more precisely the relationship of man to nature. They also refer to Arabic calligraphy and the gesture and action of writing calligraphy.<sup>216</sup> Their consistency becomes meditative, and connects to ideas of transcendence and prayer. Melehi has also connected the waves to images culled from traditional visual culture, especially those used in tattoos and rugs. I emphasize here the breadth of meaning that these waves are infused with, because while they are pulled from many places most interpretation ultimately come back in an ideological way to Morocco.

To some degree, this multiplicity of local meaning is not entirely visible on the surface of the canvases themselves. The connection to Moroccan visual culture, which is explicit in Cherkaoui's canvases, for example, is more abstracted here, and becomes more theoretical. Yet Melehi stays constant with this project, forever changing small details, reconfiguring similar elements in his research into color and form, pushing him to express this as a local reality. For instance, an untitled acrylic on wood painting from 1969 turns the waves on their side, yet shows them in gradients of blue, keeping them connected to water [Image 3.5]. The outside edges of the painting are yellow, and two mirrored sets of waves then drop from a dark and moody blue at the

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<sup>215</sup> Toni Maraini. "Melehi: un itinéraire d'action, une géométrie visionnaire." *Melehi*. (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997.) 17.

<sup>216</sup> Pierre Restany. "Mohammed Melehi, un peintre d'action." *Melehi*. (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997.) 10.



Image 3.5: Mohammed Melehi, untitled, 1969.

outer edge to aqua, then finally to a blue-green at the center. The waves are also different lengths, becoming shorter as they go towards the center. The top and bottom are filled in with red, and the very center of the painting has waves that meet and are filled in with half yellow and half red. The waves, with their scale of colors and sizes, create space in the abstraction, as if we are being led along a corridor towards the center. The red brings a level of energy, yet the blues are calming. If it is not automatically connected to a facile image or sign of Moroccan visual culture, it is a study of color and shape that is influenced by Melehi's own understanding of Morocco and its visual heritage.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Chebaa's work also revolved around graphic abstraction, as in a 1969 mural in Casablanca [Image 3.6]. While there are formal similarities with Melehi's work, Chebaa did not use repetitive motifs in the same way. During the era of the Casablanca school, though, Chebaa focuses like Melehi on clearly delineated abstractions that place colors next to one another through hard clear lines without shading or gradations in opacity. These are carefully designated lines, shapes, and colors, often done with the precision of acrylics. There is movement and life to these forms that push through and against a sense of rigidity, yet Chebaa described this turn in his work, following early black and white gestural experimentation, by its "rigorous control." Valuing a conceptual project, based in both the practical and theoretical aspects of creation, Chebaa began using these bright colors and disciplined forms to show in his words that "there is not only a tragic and oppressive human condition but also a vitality that allows man to defend himself and to research possible paths to liberation."<sup>217</sup> Similar shapes can be seen in Chebaa's untitled acrylic diptych on canvas from 1967 [Image 3.7]. Chebaa uses thick bands of color one next to the other to trace a line that crosses between the two canvases. Even

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<sup>217</sup> Mohamed Chebaa. "Fiches et questionnaire." *Souffles, Souffles*, n. 7-8, 2/3/4 trimesters (1967): 35-43



Image 3.6: Mohammed Chebaa, untitled, Casablanca: 1969.

From *Chebaa* (exhibition catalog), 112.



Image 3.7: Mohammed Chebaa, untitled, 1967. Acrylic on canvas. Author's photo.

when curving, the line is sharp and precise. He uses large blocks of muted green, bright blue, and muted purple, with bands of the same green, orange, white, and red. Three lines in orange punctuate the top of the left canvas. Brushstrokes are visible if you look closely, despite the graphic precision and separation of colors. Unlike Melehi's work from the same era, which is glossy and utterly perfect, this diptych is matte, precise but still bearing traces of human production. Chebaa consistently uses these same kinds of lines and often bright colors that often emphasize contrasts, yet his work is more personal than Melehi's. That is, Melehi's work is deliberately perfect, while Chebaa's work is also kept purposefully just before the point of perfection, so that the viewer can still see the individual working at the canvases.

These three artists had come together as faculty at the Casablanca school and formed a group with the 1966 exhibition in Rabat. While all three were deeply invested in concepts of modernity and connecting to the exigencies of the moment within Morocco, they expressed these ideas through abstractions in different forms and media. While the lack of formal continuity keeps some critics in Morocco from declaring Casablanca an artistic school as such, I take seriously the possibility of recognizing the importance of the ideological overlap more than their visual continuities.

The poster for the Rabat exhibition, designed by Melehi, highlights the common theoretical positioning that the artists sought [Image 3.8]. Providing information about the exhibition in both Arabic and French, Melehi's design is now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York – to my knowledge, the only piece in the collection by any of these



Image 3.8: Mohammed Melehi, “Belkahia. Chebaa. Melehi,” 1966.

Museum of Modern Art, New York.

artists.<sup>218</sup> It expands upon Melehi's graphic design for his personal exhibition poster for his 1965 exhibition at the municipal gallery in Casablanca, which showed overlapping circles of transparent pink with a circle made from small brick red squares.<sup>219</sup> The information for that exhibition (date, location, his name) is printed in clear black letters. The poster for the 1966 Rabat exhibition picks up on similar motifs, again focused on a central bright red circle, but pushes them farther, incorporating text and shapes into a cohesive whole. The poster in and of itself is a manifesto, trading legibility for design. It is notable in part for its simultaneous use of both French and Arabic, filling in the same information on either side of the circle. While the 1965 pamphlet about the Casablanca school, which Melehi edited, was in French and Arabic, at that time and even now, it is rare to have extensive visual arts information in Arabic, based on class-related valences of the two languages. On the poster, the geometric Kufic script at the top which gives the three artists' names gives way to a much more legible Arabic below on one side of the circle. The French text, on the other hand, becomes basically illegible, the letters seeming to take on the geometry of tiles. For all that is happening in this poster it is pared down, elegant and understated. Blending modernist design with local referents, as in the tiles and script, attempting to attract a population that was raised on French colonialism and post-colonial cultural nationalism, this poster is intimately linked to what the artists were trying to do with their art.

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<sup>218</sup> There is a note in an article from *L'Opinion* that a painting by Yacoubi was bought by MoMA. (M. Elfathemy. "De la peinture comme action et comme méditation." *L'Opinion*. N. 988, 9 April 1968.) Additionally, Melehi had previously exhibited a painting at MoMA, while he was living in New York on a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship, although the painting does not appear to have become part of the permanent collection. (Toni Maraini. "Melehi: un itinéraire d'action, une géométrie visionnaire." *Melehi*. Rabat: Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997. 13.) However, to my knowledge, the Casablanca School artists are not represented in the collection except with this print.

<sup>219</sup> Image available in *Melehi* (exhibition catalog) (Rabat: Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997.) 55.

It was with this historic exhibition that the *Souffles* group, similarly committed to rooting modernist creative expression within the actual context of contemporaneous post-colonial Morocco, branched out to include visual arts. As Laabi remembers, “The mutual understanding was immediate. Their new approach with regard to painting that was being done at the time in Morocco corresponded perfectly to our project as poets. They were therefore immediately part of the adventure of *Souffles*.”<sup>220</sup> In the first issue, Belkahia, Chebaa, and Melehi all contributed illustrations, each of which is seemingly a copy of a drawing in black ink, rather than a photograph of one of their existing works. Chebaa’s illustration is very minimal, consisting primarily of filled-in black with empty white at the bottom that seems carved out to suggest space. Belkahia’s is the most clearly sketched. Centered primarily along an undulating curve working its way up the page, the shapes become refracted and distinguished, filled in with lines or colored in. The sinuous natural forms that are seen in his canvases are here as well, but in this image the pen marks remain visible while filling in different shapes. This could almost be mistaken for a doodle if it weren’t for the formal similarities to the rest of his work. Instead, it becomes a window into the artist’s mind and creative process. Melehi’s image is, unlike the majority of his work, an almost surrealist figurative image, made up of simple precise black lines. The figure has a clear eye, nose, and body, much as the features are mixed up and removed from reality. Melehi’s signature waves here become the figure’s hair.<sup>221</sup> Rather than showcasing their finished work, here the images suggest that *Souffles* is instead meant to be a working space, a place to try out new ideas and demystify art. This policy changed: later issues reproduced distinct finished works from artists’ oeuvres. Each issue would focus on images of one specific artist’s work, putting the essays into dialogue with the images of the contemporaneous art, while

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<sup>220</sup> Abdellatif Laabi, interview by author, email, August 17, 2012.

<sup>221</sup> *Souffles* n. 1, Trimester 1 (1966). Images are interspersed throughout the issue.

also bringing more visibility to the artists. They showcased primarily Moroccan artists, although in one of many motions towards pan-Maghrebi solidarity, Mohammed Khadda, the Algerian modernist, was featured in issue 9 (1967).

The goal of the 1966 Rabat exhibition, in Belkahia's words, was to make a "coherent activity," that showed the shared goals and interests of the three artists involved.<sup>222</sup> In other words, the goal from the beginning was to designate the three of them as a distinct group, working with similar ideas, and to launch a new movement. Given the relationship that the artists formed with *Souffles*, it was in that journal that they published later in 1966 a statement of protest together, which could be read also as a kind of statement of purpose for their group.<sup>223</sup> Clearly connected to this idea of presenting themselves as a distinct working group or even school, their statement of purpose does not, however, mention the exhibition. Instead, they list the problems as they see them. They are most precise in their critiques about the "improvisational" character of the organization of Moroccan contingents for international festivals. Instead of a jury, they write, painters are being chosen by organizers selected for their philosophy or administrative competence. They also note the problems with the Association Nationale des Beaux-Arts, as well as the "pseudo-critics and pseudo-artists" orienting public discussion. They end their statement with support for the many painters that were conscious of the challenges of the situation and working hard to push themselves and their artistic work to express the complex realities and transformations that they were facing. The language and ideas are reminiscent of the introduction to the first issue of *Souffles*, a critique of surface communication and official measures and a rallying cry for artists to express the lived realities of Morocco in the late 1960s.

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<sup>222</sup> "Association Nationale des Beaux-Arts." *Souffles*. 7-8, 2/3/4 trimesters (1967): 77-80.

<sup>223</sup> Belkahia, Melehi, and Chebaa. "des peintres protestent." *Souffles*, n. 4, Trimester 4 (1966).

The artists were there from the beginning of *Souffles*, following the important meeting at the 1966 Rabat exhibition. Belkahia, Chebaa, and Melehi were all listed as part of the “action committee” of the journal starting in 1967, along with such thinkers as E.M. Nissaboury and Malek Alloula.<sup>224</sup> Melehi moreover did the original stark cover in cream with a black splotch in the center, as if it is the image of someone breathing onto a piece of glass, repeated later with other color motifs [Image 3.9]. At one point, the secretary of the school of fine arts was even typing up the individual issues.<sup>225</sup> The beginning of *Souffles* was a major event for many people in Morocco, not just those that contributed to the issues. For example, the arts writer of the daily newspaper *L’Opinion*, Salim, wrote an article a few days before the first issue was released enthusing about the inclusion of the Casablanca artists and the decision to devote *Souffles* not only to poetry, but to arts and culture more broadly. Salim writes that the appearance of *Souffles* was a credit to all of Morocco, which was finding itself increasingly in the avant-garde.<sup>226</sup>

### **“Situation: Arts Plastiques Maroc”**

*Souffles* went on to dedicate an entire issue to the arts the next year, called “Situation: Arts Plastiques Maroc.” The issue’s title suggests the stakes they were envisioning: with one document, they were trying to explain the reality of visual arts, both its strengths and its challenges, in Morocco, speaking not just to Casablanca and Rabat but to the nation overall. Read overall, this issue can be seen as a sort of manifesto of the era in the visual arts, bringing

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<sup>224</sup> “Informations sur la revue.” *Souffles* n. 5, Trimester 1 (1967). Beginning with issue 7/8, they stop listing a distinct “action committee.”

<sup>225</sup> Belkahia, interview by author, Marrakech, 18 July 2012

<sup>226</sup> Salim. “Un Événement Qui Fera Date.” *L’Opinion*. N 308, 5 March 1966.

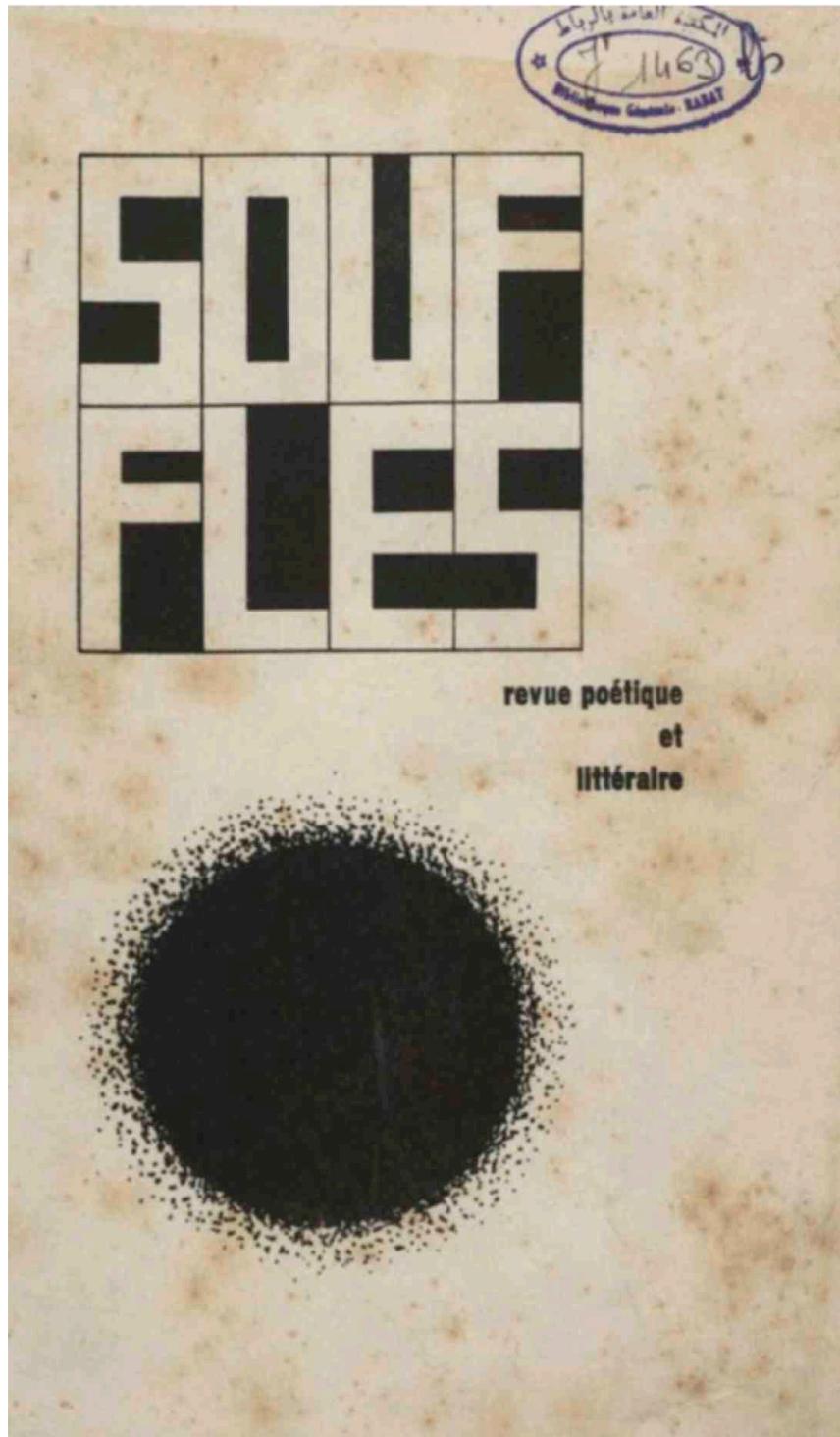


Image 3.9: Mohammed Melehi, *Souffles* n.1, 1966.

together every aspect of the work that the artists were doing. The issue therefore includes questionnaires for each of the artists about their ideas about national culture and painting, images, and broader articles about the state of art in the country.<sup>227</sup> I have frequently cited this series of questionnaires because it forms the most significant writing by this group of artists from this era. I will consider the issue at length because the artists themselves were involved in its creation, and it is therefore a unique document of self-presentation as a group. To emphasize that this was a low-budget operation done among friends, a few of the artists pointed out that they were financially responsible for this issue. Each artist personally gave 100 dirhams, a real amount of money at the time, so that it could be published.<sup>228</sup> They were therefore involved in this issue, not just in its content, but financially committed to its publication.

The issue opens first with an essay by the editor, Laabi, placing the issue in context and considering the state of arts more broadly. Laabi argues that despite all the limits placed on art and research in Morocco, an

awakening [*prise de conscience*] (restrained, certainly, but all awakenings begin like this) is spreading in Morocco, a call to the current generation to throw themselves into a decisive undertaking of clearing out and of reconsideration. Indeed, the time has come for us to shake off the torpor of the colonial traumatism and come face to face with our history.

Laabi proceeds to situate modernist art production – and moreover, research (especially by foreigners) about Moroccan art – with regard to colonialism, its lasting effects, and, particularly, its intervention into the writing of Moroccan history. Laabi’s article is a call to arms, aimed at an entire generation, that disparages colonialism and the aftermath of European influence, as well as the failures he sees of the previous generation. His call is for artists and intellectuals to consider their own history more deeply, recognizing the colonial “science” that wrote the history they

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<sup>227</sup> N 7-8, 2/3/4 trimesters (1967).

<sup>228</sup> This was brought up in interviews with Belkahia and Hamidi

were taught, that therefore structured both their past and present. Referencing Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Laabi writes that the time has come to "free the History of the oppressed man." While considering the effect of the writing of history on direct political action and intervention, as well as the writing of art history in Morocco, he looks particularly to three themes that he sees in the colonial historiography of Morocco: Assimilation, Berberophilia, and Conservatism.<sup>229</sup> The article is a precise and impassioned history of colonial ideology in Morocco via a critique of social sciences and academic writing. Yet it is more than a historical survey, because it is meant to be a call to action. Opening the visual arts issue with this essay, with its critique of European writing on Moroccan art (an idea picked up on in the debate about "naïve" painting) as well as its call to reconsider Moroccan history and its cultural heritage (asked to each artist in turn in the questionnaires), sets a radical tenor and unyieldingly anti-colonial stance for what follows, insisting that the reader maintain this point of view in considering modernist Moroccan art.

Toni Maraini, the primary writer collaborating with and writing art criticism about these artists, contributes a more general opening essay on the state of visual arts in Morocco, more closely linked to the artists featured within the issue. Additionally, a lengthy biography is offered of her, which is quite rare in this body of literature. While a good amount of information is available on the artists themselves, information on Maraini herself is hard to find. This biography explains that she was born in Tokyo in 1941, grew up in Sicily, and studied art history in Rome, Florence, the University of London, and Smith College (USA). She graduated in 1964 (it is unclear what degree this was, or who awarded it) after writing a thesis on contemporary art. At this point, she was preparing a book on popular art worldwide (although I do not know of this

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<sup>229</sup> Abdellatif Laabi. "Le Gâchis: Relâcher l'Histoire." *Souffles*, n. 7-8, 2/3/4 trimesters (1967): 1-14.

book being finished). She also describes briefly her rationale in doing the work that she does, explaining that when she moved to Morocco,<sup>230</sup> she was very moved by the art she found, but did not find any writing that satisfied her that situated it historically and culturally. Her research in popular art was motivated by questions of aesthetic and social experience, as well as by a desire to consider the (social) role of collective and non-academic artwork. These are ideas that certainly resonate with this generation of intellectuals, but they also echo the description she offers of the art history program in Casablanca, another way in which the faculty's personal research and pedagogy were intertwined. Maraini played a very significant role in the Casablanca school during this period. I treat her writing throughout this dissertation not as disengaged factual information, but as a significant historical document and testimony, because it is writing that is deeply invested in playing an active role in collaboration with the artists. In future work, it would be interesting to consider her path more specifically, to offer a historiography of her art historical writing and influence in Morocco at this time.

In this article for *Souffles*, Maraini particularly highlights the simultaneous importance and re-articulation of the ideas of the “avant-garde” and “tradition.” Beyond changing (slightly) the terms of a dichotomy between tradition and modernity, Maraini's article is particularly important because she suggests that it is not a matter of either one or another, but of situating artists in between both. She also highlights the role of pedagogy within artists' own research, focusing on the Casablanca school, where she also taught.

Some of these painters have initiated, parallel to their research, investigations to establish, with regard to the present, the role of tradition (discover its permanent features, analyze it, inventory it, reveal its different aspects and values). It is above all around Melehi, Chebaa, and Belkahia, and the pedagogical and cultural initiatives taken by the School of Fine Arts of Casablanca that these initiatives have found solid ground. In analyzing the world of forms that surround them, they

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<sup>230</sup> It is not written here, but she came with Melehi, whom she married.

have discovered an entirely other tradition that has been forgotten and ignored: rural and city popular arts, its formal [plastic] laws, its stylistic ‘patterns’ and psychological signification. It is often by such a discovery – synchronized with cultural claims and research into an authentic course, that the artistic experience of a country is enriched (for example, see the case of Russia in the 20s, of Mexico, of Japan). [...] Indeed, it is not by accident that in Morocco this ‘discovery’ happened first with painters. But, for them, it is not a question of copying this traditional popular art, nor of being inspired by it formally or mechanically. Their reciprocal relationships are situated in depth. They localize there a spirit and collective constants and they draw from it an interiorized artistic [plastic] force.<sup>231</sup>

In hindsight, it is perhaps overblown to claim that Casablanca artists rediscovered an entirely new artistic tradition, although they unquestionably changed the status of popular art (if not, perhaps, of the artisans) in the country. I highlight this because, in an introduction to avant-garde art, Maraini looks to their pedagogy and activities at the school. I argue in this chapter for a similar reading of these artists, because their teaching and structural engagements form an intrinsic part of their broader artistic projects and are grounded in the same ideology and stakes. I also quote this passage at length to point out the ways in which at this point, this movement was being explained by reference to international artistic and intellectual movements, especially those outside of Europe. Here, it is not a Third Worldist map that is being drawn (Russia, Mexico, Japan) yet it is distinctly not Western European either.

The artists themselves also write about their careers and debate different ideas. Included in the issue are Casablanca School artists Ataalah, Belkahia, Chebaa, Hamidi, and Melehi, as well as Mohammed Bennani (Fes and Rabat), Saad Ben Cheffaj (teacher in Tétouan), and Gharbaoui. Cherkaoui had died recently, and Toni Maraini writes about his work in connection to the questions asked. According to a note written on the questionnaire, Cherkaoui had received the document before his death although he did not respond. Andre Elbaz is also noted as having

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<sup>231</sup> Toni Maraini. “situation de la peinture marocaine.” *Souffles* n. 7-8, 2/3/4 trimesters (1967): 15-19.

received the questionnaire but not responding. Therefore the choice of artists is both connected to the artists that were involved with the group, as well as to some amount of self-selection. In addition to a general chronology of Moroccan art (often referenced in Chapter Two), each artist submitted a biography of their choice, which most often featured exhibitions, although some artists also included their studies and work. Each decided for himself how to present his career up until that point. They then answered the questionnaire, which included four questions:

1. What were the stages you passed in developing the preoccupations that you express in your work?
2. At the current stage of your research, how do you situate yourself with regard to the Moroccan artistic [plastique] tradition?
3. What do you think is the contribution of painting to the elaboration of a national culture?
4. What are the conditions that could help the development of visual arts in Morocco?<sup>232</sup>

The focus on national culture, Moroccan artistic traditions, and their relationship to painting is typical of the focus of *Souffles*. Similar questions were also previously posed to writers and film directors, and the journal had previously included a series of articles exploring the question of national culture at some length. With regard to this specific questionnaire, artists' responses range in depth and in length. Bennani's response is brief, as is that of Cheffaj. Atalah's response is the most cursory, explaining in a headnote that he is very busy and having trouble finding time to reflect on broad questions of the role of art in society, as he was forced to take another job in order to pay his bills [at this point, he was not yet a faculty member in Casablanca]. Gharbaoui makes clear and important points about the state of artistic structures in Morocco (quoted at length in Chapter One), although he is less forthcoming about his own path and his ideas about art. Belkahia, Melehi, Chebaa, and Hamidi give careful consideration to their time abroad and advance their ideas about national culture and Moroccan artistic traditions. Although all of the

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<sup>232</sup> "Questionnaire." *Souffles*. 7-8, 2/3/4 trimesters, 1967. 22.

artists discuss the problems of structures, education, and the (often disinterested) public, Chebaa and Melehi write at the greatest length arguing for ideas and taking precise stances, which is not surprising as they were the artists that were collaborating the most actively with *Souffles*.

Many of the artists saw their role as being quite active in the question of national culture. Mohammed Bennanni calls the role of painters in elaborating a national culture “delicate” because it is a matter of “putting past values into question again and visualizing them in an active way,” and of exploring “our interior reality” with “active, dynamic, and living participation.”<sup>233</sup> Mohamed Chebaa explains the exploration of tradition as a necessary reaction to the rupture with tradition forced by colonialism and the estrangement of the people from their cultural heritage. For Chebaa, “The status of traditional art in Morocco is futurist. Its adaptation allows us straightaway to situate ourselves in the most revolutionary artistic movements in the world.”<sup>234</sup> He goes on to write that national culture, rather than a fanatic slogan, is meant to be a means of taking back one’s own personality. Knowing the identity of the country allows international conversations, but can also act as a functional aspect of daily life for the larger society. Beyond discussions of national culture, though, many of the questionnaires return to a structural focus, in response to the psychological effects of colonialism and the inheritance of colonial educational systems, particularly for arts pedagogy.

The issue then features arts-themed articles, including a debate between Belkahia, Melehi, and Chebaa on the state of “naïve” arts in Morocco, and its critique. Connecting this art’s popularity to “a colonial cultural politics that patronized this art” as well as an “artistic mediocrity” that thrived with material support, the artists discussed why this was a predominant

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<sup>233</sup> Mohammed Bennanni. “fiches et questionnaires.” *Souffles*, n. 7-8, 2/3/4 trimesters (1967): 32-34

<sup>234</sup> Mohamed Chebaa. “Fiches et questionnaire.” *Souffles, Souffles*, n. 7-8, 2/3/4 trimesters (1967): 35-43

international image of Moroccan art, and why this art was supported within Morocco itself. I have not given exhibition histories related to “naïve” art, because I do not believe that they are relevant to this dissertation. However, the people that supported this generation of artists also often supported “naïve” artists, as can be seen by the list of artists that were featured in Gaston Diehl’s monographs. My own interest with regard to this subject is not in making an argument about “naïve” art or in classifying who might be considered “naïve.” In Morocco, most critics and artists agree that there is and was some form of “naïve” art (generally using this specific term) within the country, yet no one wants to be called “naïve” themselves. It is understandable for these artists to be wary of this term. Yet it is also not my interest to debate the term, which I use here in full knowledge of its problematic nature because I choose to follow the terms set out by the artists themselves. To some degree, they take issue with the terminology as being a word inherited from Europe to designate, as Chebaa says, naturalist painting done by artists outside of the academy. Belkahia describes it by its inability to evolve aesthetically or spiritually, and the lack of questioning of thematics and style. I am not trying to take on everything that they suggest, seeing in their words a class-based exclusion (as well as an exclusion of many working female painters), and yet I take seriously the contention that the patronage of “naïve” artists betrayed a lingering paternalistic colonial attitude.

Here, I wish primarily to clarify the discourse of these artists and highlight the way in which they were positioning themselves, as well as the colonial remnants that they saw within exhibition politics. Their position is best summed up by a comment that Chebaa makes in the debate:

Neo-colonialism is characterized by a façade of interest for the “original” realities of under-developed countries. What they [European and particularly French supporters of “naïve” art] were looking for was to falsify the orientation of our painting under the pretext that “naïve” art corresponded to the naïveté and

exoticism of the country. They did not encourage modern painting under the pretext that it represented an imported painting. I do not deny that after independence, there was a duality, at least insofar as the calendar of projects, exhibitions, and publications is concerned. But it's exactly then after independence that naïve painting emerged. I think that this situation is originally an outcome of this politics.

For these artists, “naïve” art was primarily encouraged by (former) colonial powers as a means of displaying a disparity in development. To recognize Moroccan modernism would be to recognize that Morocco could play an equal role in developing an international visual language, and that Morocco was already part of a broader global dynamic. In this argument, “naïve” art instead represents the naïveté of the country, as well as its isolation from modernism – or perhaps modernity overall. Looking to the formerly colonized country for art that reflected values or culture that came prior to colonialism, while used as a form of power in the Negritude movement, for example, when imposed from outside becomes a way of enforcing unequal power, unequal development, and unequal claims on modernity. It is important to note that for all of their critiques, Chebaa ends the debate by saying that they are not trying to condemn the very existence of “naïve” painting, and that this spontaneous and fresh expression can be very important. He tempers this support by suggesting that the danger of only seeing “naïve” art could deform people’s taste. However, as Chebaa argues, the goal of the debate was to distinguish the research-based artistic projects they were undertaking as a movement that might contribute to intellectual debates, and could be received as an art movement from a self-professedly modern, highly educated, and intellectual group.<sup>235</sup>

The issue on visual arts closes with a series of images. There is at least one artwork per artist, namely Belkahia, Ataalah, Gharbaoui, Bennani, Chebaa, Cheffaj, Hamidi, Cherkaoui, and

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<sup>235</sup> “Position 1: situation de la peinture naïve au Maroc.” *Souffles*, n. 7-8, 2/3/4 trimesters (1967): 73-76.

Melehi. Each image is a close-up of the work itself, shown without any border or installation. The work is primarily abstract, with the exception of Cheffaj, whose work includes abstracted representations of bodies. Many of these artists are deeply invested in color, but their presentation in black and white emphasizes the similar shapes and lines that can be seen. The sinuous and organic lines of Belkahia's copper works look almost like written scripts, while also connecting formally to Melehi's bright and clearly delineated waves in ways that are not as possible when the colors and materials are more visible. Hamidi's abstraction is far less graphic than Melehi, Chebaa, or Ataalah, focusing on softer shapes. In black and white, his emphasis on texture is particularly striking next to the clean lines of Chebaa. Each artist chose work that is quite representative of his personal style. Although names are provided at the end of the section, no titles or dates are given. The viewer therefore encounters the images without an artist's name or any details about the work, not just the title but also the size and materials used. Rather than giving clear details about one specific artist, these images then work together as a series that highlights continuities and aesthetic overlapping rather than emphasizing the individual artist. Additionally, there are images of a rug, jewelry, and zellige, pulled from the mediatheque at the school of fine arts, included in the issue as visual evidence of the pedagogy being used in the art school. I want to emphasize again here that when explaining themselves and their relationship to national culture, these artists turned to their teaching and pedagogy as part of that. To that end, there are images of signs displayed in Casablanca as well as images of calligraphic work done by third year students of the school of fine arts, Mina Bouanani and Maazouz, the first an image from an assignment and the other a model of traditional calligraphy.

## National Platforms for Visual Arts and Cultural Politics

The interest in collectivism shown in discussions of pedagogy in particular translated also into a desire to create a national association for visual arts, which is recorded in both this and other issues of *Souffles* and was an important factor guiding debates up through the 1970s. The final article in the *Souffles* issue devoted to the visual arts is a history of the Association Nationale des Beaux-Arts (ANBA), including questions posed to Belkahia (first president, for two months in 1963) and Chebaa (second president, 1964-1965). The ANBA was founded in 1963 as a result of the Rencontre Internationale (discussed at length in Chapter One). The goal had been to create a lasting program for biennales in Morocco that could also work to structure the local arts scene. At that point, the major arts institutions were primarily colonial holdovers, which the article cites:

the Department of Fine Arts and Historic Monuments, the Department of Museums and Antiquities, the museums of Antiquities, the museums of Traditional Arts, two schools<sup>236</sup> of Fine Arts (in Tétouan and in Casablanca), the School of Traditional Arts of Tétouan (Dar Essenaa), as well as some design classes [arts appliqués] in a few high schools.

This is an interesting list, because it points out what the artists themselves saw as the major arts institutions at the time, while also providing a relatively complete list of national structures.<sup>237</sup>

The ANBA set out to reorganize the cultural politics of Morocco, and especially the politics of arts institutions. This was equally a direct reaction to what they term the “paternalism” of foreign cultural missions, who played a significant structural role at this point, as well as sporadic

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<sup>236</sup> This is written in the article as “deux écoles élémentaires de Beaux-Arts,” which is an unusual way of describing higher educational institutions, as opposed to schools for younger children. It seems to me that this is a way of designating, per the French schooling system, that these are not “écoles supérieures,” a title both schools receive later on.

<sup>237</sup> Notably absent are the Bab Rouah National Gallery and Jacqueline Brodskis’ workshop, which had been founded in 1956.

exhibitions by state institutions, namely “some exhibitions exchanged between ‘brother’ or ‘friend’ countries, organized with much haste and improvisation.”

Given the dearth of institutions committed to attracting a broader local audience, the ANBA looked for new possibilities, beginning with its first meeting in December 1964 in Rabat. This meeting focused on the pedagogic organization of Protectorate-era institutions, as well as the creation of new institutions. These artists were often exhibiting at this point in international exhibitions that had a locally organized component, as shown in Chapter Two. A goal of this meeting was thus to set up a national structure that could carefully and methodically organize Moroccan participation in international exhibitions. The resolutions reached during the meeting, based on artists’ rights and fees, were, according to the article, both deeply nation-based as well as guided by unionizing principles, that is, laying the groundwork for a possible artists’ union. In the words of the *Souffles* article,

In general (and the interest of this first meeting is found there), starting from this meeting the ANBA claimed the role of dismantling the entire mechanism of the politico-social status-quo of the arts in Morocco and demanded of both the people in charge and the followers a lucidity and advanced conscience of the cultural problems that were arising in the country.

While the article therefore lauds the goals of the ANBA, it is quick to point out that despite these auspicious beginnings, the association quickly found itself frozen and unable to take on the tasks it had laid out. The article suggests that this was in large part connected to the variety of people engaged: the first meeting included 200 painters from varied backgrounds and institutions, collected based on no clear criteria. If the most active members wanted the ANBA to be an “instrument of action and demands,” the collective dialogue within such a heterogeneous group proved to be “impossible, if not pointless.” The second meeting was held in Casablanca in 1965, and led to the same contradictions without any concrete result, except for the crumbling of the

association itself. While at the time of the article, the ANBA technically existed and presented itself (falsely, per the position of *Souffles*) as a representative of Moroccan painters towards the Administration of Fine Arts, it did not have an active role and had legally been dissolved in 1966.

Both Belkahia and Chebaa, the first two presidents of the association, had quit within the span of the first two years. The rest of the article is devoted to a conversation between them about the creation of the ANBA as well as its failure. Belkahia, who quit after only two months, is for the most part quite dismissive of the association. According to him, most members of the association “saw in it only a launching platform, a lucrative fund, an unemployment office.” In his opinion, real change—as well as the possibility to start a new movement—was possible only among small groups of 4 or 5 people with close ties and shared goals, not on a large scale. Chebaa had just returned from Italy, where he had spent most of his time with local Communist party activists, when he learned that the ANBA had been created. While he was not at that moment invested in the particularities of the local scene, he says that he had hoped that “the very existence of an association with a national character could counter-balance the colonial cultural politics and provide us with a framework for national activities.” Despite his interest in working on a national level, Chebaa was quickly confronted with the limits of his own “idealism,” finding that the majority of members were not interested in playing a real role in the theoretic goals of the ANBA.<sup>238</sup>

The brief experience of the ANBA is particularly interesting within the framework of the themes of this dissertation. The ANBA was founded on unionizing ideals with the goal of combatting the remnants of colonial politics and arts institutions, as well as the neo-colonial

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<sup>238</sup> “Association Nationale des Beaux-Arts.” *Souffles*, n. 7-8, 2/3/4 trimesters (1967): 77-80.

structure of foreign cultural missions. Within the framework of participative politics and, if not as directly, workers' rights, the association worked towards national goals, and the creation of a national structure that could push forward the goals related to national culture. On the one hand, this demonstrates the multi-faceted ways in which these artists approached the question of national culture. I maintain that it is not possible to analyze the artwork produced by these artists outside of the context of their broader activities and engagements, because the art comes from a similar theoretic foundation grounded in anti-colonialism and national culture. Yet the brief history of the ANBA also suggests the limits of national culture. It is easy to look at Chebaa and Belkahia referencing the unemployed, the "fakes," the "naïve" artists that collectively subverted and froze the association, and read into it willful exclusions. Perhaps this is true, and perhaps there is a level of elitism that underlies the article and conversation. Yet I think it is important to take seriously the idea that these were young artists with strong and sometimes militant anti-colonial ideals. Although they found in a Third Worldist context transnational intellectual and artistic movements that supported their actions, not everyone in the nation itself supported these ideas, much less their artwork. These artists often speak now in terms of the public being "behind," a prickly idea for artists that were trying to intervene on a large scale within a public and national context. Yet a radical politics aimed at a national scale is not always accepted.

The ANBA was, for these artists, a failure to create a national structure, and demonstrated the limits of trying to work together on this scale. The Association de Recherche Culturelle (ARC), discussed in a later issue of *Souffles*<sup>239</sup> was similarly aimed at creating a national structure, yet the new structure had a more radical agenda. This time, the group was enlarged to include artists and intellectuals that wanted to think together about the larger

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<sup>239</sup> "association de recherche culturelle : programme de recherche et d'action de l'A.R.C." *Souffles*, n. 12, Trimester 4 (1968): 3-9.

questions of Moroccan culture. As they write, the rationale for creating the ARC came from being

conscious of the role that culture can play in our project of liberation and development; conscious of the originality of our cultural heritage and of the creative potentiality of our people; conscious of the harmful role of the action of colonial de-culturization and new attempts at alienation; conscious of the many blockages and obstacles that have been imposed on creation, and cultural research and action; conscious of the dangerous means by which certain circles wish to engage our culture towards demagogic and mystifying means [...]

The artists and intellectuals formed the ARC after a series of meetings, seminars, and debates.

They list the goals of the ARC, based on tenets of cultural demystification, anti-colonialism, and liberatory cultural combat. They site this group in a history of colonialism and its attendant forced loss of cultural identity, echoing Fanon's theory. Post-independence, in the ARC's opinion, nationalist movements privileged politics at the loss of support for culture. As they write,

If our culture was used by a colonial ideology for aforementioned ends, it is newly used by an embryonic ideology that, re-establishing with the most folkloric and fossilized elements of this culture, plans to take advantage of it as a decisive tool for a politics of obscurantism.

That is, rather than opening up culture as something living and morphing with the needs of the broader population, they argue that the political ideology of the time (not linked to any specific politician or party) was instead trying to deliberately render culture too obscure for its participants to penetrate. The ARC therefore calls for a renewed examination and re-elaboration of national culture as an effective anti-imperialist tool. They moreover call for western culture to be brought into question as the culture of imperialism and colonialism, and to cease using it as a reference or norm. Thus, the ARC points to "mobilization" as the primordial role of the intellectual, turning personal work towards political engagements and confrontations, while also adapting daily work to the

objective situation of the people. For this, one must be conscious of the constant interaction between cultural combat and political combat. This option of militancy can be both creative and transforming only insofar as the intellectual is able to know profoundly, to identify and express the aspirations of the exploited masses. It also cannot be those things if the intellectual does not constantly connect theory to action, knowledge to practice, if he does not make of this practice in and of itself an essential form of knowledge.

The goal of the ARC was explicitly, therefore, not just situated in the grey zone between cultural politics and politics, but meant to actively connect the two while pushing for more and more similar initiatives.

In the introduction to the issue that includes the mission statement, they state that they do not want this document for the ARC to be a

‘historic’ basic document that one rapidly classifies in anthologies or ‘serious studies’ and that one mummifies for a few centuries and that replaces the only logical function that it could have, that of provoking debate and the confrontation of ideas, of stimulating research and above all of leading all of the contesting coherences of our country towards action that is real, voluntary, programmed, liberated from false dramas and false terrors.<sup>240</sup>

Looking back on this history, this is an understandable sentiment. The mission statement and prologue to the rest of the issue burn with immediacy and deep belief in the cause. The ARC did not maintain its activities, although there is not clear documentation of why it failed, and its brief place in history as well as the way it fizzled out seems to neutralize the passion and importance of these words at the time. That I emphasize here that these associations were attempts at creating national structures that, for one reason or another, did not work is by no means a way of trying to downplay the fervor of this anti-imperialist commitment to national culture. The ARC did not fall apart for the same reasons as the ANBA, and seems to have briefly been more productive as an association. I want to emphasize, no matter what the concrete results, that creating a national platform from which to come together and advance increasingly radical ideas

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<sup>240</sup> “prologue.” *Souffles*. 12: 4<sup>th</sup> trimester, 1968. 1-2.

about culture's political role was deeply important to the very practice of these artists and intellectuals.

While the debates around national culture changed in the early 1970s, the idea of national platforms remained. I will come back to the idea of a national artists' structure with the Union Nationale des Arts Plastiques, which came later in the 1970s. I highlight here the contradictions of the discourse around the ANBA because it is important to see that in an issue of *Souffles* devoted to the national situation for visual arts, conversations highlight the limits that they were confronting in this nation-based ideal. Yet even among a smaller and increasingly radical group, the ARC also did not as an association create the new anti-colonial national culture they wanted to create. While there are not easy answers to why these associations did not flourish, I will explore later in this dissertation the ways in which this ideal of a national association working towards national issues became increasingly charged.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued in this chapter that these multiple activities are fundamental to their individual artists' projects, and that an analysis of the artwork is only possible in the context of the larger stakes of their actions. Following the international experiences that formed the foundations of Moroccan modernism, this generation of artists began to return to Morocco, and a movement began to crystallize around the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux Arts. Despite their divergent aesthetics, the faculty at the school became the Casablanca "group," the artists held together more by their ideas of modernity than by shared aesthetics. Starting with Farid

Belkahia's return in 1962, the artists began creating a new kind of arts pedagogy for Morocco, despite the huge challenges that they faced at the school, a small and underfunded municipal school. In the almost complete absence of structures, artists were forced to take on multiple roles, working to create associations, collaborate across disciplines (particularly with the journal *Souffles*), and explore new possibilities for engaging in ideas of national culture. By the time the ARC was founded, the artists were becoming increasingly engaged in local cultural politics and invested in Third Worldist ideologies and connections. The difference in the claims of the ANBA and the ARC presages the increasingly public role that artists begin to envision for themselves as public intellectuals.

## CHAPTER FOUR: POLITICS OF CULTURE: THIRD WORLDISM AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

**“We must undertake an education of the visual sense. For that, all action can only be collective. The idea of the artist-individual must disappear. It is absurd to still think of the artist as a genius isolated from society. No artistic expression can stay prisoner to individualism. More and more, we are going towards a gathering of experiences.”**

**-Farid Belkahia<sup>241</sup>**

Modernism for the Casablanca school as well as the *Souffles* group was certainly located in the intersection of the local/national and the transnational. Despite their intense insistence on national culture and national structures, As demonstrated in the prior chapters, Third Worldist theories and exhibitions have shaped the work of this generation of intellectuals in significant theoretical and practical ways. In this chapter, I will thus trace the articulations of local/national and transnational with regard to specific Third Worldist cultural events.

This Third Worldist theory pushed artists to reimagine the role of art and of the artist in society. Beyond their actions within arts structures, such as the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux Arts, their contributions to *Souffles*, and the associations that they created, as discussed in the previous chapter, this group of artists began to take on a more public role. The ideology of Third Worldism encouraged artists and intellectuals in Morocco to try to foment a national culture by appealing to the nation at large, often via public events, including but not limited to the infamous 1969 open-air exhibition in Djemaa al-Fna in Marrakech, the “exposition-manifeste.” In this

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<sup>241</sup> Farid Belkahia. “fiches et questionnaires.” *Souffles*, N 7-8, Trimester 3/4 (1967): 25-31

chapter, I will both describe some of these engagements with the idea of the public, and analyze both what “the public” means at this time and how it is constituted, especially with regard to the idea of the nation. In light of the centrality of the idea of the nation as well as the broader cultural currents lauding public engagement, I therefore consider art in the public sphere within the framework of post-colonial national culture.

A guiding argument of this dissertation is that in order to analyze the experience of modernism in Morocco, there must constantly be a balance between local and global, and between internationalism and nationalism. In the context of decolonization, I argue that modernism is constituted by the ways in which transnational ideas and movements play out within the specific confines and exigencies of a particular context. Within Morocco, it is not possible to consider the politically motivated ideas of post-colonial national culture without understanding the larger political context of the “Years of Lead,” the term used to denote the repressive regime under King Hassan II (1961-1999). The idea of tradition, while dear to modernists mining the local visual cultures for referents to ground international modernism in a Moroccan idiom, becomes particularly politicized within this framework. The chapter thus ends with a discussion of the Years of Lead and the political context in which this generation of artists was working.

### **Third Worldism: Postcolonialism and the Ideology of Modernity**

For the Casablanca artists, the connection to *Souffles* was primarily forged on their ideological intersections. Like the artists themselves, *Souffles* overall during this period (up until

the end of 1969, when the focus changes) was deeply committed to questions of national culture, anti-colonialism, and Third Worldism. As well as numerous articles about post-colonial national culture (both broadly and discipline-specific), a variety of intellectuals contributed essays specifically about Third Worldism, as in Abdallah Stouky's "The Third World Intellectual and National Edification."<sup>242</sup> I am particularly interested here in the intersection of national culture and Third Worldism. At first glance it seems like an inherent contradiction, that a focus on national culture is developed by the broad transnational intellectual currents of Third Worldism. Yet I am interested in understanding the specificities of the iteration of Third Worldist ideology within Morocco at this point, particularly via the experience of *Souffles*, which claimed simultaneously a national, regional, and trans-national outlook.

While the artists during this period did not claim the same transnational collaborations that the writers involved with *Souffles* did, their training and foundation were cosmopolitan (as shown in the Chapters One and Two) and continued to be built on internationally. A major example of this was the participation of the Casablanca artists in the First Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar. Under President Léopold Senghor, the arts in Senegal played a significant and functional role in post-colonial nation building, culminating in the 1966 festival and celebration of all African art forms. This festival was an official venture, and Morocco participated based on the official invitation from Senghor. In 1965, a letter from Hassan II to Senghor celebrates the venture for its major importance for the continent. Hoping to, in Hassan II's words, "reaffirm the links of friendship and comprehension that exist between our two countries and to maintain the historical relationships that tie the Kingdom of Morocco and the Republic of Senegal," Morocco was happy to participate. Emphasizing the official nature of the proposal and acceptance, the

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<sup>242</sup> Abdallah Stouky. "l'intellectuel du tiers-monde et l'édification nationale." *Souffles* 4, Trimester 4 (1966): 13-18.

letter notes that both the country and government will be involved. The responsibility for the exhibition was assigned to Moulay Ahmed Alaoui, Minister of Tourism, Handicraft and Fine Art (which had also been the governing body in charge of the *Rencontre International*) based on his competencies and large amount of knowledge about art. The letter closes with wishes for complete success for “this important African project.”<sup>243</sup> Local artisans were invited, included weavers, potters, and wood-workers, as well as visual artists, including Melehi, Belkahia, and Saad Ben Cheffaj, an artist working in Tétouan.

The festival in Dakar received a large amount of attention in Morocco. In the daily journal *L'Opinion*, Royal Air Maroc ran advertisements throughout March and April advertising a 20% reduction on airline tickets in order to go to Dakar, including information on the festival, a list of disciplines involved, and a large image of a wooden carved mask [Image 4.1]. The mask, out of context, seemingly meant to signify a romanticized ideal of “Africa,” aimed nonetheless at residents of the continent in North Africa. The advertisement is interesting, both in showing that many people knew the event was happening, and that enough people in Morocco were interested in the festival that Royal Air Maroc was offering specials and paying for advertising space. The festival opening was also featured, along with a photograph, on the first page of *L'Opinion*.<sup>244</sup> The newspaper then featured consistent information on the festival throughout April, primarily with AFP photographs.

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<sup>243</sup> Letter from HM Hassan II to President Leopold Senghor, 25 November 1965. Unofficial translation into French, available in National Archives in Dakar. Thanks to Jessica Gershultz for this source.

<sup>244</sup> “Le premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres.” *L'Opinion*, N 331, April 3-4, 1966.



**DAKAR**  
du 1<sup>er</sup> au 24 Avril 1966

**1<sup>er</sup> FESTIVAL  
MONDIAL  
DES ARTS  
NÈGRES**

MUSIQUE BALLETS  
CINEMA, CHANT,  
POESIE  
PLUS DE MILLE CHEFS D'ŒUVRE :  
PEINTURES SCULPTURES,  
CERAMIQUES,  
TAPISSERIES, ETC

**20% de réduction sur nos tarifs ...!**

par Caravelle  
**royal air maroc**

Image 4.1 : L'Opinion. 31 March, 1966.

The arts critic of the newspaper, Salim Jay, also writes about the festival, with breathless enthusiasm about Senghor and the festival, punctuating the end of one section: “Bravo Africa!”<sup>245</sup> On the same page, as part of Jay’s collection of thoughts on culture, he writes about the importance of Morocco’s international exhibitions – and especially in Dakar – because of the lack of structures in Morocco itself. As he writes,

Moroccan painting is honored abroad and forgotten in our country, where ‘art galleries’ present green and ochre snake charmers, mauve mountains, pink suns ... or close their doors, as is visibly the case for the Bab Rouah gallery.

The article continues, explaining the need for a museum and the ways in which artists were agitating for a museum. In Jay’s opinion, though, Morocco “denied” its painting, given factors including the lack of museums and galleries, as well as “the little, really too little, moral and even less material support.” He closes the section by underlining the importance of the festival in Dakar to pay witness to both the presence of Moroccan painting as well as “our African-ness.”<sup>246</sup>

Jay’s article highlights the continued efforts by artists to build their practice in important ways through international Third Worldist exhibitions. For Jay, this was not only to affirm the artists’ Third World identities, although his discourse is clearly influenced by pan-African pride, as in the “Bravo Africa!” and his focus on the importance of claiming African identity. The importance for Jay was also the reality that the festival in Dakar created a structure to support, recognize, and encourage artists, which was for the most part lacking in Morocco. Much of the discourse from this era returns constantly to the utter lack of artistic structures and public support and interest in art. In Jay’s view, the international exhibition highlights a deficiency at home. In other words, the festival in Dakar can be studied both in terms of its role in Senegal as well as in

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<sup>245</sup> Salim Jay. “Le Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres : Un Feu D’artifice de Merveilles et de Sortilèges.” *L’Opinion*, N 335, April 9, 1966.

<sup>246</sup> Salim Jay. “Le Maroc Renie-t-Il Sa Peinture?” *L’Opinion*, N 335, 9 April 1966.

the ways in which this festival, by operating on a pan-African level, played into and was articulated via prevailing local concerns and dynamics exterior to Senegal.

The festival in Dakar also features in an early issue of *Souffles*. Negritude, a movement deeply influenced and orchestrated by Senghor that searched for and celebrated an innate African identity<sup>247</sup>, is discussed periodically though out the journal. Yet there is also an essay devoted to the 1966 festival in Issue 2 by Abdallah Stouky. Unlike Jay, Stouky is highly critical of both the festival and of Negritude more broadly as he offers a second person narrative of an arrival to the festival in which one was continually frustrated, continually met by jarring dissonances and cultural inequalities. The article drops many names, including Fanon and Césaire, suggesting the expectation that readers of the journal would be familiar with their ideas. Stouky writes,

Africa needs art. Not because the Negro is all emotion and does not understand discursive reasoning, as the backward supporters of Negritude like to repeat, but because, as the poet Aimé Césaire has shown, “Africa had entered definitively into the aura and circle of influence of occidental civilization, whose impact is enormous in the world. This is why the art of Africa is necessary for Africa, because it uproots cultural integration and avoids depersonalization.” It is therefore a question for the African intellectual or artist to not fall into the puerile aestheticism of Mr. André Malraux, French Minister of Culture and writer, and regret that the Negro-African artist can do no more than remake the marvelous masks of yesteryear.

Stouky’s discourse is influenced by anti-colonial theorists and is strongly and openly critical of French intervention and paternalism. It is unsurprising that a more militant and critical anti-colonial stance can be found in *Souffles* than in *L’Opinion*, the newspaper of the political party Istiqlal.

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<sup>247</sup> A particularly strong analysis of this subject can be found in Ima Ebong. “Negritude: Between Mask and Flag: Senegalese Cultural Ideology and the Ecole de Dakar.” *Africa Explores: African Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Susan Vogel. (New York: Center for African Art, 1991): 198-209.

Stouky's article highlights an unstated yet newly active identification of Morocco as African. He argues that one of the failures of Negritude is the elision of differences between black people. He highlights the vast differences between problems faced by black Americans and black Africans, and the importance of focusing not on blackness but on questions of decolonization and national sovereignty. Yet his forceful writing also frames the issues of the festival, Africa, and the Third World more broadly as issues that concern Morocco, and moreover are shared by Morocco. He ends the article,

To not recognize that advocating Negritude is confronting coins and comparing sarcophagi is to live outside of one's era and to betray the future of Africa. It is starting with an effective economic and social liberation, the condition of a veritable revolution, that the two cultures, national and that of the former occupier, can come face to face and enrich each other in a real way, universalism being only, to parody the president-poet, the management of reciprocal relativism of different cultures – definitively excluding all forms of hegemony.<sup>248</sup>

In other words, Stouky pushes for a radical economic and social liberation from the colonizing culture in order to allow for a meeting between equals. Negritude, for him, is backward-looking as opposed to invested in the future of Africa. I emphasize Stouky's discourse because it highlights the importance and resonance of Third World ideology for Moroccan intellectuals. Artists and intellectuals both were highly influenced by theory, social movements, and artistic movements of Third World artists and intellectuals, yet these ideas were also meaningfully and precisely articulated for a Moroccan context and developed based on local needs.

The documentation that exists about the Moroccan presence in Dakar seems deliberately framed by governmental imperatives, between the governments of Morocco and Senegal, and by Alaoui, who held a position in the national government. The 1969 Pan-African Festival in Algiers was similarly shaped by official delegations and followed African ruling regimes'

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<sup>248</sup> Abdallah Stouky. "le festival mondial des arts nègres ou les nostalgiques de la négritude." *Souffles*, N 2, Trimester 2 (1966): 41-45.

identification more than their militant rebels. Yet the traces that remain from the Moroccan presence still seem to be more deliberately shaped by the Casablanca School. In the catalogue that was produced for the Moroccan contribution to the Algiers festival, Maraini describes the particular interests of the artists at the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux Arts, writing within a lexicon of militant cultural engagement rather than placating governmental ideology. She explains that the Casablanca artists were combating the remnants of the colonial, reactionary national arts policy and its ramifications within the stereotyped principles of academic artistic culture, the paternalistic activities of the foreign cultural missions, and the problems with communication and arts pedagogy.<sup>249</sup>

In part, the ideology of the Algiers festival itself was arguably more distinctly in line with the ideology of the Casablanca artists than the festival in Dakar. Organized by the Organization for African Unity (OAU), whose chairman was Algerian President Houari Boumedienne, the manifesto written at the festival's symposium focuses on the role of African culture in national liberation struggles and as a tool for economic and social development. The manifesto calls for a return to pre-colonial sources that does not stay in the past, but brings these cultural elements up to date, "so as to bring them into line with what is modern and universal." It presents an image of the African intellectual or artist that inspires the country but is integrated fully into his home culture. The OAU demands in this manifesto total independence, pushing artists and intellectuals to look to Africa for their inspiration.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Toni Maraini. "Art in Morocco Today." *First Panafrikan Cultural Festival*. (exhibition catalogue) (Alger: 1969). n.p.

<sup>250</sup> Organization of African Unity. "Pan-African Cultural Manifesto." English translation reprinted by the Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa. [http://ocpa.irmo.hr/resources/docs/Pan\\_African\\_Cultural\\_Manifesto-en.pdf](http://ocpa.irmo.hr/resources/docs/Pan_African_Cultural_Manifesto-en.pdf) (accessed 30 April 2013)

The entirety of this manifesto, including the forty suggestions and proposals offered about how to enact these ideas, was printed in *Souffles* eight months after the festival. The manifesto was published with the goal of both giving the ideas greater attention and providing another means of holding the OAU accountable to its goals.<sup>251</sup> The issue also included a broader dossier on the festival, suggesting that there had not been sufficient media coverage or critical analysis of the event. The dossier includes intervention from the symposium by the delegation of Guinea, the delegation of the Portuguese colonies (M.P.L.A., FRELIMO, P.A.I.G.C.), and the Haitian writer René Depestre. There is also an enthusiastic article on the Black Panthers at the festival by Abraham Serfaty, including an image of a poster by Emory of a man yelling and holding his rifle in the air [Image 4.2]. Absent from the dossier is a discussion of painting, theatre, dance, and music. They do note in a footnote that Tayeb Seddiki (director of the theatre of Casablanca) performed a piece, although they are deeply critical of the “myth” of Seddiki as “progressive and a man of avant-garde theatre,” although the text is not expanded to fully articulate such critique. It is therefore worth noting here that not all of the people discussed in this chapter were connected to *Souffles* and that these differences were often expressed publicly.

Some members of the *Souffles* team had gone to Algiers, and therefore created this dossier with the goal of “militant objectivity.” As they write,

We uphold the idea of militant objectivity. Because we did not go to Algiers to look for some kind of emotional communion or to verify ideas we had fixed in advance. Our positions of the problems of culture similar to our concrete actions are known. We are interested only in the ideas, the decisions, the realizations that shatter without any ambiguity the vicious circle of subtle alienations that are still upheld in our country by neo-colonialism and that open a clear path towards the initiative of the liberation of our peoples on the cultural and political level. The mystic ideas of unity, of pigmentation, of shared conditions only have sense for us and are coherent only if they questions the real foundations from which can spring

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<sup>251</sup> “manifeste culturel panafricain.” *Souffles*. N 16-17, Trimester 4 (1969-1970): 9-13.



Image 4.2: Emory, 1969. Poster printed in *Souffles*, N 16-17, Trimester 4 (1969-1970): 34.

our challenge to occidental culture, Negritude, our anti-imperialist struggle – or any other point of rallying.

Given the militancy of this stance, that unity is only meaningful if it is grounded in active liberatory struggles, the *Souffles* group felt that the festival was too full of courtesy and openness towards far-reaching elements of union at the loss of militant action. They are critical of the official nature of the festival, and the choice to have official delegations chosen by African regimes. They also voice their concerns about the implementation of the suggestions given in the manifesto. Overall, however, they explain that the importance of the event was in meeting international Third World intellectuals:

In the end, in Algiers, we met outside of the events militant intellectuals from the Arab Near East, from Africa, and from Latin America. These encounters allowed us to confront our own experiences, and to lay down the foundation for a dialogue that will become progressively more concrete in SOUFFLES. On our side, we did not lose any occasion, any encounter, to explain to our interlocutors the concrete national realities and the nature of our own combat, in part integrated into the Arab and African combat.<sup>252</sup>

I emphasize here, once again, the importance of Third World solidarity for this group of artists and intellectuals. It is important to note here that I have not found either written traces by Moroccan artists about the festival or photographs to visually document these events. I want to be careful not to collapse the rhetoric espoused by the *Souffles* group with the Casablanca artists, as, by the time the issue on the festival in Algiers was published, only Chebaa was still involved with the journal.<sup>253</sup> However, I maintain that the vast majority of these artists and intellectuals (those connected to *Souffles* and to the Casablanca school) at this point identified in solidarity

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<sup>252</sup> “le festival culturel panafricain d’alger 1969.” *Souffles*, N 16-17, Trimester 4 (1969-1970): 7-8.

<sup>253</sup> The festival in Algiers happened in July 1969 and I want to point out that the Casablanca school was decidedly still a working group at the point of their inclusion and collaboration with Maraini. However, as discussed in Chapter Five, the group splintered with issue 15 on Palestine, and by issue 16/17, had differing relationships with the journal and the structure of the school.

and dialogue with the Third World. The intellectual and artistic ideas were expanded in these transnational events yet were simultaneously deeply rooted in local prerogatives. The final quotation from the Algiers dossier speaks to this: these Third World militant intellectuals pushed the writers to confront their own experiences, while creating new possibilities for the future of the journal. It is therefore not possible to discuss modernism in the Casablanca school in terms of discreet entities, of either the local/national context or the transnational ideals of anti-colonialism and national culture. To the contrary, it is intrinsic to the experience of modernism in Casablanca that it rested on the tension between the articulation and overlap of both.

Similarly, in 1968, Melehi was invited as a sculptor to Mexico to an international meeting of sculptors. The event was organized as part of a yearlong series of artistic exhibitions and performances meant to coincide with the Olympics, held that year in Mexico. Eighteen sculptors took part: three from Mexico and fifteen from the five other continents. Melehi was invited to represent the African continent. Although the article in *Souffles* written by Toni Maraini<sup>254</sup> points out that the goals of the event were conditioned by organizational problems and bureaucracy, it still emphasizes the important collaboration between disciplines that marked the event and the interest in public art and urban planning, meant to lead to 18 large-scale public sculptures made out of cement. Melehi's contribution was a 12 meter vertical wave made of bleached cement and framed by a square metallic structure at the base painted red and orange. It was set up on the median strip of a highway [Image 4.3]. Maraini describes this as a "mental flame" escaping from its material angular structure.

Maraini calls the event "futurist" because it focuses on art in the street: "The action of artists, taken outside of the closed circle of galleries, faced with the collectivity." This focus on

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<sup>254</sup> Here signed Toni Maraini Melehi

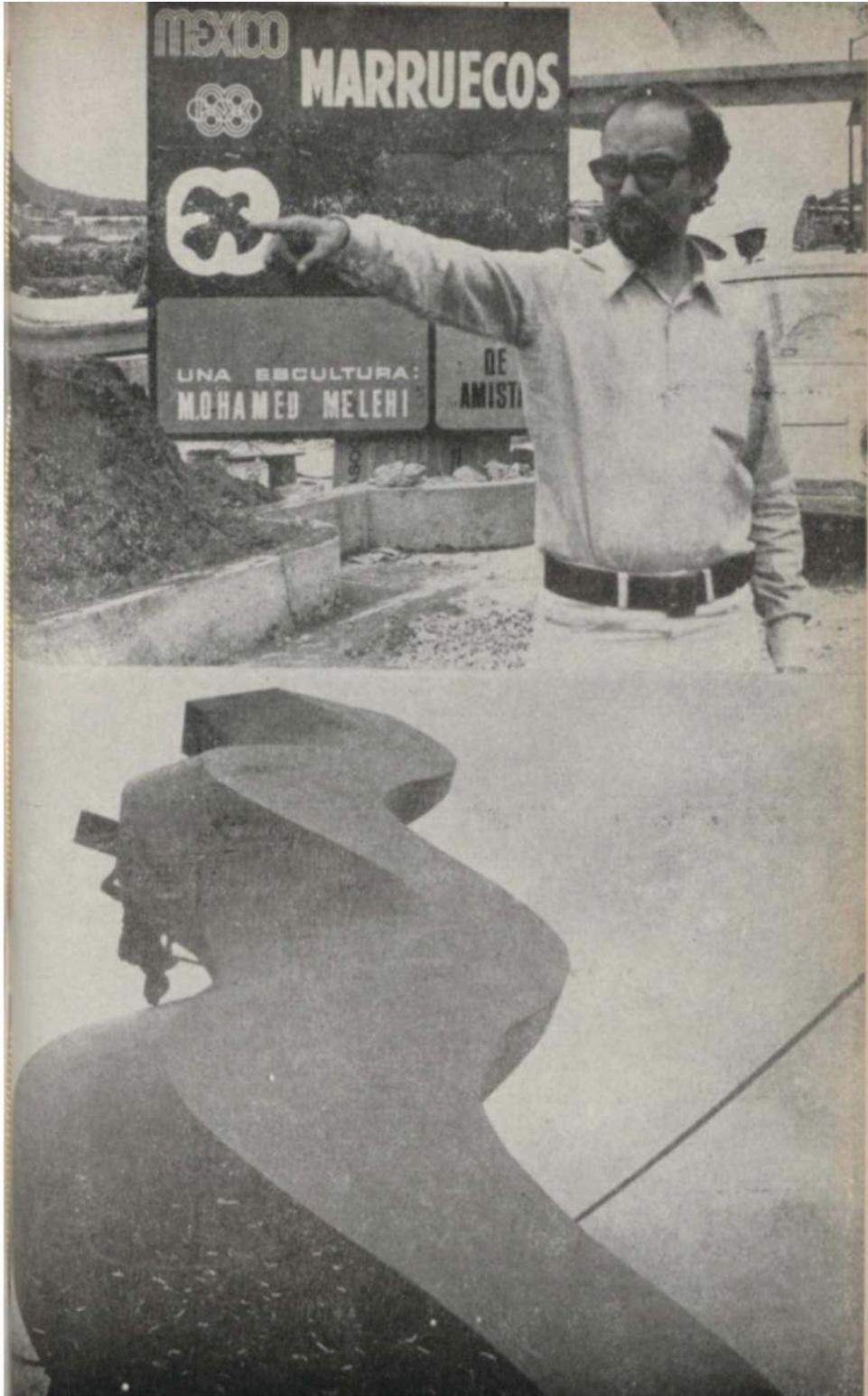


Image 4.3: Photographs by Mohammed Melehi. *Souffles* N 10/11, Trimester 2/3 (1968): 53

art in the street, the relationship of art to the public, and the importance of moving art outside of the realm of the elite would become increasingly important ideas in Morocco. Of particular interest is the way in which Melehi self-identifies as African.

Conscious of the fact that I needed to represent Africa – too huge of a task, really – I wanted to create a form that, while traditional (the wave appears in all African art), while new (it is structurally modern), symbolizes a determined situation: despite its bloodthirsty, metallic, and programmed oppression, the dynamic spirit of this continent (its ‘SOUL’ [sic]) rises up forcefully towards the sky.<sup>255</sup>

This is not the Casablanca group, but Melehi arriving as an individual to represent not just the city or the country but the continent. Yet the movement towards claiming a transnational Third Worldist identity is notable, towards orienting artwork in relation to the Third World as opposed to Europe or the United States. Here, Melehi is making a relationship between the lived realities of Mexico and Africa, drawing a map of shared experience. Yet he is also claiming his own African identity in a new way that was not seen before this point among visual artists. These ideals of Third Worldism in art arise from a national context, yet are elaborated in artistic events throughout the Third World, in collaboration with other Third World artists.

I am particularly interested in this tension between the local experience of post-colonial national culture and the importance of transnational artistic and intellectual movements in articulating these ideas. For the Casablanca artists, especially as shown in their responses to the *Souffles* questionnaire, the nation was used as a framework to actively elaborate a unified post-colonial culture. Yet this framework is nonetheless deeply rooted in the broader Third World culture. For example, Belkahia argues that the revalorization of tradition must be seen as the creative energy of the collective that makes up the patrimony, but that the national context is only part of it; it is connected to the ensemble of Third World countries engaged in similar

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<sup>255</sup> Toni Maraini Melehi. “symposium international de sculpture de mexico.” *Souffles*. N 10/11, Trimester 2/3 (1968): 50-52.

inquiries.<sup>256</sup> There is thus an important resonance that we can read in their theorization of national culture and Frantz Fanon's writing on the same topic, emphasizing the regional movement of ideas that play a role in local contexts. Much as the importance of transnational currents of thoughts in contributing to this theorization of national culture makes this resonance all the more apt, it is nonetheless important to point out that the influence of Fanon was perhaps indirect: many of the artists have told me that they do not remember ever reading Fanon.

There is a tension throughout *The Wretched of the Earth* between the role of transnational unity and the nation. Fanon, who himself was from Martinique but lived in Algeria and was involved in the anti-colonial struggles there, writes broadly about the colonized individual. To some degree this can be—and certainly has been—abstracted from the precise configuration and variety of colonialism and liberation experienced by Algeria, and Fanon moreover calls upon other precise national contexts. He distinguishes between nationalism and national consciousness, between the ideology of the bourgeoisie looking to maintain a colonial power structure and a national consciousness that comes into being through the masses, as he often terms the larger population. He takes seriously the importance of solidarity between liberation movements, yet is careful to stipulate that this solidarity is possible primarily from the position of the nation. It is thus the national character that, by its existence, can influence and penetrate other cultures.<sup>257</sup> As he writes, “National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is alone capable of giving us an international dimension.”<sup>258</sup> Much as the international dimension comes from national consciousness, the experience of colonialism was transnational. Fanon argues that colonialism did not “think it worth its while denying one national culture after another,” and

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<sup>256</sup> Farid Belkahia. “fiches et questionnaires.” *Souffles*, N 7-8, Trimester 3/4 (1967): 25-31

<sup>257</sup> Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Richard Philcox. (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 177

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid* 179

therefore created a binary denigration of all non-European cultures. Thus the response of the colonized was immediately continental.<sup>259</sup> If under colonialism, all black people have no culture, or all Arab people are intrinsically barbaric, the immediate anti-colonial response is to celebrate these cultures in similarly broad sweeps—which, he is quick to note, are often racialized. Yet for Fanon, rather than celebrating regional response, it is only through the framework of the nation and national consciousness that culture can be productive and substantive.<sup>260</sup> He argues that cultures can address issues from a similar perspective based on shared ideas and historical situations, but no cultures can be completely identical, and thus that a unitary identity of the black man or of the Arab created by colonialism was necessarily in the process of disappearing.<sup>261</sup>

This insistence on the nation as a platform is deeply tied to the moment in which Fanon was writing, in the midst of the Algerian war for independence and decolonization in general. For Fanon, culture perishes when it is denied the “twin supports of the nation and the state” by colonialism. “National liberation and the resurrection of the state are the preconditions for the very existence of a culture.”<sup>262</sup> His essay “On National Culture,” from which this theory has been drawn, was written for the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome in 1959. Presented after Moroccan independence, this is written in the thick of the bloody Algerian revolution, well before Algerian independence. Fanon writes from a point of view in which he identifies with Algerians that do not have a state, that were in the midst of fighting the French for an independent state. The prerogatives of the anti-colonial struggle cannot be divorced from this conceptualization of the strength of the nation-state.

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid 150

<sup>260</sup> Ibid 154-155

<sup>261</sup> Ibid 169

<sup>262</sup> Ibid 177

Fanon is helpful in trying to unpack the multiple influences of the nation and of the transnational, allowing us to see both in his own biography as well as the transnational importance of his writing the way in which these are concepts that are simultaneously important. He also describes the responsibilities of the colonized writer by stages, arguing that within this broader Third Worldist and anti-colonial solidarity, the intellectual's strength and importance comes from the nation. Fanon provides three stages of the colonized writer, culminating in combat literature, in which the writer, "after having tried to lose himself among the people, with the people, will rouse the people."<sup>263</sup> The importance of combat literature is in providing shape for national consciousness and a platform through which to call upon the masses to join in the struggle for the nation.<sup>264</sup> National culture is thus a productive platform for struggle, and must be met by active physical struggle beyond an empty rhetoric. It thus cannot be separated from the nation. National culture is, for Fanon, at the heart of the anti-colonial struggle because it is "the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong."<sup>265</sup> The colonized intellectual's responsibility is thus to the nation as a whole, not just to culture. This latter argument, that responsibility is owed to the nation, is an important entry point into the Casablanca artists and the *Souffles* group, because it grounds their varied actions in terms that are hard to understand on a visceral level today.

By 1967, Fanon's critique of the visual arts is not necessarily relevant to the School of Casablanca artists, that is, of visual artists that turn their back on the modern techniques and contemporaneous trends they have learned in order to show only stereotyped, calcified concepts of pre-colonial tradition. Yet it is important to consider Fanon's argument that the "colonized

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid 159

<sup>264</sup> Ibid 173

<sup>265</sup> Ibid 167-168

intellectual, however, who strives for cultural authenticity, must recognize that national truth is first and foremost the national reality.”<sup>266</sup> I am eliding here to some degree the distinctions Fanon draws between intellectuals, writers, and visual artists. In part, the project of *Souffles* lends itself to this elision because it calls upon all of these groups to engage about the same issues. Despite my interest in distinguishing between national culture and political nationalism, Fanon reminds us that the “national reality” as such is inseparable from national culture. National culture must speak to this national truth. As I work to show throughout this chapter, national culture is influenced by transnational solidarities while being profoundly intertwined with the machinations of the nation-state, not just the ideal popular-driven nation that Fanon argues for.

### **Art and the Public Sphere**

Similar to Fanon’s comments on the colonized writers’ responsibility to the nation, many artists and intellectuals in Morocco tried to foment a national culture by appealing to the nation at large, often via public events. I will here describe some of these engagements with the idea of the public, as well as try to analyze what exactly is meant by “the public,” and how it is constituted. This is not a separate question from the nation, but a complication of the same question. Beyond attempting to explore the relationship of the transnational and the national when thinking about how post-colonial and Third Worldist ideas were articulated within one national context, how were these same ideas aimed towards local and national publics and translated for a non-professional art public? How is a national public created? Given the

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid 161

centrality of the idea of the nation as well as the broader cultural currents lauding public engagement, art in the public sphere is an important element of post-colonial national culture.

The *Souffles* group worked in many ways to re-imagine the place of culture in daily life, and to try to attract a larger audience of anyone that was interested in culture. Other disciplines did this more directly, although across the board, the debates were often centered by the late 1960s on how to expand the audience to reach a public outside of the *makhzen*, the political and economic elite of Morocco. For example, beginning in 1967 but expanding in 1969, Tayeb Saddiki, director of the Casablanca municipal theatre, proposed a moving theater, the TAK (Théâtre Ambulant Kheima), that presented theater pieces in popular neighborhoods for a fixed price of 1 Dirham. The pieces were written, directed, and acted by Moroccans, and sought to attract a new crowd to theater by going directly to areas of the city where inhabitants could not afford the usual tickets.<sup>267</sup> The original plan was for an art exhibition to travel with the troupe, though I have not been able to confirm that this happened.

The most well known example of artists moving outside of elite closed spaces is the 1969 Casablanca school exhibition in Djemaa al-Fna in Marrakech. Expanding upon ideas first articulated in the 1966 exhibition in Rabat, by 1969, the Casablanca school was established, as both an art school and a school—that is to say, a movement or group. Many of the artists – though not all – were invited to participate in the official Salon de Printemps in Marrakech, held within the Ministry of Transportation. The Casablanca artists decided to boycott, with different sources pointing to different rationales given to justify their decision: a direct critique of the Ministry of Culture, frustration that there was no filter on the amount of art being shown and that

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<sup>267</sup> “Une innovation théâtrale—pour la saison 1967-1968 : Le théâtre descendra dans la ville.” *L’Opinion*, N 805, Septembre 9, 1967; “SADDIKI : On devrait construire un théâtre accessible au public moyen.” *L’Opinion*, N 1536. September 29, 1969.

they would be exhibited with amateurs,<sup>268</sup> or that the guards at the door required state papers to enter and the exhibition would therefore only cater to an elite.<sup>269</sup> To counter this official exhibition, as a protest, the six Casablanca artists – at that time, Belkahia, Chebaa, Melehi, Hamidi, Hafid, and Ataalah – held an exhibition in the public square Djemaa al-Fna in Marrakech during ten days, and stayed with the artworks to engage passers-by. Calling it the “exposition-manifeste,” the title is a play on words, in which the exhibition is perceived as manifest (that is, present and on display), as a manifesto, and as a protest. Art critic Pierre Restany describes this event as “the affirmation of contemporary art in Morocco.”<sup>270</sup> Up until now, the meaning or importance of this exhibition is still undecided, nor is it clearly articulated in Morocco. For example, in October 2011, *Souffles* writer and poet Mohammed Loakira gave a talk in Casablanca, and painter Mohammed Hamidi was present. Although this was a talk about poetry, the question and answer session quickly moved from a discussion of Loakira’s writing to broader questions of public engagement through culture. Although he was silent, in Hamidi’s presence, the debate switched to visual arts, and became heatedly centered on this action by the artists, and whether it was public enough.<sup>271</sup>

The photos of the exhibition suggest large crowds, made up of all the people passing through Djemaa al-Fna, a large and storied square known as a Saharan trade route meeting point, and for its circles (halqas) of worshipping or singing, public spectacles, and night market [Image 4.4]. The artists, in their statement for *Souffles*, described the appeal of this “collective

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<sup>268</sup> Ahmed Chakib. “L’*école de Casablanca boycotte le pré-salon auquel participent plus de trente peintres marocains*,” *L’Opinion*, N 1329, April 7, 1969.

<sup>269</sup> Farid Belkahia, interview by author, Marrakech, 30 July 2010.

<sup>270</sup> Pierre Restany. “Mohammed Melehi, un peintre d’action.” *Melehi* (exhibition catalog) (Rabat, Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997.) 10.

<sup>271</sup> Café Littéraire: Mohammed Loakira in conversation with Kenza Sefrioui. (Conference.) (Café Littéraire meeting at the Club de Tennis de l’USM, Casablanca, 18 October 2011.)



Exposition jamaâ Ifna, marrakech

معرض جامع لفنا - مراكش



Image 4.4: Photographs by Mohammed Melehi. *Souffles*. N 13-14, Trimester 1-2 (1969).

atmosphere.”<sup>272</sup> Despite the emphasis on connecting to the broader public in the square, the audience was barred from direct access to the paintings by thick metal barriers [Image 4.5]. The artists have been criticized for both the visual impact of these barriers, as the images suggest not inclusive action but people being kept out, and for the official approval by the Wali (regional governor) of Marrakech.<sup>273</sup> However, this exhibition stayed up for 10 days, and therefore had to be both protected and officially sanctioned. I argue that it is idealistic to imagine that the artists could have done this without official approval: up until today, all interventions in public space need prior authorization by the city government. Additionally, if this was a sanctioned exhibition, it was not a supported exhibition: it is often forgotten that it was entirely paid for personally by the artists, who did this on their own initiative and via their own funding.<sup>274</sup>

On the thick stone walls of Djemaa al-Fna, the paintings seem crammed together, with one piece by each artist [Image 4.6]. The exhibition, rather than giving the distance and space for contemplation of a more traditional installation, instead seems to focus on collectivity, on the group of these works presenting an idea, echoing in an exhibition the ideals of collectivity expressed in other written forums. From the round swoop of Chebaa’s abstraction to the clean lines of Melehi’s waves, or the organic outcropping on the left side of Chebaa’s canvas bringing out the equally organic forms in the copper work by Belkahia, these pieces work together with variations on modernist hard edged abstraction rooted in shared referents of visual culture, culled from tattoos, rugs, and architecture. None of these works were specifically designed for public or

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<sup>272</sup> Mohammed Atalah, Farid Belkahia, Mohammed Chebaa, Mustapha Hafid, Mohammed Hamidi, and Mohammed Melehi. “action plastique: exposition jamaâ Ifna. marrakech.” *Souffles*. N 13-14, Trimester 1-2 (1969): 45-46.

<sup>273</sup> See for example in Katarzyna Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 137-138.

<sup>274</sup> Maraini 101.



Image 4.5: Photograph by Mohammed Melehi, “exposition-manifeste,” Marrakech, 1969.

Image can be found in Katarzyna Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 137-138.



Image 4.6: Photographer unknown. The artists (Ataalah, Belkahia, Hafid, Hamidi, Chebaa, Melehi) in front of the exhibition (Ataalah, Melehi, Hamidi, Hafid, Belkahia, Chebaa), Djema al Fna, Marrakech, 1969.

Image re-printed in *Melehi* (exhibition catalog) (Rabat, Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997.)

outdoor spaces, but were instead created for display in an indoor space but then placed outside. In an important distinction argued by Miwon Kwon about different models of public art, this is an example in which the work is public because of its location in the square, what she terms “art-in-public-places,” rather than being public art per se, in which its publicness is an intrinsic part of the work itself.<sup>275</sup>

Throughout this period in Morocco, the artists simultaneously sought out public engagement, while also criticizing the public as being “behind” them, or not being receptive to their work. For example, Belkahia, in his response to the *Souffles* questionnaire, suggests that man [that is, the everyman, or the non-artist] “needs a readaptation to today’s world” and its enormous mutations. He continues, “The essential problem seems to be an anachronism in man’s perception. The artist is not ahead of his time, as we like to repeat; it is society that is behind its time.”<sup>276</sup> I want here to problematize the way in which the idea of “the public” is used at this point in order to clarify the stakes of these publicly oriented activities. I hope to disrupt the notion that any public is primordial rather than created. The contingent and negotiated qualities of publics must be understood within a historic and cultural framework. In attempting to understand this important characteristic of many artistic projects within Morocco, the concept of “the public” must first be deconstructed before considering the multiple implications of public

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<sup>275</sup> This is seen similarly in the United States. Kwon argues in her book *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* that in the United States, the art-in-public-places model of the late 1960s and 1970s was the first paradigm of public art in this national context. Typified by Alexander Calder and Isamu Noguchi, she argues that this model placed versions of artworks that could be in museums into public spaces, “public” by virtue of their location, not as a quality intrinsic to the work itself. (Miwon Kwon. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002. 97.)

<sup>276</sup> Belkahia “fiches et questionnaire” *Souffles*, no. 7-8, 2/3/4 Trimester (1967): 25-31.

engagement. I want to suggest here that publics are created and always shifting based on who has a say, and who is empowered to claim visibility.

Kwon offers the important insight that communities—temporary or otherwise—can be sparked by artworks, and need not be treated as prior, coherent units.<sup>277</sup> This connects in important ways to Michael Warner’s theorization of publics, and its ramifications on public artistic engagement. For Warner, it is impossible to speak of “the” public. A public in varied cultural and historical conjunctions is necessarily different, because the form of a public relies on the background and self-understanding of its participants.<sup>278</sup> For him, much of the process of creating a public is invisible to individual and collective consciousness and agency, and therefore cannot be willfully created.<sup>279</sup> He uses a textual model for understanding the creation of publics through circulation. Warner is careful to note that in this model a “text” is not necessarily literary, but can also be visual or audio.<sup>280</sup> Yet publics themselves are “essentially intertextual, frameworks for understanding texts against an organized background of the circulation of other texts, all interwoven not just by citational references but by the incorporation of a reflexive circulatory field in the mode of address and consumption.”<sup>281</sup> Publics are generated by the circulation of texts, yet exist in the interstices as a framework for understanding and address.

This understanding of a public is distinct from the idea of the public as a social totality or a purely bounded public of a concrete audience. Warner offers a variety of characteristics of this concept of a public. This textual public is self-organized, existing as a consequence of being

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<sup>277</sup> Kwon 146

<sup>278</sup> Michael Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*. (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 9.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid* 14.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid* 67.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid* 16.

addressed.<sup>282</sup> A public is a relationship between strangers, and the form requires that all of the participants do not (and cannot) know each other. Therefore, to be part of a public, a person needs to feel that he is being personally addressed by the text, while simultaneously recognizing the impersonal nature of the address, the way that the text is oriented towards a grouping of strangers.<sup>283</sup> Publics act historically and temporally by their circulation.<sup>284</sup>

I am particularly interested in the ramifications on artistic practice of Warner's suggestion that publics are created by the attention of the participants and the "reflexive circulation of discourse." Warner uses a spatial metaphor, discussing a space of encounter that is constitutive of publicness. He distinguishes totalities (classes, nations) from publics by virtue of voluntary attention.<sup>285</sup> This begs the question of the distinction between a realized public, which is to say the assemblage of individuals that have encountered these texts and taken part in its discourse, and a projective, possible public. Warner points out that there is a class of writing addressed towards a grouping that is essentially imaginary such as a generation, the nation, liberals, or believers. He distinguishes between the imaginary character of this kind of address and the conclusion that this would make this public unreal. As he explains, "Although such publics are imaginary, writing to a public is not imaginary in the same way as writing to Pinocchio. All public addressees have some social basis. Their imaginary character is never merely a matter of private fantasy."<sup>286</sup> For Warner, publics cannot be created by a single person or text and are always partial and relational. They rely on imagined constituents, but are always rooted in some social basis.

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid 67

<sup>283</sup> Ibid 74-6.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid 96.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid 87-90.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid 73-4.

Drawing upon Kant, Warner explicates the distinctions between “public and political,” further exploring this distinction through Habermas’s 1962 text *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Warner focuses on how the ideals of the public for Habermas contain a liberatory potential that needs to be realized by civil society. In the historical structural transformations of the public, two major impediments arose: the nature of mass culture and the increasing entanglement of state and civil society, making the realization of the ideals more and more difficult.<sup>287</sup> In Habermas’s text, based on a variety of cultural and societal factors including the rise of newspapers and sociability in salons, the “representative public sphere” of the aristocratic or monarchical model of power became the “the public of the now emerging *public sphere of civil society*.”<sup>288</sup> This reading of the public was rooted in the educated classes and rarely penetrated into the “common man.” In other words, the importance of these distinctions is that the structures and organizations of bourgeois society for Habermas always contradicted its ideals of publicness.

It is important to consider the multiple public spheres that exist when trying to clarify what “public engagement” implies for artists. For Habermas, the public sphere within the political realm came about as a result of being able to legislate itself, which seems to be a gloss on functioning democracy, establishing the relationship between law and public opinion. These spheres, however, remained separate and sometimes oppositional, despite their important relationship. The public sphere hinged on the possibility of universal access much as in practice the public of civil society assumed its specific form of the reading public.<sup>289</sup> The original model of the public sphere, in which public opinion stood for the dissolution of power, was eroded by

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid 49.

<sup>288</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 23.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid 81-87.

the organization of capitalism. The principle of the public sphere, critical publicity, loses its strength in its changing position: “While it penetrated more *spheres* of society, [the bourgeois public sphere] simultaneously lost its political *function*, namely: that of subjecting the affairs that it had made public to the control of a critical public.”<sup>290</sup> The idea that the public sphere might be a space in which power is suspended was lost, for Habermas, in this transition, and further eroded by the uptick in mass culture. The importance of the public is therefore in part in its criticality, in its functioning as a thinking and responsive public.

While we speak about “the public” and the creation of the public sphere, there is reason to be wary of thoughtlessly assuming these configurations can be transposed into Morocco. In 1992, Habermas foregrounds that the bourgeois’ public sphere cannot be abstracted from its history, or “transferred, ideal typically generalized, to any number of historical situations that represent formally similar constellations.”<sup>291</sup> In other words, this formulation is not meant to exist outside of its particular sociocultural constraints as a broad model of all public spheres. Rightfully so—the political and economic history of Morocco is significantly different than the same history for the English and French bourgeois. Habermas elaborates a theorization of the bourgeois public sphere of civil society within a very precise environment. The examples within the text arise primarily from England and France. He traces the constitution of this sphere through the stages of capitalism, emphasizing its roots in the eighteenth century. This presents the limitation of Habermas’s theory for this project. Following his theory, the public sphere is something that needs to be understood within its history, social structures, and changing economy. Colonialism enters *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere* based on

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid 140.

<sup>291</sup> Jürgen Habermas. “Introduction.” *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Ed., Craig Calhoun. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992). Xvii.

trade with the center, trade between “home and abroad,” but the theorization of the public sphere of the colonized never arises.<sup>292</sup> To follow a Habermasian model, I would need to trace the economic, political, and social history of Morocco, following the creation of civil society as such and the structural transformations based on that history, which is outside the purview of this dissertation.<sup>293</sup>

Within the context of Morocco, a further challenge to Habermas’s theory within the space of Morocco would be the opposition between the monarchical model and the democratic model that allows for the creation of the public sphere in civil society. Morocco is a constitutional monarchy. The king is by no means solely a figurehead, though. He is the political and religious leader of the country. King Hassan II moreover suspended parliament in 1965 under the state of emergency that was imposed up until the creation of a new constitution and parliament in 1972, as discussed at the end of this chapter. When the public sphere is so closely linked to participative government by Habermas, how does this change in a monarchy? It would be interesting in further work to study this question more fully.

Following the nuances of the multiplicity of publics and the multiple ways in which we might theorize their creation, it is particularly interesting to analyze the artists’ statement about the “exposition-manifeste.” Given the body of theory surrounding the public sphere, I do not mean to accept at face value that the public sphere that the artists aimed their work towards was contiguous with the nation or the imagined national public. However, it is important to analyze closely what precisely the artists meant by the public and what they imagined this action might do. The artists explained in *Souffles* that they wanted to “awaken the interest of [the] man [of the

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<sup>292</sup> Habermas 1989, 78.

<sup>293</sup> There has been important work done in writing this kind of history, though, particularly by Abdallah Laroui and Fadma Ait Mous.

street], his curiosity, his critical spirit, stimulate it, done so that he integrates new plastic expressions within his rhythm of life, within his daily space.”<sup>294</sup> Connecting to questions of national culture in their art works and their pedagogy at the art school, we can read in this statement – in the exhibition itself—the way that this “man of the street” is meant to encompass a nation-based everyman. This is on the one hand the responsibility to the nation that Fanon describes, but it is also more broadly an imagination of a national public. This is not the Marrakchi public, or the possible transnational public of Djemaa al-Fna, but the man of any Moroccan street. As I read it, through this action, the artists are attempting to create the national community that they are simultaneously orienting this work towards – enacting an intervention that brings awareness to a public, attempting to draw this public in, while also creating the work for this future public. For the artists, this national public seems therefore to be both in the process of creation and attached to something that is primordial. That is, this public is in the process of forming as a critical mass, but the artists also assume that it exists as a concrete reality. While this directly contradicts the theorizations of publics that I have offered thus far, it must also be understood in terms of the post-colonial claims to participation in the public.

As I broach the concept of the national public as employed by artists in the late 1960s, I am by no means looking to become an apologist for nationalism or nation-based politics. Yet neither were post-colonial Moroccan artists as they employed the concept of the nation. It is important to remain critical of the exclusions that were enacted within the framework of national culture. However, we must also avoid eliding nationalist politics with the strategic employment of a national public by these artists. Hardt and Negri point out that the concept of the nation is deployed outside of Europe among subjugated groups as a tool of change. As they argue,

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<sup>294</sup> Atalah et al. *Souffles*, 1969.

“whereas the concept of nation promotes stasis and restoration in the hands of the dominant, it is a weapon for change and revolution in the hands of the subordinated.” This progressive “subaltern nationalism” serves as a means to fight the domination of more powerful external economic and political forces as well as to fight the imposed ideology of inferiority, thereby restoring dignity to the nation. On the one hand, they warn, these barriers against external domination can equally create internal oppression, actively erasing opposition to create a line of unity. As they write, “Protection and oppression can be hard to tell apart.” They are quick to note, though, that the progressive character of subaltern nationalism exists only until the nation is effectively linked to sovereignty, when it is an imagined configuration rather than a realized sovereign state. When linked to structural power, the nation will take on the oppressive characteristics of the modern nation-state.<sup>295</sup>

Recognizing its internal repressions, it is helpful to work with this framing of the imagined post-colonial nation by its ambiguously progressive function. Much as in 1969 there was a fully realized independent Moroccan state, there was also an imagined nation. In ways that would end up being less true, there was at this point the belief that the nation could be fundamentally different. In part, this was an idea that the political structure could be different, although I want to be clear that while this different political structure is seen in the writings of intellectuals in *Souffles*, this group of artists (with the exception of Chebaa) was not speaking about political institutions. I instead want to suggest that there was more broadly at this point in Morocco a strong belief that change was possible, and that nation-based engagement was closely linked to both the notion of post-colonial national culture as well as to this belief in the possibility of change. While Hardt and Negri speak about “subaltern nationalism” outside of the

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<sup>295</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2000), 106-9.

realized state, I think that this configuration, deeply rooted in a possible national body, can also be theorized in similar terms that are more nuanced than focusing only on the heavy exclusionary mechanisms of nationalism.

The “exposition-manifeste,” despite its all-encompassing rhetoric, of course performed exclusions, not least because of the aesthetic incomprehensibility of modernism for many viewers. Part of the positioning of the exhibition comes from the subject positions of the artists who were implicated in the government only insofar as they were teachers in the municipal École des Beaux-Arts in Casablanca and that were offering a direct critique of elite spaces within nationalized political institutions. While they certainly formed an elite, at the point of the “exposition-manifeste,” the artists were attempting to imagine the role of the nation as not being continuous with the machinations of the state. In the employment of the figure of the nation in the discussion of national culture, it is an imagined subaltern nation, a nation inclusive of multiple claims, as opposed to the extant, sovereign nation. It is possible to read into the action an attempt to create a space to make claims for the non-elite to be part of this national public. This was partial, unfinished, and contained its own exclusions. Discounting the national focus, though, forces contemporary prerogatives from positions that have seen the failures of many post-colonial states, as opposed to considering the use of the concept of the nation as a form of post-colonial empowerment.

It is not clear if this was entirely successful – critiques that are surfacing now often argue that it did not actually engage people in Djemaa al-Fna.<sup>296</sup> Even at the time, the journalist that wrote about the exhibition in the *Istiqlal* daily newspaper *L’Opinion*, Mustapha Benhida, criticized it on those grounds. While he describes it as a “protest exhibition” and celebrates the

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<sup>296</sup> This is also suggested in the same section by Pieprzak mentioned earlier.

singularity of the initiative within the visual arts to attract a larger audience, he still criticized the painters for not giving what he calls the “average Moroccan” more tools to help them understand the abstract works, and accuses them of hiding behind their canvases.<sup>297</sup> The artists themselves now say that the main problem was that there was no continuity or enough follow up on these early efforts and pioneering ideas.<sup>298</sup> To their credit, beyond the work they did in public elementary and high schools and later in mental hospitals, they went on later that year to do another exhibition – including some of the same works – in the Place du 16 Novembre in Casablanca [Image 4.7]. In this second exhibition, however, rather than inciting conversation, the works were seen primarily from moving vehicles driving past them, suggesting a daily-ness to these works, to the role of art in everyday urban life. This was also followed by activities in local high schools, which again focused on moving art out of the realm of the elite towards a more broad audience.

Directly following the exhibition in Djemaa al-Fna, the left-wing magazine *Lamalif* identified the “exposition-manifeste” as the first time in Morocco that painters “dared to descend into the street and to exhibit (*exposer*), naked, before an unprepared public.”<sup>299</sup> I am hesitant to confirm that this was the first example of art “in the streets” in Morocco’s modern history. However, the tenor of this article is indicative of the rhetorical claims offered by the exhibiting artists, including the unacknowledged condescension inherent in the idea of descending into the street. Artists worked in Djemaa al-Fna in Marrakech during the Protectorate, and paintings exhibited on the walls of coffee houses. The difference here is the idea that the artists formed a

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<sup>297</sup> Mustapha Benhida, “Les peintres contestataires » exposent.” *L’Opinion*, N 1376, May 16, 1969.

<sup>298</sup> This idea runs through my interviews with Atalah (Tangier, 17 August 2010), Chebaa, Hamidi, and Belkahia (2010).

<sup>299</sup> *Lamalif*. “Il faut revaloriser et encourager l’art.” *Lamalif* 30 (May-June 1969): 48.



Image 4.7: Exhibition at the Place du 16 Novembre, Casablanca, 1969.

(Provenance of image unknown.)

rarefied group that were distinct from “the street,” that they had to “descend” to the public.

While there is such paternalism here that I am wary of attributing it to the artists, I concur it is true that part of the difference between what came before and the “exposition-manifeste” was the idea that the artists were separate from the rest of the public, and were therefore doing something for the benefit of the public.

Included alongside the three-paragraph review of the exhibition in *Lamalif* is a statement about the situation of arts in Morocco by the artists. Distinct from their statement on the exhibition printed in *Souffles*, this statement instead focuses on the precise cultural areas that need attention. The artists had never been seen as an ensemble to act as legitimate interlocutors about the problems of art in Morocco, despite their numerous attempts to form associations. Official attention had not taken into account the artists’ engagements with the fine arts institutions up until this exhibition. Similar to in other statements, the artists recommend the creation of a national council for fine arts made up of specialists, historians, critics, and artists to deal with problems including those of museums, the safeguarding of the national cultural heritage, the control of the artisanat, the preparation and actualization of artistic manifestations with a “national and international character,” and the elaboration of a politics of artistic pedagogy on all levels. They specifically target here what they consider to be the continuation of protectorate methods at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Tétouan. The council was furthermore to be charged with the elaboration and application of the arts, and, separately, the application of a politics giving more participation to artists in both public and private sectors.<sup>300</sup> In other words, for these artists, these actions go hand in hand. There is a continuity between the changing role

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<sup>300</sup> Ataalah, Mohamed, Farid Belkahia, Mohamed Chebaa, Mustapha Hafid, Mohamed Hamidi, and Mohamed Melehi. “Il faut revaloriser et encourager l’art.” *Lamalif* 30 (May-June 1969): 48-9.

of the artist within arts discourse (creating a national council to advise the government on policy) and within society at large.

Similar motions can be seen outside of professional artists, with many activities revolving around an attempt to move culture outside the hands of an elite and into daily life. At a certain moment around this same year, 1969, with exhibitions held all around the country in any sort of meeting space being consistently referenced in newspapers, culture does seem to take on a new dimension, with newspapers celebrating the attempts of non-professional artists to express this post-colonial reality as they understood it. For example, in 1969, *L'Opinion* printed an image of a painted car parked on the street [Image 4.8]. Dubbed the “hippie car,” the image was published with a text that voiced an impulse to display this car as an art object, then asked viewers to take its abstract motifs seriously, writing: “Unlike what we might think, the sides of the car show real abstract motifs.”<sup>301</sup> The clearest example of this broader shift with relation to culture to my mind was the multi-part art review on the salon of post office artists that year. It is written about in *L'Opinion* as a “lively success,” with the quality of these post office worker artists surpassing the quantity.<sup>302</sup> Another article discusses the “brilliant” reception given for the post office worker artists, and discusses the winners of awards given by each of the cultural institutes in Morocco, including Dar America, the Spanish Mission, and the Goethe Institute [Image 4.9].<sup>303</sup> The art is not modernist – the paintings are realistic portrayals of mainly well-known locations around Casablanca – and yet the support for this event by both newspapers and cultural institutions suggests a changing idea about who has the right to do art, or to see art, or what role art might play.

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<sup>301</sup> Lahlou (image). “Voiture Hippie!” *L'Opinion*, May 24, 1969.

<sup>302</sup> “Entre le Guichet et la Peinture . . . Vif Succès du Salon des Artistes-Postiers.” *L'Opinion* May 24, 1969.

<sup>303</sup> “Distribution des prix aux artistes postiers.” *L'Opinion*, May 26, 1969.



Image 4.8: Photograph by Lahlou. "Voiture Hippie!" *L'Opinion*. May 24, 1969.

Text reads: "In the last few days, this car has been capturing the attention of passers-by in Casablanca. If you look at it closely, you want to dismantle it and exhibit it. Unlike what we might think, the sides of the car show real abstract motifs. It was painted by its owner, Laachira Ahmed, leader of painting classes at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, in preparation for an exhibition of works by young artists that will be hosted by the Ministry."



Image 4.9: Photograph of the awards ceremony for post office worker artists.

*L'Opinion*. « Distribution des prix aux artistes postiers. » May 26, 1969.

## The Years of Lead and the Politics of Tradition

Writing about this era of the School of Casablanca in terms of a “culturalist engagement,” in which both form and content provided bases for a new national culture and a space to interrogate a modern form of being, Khalil M’Rabet argued that the artists concentrated on what he describes as “a cultural combat rather than a political one.”<sup>304</sup> Understood within a contemporaneous political culture, though, I have always argued instead that the line between political and cultural engagement is more ambiguous. Today, the discourse about this generation of artists working in Morocco often starts with whether this art was “political” or not. This language mirrors the artists’ own discourse from this era, questioning the line between political and cultural engagement, questioning the grounds on which engagement was possible as well as the role art itself was meant to play. Making these distinctions can sometimes seem like word play, or like a question of semantics, yet they carry real weight. My own stance is that the line between politics and culture is thin and fluid, and that cultural questions—and especially the questions of national culture—can have major political ramifications.

Up until late 1969, when the artists take a stronger position on Palestine and *Souffles* radicalizes (as discussed in Chapter Five), the profoundly political nature of these artists’ activities is often expressed in seemingly oblique terms. The artists are repeatedly claiming—using other words—their right to political visibility. Yet many of the visual artists disavowed direct political action, and they have been heavily criticized by the younger generation of artists in Morocco for their silence against widespread political repression.<sup>305</sup> To some degree, beyond

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<sup>304</sup> Khalil M’Rabet. *Peinture et identité: L’expérience marocaine*. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1987), 139-143.

<sup>305</sup> Younger artists and arts workers have always made this critique to me off the record.

the legitimate personal decision of political activeness, which I want to emphasize because it is not a given that all artists want to be politically active, this wariness of direct political action must be understood in relation to the contemporaneous political climate of Morocco.

In and of itself, the continuous deferral to questions of tradition and traditional (visual) culture within Morocco existed in a political field, both in terms of the post-colonial and Third Worldist's claims of rooting local modernism in this tradition, but also because of Moroccan politics. The concept of tradition in relationship to modernity was heavily exploited within political debates in the years following Morocco's 1956 independence. The first post-colonial leader, King Mohamed V, attempted to modernize Morocco based on, according to Zakya Daoud, a Third Worldist and pro-African orientation.<sup>306</sup> Upon his death in 1961, his son, King Hassan II, ascended to the throne. Abdallah Laroui's seminal 1974 text *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?*<sup>307</sup> argues that under Hassan II, after an interlude marked by alternative discourse, the concept of "tradition" was revived as a binary opposite to the discourse of modernism. He looks to earlier moments of what he terms "traditionalization," as in the nationalist movement in Morocco during periods of repression, primarily to ground his argument about the employment of this concept under Hassan II. He differentiates between lived tradition and the formulation of values as traditional. This traditionalization by the *makhzen*, the Moroccan politico-military elite, is for Laroui a consciously constructed process to secure the power of the extant elite in the face of threats by the political debates of modernity and nationalism. Here, tradition is actively created as a way to insure that people are focused on the unifying aspects of the past, rather than imagining alternative futures.

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<sup>306</sup> Zakya Daoud. *Les années lamalif: 1958-1988 trente ans de journalisme au Maroc*. (Rabat: Tarif Editions, 2007), 78.

<sup>307</sup> Abdallah Laroui. *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?* Trans. Diarmid Cammell. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976)

The political “traditionalization” of the country, using Laroui’s word, was used to create a narrative that would allow the repression of the “Years of Lead.” Hassan II’s regime frequently argued that they were returning to the pre-colonial system of governing the country. As Zakya Daoud recalls of this period of “retraditionalization,” as she named it, “all the modernization brought by urban nationalism since the 1930s was sanded down, and Morocco resembles more and more the paintings of Delacroix and apparently, everyone is congratulating himself.”<sup>308</sup> Daoud’s evocative image is helpful because it foregrounds the falsity of this idea of return, comparing it more to an Orientalist image of past *marocanité* than the return to the vaunted foundations of the country that Hassan II argued for. On the one hand, John Waterbury (1970) and Abdellah Hammoudi (1997) have both explored the actual importance of pre-colonial cultural and political traditions in post-colonial structures of power. Clifford Geertz goes so far as to suggest that the Protectorate did not fundamentally change these structures. He writes,

The artificiality of the Protectorate, presiding, socially aloof and culturally intramural, from the small hill in Rabat called, like an attendant ministry to a foreign court, La Résidence, as well as its brevity (though formally begun in 1912 and formally ended in 1956, it was hardly in general control of things before the early twenties and was reduced to spectatorship by Vichy and the allied invasions by the middle forties), meant that any departure it induced from the brittle personalism of Moroccan society was local, partial, and short-lived.<sup>309</sup>

These academics have argued that there is a cultural continuity that is not fundamentally ruptured by the Protectorate. None of them are presenting this in celebration of the pre-colonial; rather, they are working to understand the way that power is exerted on multiple levels in relationship to a larger history and culture.

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid 97

<sup>309</sup> Clifford Geertz. *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist*. (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1995). 32

At the same time, the gesture towards discounting the importance of the Protectorate in modern Moroccan history and governance seems a bit hasty. For all that Hassan II argued for a return to the pre-colonial roots of the culture, the repressive policies of the years of lead are closely related to Protectorate policy, particularly the *dahirs* (orders) of 29 June 1935 and of 26 July 1939, which provided the legal precedent for the incarceration of opposition under King Hassan II. Laroui, writing in 1974, argues that the contemporaneous regime of Hassan II is

not a resurgence of a pre-colonial system, but a continuation of the regime of the Protectorate. Now, this regime of the Protectorate had ‘read’ nineteenth-century Morocco and had derived from it a policy which it endeavored to keep in touch with reality by separating Moroccan society for as long as possible from the new society that colonial capitalism was creating (a dualism at every level). If in fact this continued policy is effective, this is because the new regime has maintained the socioeconomic dualism upon which it was based, and not because it has rediscovered a bogus pre-colonial substratum.<sup>310</sup>

Here, the connection to pre-colonial Morocco is that of the imagined Morocco of the colonists. Daoud’s comparison to Delacroix resonates in this reading, and rightfully so. As Edward Said argues, the importance of orientalism was primarily its weight, the closed system of knowledge that was based in colonial power structures.<sup>311</sup> I am not trying to nullify the importance of historical structures in Morocco or argue that the Protectorate wiped everything out. Yet it seems like the very ability to argue that the Protectorate period was unimportant is closely linked to the system of colonial governance that actively sought to maintain and calcify tradition in order to separate Moroccan society, glossed by the colonial power, from the French system of government. This brings to mind the evocative words of colonial functionary Maurice Tranchant

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<sup>310</sup> Laroui 39

<sup>311</sup> Edward Said. *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage, 1979)

de Lunel's<sup>312</sup> and his crystalline summation of the cultural side of Protectorate policy: "Intervene everywhere, but change nothing."<sup>313</sup> Of course, the very act of intervention changes the space. I am interested, therefore, in taking seriously the proposition that Hassan II's regime was closely linked to the system of governance used by the French Protectorate.

Laroui begins his book by formulating that the modernity prescribed for post-colonial countries by the West is a "naïve" modernity. He writes,

It is post-liberal Western culture that is conceding its modernity to Arab culture, which accepts it as a gift, effortlessly. The Arab intellectual of today who sets out to investigate these directions has, in one way or another, more or less interiorized liberal culture; therefore his sensibility and his intellect have already positively conceded what I call cultural retardation.<sup>314</sup>

This idea that Western culture has "conceded" modernity can be seen, for example, in the declaration of Moroccan independence by the French government from Paris on March 2, 1956, which explained that the 1912 treaty of Fes that had made Morocco into an official Protectorate "no longer corresponds to the requirements of modern life and can therefore no longer govern Franco-Moroccan relations."<sup>315</sup> It is curious in this declaration the role that the notion of "the modern" plays. What does "modern life" refer to here? To what life is this contrasted, that implicitly had requirements that led to colonization? We can see in such examples the importance of Laroui's theory that in this formulation, Arab culture is meant to become an apprentice or illustrator of Western modernity. In part, this is because the so-called modernity is

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<sup>312</sup> The first director of the Bureau of Fine Arts, established in 1912 under Resident-General Hubert Lyautey, Tranchant de Lunel was in charge of the preservation of historical monuments and crafts.

<sup>313</sup> Quoted by Gwyndolin Wright. *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 130.

<sup>314</sup> Laroui 9

<sup>315</sup> Qtd by Elizabeth Fernea. "Introduction to the First Edition." *Year of the Elephant: A Moroccan Woman's Journey Towards Independence*. Trans. Barbara Parmenter. (Austin, TX: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2009.) xxvi

applied only to elite culture while it is irrelevant for the socio-economic realities of the rest of society, given what Laroui sees as a rupture between intellectuals and everyone else. He finds the solution in historicism, that is, in understanding history as containing a pattern and path of development. Historicism allows for political praxis, by closing the boundary between ideology and structure. Most importantly, by using this historical understanding, and particularly a Marxist historicism, intellectuals are able to create long-term plans envisioning the future. For Laroui, though there remains a notion of dependency in relying on this Western model (Marxism), “it is transitory; what is more, it is understood. The other ideologies offer that most spurious of liberties, where the very act of repudiation enmeshes one more deeply in the trammels of dependency.”<sup>316</sup> In this praxis-based model, by rejecting Western modernity as it is conceded to Arab culture, society can actively modernize through historicist Marxism.<sup>317</sup>

In other words, for Laroui historicism becomes a way to initiate modernization as an action, rather than accepting the pre-determined outlines of modernity as it is experienced in Western culture. The importance of actively creating modernization is the equally active process of traditionalization in the *makhzen* under Hassan II. Part of the responsibility for this, according to Laroui, rests in the cultural workers and intellectuals. He calls on Arab intellectuals to radically criticize culture and tradition, simultaneously decolonizing culture and the Moroccan socio-economic reality.<sup>318</sup> Laroui saw failure in the elite’s capitulation to European demands and the moves towards increasing authoritarianism within Morocco. Furthermore, the elite retained for the most part sole ownership of both the methods of production and the products themselves. This social restructuring away from the elite would open up space for the masses to have a stake

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<sup>316</sup> Laroui 155

<sup>317</sup> Ibid 109

<sup>318</sup> Katarzyna Pieprzak. *Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 114

within this system. The counterpart to this political and economic historicist Marxism is a cultural turn towards these issues as well.

While Laroui is questioning who has the right to ownership of production from an explicitly Marxist perspective, Moroccan artists – themselves part of the debates defined by the prevailing socialist influence on the Moroccan political and cultural left—at that time can be seen as questioning who has the right to the ownership of culture as described in the section on art in the public sphere. Yet their critique of tradition is arguably not the radical critique Laroui seeks. The framework of the “exposition-manifeste” repeatedly draws upon a rhetoric of protest. Because of the centrality of these multiple levels of protest—particularly the spark of protest, against the official exhibition held in a ministry building—the action has been critiqued on numerous grounds, as shown in the previous section. As I show, these critiques, however, point to a larger question, of whether it was protest *enough*, whether the action was critical *enough*. By describing at length the political context in which these artists were working, however, I argue instead that we must see this action within a political context in which all protest was fundamentally circumscribed.

The ten years following independence were characterized by, according to Abdellah Hammoudi, “a reinforcement of the apparatus of repression, a weakening of the opposition, and the establishment of a social coalition supporting the monarchy.”<sup>319</sup> Following major riots in Casablanca in 1965, Hassan II instituted a state of emergency. The first parliament, instituted in 1962 with the second constitution, was thus disbanded until the third constitution was adopted in 1972. The state of emergency officially ended that year, though in practice it lasted through

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<sup>319</sup> Abdellah Hammoudi. *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 25.

1975.<sup>320</sup> The return to constitutional governance, though, masks the reality that it becomes particularly explicit in the 1972 constitution that the sovereign is able to make decisions and legislate outside of any constitutional restraint. This extra-constitutional legitimacy is tied to the identification in this constitution of the king as commander of the faithful, both the military head of the country and its religious authority.<sup>321</sup> As John Waterbury suggests, at the times that the king has “directly participated in the political arena,” as in times that Hassan II took on the role of prime minister as well as king (such as from 1961-1963 and from 1965-1967), he used this religious role to “render difficult any opposition to his purely political stances.”<sup>322</sup> In 1972, this dual political and religious role became concrete in titling the king “commander of the faithful.” Oppositional viewpoints thus become constrained as not just political difference but as critiques of his religious righteousness.

This period in Moroccan history is commonly called the “Years of Lead” (*les années de plomb*). Characterized by heavy repression, the exact dates of this period are undecided. Hammoudi argues that by the time the parliament was reactivated in the 1976 and 1977 elections, a new consensus had emerged based on the height of oppression and the manipulation of the Green March in the Western Sahara to forge national unity.<sup>323</sup> Thus the period effectively ended, for Hammoudi, by virtue of the disappearance of opposition. For others, like Khadija Rouissi, member of the Committee of the Families of the Disappeared, this period has not yet ended. Just as the end (or not) of the “Years of Lead” is undecided, so is the beginning point. The

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid 162, note 29.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid 13-24

<sup>322</sup> John Waterbury, *The Commander of the Faithful: The Moroccan Political Elite—A Study in Segmented Politics*. (New York: Columbia UP, 1970), 154

<sup>323</sup> Hammoudi 21

year 1965 is used as a starting point for some, based on both the institution of the state of emergency and the kidnapping of Mehdi Ben Barka.<sup>324</sup>

In January, 1959, the National Confederation of the Istiqlal party split with Istiqlal, the anti-colonial coalition and major Moroccan party. Mehdi Ben Barka received, in Waterbury's words, "most of the public credit or blame" for this break, although he was one of three leaders with Abdellah Ibrahim and Abderrahim Bou'abid. The latter two held government positions at the time and could not openly associate with the National Confederation of the Istiqlal Party. This split in and of itself was important in weakening the opposition to the crown, as Istiqlal in the years following independence was the major political force checking the monarchy.<sup>325</sup> Young militants within the National Confederation formed the autonomous party the Union Nationale des Forces Populaires (UNFP) in September 1959. Waterbury argues that the UNFP specifically sought its constituents from the people who had broken with old social patterns, attempting to recalibrate to the demands of "modern society." As he writes from the vantage point of 1970, "If Morocco is to become a modern nation, the UNFP's potential clientele, it is believed, will be preponderant in the political and economic life of the country."<sup>326</sup> This interesting connection to discourses of modernity is particularly compelling in light of Laroui's contemporaneous discussion of the simultaneous traditionalization by the monarchy. The most active UNFP members were young and French-educated, "immersed" in the politics and culture of the French left. Therefore, the UNFP, "a self-proclaimed party of the masses, has a definite communications problem with these same masses whose culture and mentality they no longer fully understand nor

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<sup>324</sup> Susan Slyomovics. *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 50

<sup>325</sup> Waterbury 188-195

<sup>326</sup> Ibid 196

respect.”<sup>327</sup> When considering this reading of the UNFP and its alienation from much of the country, it is important to situate Waterbury’s comments as published in 1970. He was therefore conducting research at the height of repression during Hassan II’s state of emergency, in the years leading up to the two failed coups in 1971 and 1972. The same year that the UNFP formed, 1959, a plot against crown prince Moulay Hassan (later Hassan II) was “discovered.”<sup>328</sup> Building on the already weakened state of the coalition of opposition force, the monarchy used this event to repress UNFP militants, just as strikes in 1960 were used to exclude the left from the government. Repression against the UNFP in particular arose again in 1963, with the discovery of another anti-monarchy plot, and Ben Barka was exiled at this point.

The assassination of Ben Barka in 1965 is linked to the government’s attempts to discredit the left. In the 1960s, Allal el-Fassi, leader of Istiqlal, began expanding a broadly defined platform of “Islamic socialism,”<sup>329</sup> though the ideology of the UNFP is more precisely linked to socialism. Vijay Prashad looks back at these events and points to the assassination of Ben Barka as representative of the disregard the Moroccan regime had for its communist parties. He connects this to such events as the 1961 assassination of Lumumba in the Congo to show broadly the treatment of communist parties by Third World regimes.<sup>330</sup> This is not completely accurate because, while Ben Barka was a significant revolutionary thinker, the UNFP was not ever a communist party, and was distinct from the Moroccan Communist Party. It is more accurate to think about the disappearance of Ben Barka in terms of the growing repression of opposition by Hassan II’s regime.

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid 214

<sup>328</sup> Hammoudi puts this in quotation marks, suggesting that its seriousness was strategically overblown by the government.

<sup>329</sup> Waterbury 192

<sup>330</sup> Vijay Prashad. *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World*. (New York: The New Press, 2007), 163

Ben Barka was disappeared in Paris on 20 October 1965, reportedly by a coalition, in the words of Susan Slyomovics, of “the French authorities, assorted French gangsters, the French and Moroccan secret services, Israel’s Mossad, and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)—a lethal cocktail of operatives representing those most committed to upholding Hassan II’s regime.” The former secret service agent Ahmed Boukhari provides information about this kidnapping and assassination in his book *Le secret* (2002), information that is coming out almost forty years after the event itself. As Boukhari tells it, Ben Barka was moved to a secret torture center in Rabat, Dar El Mokri, and his body was disposed of with the help of a CIA agent in Morocco who used a stainless-steel tank filled with acid to dissolve all physical evidence of the body. The disappearance of Ben Barka was quite notorious, because of his importance for the Moroccan left, and the complicity of western international secret services in such a tragic event. Moreover, Ben Barka’s remains were (of course, if Boukhari is correct) never found after he was kidnapped in Paris. Yet Ben Barka’s disappearance was also not an isolated incident. Boukhari suggests that approximately 13,500 forcible disappearances from 1960 to 1973 had taken place. He estimates about 350 cases per year, with huge increases during political upheaval, namely approximately 5,000 in 1963 (in which only two people appeared before a judge), and 6,000 in 1973 after an uprising in the Middle Atlas. More than 2,500 people were kidnapped and disappeared in 1969-1970, the year, that is, of the “exposition-manifeste.”

Susan Slyomovics, whose book *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco* (2005) details the history of disappearances and the role of the secret prisons under Hassan II, emphasizes the culture of fear that was created during the Years of Lead. As she writes, “The subjective experience of fear, inspired by the objective existence of sites such as Tazmamart prison, encompassed an entire population to create a context that forced many Moroccans into

silence and complicity.” Tazmamart was a French-built military barracks in remote southern Morocco that was converted into the most extreme and brutal secret detention center in the country, and its exact location was not known at the time. She argues that the culture of fear at the time and the way that Tazmamart was used as an example to the Moroccan population created a “pervasive Moroccan political and social climate of government intimidation, terror, and fear in the face of anything resembling *nidal* (political activism).”<sup>331</sup> The known existence of a place possibly filled with unknown numbers of disappeared people in an unknown location is an important counterpoint to the question of public space at this time, because its effect was so far-reaching. In her 2003 memoir *Tazmamart côté femme: Témoignage*, Rabéa Bennouna, the wife of a prisoner, writes about Tazmamart, “Even were they to distance themselves from this cursed name, the latter imposed itself on them, towards and against everything. A generation lost that a country turned into a dead-end. A generation traumatized that passed on to its descendants paranoia about everything that touches relations with the state.”<sup>332</sup> Slyomovics continually argues for a reading of this time based on the culture of fear that was created for all of the people that were not imprisoned and the effects on this wider population, as well as a deeper understanding of the enormous extent of disappearances and imprisonments.

Published information about the prison began to be available in the 1990s. Slyomovics addresses the controversy surrounding Tahar Ben Jelloun’s novel *Cette aveuglante absence de lumière*. Written from the perspective of a person imprisoned there, the novel was based on interviews with Tazmamart survivor Aziz Binebine. It was published in France in 2001 and in English translation as *This Blinding Absence of Light* in 2002. The book has been deeply

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<sup>331</sup> This historical information on the prisons, as well as the direct quotations, is drawn from Slyomovics, 49-57.

<sup>332</sup> Quoted by Slyomovics 64

criticized for capitalizing on the growing discourse against these prisons after the fact, as Ben Jelloun was never openly critical during the Years of Lead themselves. He has defended himself based on this culture of fear, pointing out the larger silences evidenced by facts such as that aside from one exception, no Moroccan politician ever raised the issue of Tazmamart in Parliament. In his words: “I was afraid. I didn’t want to confront Hassan II. I wanted to be able to come home.”<sup>333</sup>

The criticism voiced by young artists today in Morocco is one of the complicity of artists and intellectuals during this era. Yet to give perspective on the shroud of silence in Morocco, the first book that directly criticized the monarchy and the king’s brutal tactics of repression was published by a Parisian publisher, Editions Gallimard, in 1991: Gilles Perrault’s *Notre ami le roi*. Edwy Plenel, the editor managing the collection at Gallimard, recalls, “Overriding our caution and brushing aside our reservations, Gilles [Perrault] never stopped reiterating to us that the goal of this one little book was – pardon the oversimplification – to defeat the monarchy, to cause its symbolic collapse under the weight of its crimes and their disclosure.”<sup>334</sup> Plenel’s description of the monumental character of the book is confirmed in many ways in Malika Oufkir’s memoir. The eldest daughter of General Mohammed Oufkir, the Minister of the Interior that led the failed 1972 coup d’état, she was imprisoned for approximately twenty years as a punishment for her father’s crime along with the rest of her family, including her toddler brother. She writes, “We learned [that the book *Notre ami le roi* had been published] from Moroccan television and, judging from the outcry up and down the country, His Majesty was not happy with this book... It was so violently anti- the King that its effect on me was like a third coup d’état. An outsider, a

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<sup>333</sup> Quoted by Slyomovics 61

<sup>334</sup> Edwy Plenel. “Preface.” *Letter from Morocco*, Christine Daure-Serfaty. Trans. Paul Raymond Côté and Constantina Mitchell. (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2003), xv.

Frenchman to boot, had the temerity to criticize the King and to condemn, without qualms and without compromise.”<sup>335</sup> It is deeply telling of the extent of silence during this era that a single book can earnestly be described as hoping to topple the monarchy, and succeeding in shaking the foundation of the monarch’s power, solely by exposing the situation.

The silence is often attributed to the so-called complicity of intellectuals, a question that frequently surfaces in recent writing looking back at the “Years of Lead.” Shana Cohen and Larabi Jaidi suggest that, despite the myths of the development of the post-colonial nation, the Moroccan elite functioned through patronage based on loyalty and that this network created complicity. By the mid-1970s, the opposition had accepted the legitimacy of the monarchy because of this complicity.<sup>336</sup> In considering the various positions on this issue, it is important to note that Jaidi speaks from the perspective of former leadership within the Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP), a party formed as a breakaway group from the UNFP that takes the socialist agenda farther.<sup>337</sup> For Cohen and Jaidi, complicity arose because the opposition became subsumed in these financial networks of patronage. They go on to argue that the opposition returned to strength in the 1990s because there were not enough resources to distribute in order to keep this system of patronage going due to weak economic growth, despite efforts at market reform.

Hammoudi on the other hand argues that the political opposition died out in the 1970s due to the extent of oppression and the staging of unity in the Green March, a consensus he argues was still in effect at the time that the book was published (1997). Hammoudi also

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<sup>335</sup> Malika Oufkir with Michèle Fitoussi. *Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail*. Trans. Ros Schwartz. (New York: Hyperion, 1999). 270-271

<sup>336</sup> Shana Cohen and Larabi Jaidi. *Morocco: Globalization and Its Consequences*. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 58

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid* ix

identifies his own possible complicity as part of the post-colonial elite. He writes, “We were to fit the slot of the respected, learned, and privileged elite, but the disciplining of our minds and bodies was effected through that fit as well as through coercion and privilege itself.”<sup>338</sup> The idea of the complicit intellectual must be seen, in other words, in relation to both privilege (if not direct patronage) and the culture of fear promoted by state oppression.

A veiled version of the critique of complicity aimed directly at these artists can be read in the way that the younger artists are framed and have framed themselves. For example, the young artist Mustapha Akrim is identified for the 3<sup>rd</sup> AiM Arts in Marrakech Biennale (2009) as being part of a young generation of artists: “With a nuanced understanding of history and the dynamics of power, this generation searches for a new freedom in its break from the aesthetics developed in the immediate post-colonial period and after.”<sup>339</sup> Implicit in this is a rupture between the younger generation, working in full knowledge of the dynamics of power, and an older generation that presumably did not.

For some people, including Toni Maraini, there is a moment at which the cultural-political positioning of these artists changes. Maraini, in a message entitled “Message pour les peintres de l’Association al-Qna de Tétouan,” addressed to an association that held an outdoor exhibition in the Place de Feddan in Tétouan in 1986, frames the action within a genealogy of the “exposition-manifeste.” She loosely references the changes the generation of artists affiliated with the School of Casablanca underwent. Maraini writes of the School of Casablanca that they were “drunk on new projects and ideas,” pursuing a long road of ideals. She continues,

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<sup>338</sup> Hammoudi xiv

<sup>339</sup> Abdellah Karroum. “Mustapha Akrim.” *A Proposal for Articulating Works and Places: 3<sup>rd</sup> AiM International Biennale*. <http://www.works-and-places.appartement22.com/spip.php?article63> 2009.

In the midst of this path, also, if certain members stayed alive (in the way that Absâl de Hayy Ibn Yaqzan uses this in the philosophical metaphor), others on the other hand deserted, got lost, changed their route while diving into the detours of history. Staying on for about twenty years in a constant situation of creation, self-criticism, and artistic self-consciousness is not an easy thing.<sup>340</sup>

As far as I know of, this is the only instance of a member of the School of Casablanca that spoke openly about the real change in the political positioning of its members that occurred after the early-1970s. Here, Maraini attributes the change to the difficulty of maintaining the struggle.

While it is rarely discussed, artists did feel pressure from the political situation at the time. In an interview, Belkahia told me the anecdote of being called into the police station while director of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. The police had put together a dossier on one of the professors that confirmed in their eyes that the professor in question was homosexual, and they told Belkahia that the man would need to be fired. Belkahia refused on the grounds that what a professor did in his personal life was not his business, saying that he himself would resign if pushed. As he remembers it, he carried in his pocket every day a letter of resignation that he would produce whenever the municipal government or police tried to play too active a role in the school's proceedings. These are revealing anecdotes. In part, that the director of the school would feel that his integrity as an educator was so consistently threatened by the governmental maneuvering that he would carry around a letter of resignation is significant. Yet I find even more telling that the police had compiled a dossier on this professor's sexual habits and tried to use it to get the man fired. Even when not directed at political activities, it suggests a high level of surveillance directed towards these public figures.<sup>341</sup>

Wondering about the extent to which the charge of later complicity has affected the reading of the exhibition within its own moment, I offer brief thoughts on what happened in the

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<sup>340</sup> Maraini 249

<sup>341</sup> Farid Belkahia, interview by the author, Marrakech, 18 July 2012.

years leading up to the “exposition-manifeste,” as well as how people look back on this era. In other words, that many have viewed the “exposition-manifeste,” despite its proclamation as protest, as less effective in achieving its goal might be connected to the valence the action has taken after the fact. This becomes clearer in connection to the history that followed it, and the government roles that a number of the artists took, while simultaneously turning away from publically engaged practices. There is reason to understand the “exposition-manifeste” within the space of late-1960s Morocco without conflating it with what happened later (a history which will be discussed in more depth in Chapters Five and Six). Here, I want to argue that it is not possible to consider the quality of protest and particularly of publicness of the “exposition-manifeste” without taking into account the contemporaneous rise in state repression. Just as the use of “traditional” elements in the aesthetics of this artwork must be inserted into a political field that actively undertook a cultural “traditionalization,” the concept of “the public” and public engagement must be seen with a contrapuntal awareness of the space of Tazmamart and the connected histories of disappearances, imprisonment, and repression.

## **Conclusion**

The broader activities of the artists of the Ecole des Beaux Arts of Casablanca as well as their personal artistic projects together have created a cohesive whole because they were rooted in the same commitments to national culture and anti-colonialism. They also reveal the increasingly public position that the artists were taking on throughout the 1960s. I wish to argue that such actions were aimed at a national public, while simultaneously attempting to create this

national public. This deep commitment to the structure of the nation and national culture is in tension with the transnational currents of Third Worldism, and I have attempted here to map out the ways in which the local/national and transnational were articulated. The simultaneously local/national and transnational interests of these artists were fundamental to the very project of modernism for the Casablanca school artists. The discussion of the political climate of the Years of Lead should have helped to put their work in context, and clarified as well the profound political stakes of their artworks and exhibitions. It is at this point that the question of cultural/political and distinctly political comes to the front, a subject which I discuss in the chapter to come.

## CHAPTER FIVE: ART AS POLITICS: THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1967 WAR

In the immediate aftermath of the war in 1967, the francophone daily Istiqlal party newspaper *L'Opinion* pressed all Moroccans to speak out against Israel [Image 5.1]. On the front page in the right hand corner, these brief texts reached out, always to “Moroccan”<sup>342</sup>: “Moroccan, your sacrifices will guarantee the liberation of Palestine and the victory against Zionism.” “Moroccan, it is through daily struggle and your daily sacrifices that you will finish by liberating Arab Palestine from the Zionist claws.” “Moroccan, the Palestinian cause is your cause.” In French, these texts are addressed to “tu,” that is: “Marocain, c’est par la lutte quotidienne, et tes sacrifices quotidiens, que tu finiras par délivrer la Palestine arabe des griffes sionistes.” It is notable that rather than being addressed to “vous,” which might connote either a collective group (second person plural) or a formal singular, the texts use “tu,” the second person singular that is informal. It is as if being addressed to a friend or compatriot, but it is also resolutely singular – a reader cannot escape the individual nature of this call.

Nonetheless, in the words of Hassan Benaddi, a collaborator with the journal *Souffles*, in Morocco, “Palestine lived in the popular and national conscience by projection.”<sup>343</sup> Despite the personal nature of these calls for sacrifice, it seems to me that Morocco is often left out of the broader discourse about Palestine and the effects of the war of 1967. It is certainly true that

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<sup>342</sup> See boxed texts on the front pages of issues of *L'Opinion* throughout July and August 1967. I assume that these were also present in June, but the Media Archive of the National Library in Rabat does not have copies from June 1967.

<sup>343</sup> Qtd. by Kenza Sefrioui, “La Revue Souffles: 1966-1973” (Ph.D. diss., Paris IV, 2010) 110



Image 5.1: *L'Opinion*, July 1, 1967.

Caption reads: “Moroccan, your sacrifices will guarantee the liberation of Palestine and the victory against Zionism.”

Palestine has been left out of the art history of Morocco. There are, of course, reasons for both lapses – what was lived in Morocco was mainly “by projection” based on distance. In the visual arts, the responses were also limited, both in number of productions and in the brief time period in which they were made. Yet I argue in this chapter that the war of 1967 profoundly shaped both national identity and the shape of and debates about national culture. I argue here that for many artists, the question of solidarity with Palestine pushed a moment of radicalization, and a rupture between artists interested in cultural politics and politics tout court. The question of Palestine therefore affected Morocco by playing a significant role in a charged local context. Solidarity with Palestine also urged artists towards increasingly assuming an Arab identity, leading towards the pan-Arabist events, exhibitions, and associations of the 1970s. Finally, 1967 marked a significant changing point for the demographics of Morocco as the majority of the Jewish population left the country following the war, and I will end the chapter by discussing the effects of the war on artist Andre Elbaz.

### **Solidarity with Palestine and the *Souffles* Posters**

From May 12 to 16 1969, the Union of Moroccan Writers (UEM) organized “Four Days for Palestine” in Rabat. The goal was both to support Palestinian literature and to support the Palestinian cause, with an exhibition of Palestinian photographs and posters, conferences and debates in French and Arabic, and a series of films that supported Fatah, the major political force

in post-1967 Palestine founded by Yasser Arafat.<sup>344</sup> The photographs suggest a large attendance [Image 5.2], and one article in *l'Opinion* quotes one response to the conference by Abdellatif Laabi<sup>345</sup> – a member of the UEM since 1968.<sup>346</sup> During another conference, Moroccan intellectuals agreed that it was important to defend the Palestinian cause with arms as well as with the pen. The article in *l'Opinion* continues, “Moroccan literature must be – as it is – engaged in this sense.”<sup>347</sup> The same issue of *l'Opinion* includes a lengthy article about the exhibition, the “Exposition Manifeste,” discussed at length in Chapter Four, that the Casablanca School artists were holding during these same days in Djemaa al-Fna in Marrakech. The journalist, Mustapha Benhida, describes it as a “protest exhibition,” and although he celebrates it, Benhida criticizes the painters for not giving what he calls the “average Moroccan” more tools to help them understand the abstract works, and accuses them of hiding behind their canvases.<sup>348</sup>

In many ways, this issue of *L'Opinion* can be read as a telling moment for this group of artists. On the one hand, the writers’ union, with the *Souffles* editors and contributors in the audience, was agitating for both armed and cultural combat, pushing for political change. Simultaneously, the artists had left town and were in Marrakech, agitating for cultural change, and confining their protests to questions of national cultural structures and the role of national culture. Khalil M’Rabet has written about this era of the School of Casablanca in terms of a

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<sup>344</sup> “Du 12 au 16 mai, l’Union des Ecrivains du Maroc Organise : « Quatre journées palestiniennes ». ” *L’Opinion*, N 1261, May 10, 1969.

<sup>345</sup> “La conférence-débat sur la question palestinienne a suscité un grand intérêt : Lorsqu’une injustice est commise, on assiste à une réaction et chaine des opprimés.” *L’Opinion*, N 1375, May 15, 1969.

<sup>346</sup> Sefrioui 90

<sup>347</sup> “Mercredi Soir, A Dar el Fikr, Dans le Cadre Des Journées Palestiniennes: Brillant débat sur la littérature arabe et le problème palestinien.” *L’Opinion*, N 1376, May 16, 1969.

<sup>348</sup> Mustapha Benhida, “« Les peintres contestataires » exposent.” *L’Opinion*, N 1376, May 16, 1969.



Image 5.2: *L'Opinion*, May 17, 1969. Attendees at the conference “Four Days for Palestine” in Rabat organized by the Union of Moroccan Writers (UEM).

This specific meeting took place at the Mohammed V National Theatre and was organized by the Moroccan Association for Support for the Palestinian Struggle (l'Association Marocaine de Soutien à la Lutte Palestinienne)

“culturalist engagement,” in which both form and content provided bases for a new national culture and a space to interrogate a modern form of being; the artists concentrated on what he describes as “a cultural combat rather than a political one.”<sup>349</sup> Understood within a contemporaneous political culture, though, I have always argued instead that the line between political and cultural engagement is more ambiguous. And yet, this moment of solidarity with Palestine provoked a split based on the extent to which art and artists should directly engage with overtly political questions.

Unlike the writers’ union, many of the visual artists disavowed direct political action. Yet the most striking artistic response to the war of 1967 was the series of posters published by artists from the Casablanca school in the special issue of *Souffles* on Palestine in 1969, set apart from the rest of the work the artists did by virtue of the direct political engagement. The special issue on Palestine was published in the third trimester of 1969 in both French and Arabic, although it had been in the works for a year following a call for contributions. As Laabi explains, the special issue was meant to be a “contribution on the part of Maghrebi intellectuals and creators towards the clarification of the Palestinian problem, the support of the struggle for the national liberation for the Palestinian people (and this by all means and forms of expression), but above all, taking collective responsibility for the Palestinian cause.”<sup>350</sup> Again, there is an emphasis on claiming responsibility within Morocco for Palestine. The issue included analytical essays on topics such as the Palestinian resistance in relation to the global revolutionary movement,<sup>351</sup> the relationship between the crisis in the Middle East and the conflict between

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<sup>349</sup> Khalil M’Rabet. *Peinture et identité: L’expérience marocaine*. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1987), 139-143.

<sup>350</sup> Abdellatif Laabi, “Au lecteur.” *Souffles*, N 15, Trimester 3 (1969): 1-2.

<sup>351</sup> Abdelaziz Belal, “le résistance palestinienne et le mouvement révolutionnaire mondial,” *Souffles*, N 15, Trimester 3 (1969): 38-42

imperialism and the Third World<sup>352</sup>, and the relationship between Moroccan Judaism and Zionism.<sup>353</sup> The issue also included poems, documents such as the January 1969 declaration by Fatah, statements by groups including the Moroccan National Student Union (UNEM), a call for solidarity to Moroccan writers, and lengthy bibliographies for both French and Arabic titles.

This was by no means the first time the Arab-Israeli war or the Palestinian question had been mentioned in *Souffles*, and it is worth pointing out that the special issue came out two full years after the war of 1967. The Six Day War between Israel backed by the USA and other western allies and a coalition led by Egypt, Jordan, and Syria lasted from June 5 to June 10, 1967. Tensions had been mounting, particularly between Egypt and Israel, but following a large-scale surprise air attack on Egypt, Israel had a quick and decisive victory. Over the six days, Israel took control of a vast amount of Arab territories: Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, the Palestinian Gaza Strip, the Syrian Golan Heights, and the West Bank including East Jerusalem. Eugene Rogan argues that this defeat brought in a "radical new age of Arab politics," based on the "deliberate deception of the Arab public" by the state leaders and the subsequent crisis of confidence in them. Moreover, both direct and covert negotiations between Arab states and Israel stopped as the relationship hardened.<sup>354</sup>

The Six Day War is primarily framed in terms of its effects on the Arab world overall, but it also had multiple effects in Morocco specifically. Moroccan intellectual Abdallah Laroui described the post-1967 period as one of "anguished self-criticism, a searching reappraisal of

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<sup>352</sup> Mostéfa Lacheraf, "réflexions autour de la crise du moyen-orient et du conflit impérialisme-tiers-monde," *Souffles*, N 15, Trimester 3 (1969): 45-50.

<sup>353</sup> Abraham Serfaty, "le judaïsme marocain et le sionisme," *Souffles*, N 15, Trimester 3 (1969): 24-37.

<sup>354</sup> Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 333-341

postwar Arab culture and political practice.”<sup>355</sup> The challenges posed to Arab Marxists specifically, for Laroui, were felt both intra-nationally and across the Arab world. His book, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?* (1974), treats Morocco as a test case to explore questions of modernization within the interconnected Arab world, and for him 1967 is a decisive turning point. Zakya Daoud, co-founder of the leftist journal *Lamalif* (1968-1988), remembers in her memoir the sense of the Six Day War as an irremediable turn in the eyes of Moroccans. She emphasizes the shame of the defeat. While Moroccans differed in their opinions of the relative merits of negotiation and war, according to Daoud all held Zionism responsible for the catastrophe. As she tells it, in light of the war, Palestine became “a problem internal to Morocco,” utilized by Hassan II.<sup>356</sup>

In *Souffles* in 1967, Laabi addressed the Six Day War in an introductory note to Issue 6. Laabi approaches the war from the perspective of Arab and Third World solidarity. As he writes, the “blood of our generation” could not be cold in front of this war, similar to when faced with “no matter what slaughter in Vietnam, massacres in the Portuguese colonies, Apartheid and racisms, extinction of revolutionary voices that, from South America, from Africa and from Asia arise, more and more decided, to oppose the arbitrariness and the law of the jungle of a century that pretends to be humanist and civilizing.” For Laabi, “we”—an inclusive “we” that extends to all readers—were not tricked by the lies of the media, and will never be duped by a world that does not hesitate to trade one racism for another while pretending to be liberal, in large part because the wars of independence happened so recently. The war therefore serves as an occasion

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<sup>355</sup> Abdallah Laroui. *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?* Trans. Diarmid Cammell. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.) (First published in French in 1974) viii

<sup>356</sup> Zakya Daoud. *Les Années Lamalif: 1958-1988 trente ans de journalisme au Maroc*, (Casablanca: Tarik Editions, 2007), 176.

to remind “the Arab peoples as well as the ensemble of Third World countries” to be vigilant against false ideals that they do not agree to, to fight against the inertia that masks the real problems of the people in a “hagiographic somnolence.”<sup>357</sup> Critical of blind nationalism or a reverential treatment of the war, Laabi appeals to the Third World to unite against inhumanity. He situates the war within contemporaneous moments of violence throughout the Third World. His criticism can be seen in terms of the violence enacted by the war on the one hand (namely against the Arab people, because he situates it within events of brutal massacres, not actions between equal offenders), but also in connection to the lies given by Arab leaders. He does not use the word Israel or refer to religion at all. It is typical of the ideology of *Souffles* to connect this to a call for the people to rise up against the powers that act against justice. Rather than focusing on pan-Arabism or nationalism as such, Laabi seeks to invigorate readers to exercise their critical capacities against all violence committed against the Third World. Moreover, in 1969, Laabi as well as a number of other intellectuals created the “Vietnam-Palestine Committee” (Comité Viet Nam – Palestine) to defend the cause for liberation for both people. Laabi looks back on this as the most innovative intellectual and political creation that they made during this time.<sup>358</sup> I want to highlight that Palestine, for *Souffles*, on the one hand was deeply connected to pan-Arabism, and yet it stayed within a broader dialogue of Third Worldism up until this point.

Over the next two years, between the war itself and the special issue on Palestine, the question of post-1967 Palestine comes up frequently throughout *Souffles*. Laabi himself writes

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<sup>357</sup> Abdellatif Laabi, “avant-dire.” *Souffles*. N 6, Trimester 2 (1967): 3-4.

<sup>358</sup> Abdellatif Laabi, interview by author, email, August 17, 2012.

the melancholy poem “oeil juin 67.”<sup>359</sup> The Syrian poet Adonis contributed a poetic “manifesto” of self-reflexive questions and pointed critiques of Arab intellectuals and politicians. For Adonis,

The revolutionary Arab man loses reality while he latches onto theory. He ignores man and persists in his beliefs. He is wary of the citizen and glorifies the privileged. We find there a real problem without historical precedent: it is no longer so much a question of instilling in citizens a belief, an order, or a principle, so much as of persuading him that he has a homeland.

The answer to this loss of reality on the part of intellectuals and the disappointments and betrayals of Arab politicians must be found via three imperatives that Adonis lays out: liberty, creation-action, and the triumph over habit. As he writes,

The nationalist political revolution must be passed, guided by the revolution of creative thought. Creation directs actions... Today more than ever, history calls us. Art is no longer a question of aesthetics but of logics: logics of history, of society, of the universe. And in a world deprived of logic, the individual can only live a life without logic.<sup>360</sup>

The question for this generation of intellectuals is not only how to concretely respond, an increasingly pressing idea, but how to understand as a generation the betrayals and defeat, and how artists played a role in that.

The only time visual artists intervene together within the pages of *Souffles* for Palestine is in the special issue from 1969. Seven posters were realized for the issue at the invitation of Laabi<sup>361</sup>, including one by Mohammed Chebaa, which was the cover of the issue [Image 5.3]. Chebaa’s work was, at least theoretically, broadly invested in questions of politics. Valuing a conceptual project, based in both the practical and theoretical aspects of creation, Chebaa began using bright colors and disciplined forms to show that “there is not only a tragic and oppressive human condition but also a vitality that allows man to defend himself and to research possible

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<sup>359</sup> Abdellatif Laabi. “oeil juin 67.” *Souffles*, N 10-11, Trimester 2-3 (1968): 31-33.

<sup>360</sup> Adonis, “le manifeste du 5 juin 1967,” *Souffles* N 9, Trimester 1 (1968): 1-11.

<sup>361</sup> Mohammed Chebaa, interview by author, Casablanca, March 5, 2012.



Image 5.3 : *Souffles*, N 15, 1969. Cover by Mohammed Chebaa.

paths to liberation.”<sup>362</sup> This sentiment is echoed, in many ways, in the poster he did for Palestine. It was also the only one of the set of posters that was printed and distributed in large format – the others were only included as part of the journal.<sup>363</sup> The poster is metallic and resembles aluminum, almost as if the journal itself is a weapon, with a freedom fighter that is ready for combat. He is holding a rifle that is raised up, pointing up towards the title, towards the sky. In Chebaa’s words, the metallic aspect of the cover was meant to show that the broader conflict in Palestine was “not separate from modern thought, modern ways of being.” In our interview, he continued, explaining that the strong image of a fighter that is ready to go was in many ways a response to the images and ideas that were circulating in the media. “At this time, even after, most images we saw were lamenting the realities for these people, and that’s not interesting for me. Here, there is a pride, a presence. It’s an image of war and misery . . . but also glory.”<sup>364</sup>

Beyond the cover, posters were realized for the issue by Melehi, Hamidi, Abdallah Hariri, Ali Noury, Tétouan artist Saâd Ben Cheffaj, and writer Tahar Ben Jelloun. Of these seven, Chebaa, Melehi, and Hamidi were all professors at the Casablanca School of Fine Arts, and Hariri and Noury were two of their students. The artists were showcased in and involved with *Souffles*, and there was an important complicity between the writers and visual artists, all of whom were engaged in cultural politics and both debating and struggling for a national culture (as shown in Chapter Three). The posters for *Souffles*, however, were the only time that many of them ever made any direct political comment in their art. There were other posters done for the

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<sup>362</sup> Mohamed Chebaâ. “Fiches et questionnaire.” *Souffles*, no. 7-8, 2/3/4 Trimester (1967): 35-43

<sup>363</sup> Abdellatif Laabi, e-mail message to author, August 17, 2012.

<sup>364</sup> Mohammed Chebaa, interview by author, Casablanca, March 5, 2012.

journal, although these are in many ways the most strident.<sup>365</sup> Overall, these posters represent a moment of militancy, in which artists were providing a call to arms that can equally be read within the context of *Souffles* as a call to a politically engaged art.

Mohammed Melehi is one of the few artists that were involved in a more in-depth and long-term manner with graphic design. His posters were rarely political, especially as Melehi distanced himself from politics in the late 1960s, yet his multi-faceted career led him at this point towards varied disciplines, including photography (as in the photographs of the “Exposition Manifeste,” 1969) and graphic design (throughout *Souffles*). Melehi also began a cultural and literary journal, *Integral*, in 1970, and immediately after that, a printing press, Shoof (meaning “look” in Arabic). Shoof was well known particularly for the monograph about Ahmed Cherkaoui,<sup>366</sup> although it was also a vehicle that allowed Melehi to produce documentary films, books on photography and poetry, and posters.<sup>367</sup> One such poster, produced for Shoof and included in Melehi’s 1997 retrospective at Galerie Bab Rouah, reads “LA FEMME 1975” (WOMAN 1975). At the top there is a black and white photograph of a young, barebacked black girl with a doll attached to her back as if she were carrying a baby. The text is written in black on a yellow background, and between the text and photograph are purple and green waves and a

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<sup>365</sup> Abdellatif Laabi, interview by author, email August 17, 2012: Laabi describes that they began posters for a special issue of Maghrebi literature and later an issue on struggles on the African continent. This would suggest issues 10/11 (1968) and 19 (1970). While the later issue includes a new graphic design using large-scale photographs, as of Patrice Lumumba, that have often been manipulated, I have been unable to find “posters” as such, particularly in the way that they exist in issue 15 as posters commissioned by numerous artists.

<sup>366</sup> Mohammed Melehi, ed. *La peinture de Ahmed Cherkaoui*, Trans. Firmin O’Sullivan. (Casablanca: SHOOF Publications, 1976.) Includes essays by Abdelkébir Khatibi and Edmond Amran El Maleh.

<sup>367</sup> Nadine Gayet-Descendre. “Mohammed Melehi, une vie.” *Melehi* (exhibition catalog) (Rabat, Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997.) 57.

rainbow, as well as a yellow hand. The colors and pop art aspect of the work clearly situate it in the 1970s, and bring to it a brightness and enthusiasm, rather than gravity.

His poster for Palestine in *Souffles* is far more somber, and seems both less celebratory than the 1975 poster and more militant [Image 5.4]. Here, all extraneous images have been cut. The poster bears a more immediate formal relationship to his broader body of work than Chebaa's. Melehi has consistently worked with the motif of waves in his paintings, as well as in the 1975 poster. Often, the waves are written about in connection to faith (in their meditative enactment) and the movement of water. Yet this sense of peace and serenity so often connected to this visual motif in Melehi's work is not found in the waves on his poster for Palestine. Here, the waves have become flames, building up in a triangular form until they are licking at the letters at the top, printed, simply, "PALESTINE." As Melehi explains, "The flame symbolizes the awakening in the Arab world, the Palestinian revolution, the revolution in all of the countries that wanted to change, that dreamed of something else."<sup>368</sup> This is not the bright yellow hand with waves of the 1975 poster, or the meditative waves of many of his paintings. These waves, in Melehi's own words, are militant, are invested in a building revolution.

Tahar Ben Jelloun's poster seems to echo the original cover of *Souffles*, which was designed by Mohammed Melehi in cream with a black splotch in the center [Image 5.5]. Yet the messy edges of the poster that radiate out from that central motif suggest some increased violence, whether blood, as Kenza Sefrioui suggests, or a shattered surface that has been hit by a bullet. We can also read in this poster, through the visual echo of the *Souffles* cover, a conscious evocation of solidarity, changing the title and focus to Fatah [transliterated in the poster as Fath]. Ben Jelloun is primarily known as a writer, unlike the others that had created posters, all self-

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<sup>368</sup> Qtd. by Sefrioui, 111

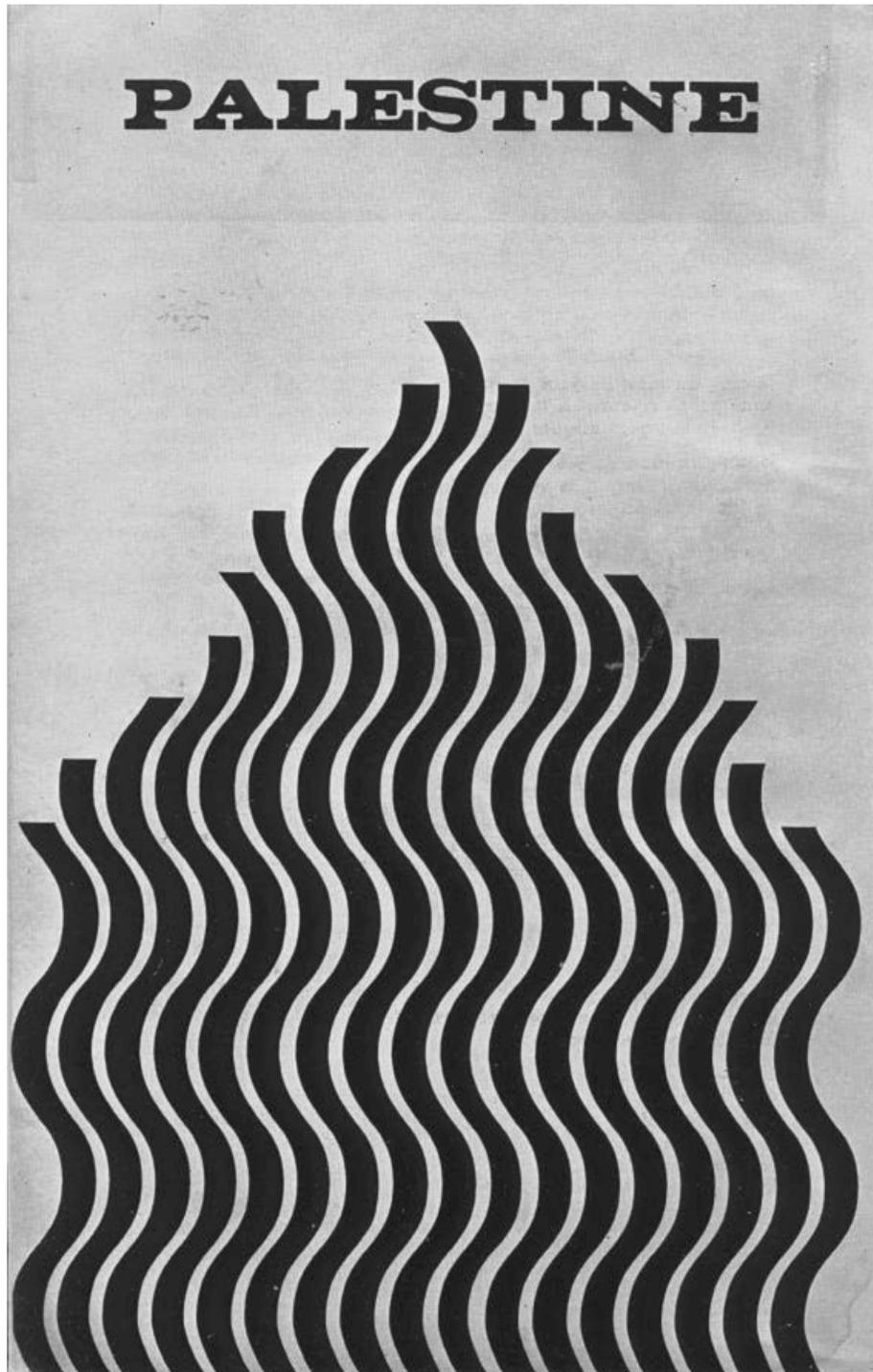


Image 5.4: *Souffles*, N 15, 1969. Mohammed Melehi.

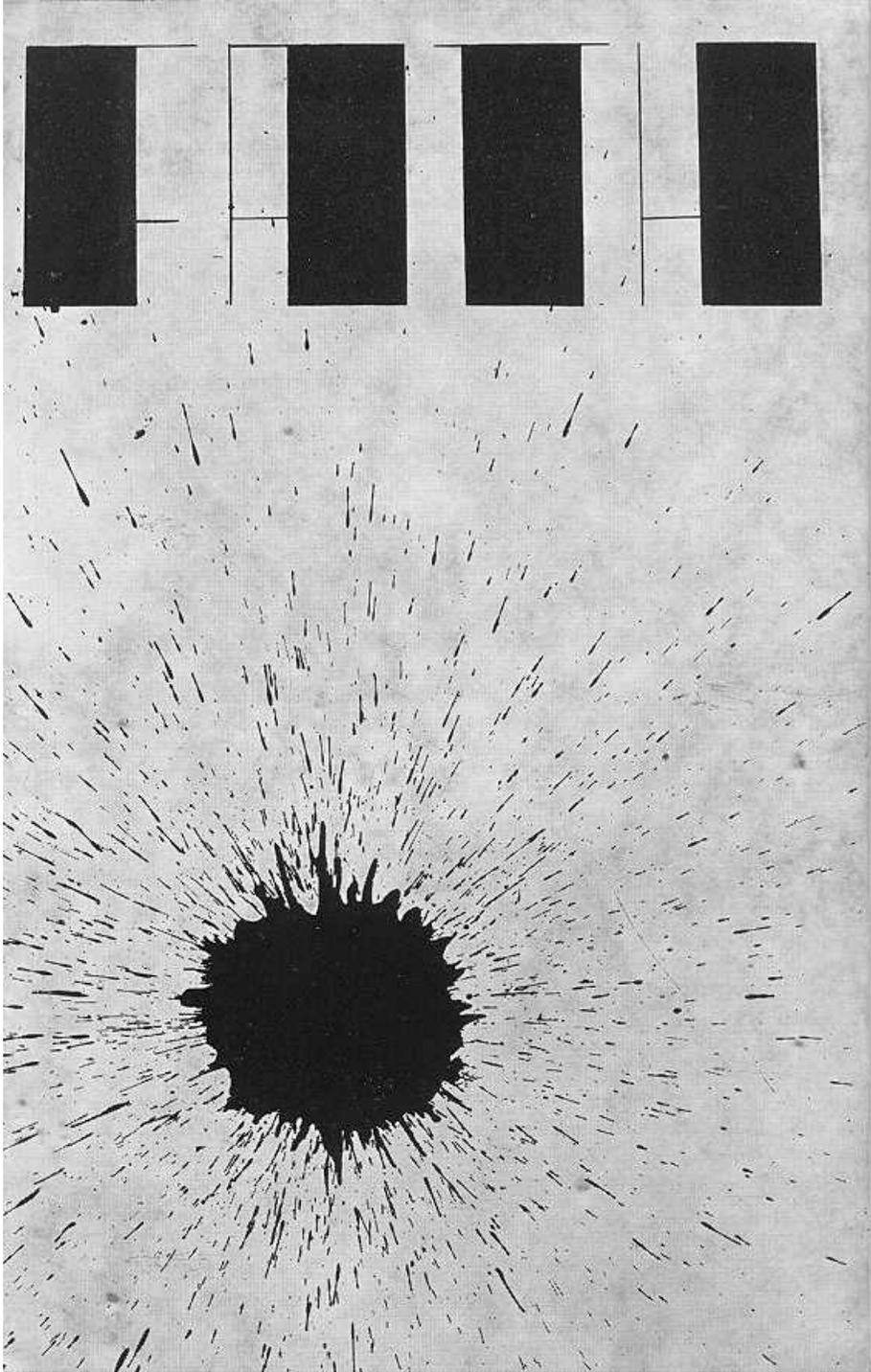


Image 5.5 : *Souffles*, N 15, 1969. Tahar Ben Jelloun

professed visual artists. He is a francophone writer that taught philosophy in Tétouan and Casablanca up until leaving Morocco in 1971 for France. He contributed to *Integral* and *Souffles*, and later won the Prix Goncourt for his 1987 novel *La Nuit Sacrée*. For the issue on Palestine, he also contributed a prose-poem “Telegram” to the issue, mimicking an actual telegram, that ends “stop palestine notre corps stop sommes tous palestiniens” – “stop Palestine our body stop are all Palestinians.”<sup>369</sup> Like this pronouncement that equates Palestine with one collective, shared body, the poster speaks to a conscious solidarity with Palestine. If *Souffles* saw itself as a major supporter of Palestine within Morocco, Fatah, in this poster, also becomes framed as a group breathing new life into the Arab world, living in a different and perhaps more immediate way the ideals that *Souffles* had been built on.

Most of the posters include the word Palestine on them, as in Hamidi’s poster, in which a hand filled in with diagonal stripes is raised underneath the word “PALESTINE” written in white [Image 5.6]. This poster is not militant in the same ways. To the contrary, the hand seems almost helpless, raised not in a fist but in an attempt to be seen, perhaps to be helped. Saad Ben Cheffaj, a professor in Tétouan that was linked with *Souffles*, has only “P” written on his poster, printed on the bottom half of the image inside of a circle, almost like a monogram as if giving the image a seal from Palestine [Image 5.7]. In the upper half of the image, three diagonal stripes cut across the page. Inside are imperfect, transparent stamps of a shape that seems to be an AK-47 rifle, as if it was dipped in ink and laid out three times in a row, with varying opacities and amounts of ink left on it. The rifles also look like lanky human limbs, or like bodies stacked one upon the next as if in individual graves. These two posters both take a less clear stance on Palestine and militant support, with Hamidi’s call for help, and Cheffaj’s image of violence.

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<sup>369</sup> Tahar Ben Jelloun, “Telegrammes.” *Souffles* N 15, Trimester 3 (1969): 110.

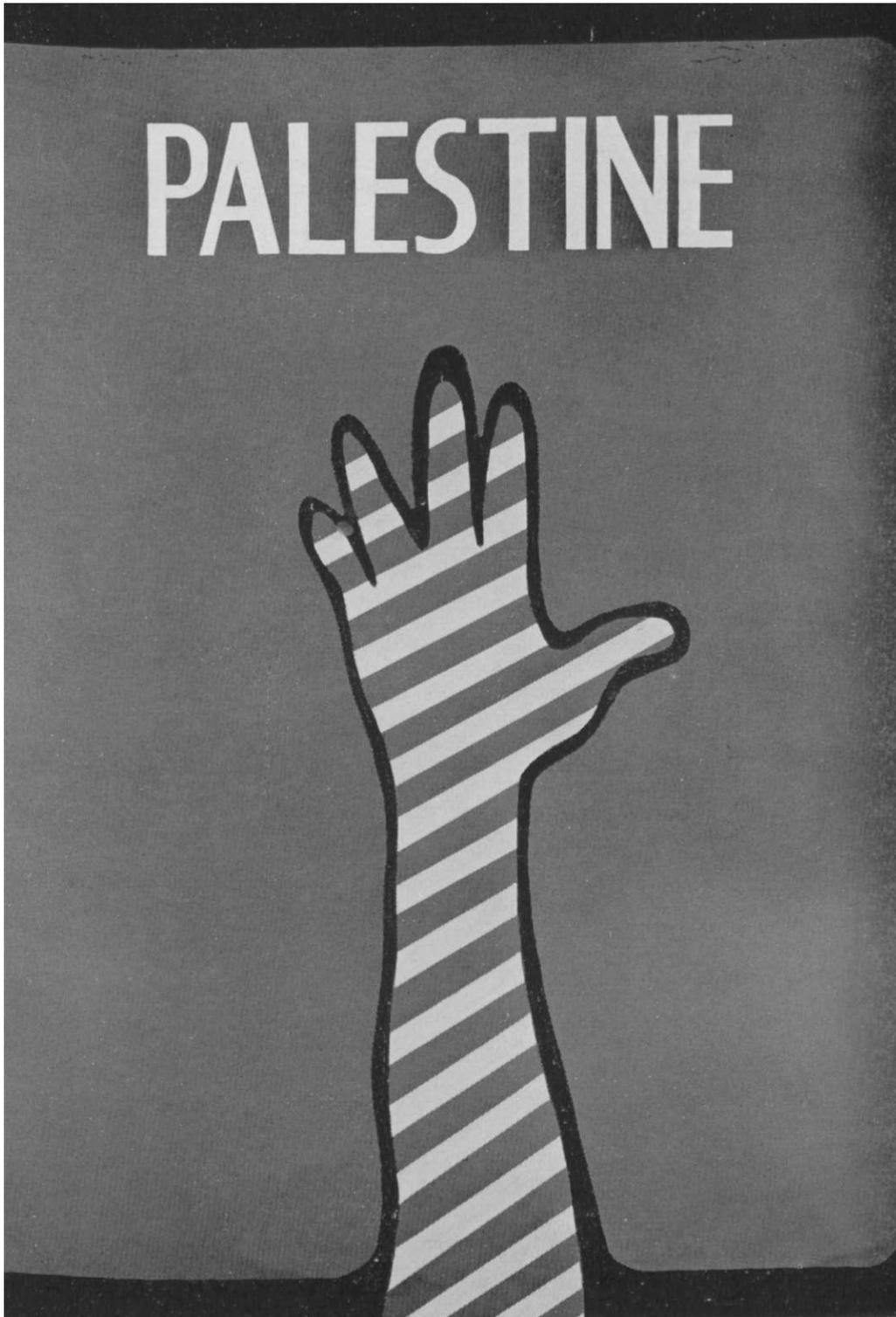


Image 5.6 : *Souffles*, N 15, 1969. Mohammed Hamidi.

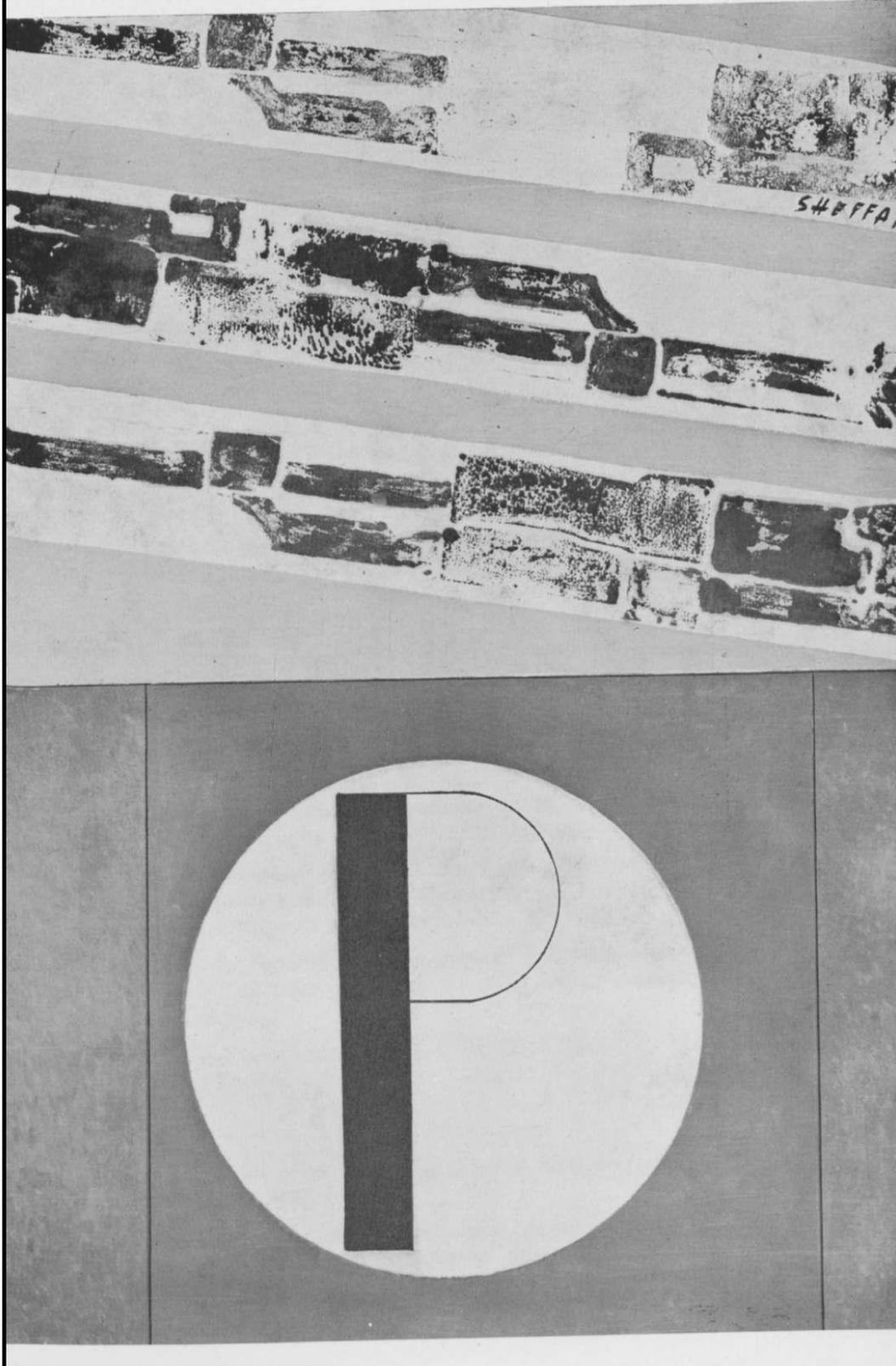


Image 5.7 : *Souffles*, N 15, 1969. Saad Ben Cheffaj.

Two students from the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux Arts contributed posters: Abdallah Hariri and Ali Noury. Noury's poster includes the most text, here in both French and Arabic [Image 5.8]. Students at the Casablanca school studied calligraphy, and the varying levels of legibility and styles of the text call to mind this special training. The French text at the bottom of the poster, written in large, squared off letters, is quite clear: "Palestine Calls Me" (Palestine M'Appelle). To the contrary, his Arabic calligraphy is highly stylized and much less legible. The words become clear to those habituated to looking at calligraphic design, although I want to emphasize that the Arabic is deliberately less easily read.<sup>370</sup> From top to bottom, the poster reads:

"The book and the arms  
Palestine  
Cry<sup>371</sup>  
In the face of  
The usurping enemy  
Palestine Calls Me"

Interestingly, here the letters themselves become part of the morphing design. At the top, the letters that form "the book and the arms" are extended and squared off, as if to create a rifle, in which the swooping letters of "Palestine" form the swooping edge of an AK-47. This rests on a curved shape that looks like an opened book. Other words are stacked one upon the next as if forming a building. The rest of the shapes – a series of circles and plunging lines, suggest simultaneously birds, a soldier, eyes, and bullet holes. Unlike the clear designs of other posters, here this is a different image of graphic design that recalls Melehi's bilingual poster for the 1966 Melehi-Chebaa-Belkahia exhibition in Rabat more than the clear perspectives of the other posters. Yet this poster plays a fascinating role in this series of images because I read it in many ways as a manifesto for the interrelation of politics and culture. The gun and the book exist

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<sup>370</sup> Thanks to Samah Hijawi and Hussein Alazaat for help in identifying the text within the poster.

<sup>371</sup> In the sense of yell, shriek

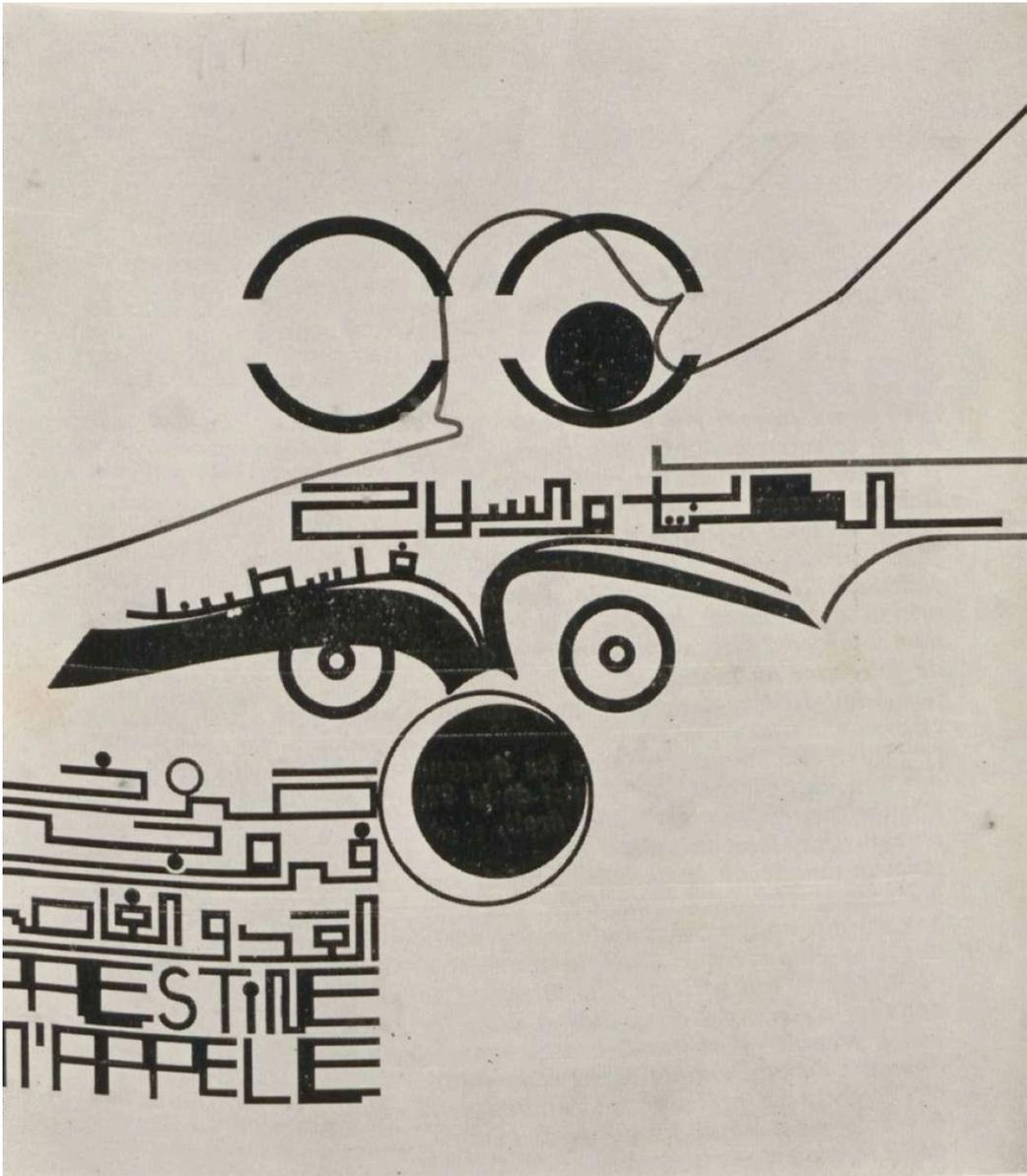


Image 5.8 : Souffles, N 15, 1969. Ali Noury.

visually together, simultaneously, with the book supporting the gun and the gun emerging from the book. They are written together: “the book and the arms.” If the poster is perhaps advocating an armed response against Israel, it is even more suggesting a politically engaged art, the “cry in the face of the usurping enemy” being the written word executed in a free hand style of calligraphy Noury was incorporating into his artistic practice. In many ways, this is thus the most militant and most direct poster of the group, despite its illegibility. It is not just in support of Palestine, but Noury here shows himself being called individually to support Palestine, with the gun or with the book. The responsibility is not just in the hands of the Palestinians that are fighting, captured in various other posters – the responsibility is also thrust upon the artist and the intellectual.

Hariri’s in contrast is much more pared down [Image 5.9]. The Kufic calligraphy (reading “Palestine” in Arabic) is not the clear-cut letters of Melehi or Hamidi, but is still easily legible. Hariri’s work up to today relies heavily on Arabic calligraphy. This trend, called *hurufiyah* (lettrism), refers to the abstraction of calligraphy in modern art, and it gained popularity throughout the Arab world in the 1970s and 1980s as a means of connecting modernism to national and pan-Arab identity.<sup>372</sup> Hariri has specifically located this turn in his own work as a response to the 1967 war, as a way of consolidating against cultural incursions.<sup>373</sup> This idea can be seen in this poster. In the rest of the image, thick black and white stripes are bifurcated, and out of them appears a man wearing an army helmet that is yelling with his mouth open, holding a rifle up and pointed towards the sky and the letters. There is not the dreaminess

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<sup>372</sup> Nada Shabout. “The Arabic Connection in Articulating North African Modernity in Art.” *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 109:3. (Summer 2010): 539.

<sup>373</sup> Abdallah Hariri, interview by the author, Rabat, Morocco, 22 July 2010.

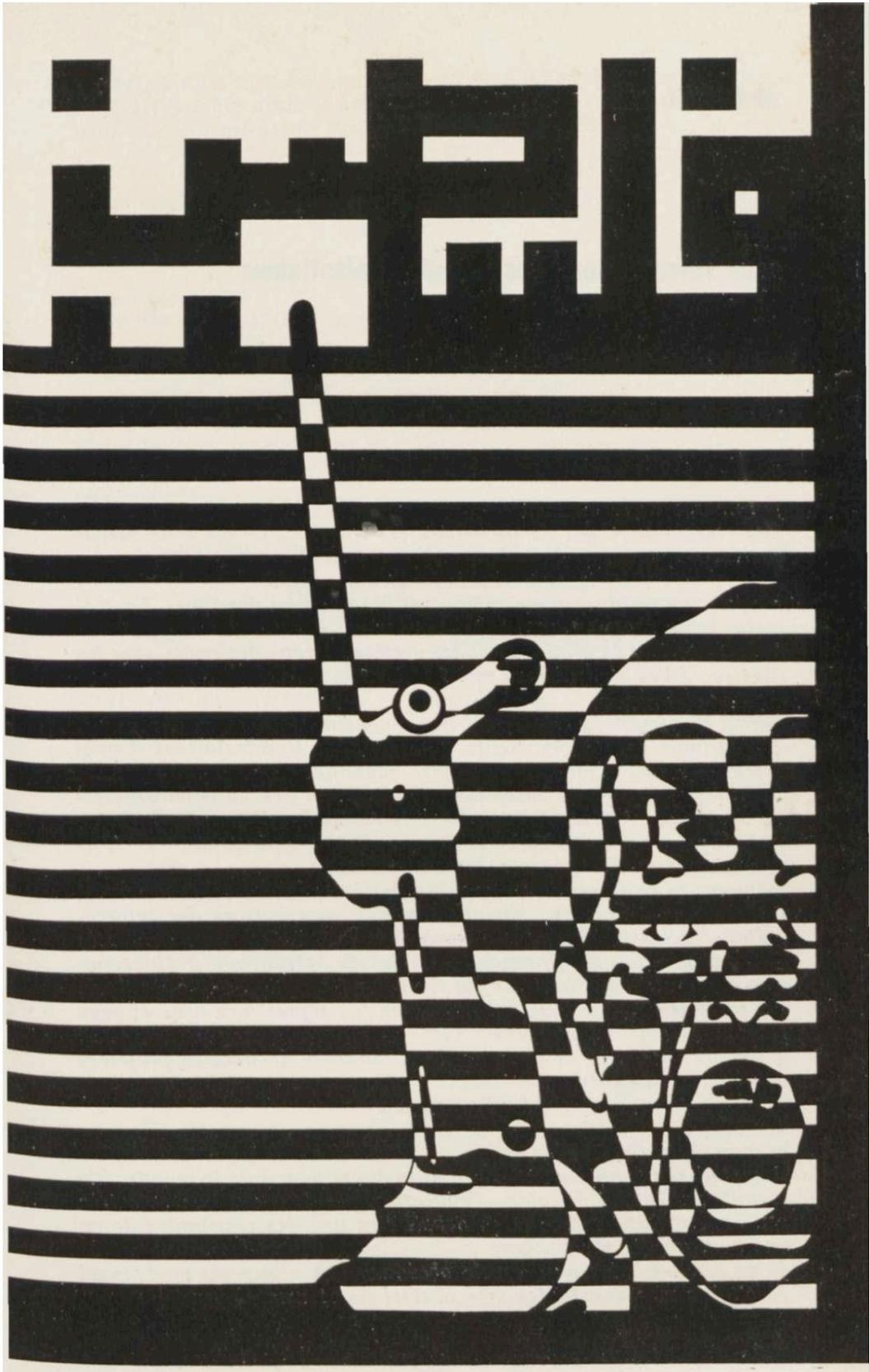


Image 5.9 : *Souffles*, N 15, 1969. Abdallah Hariri.

or multiple readings of Noury's work: here, Hariri's poster is a call to arms, the thick stripes only adding to the drama and fighting spirit of the poster.

At the end of the issue, there are two cartoons by Georges Wolinski. One is aimed at the international perception that Palestinians "did not exist" in a real way within the nation-state structured world [Image 5.10]. The cartoon therefore shows a dialogue between two people:

"-I am a Palestinian.  
-Impossible! You don't exist  
-Can you hold this for me for a second? [holding out a grenade]  
-Aie! A grenade!  
-I don't understand how someone can be afraid of something that doesn't exist  
-My problem is my existence, not yours"

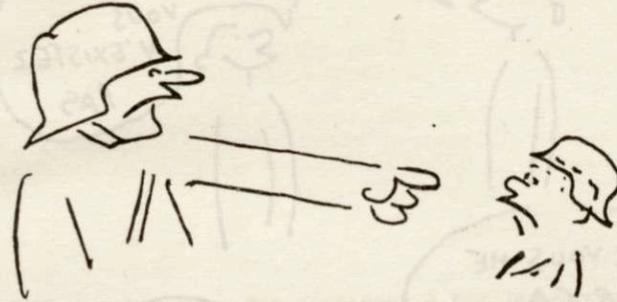
Here, Wolinski jokes about the limits of recognition for a people that is denied citizenship yet accorded such a huge amount of fear.

Both cartoons are written in French, as Georges Wolinski was a French cartoonist that was born in Tunis [Image 5.11]. During the uprising of May 1968 in Paris, he co-founded the politically engaged satirical magazine *L'Enragé*. This suggests an interesting constellation that has not been explored between Moroccan youth activism in the late 1960s and May 68 in Paris. Beyond a general sense of the global unrest of the 1960s, this may be a rich line of questioning given the close relationship between Paris and Morocco in general, as well as the high levels of mobility between Casablanca/Rabat and Paris for Moroccan artists and intellectuals at this time. I focus more on the relationship of Morocco to the Third World and to the Arab world in the late 1960s, and it is therefore outside the purview of this work to consider the ramifications in Morocco of May '68, though this constellation will be an important line to pick up especially in further considering transnational solidarities for nation-based protest within a more global view of the 1960s.

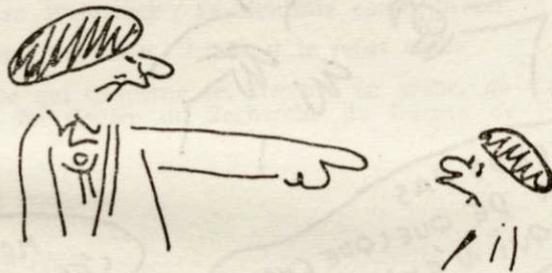


Image 5.10 : Souffles, N 15, 1969. Georges Wolinski.

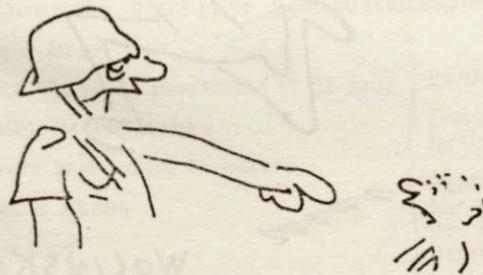
TU ES UN ALLEMAND  
TU DOIS SOUTENIR LE  
NAZISME.



TU ES UN FRANÇAIS  
TU DOIS SOUTENIR LE  
PÉTAINISME.



TU ES UN JUIF  
TU DOIS SOUTENIR  
LE SIONISME.



WOLINSKI

Image 5.11 : Souffles, N 15, 1969. Georges Wolinski.

The issue of *Souffles* is thus multi-faceted, culling contributions from intellectuals, artists, a cartoonist, and activist groups. The art and cartoons included are very politically charged and often militant, and in the case of the art, rare within the artists' oeuvres for this open political stance. The idea of soliciting posters was connected to the conception and practice of art and literature defended by both *Souffles* and the varied cultural manifestations that have been discussed in this dissertation thus far. Speaking of these posters in relation to these broader cultural currents, Laabi recently explained, "We thought that works of cultural creation needed to be – beyond their normal functions – of social use, or if you will, to be at the service of society, combats that needed to be led for social and political emancipation."<sup>374</sup> Reading through *Souffles*, the move towards politically engaged art becomes increasingly defined. Earlier issues devoted to national culture give way to the creation of the ARC (the Association de Recherche Culturelle), whose mission statement was included in 1968 (see Chapter Three) and called for anti-imperialist, engaged art. Slowly, as Laabi is describing, there ceases to be a distinction for the *Souffles* group between art and culture, instead moving only towards art that had a "social use."

Up until 1969, *Souffles* was primarily focused on cultural politics. Prior to 1969, it was not affiliated with a political party, although many members of the group were both very politically engaged and left leaning, such as Laabi and his collaborator Abraham Serfaty, both of whom had militated for the Liberation and Socialism Party (PLS), the accepted version of the former Moroccan Communist Party, before following PLS dissidents that created the radical

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<sup>374</sup> Abdellatif Laabi, interview by author, email, August 17, 2012.

group Ilal Amam.<sup>375</sup> The journal, catalyzed by the Palestinian struggle, decided to change its orientation, radicalizing as it became resolutely politically engaged and Marxist-Leninist.

Jocelyne Laabi, the wife of Abdellatif Laabi, writes in her memoir, *La Liqueur d'Aloès*, about the ambience of these days. I quote her here at length because it is such an evocative description of the turn towards increasingly militant political action, increasing interest in Communism, and the inextricable (if here, unexplored) relationship of the War of Six Days to this changing situation for *Souffles*.

June 1967 anchors *Souffles* in a combat that is more and more unmasked, blurring an already thin border, and the political meets the cultural and they become inseparable. Palestine, Vietnam, Cuba, Third Worldism, people's struggles, combat writing: the references become explicit. Our shelves are weighed down with new books, Marx, Lenin, the thin yellow Chinese editions of the works of Mao, that I begin to read like an evangelist, me that never read the others. I am seduced, enter finally into politics.

Abdellatif dives into action as if he wanted to live three times every minute of his life, devour it with a voracious energy. The little journal [*Souffles*] has become a pole in intellectual life. It taps the creators, directors, painters, writers, thinkers of Morocco, of the Maghreb, makes known those from the Third World, the aspirations and struggles of peoples, and attracts new actors: political militants, claiming to be the majority of the adherents of the ex-Moroccan Communist Party, a party that has been outlawed numerous times, numerous times resuscitated with diverse names – Liberation and Socialism Party (PLS) during those years.<sup>376</sup>

As seen in this issue, for the *Souffles* group the question of Palestine following the war of 1967 was deeply connected to a broader question of Third Worldism and transnational peoples' struggles against colonial and neo-colonial oppression. Yet it is also important to see the way in which, in Jocelyne Laabi's memoir, 1967 was a catalyst for change, linking in a way that felt impossible to unweave politics to culture, broadening their base to political militants as well as Moroccan and regional intellectuals.

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<sup>375</sup> Sefrioui 22

<sup>376</sup> Jocelyn Laabi. *La Liqueur d'Aloès : récit*. (Paris : Editions de la Différence, 2005).

Laabi addresses this move towards deliberately political engagement in the introduction to the same special issue on Palestine. He explains this change, writing that it seemed like a journal that was only literary could become a kind of luxury, given the deficiencies and limitations of the national press, as well as the emergence of creative potentiality contributing “not only to the edification of a new national culture but equally to a scientific approach to our realities and reflection on the paths of the transformation of our society.” The goal was thus to make the journal into “an adequate instrument of work, communication, and combat.”<sup>377</sup> The journal became openly engaged with the radical political group Illa al Amam. New rubrics were put into the journal based on workers’ rights and struggle. The journal began to actively combat an idea of art that took culture as its only battle, rather than engaging a broader political sphere.

The transition can be seen in a later issue of *Souffles* from 1970, which opens with a statement “For the Palestinian Revolution,” which states, “Imperialism, enemy of the Arab peoples, will never change its nature.” Imperialism and Zionism are directly linked, and a call is given to each individual to mobilize all their energy in support of the Palestinian revolution.<sup>378</sup> Maintaining the journal’s stance of transnational cultural militancy, the issue includes a rubric called “Liason,” which was meant as a platform for cultural information, and includes a new ARC manifesto alongside an ARC bulletin on youth culture in Salé (the impoverished sister-city to Rabat) and a description of the Algerian Théâtre de la Mer (Oran). The ARC “Manifesto for a People’s Culture” reflects the Marxist, militant stance of the editorial supporting the Palestinian revolution, setting the ARC against “the current paralysis of Moroccan culture” given the “repression of the initiative of popular masses and the negation of their creative potentialities” that the “general politics of the System” is based upon, and the neo-colonial domination of the

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<sup>377</sup> Abdellatif Laabi. “Au lecteur.” *Souffles* N 15 (1969): 1-2

<sup>378</sup> “Pour la révolution palestinienne.” *Souffles* N 18 (1970): 2-3

country. The ARC lists point after point under headings “WE MUST STRUGGLE,” summarizing “IN ONE WORD we must struggle so that the laboring masses take change of their role as creators of culture.”<sup>379</sup> No longer the more broad strokes of earlier associations, the ARC here positions itself directly in opposition to the “System” (perhaps referring to the economic-political elite called the *makhzen*, or more precisely the regime).

It is here that we can see the split that led to the end of the Casablanca school: the space between cultural engagement, and cultural-political engagement, or perhaps the space between individual art understood in a national context, and art aimed towards a “social use” for that nation. Chebaa was the only Casablanca School artist that pushed more and more for direct political engagement, and became the only *Souffles* representative at the school.<sup>380</sup> Belkahia had not collaborated with *Souffles* since the 1967 issue on visual arts. Following the Palestine issue, he increasingly sought to distance the *Souffles* group more decisively from the school, which had once been a major meeting point for the group.<sup>381</sup> While there are some questions about the form that this distancing took, there was by this point a clear distinction made between Belkahia as

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<sup>379</sup> Association de recherche culturelle (Rabat). “manifeste pour une culture du peuple.” *Souffles* N 18 (1970): 95-96

<sup>380</sup> Ali Noury, a student at the school, did continue to collaborate with Chebaa on the visuals and design of the journal, although I do not know at what point he graduated.

<sup>381</sup> In some accounts, at this point he ceased to allow the group to meet at the school. This is specifically asserted in the unpublished doctoral dissertation on *Souffles* by Kenza Sefrioui (Paris IV, 2010, 168) as a quotation by Mohammed Melehi: “[Belkahia avait] commencé à avoir peur. Il ne voulait plus que les réunions se tiennent à l’Ecole.” This is restated in the published book that resulted from this dissertation: “Il [Belkahia] ne veut plus y accueillir [à l’école] les réunions.” [Kenza Sefrioui, *La revue Souffles 1966-1973: Espoirs de révolution culturelle au Maroc* (Casablanca: Editions de Sirocco, 2013)]. However, both Belkahia and Hamidi denied that the group was not allowed to meet there, suggesting that they chose to meet elsewhere after losing support within the school. Laabi did not directly respond to the question, saying only that they usually met at 4, rue Pasteur, his apartment in Rabat. [Abdellatif Laabi, e-mail message to author, August 17, 2012.] Although a small point, given that this is a central point in the narrative of the end of the school, it is worth at least noting that the precise events that led up to Chebaa and Melehi leaving are remembered differently.

representative of the structure of the Ecole des Beaux Arts and the increasingly militant *Souffles* group. Melehi and Toni Maraini both stopped collaborating with *Souffles* after this issue<sup>382</sup>, disagreeing with Laabi that cultural action was a bourgeois interest, and should be placed behind direct political engagement.

According to some accounts, this rising tension about the role of politics led both Chebaa and Melehi to leave the school at the end of 1969.<sup>383</sup> Maraini has suggested that the artists abandoned the school in the midst of attempts at both what she describes as a recuperation into the government, that is, the attempt by the government to utilize the artwork to support the goals of the regime, as well as broader censorship of the artists.<sup>384</sup> After *Souffles* was shut down in 1972, along with Abdellatif Laabi, Abraham Serfaty, and other *Souffles* contributors, Chebaa was arrested and jailed. Chebaa told me he assumed his arrest was based on his activities with *Souffles*, although he was never told the reasoning for it.<sup>385</sup> Belkahia did not leave the school until 1974, but once Melehi, Maraini, and Chebaa had all left, the movement was effectively ended and the group disbanded.

My interest here is in considering the way in which support for Palestine played out in a local context, and the way in which this sense of transnational solidarity acted as a flashpoint to exacerbate existing local concerns. The question of Palestine radicalized members of *Souffles*, and yet it is important to see that members including Laabi and Serfaty had been politically engaged before, as members of the PLS, much as *Souffles* as a journal took a more radical

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<sup>382</sup> Nissaboury also left the review at this time. Laabi confirmed that this radicalization was the reason that Melehi and Nissaboury both left the group, and suggested it was the reason that *Integral* was later created. (Abdellatif Laabi, e-mail message to author, August 17, 2012.)

<sup>383</sup> Kenza Sefrioui, *La revue Souffles 1966-1973: Espoirs de révolution culturelle au Maroc* (Casablanca: Editions de Sirocco, 2013), 99.

<sup>384</sup> Maraini 118.

<sup>385</sup> Chebaa, 7 March 2012

socialist stance and became affiliated with Ilal Amam. Earlier issues of *Souffles* urged politically engaged creation, although after the special issue on Palestine artistic creation on its own terms became less valued than for its political import. The question of political engagement versus the political effects of cultural-political engagement already existed within the increasingly heavy repression of the Years of Lead (discussed in Chapter Four), much as it intensified at this moment. The articulation between transnational ideas and solidarities and the desire to focus on local concerns already existed, although it took on a new tenor. In other words, my argument is that solidarity with Palestine played a profoundly important role in Moroccan modernism because of the way that it intensified existing tensions as well as the way in which the radicalization that accompanied this solidarity played out in a local context.

As previously discussed, to some degree, beyond the legitimate personal decision of political activeness, the wariness of direct political action on the part of many artists must be understood in relation to the contemporaneous political climate of Morocco. Following major riots in Casablanca in 1965, Hassan II instituted a state of emergency. The first parliament, instituted in 1962 with the second constitution, was thus disbanded until the third constitution was adopted in 1972. The state of emergency officially ended that year, though in practice it lasted through 1975.<sup>386</sup> As discussed in Chapter Four, former Moroccan secret service agent Ahmed Boukhari suggests that there were approximately 350 forcible disappearances per year, with major increases during political upheaval. More than 2,500 people were kidnapped and disappeared in 1969-1970 alone.<sup>387</sup> That year is the year of the exhibition in Djemaa al-Fna, but

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<sup>386</sup> Susan Slymovics. *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 162, note 29.

<sup>387</sup> Slymovics 49

it is also the same year as the UEM conference, and the publishing of the issue on Palestine that prompted *Souffles* to radicalize.

Moreover, Palestine and Palestinian solidarity were not separate from this history of repression. As Chebaa explained to me, “Defending the Palestinian cause... was perceived by people as a risk of being classified as a revolutionary.” The people in charge of repressing radical and revolutionary ideas within Morocco would then put you on “the list.” As Chebaa continued, “as soon as [government or police officials] heard mention [of Palestine], they took out the revolver, as they say... They saw you with a Palestinian... and you were classed... Maybe they had a reason to, as once you were interested in Palestine, it showed you were interested in liberty, in freedom, in the right to freedom, the right of self-determination.”<sup>388</sup> Laabi confirmed this to me in a personal correspondence. As he says, “The regime could not help but see our actions on this level in a negative light because, like the majority of Arab regimes at this time, it was hostile to the Palestinian revolution.”<sup>389</sup>

In light of the stakes of engagement with the Palestinian cause, understood more broadly within the context of the Years of Lead, it becomes increasingly clear the ways in which Palestine acted as a flashpoint, activating broader debates about the relationship of art and politics. The very act of artistic creation in support of Palestine can thus be understood as a significant position that is being taken, an expansion given the gravity of the political repression on the existing debates. In comparison to the position I have described up until this point, Farid Belkahia, who did not do a poster, took a different position. In a recently published interview, discussing the legacy of *Souffles*, he said,

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<sup>388</sup> Mohammed Chebaa, interview by author, Casablanca, March 7, 2012.

<sup>389</sup> Abdellatif Laabi, e-mail message to author, August 17, 2012.

*Souffles* did not understand that when one wants to struggle against a regime, one must evaluate the situation. It's the least of things for making a strategy: evaluating one's strengths and one's means. The weapon of culture, the more it is enigmatic, the better it is. Entering into open conflict against a regime that has an army, police, prisons, it's suicide. You know what happened after ... This orientation towards suicide didn't interest me. It's not useful. It would have been better for Laabi and the others to be outside of prison than in it. I am a little angry at them, all the same, because they provoked the dispersal. The Ecole des Beaux-Arts of Casablanca was at the avant-garde of what it was doing. But unfortunately, everything has an end.<sup>390</sup>

In similar terms, Belkahia explained this idea of the role of cultural combat to me. He offered an alternative look when he explained his understanding of the positioning of cultural combat to me.<sup>391</sup> He began with his understanding of art in Eastern Bloc countries during this era, reflecting especially on his own studies in Prague, saying that what was extraordinary was the attention paid to cultural workers. As he put it, about the power of artists in a political situation like that of Prague, "At the moment that you made a 'hard' claim, the power would use their equivalent means to respond. But as long as you used culture in a very, very subtle way, where you are not yet in illegality, you can live for a long time, and you can make things evolve." I asked if there was any resonance for him in this idea with Morocco in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He confirmed, saying that this was the same positioning for artists during this era in Morocco, drawing a similarity between cultural activities under authoritarian communist governments and the regime of Hassan II. I quote Belkahia at length here, because while he is maintaining the same position, in our interview he focused more on the visual arts and how to push forward a cultural agenda in harsh political situations. Referencing the increasing support for Palestine, he said,

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<sup>390</sup> Kenza Sefrioui. "Entretiens - Farid Belkahia." *La revue Souffles 1966-1973: Espoirs de révolution culturelle au Maroc* (Casablanca: Editions de Sirocco, 2013), 335-336.

<sup>391</sup> Farid Belkahia, interview by author, Marrakech, July 18, 2012.

It's not that we were against that! We did things for Palestine. We had exhibitions, we participated. But Morocco was in an emergency, in my mind. Moroccan culture was in an emergency. So, at a certain moment, I pulled back [from *Souffles*], Melehi pulled back, and Chebaa stayed up until the moment that he was arrested. And I believe that, in conditions like that, above all, society needs artists and creators. Even if it's not an immediate need. That is to say, maybe an engineer is more important than me, because he'll give solutions to construct a road or something, ... -- but artists in the long term are very important. And I believe that artists, poets, writers, are more helpful, more efficient, outside of prison than inside it... You needed to stay in the narrow, narrow space in which you had to function, to stay legal, and you could change things.<sup>392</sup>

In other words, Belkahia confirmed to me in these interviews the contemporaneous political atmosphere of the “Years of Lead” that each artist not only witnessed, but also felt pressured by. Aside from those that were jailed, many artists have avoided such direct confirmations in their interviews with me, preferring to tell the history by a disavowal of politics.<sup>393</sup> Yet the interest in these interviews is in the distinction that he sets out of the two sides of this debate, which are often set in terms of engaging and turning away from engagement. Through Belkahia's positioning, the question becomes instead whether it is most important to lead a direct battle with the government, as in the case of *Souffles*, or whether, as he believed, it is most effective to stay inside of the narrow legal space of cultural critique and push the ideas forward slowly and obliquely. While I am not advocating for either position, Belkahia's interview allows us to approach the topic from a more nuanced point of view than is often present in the critiques of these artists, suggesting another possibility beyond that of complicity or combat.

Each person gives a different account for why the Casablanca school ended or gradually faded away. Belkahia suggested in one interview that it was the dispersal of artists. Perhaps, as he suggested to me, artists were ready to advance in their personal careers, and wanted to devote

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<sup>392</sup> Farid Belkahia, interview by author, Marrakech, July 18, 2012.

<sup>393</sup> It is unclear if this is due to genuine disinterest in politics, continued political pressure in Morocco today, or a way of changing the prevailing narrative.

time to their own work.<sup>394</sup> Perhaps the artists wanted to avoid the increasing censorship and governmental utilization of these artists while they were working in positions paid for by the city, as Maraini suggested. Perhaps it was the breaking point of theoretical stances on art and politics, the limits of personal sacrifice, and the belief in how best to move forward with the ideals they all shared. For all of these reasons, the tensions built, and the central group was disbanded in 1969 as Chebaa, Melehi, and Maraini all left the school.

This is not a new debate, whether to act inside or outside of the system. In the case of authoritarian rule during the Years of Lead, though, this is more complex: whether to stay only in the debates of culture, because it is possible to be subversive and make things happen in this narrowly legal space, or whether to advocate for broader social and political change, because it is a luxury to produce art objects disengaged from direct politics under authoritarian conditions. If the methods were different, nonetheless, all of these people now look back on this era using similar words of social and cultural emergency. If ultimately the school broke up because of the theoretical divergence on how to enact these ideas, the school still rested on shared ideals from the beginning, bringing these artists back from Europe. Together, they tried to create and support a post-colonial national culture at the intersection of transnational currents of thought through independent and interdisciplinary initiatives, each person working simultaneously teaching, creating, taking a role in artistic structures to express a new possibility of a modern Morocco.

### **The War of 1967 and the Jewish Question in Morocco**

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<sup>394</sup> Farid Belkahia, interview by author, Marrakech, July 18, 2012.

In Morocco in the late 1960s, the role of the nation within the framework of national culture exists in an interesting tension with the profoundly transnational nature of the cultural movements with which this ideology resonates. *Marocanité*, or Moroccan-ness, as such can be considered especially at this point in relation to its multiple transnational connections. These multiple identities—framed as African, Arab, Amazigh (Berber), Muslim, francophone (and, in the north, hispanophone), and, for many activists, socialist—were claimed as national, as parts of a nation-based identity, yet engaged on transnational planes. Many of these identity markers are, in other words, deeply invested in international configurations, as in the Communist International. Imazighen (the plural of Amazigh, the preferred word in Morocco to refer to the people that are also called Berbers) are historically nomadic for the most part and thus exist as a group outside the strict delineation of the nation-state, though the state has worked to limit these connections to only intra-national. The importance of the *umma* [nation] in Islam foregrounds a transnational connection. Vijay Prashad has convincingly argued for a reading of the Third World as a project and as a movement. In his book *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, Prashad traces the rise and fall of the Third World based on transnational currents of ideology, as well as the importance of unity and solidarity as a bloc.<sup>395</sup> Yet, as I have worked to show throughout this dissertation, the language employed by many cultural workers in the late 1960s, while invested in transnational debates, repeatedly comes back to a focus on the nation.

In the section, I want to problematize the framing of national culture between approximately 1967 and 1973 specifically with regard to the Jewish community in Morocco. These dates are multiply important—they are the height of the School of Casablanca after it is

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<sup>395</sup> Vijay Prashad. *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007.)

identified as such in 1966 and the ending years of the tenure of Farid Belkahia as director of the Ecole des Beaux Arts de Casablanca; they are moreover in the midst of the Years of Lead and the state of emergency instituted by Hassan II. These dates are also the years of the Six Day War and the Ramadan War/Yom Kippur War. Arab and Muslim identity became especially important in 1967 in relation to the Six Day War. Yet for all of the emphasis on Arab and Muslim identity, these years are major years in which these artists were engaging the question of national culture and their role in it.

Anthony D. Smith argues that Benedict Anderson's theorization of nationalism<sup>396</sup> leaves out important questions relevant to non-European nationalisms. He asserts that the centrality of text and discourse within Anderson's theory highlights important aspects of European nationalism, but does not capture the ways that the nation was imagined outside of Europe. He points particularly to the role of religion in public consciousness as surpassing the importance of language and literacy for many countries, especially based on differing literacy rates. Smith argues that the nature of the nation becomes almost religious, albeit with a secular appearance, as it is "felt, and felt passionately, as something very real, a concrete community, in which we may find some assurance of our own identity and even, through our descendants, of our immortality." Smith argues that whether or not the nation is imagined, it is experienced as real, including this means of almost transcending death. Yet this pseudo-religious nature of nationalism does not necessarily mean that nationalism has picked up where religion left off. As Smith continues, "It is simply not the case that all the great sacred-script communities declined and thereby made

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<sup>396</sup> *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (New York: Verso, 1983)

space for the nation.” He provides as an example the revival of Islam in states such as Pakistan, Malaysia, and Iraq that has simultaneously strengthened their national identities.<sup>397</sup>

This question of the articulation between the nation and the national religious community or communities becomes particularly important following the Six Days War. This has been a thorny issue in the context of Morocco for multiple reasons. First, religion is rarely foregrounded in the artworks themselves, or even discussed overtly in the written discourse that remains. While pan-Arabism becomes increasingly important for many Moroccan artists into the 1970s (as will be discussed in the following section), this connection is usually linked to Arab identity, not Muslim identity. Secondly, as I tried to emphasize in the previous section, the intellectual community of *Souffles* worked to struggle for Palestine from a Third Worldist and anti-imperial perspective, that also extended to Vietnam. Thirdly, it is hard if not impossible to write a history of private intentions. Particularly with regards to Judaism in Morocco, trying to write a history of exclusions of Jewish intellectuals can often veer towards a debate of “he said”/“she said.” Finally, I write this not because I am seeking to blame anyone, or to suggest a charge of anti-Semitism for individuals, or to lose sight of the primary history that I am considering, that focuses on a broader trend towards pan-Arabism and Palestinian solidarity.

Instead, I want to highlight that one of the particularities for Morocco in terms of the reverberations of the Six Days War across the Arab World had to do with the established Jewish community that existed within the country. The Six Days War profoundly changed the demographics of the country, beyond the changes that had already been set in place with the creation of Israel in 1948. Moroccan Judaism was sometimes conflated with Zionism, sometimes actively distanced from Zionism by intellectuals. Within a broader context of debates of national

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<sup>397</sup> Anthony D. Smith. *Nationalism and Modernism: A critical survey of recent theories of nations and nationalism*. (New York: Routledge, 1998): 140-141

culture within a transnational context, I think that is important to consider the possible exclusions that were therefore enacted, and the debates about what constituted national identity. Solidarity with Palestine within the context of Morocco therefore had a second layer that did not exist in the same way in the Levant. In order to consider this more precisely, I will therefore highlight the specific case of the Moroccan Jewish painter Andre Elbaz, as well as the treatment of the question of Moroccan Judaism in *Souffles*.

As described earlier, the Six Day War had multiple effects in Morocco specifically. As well as a changing ideological orientation within Morocco, the character of the national identity as well as related question had changed. According to John Waterbury (1970), the historical Moroccan Jewish community had steadily declined from approximately 255,000 at the time of the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 to less than 60,000 in 1966. He estimated that the result of the 1967 war would lead to the emigration of half of the remaining community.<sup>398</sup> The community had been an important minority in Morocco, and young Jews had actively participated in the politics of independent Morocco following their connection to the anti-colonial Istiqlal party under the Protectorate. To this day, the Jewish Museum in Casablanca, the Musée du Judaïsme Marocain, which was founded in 1997, is the only Jewish museum in the Arab world, and is devoted to the importance of the minority community within Morocco. As Waterbury explains it, the large amount of emigration was encouraged by both Zionist organizations that warned that “Muslim rule would be disastrous for the Jewish community” and the Moroccan response to Israel as an enemy state. This historical community therefore was widely depleted. In his words from the perspective of 1970, “Morocco’s Jewish ‘problem’ is in the process of self-liquidation, and despite their importance in the past and their present

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<sup>398</sup> John Waterbury. *The Commander of the Faithful: The Moroccan Political Elite—A Study in Segmented Politics* (New York: Columbia UP, 1970), 11

qualifications, Morocco's Jews will never in the future occupy an important place in the political elite."<sup>399</sup> National identity, connected to Muslim identity in the monarchy, juridical system, and political parties, therefore arguably hardened as the most significant historical religious minority group dwindled.

The question of Arab Judaism comes up with some consistency in *Souffles*. The immediate response to the Six Days War, as discussed previously, came from the perspective of Third Worldism and anti-imperialism. The issue of *Souffles* immediately following the war (No. 6) has at its center a section entitled "Albert Memmi et Nous" (Albert Memmi and Us), with a biography, an interview, and a self-portrait. Memmi is a Tunisian Jewish writer who focused particularly on the anti-colonial struggle and post-coloniality. His Jewish identity is specified in the preface to his important book *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957). Memmi writes, "How could I have permitted myself, with all my concern about personal experience, to draw a portrait of the adversary? Here is a confession I have never made before: I know the colonizer from the inside almost as well as I know the colonized." He goes on to explain that while a Tunisian citizen and therefore treated as second-class under the colonial system, for him the Jewish population actively tried to identify with the French, with the colonizer, rather than with the colonized Muslim Arab population. As he explains, "His [the Tunisian Jew's] privileges were laughable, but they were enough to make him proud and to make him hope that he was not part of the mass of Moslems [sic] which constituted the base of the pyramid."<sup>400</sup> Many Jews fought with the French in Algeria as part of this self-identification, but instead of forging solidarity with the French, Memmi chose to identify with the colonized instead.

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid 127-8

<sup>400</sup> Albert Memmi. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Trans. Howard Greenfield. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.) (First published in French in 1957.) xiii-xiv

In the *Souffles* interview, Memmi was identified multiply as Tunisian, Jewish, francophone, and living and writing in France. The questions emphasize his status as a Maghrebi writer, and frame him as an artist fighting colonialism, speaking to other Maghrebi writers and culture workers.<sup>401</sup> In his self-portrait, Memmi approaches oppression from the perspective of being Jewish and then connecting to each type of oppression, which for him includes the colonized, the black American, and the woman. As he explains, “I think today that all the oppressed resemble each other beyond their differences; that all men, all women, that want to liberate themselves, must undertake the same struggles.”<sup>402</sup> Again, a transnational solidarity is foregrounded in lieu of a unitary nationalism. Jewish identity is highlighted as one of being oppressed—and as an important Maghrebi identity. Israel is strikingly absent from the discussion.

The journal was unquestionably anti-Israel, although perhaps it is more true to say that the journal was unquestionably pro-Palestine. The discussion in the *Souffles* continually comes back to support for Palestine and the Palestinians more than critiques of Israel, an active and militant discourse rather than the removed discourse of critique. It is never a question what side the intellectuals of *Souffles* are on: the special issue on Palestine had begun seeking contributions one year before it was published, and the writers were actively involved in activities supporting Palestine. In the Palestine issue, Moroccan Judaism is actively distinguished from Zionism. Activist Abraham Serfaty, later jailed in connection to his activities with *Souffles*, poses this question in one of his contributions to the issue: “They’ll tell me, they told me, why, today, worry more about Moroccan Judaism? We can let this community be reduced to its most simple

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<sup>401</sup> Albert Memmi. “questionnaire: Albert Memmi et nous.” *Souffles* N 6, Trimester 2 (1967): 6-7

<sup>402</sup> Albert Memmi. “auto-portrait: Albert Memmi et nous.” *Souffles*. N 6, Trimester 2, (1967): 8-9

expression by the departures; the few diehards won't pose more of a problem." Instead, Serfaty suggests that this mystification of all Jews is militarist and racist, and continues the colonial enterprise of racial and ethnic distinctions. He instead paints a picture of Judaism in the Arab world as "prisoner of Zionism, that will become aware of its profound solidarity with the Arab revolution and thus contribute to shattering the latest capitalist historic enterprise to shut Jews inside a ghetto, and what a ghetto... at the global level!"<sup>403</sup> This sense of solidarity against a colonial incursion works against the equation of the sum of all Arab Jews with Zionists. That being said, there is absolutely no political position offered aside from a strict anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian line.

A similar idea that actively distinguishes Judaism and Zionism is presented in the other cartoon contributed by Georges Wolinski to that same issue, beyond the cartoon discussed above [Image 11]. In three panels, militaristic figures command a small man wearing some symbol of cultural identity: "You are a German, you must support Nazism," "You are a Frenchman, you must support Pétainism," (referring to the authoritarian leader of Vichy France), and finally "You are a Jew, you must support Zionism."<sup>404</sup> Wolinski thus places Zionism as the latest installment in a genealogy of European fascism specifically targeting Jews, rather than as the response to this same history of oppression.

Across the media response to the war to 1967 there is a real wrestling with the relationship of Judaism to Moroccan nationalism. While consistently anti-Israel, the pages of *Souffles* included repeated calls and genuine attempts to distinguish Arab Jewish identity from Zionism. Arguably, given the history of the Jewish community within Morocco, this sentiment

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<sup>403</sup> Abraham Serfaty. "le judaïsme marocain et le sionisme." *Souffles*, N 15, Trimester 3 (1969): 24-37

<sup>404</sup> Wolinski. *Souffles*. N 15, Trimester 3 (1969):126-127.

was not necessarily mirrored throughout the rest of the country. In the case of the journal *L'Opinion*, sometimes Moroccan Jews that reject Israel are used to add to their anti-Israel stance. For example, they hail the work of Serfaty in an article that attempts to refute the idea that all Moroccan Jews were complicit, saying that it is the duty of all Moroccan Jews to denounce Zionism.<sup>405</sup> They highlight the group of Moroccan Jewish intellectuals (including Serfaty) that proposed a national movement to incite Jews to activity. The article shows itself to be increasingly wary of the Jewish community overall, though. The article says that the call went out to “the Jewish community of Morocco that seems to still be watching the combat that delivers Zionism to the Arab world as spectators, and that give the impression that they want to step away from the conflict if not more, with regard to the drama that the Moroccan nation is living which this minority nonetheless is a part of.”<sup>406</sup> The paper also features a translation from its Arabic language counterpart “Al Alam” of an opinion piece distinguishing Judaism from Zionism.<sup>407</sup> That being said, the newspaper is also often dismissive of Moroccan Jews. An article about the exodus of Moroccan Jews to Israel writes that the problem is exacerbated by the reality that the “majority” of Jews that emigrated left behind debts that were not honored and taxes that had not been paid, among other problems.<sup>408</sup> Nonetheless, the question is often raised of why attempt to separate Judaism and Zionism at all, showing that there was backlash to this position.

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<sup>405</sup> “Un juif marocain déclare : La nature du Sionisme est fondamentalement agressive et raciste... Les Marocains juifs ont pour devoir de dénoncer le sionisme.” *L'Opinion*, N 753, July 8, 1967.

<sup>406</sup> “Dans un appel lancé par un groupe de marocains juifs : « L'Etat d'Israël », issu du partage impérialiste du Moyen-Orient et de la colonisation sioniste est et reste une réalité coloniale” *L'Opinion*, N 788, August 18, 1967.

<sup>407</sup> “« Al-Alam », le sionisme et le judaïsme.” *L'Opinion*. N 1378, May 18, 1969.

<sup>408</sup> “L'épouse juive d'un Marocain fuit en emmenant avec elle ses quatre enfants.” *L'Opinion*. 3 April, 1968.

This elision of Judaism and Zionism can be seen with regard to the career of Moroccan Jewish painter Andre Elbaz. According to the biography that Elbaz now offers, the noted French art critic and historian Gaston Diehl began supporting his work following the 1961 Biennale of Paris. Diehl produced an early set of monographs of Moroccan artists while French cultural attaché in the country, and his support arguably shaped the course of who became visible during this time period. Diehl invited Elbaz to do a series of exhibitions at the Instituts français throughout Morocco, and so Elbaz, who was based in France at the time, returned to Morocco. Following an exhibition at the municipal gallery Bab Rouah in Rabat, Diehl dis-invited Elbaz from continuing the series of exhibitions in Casablanca. For Elbaz, Diehl was angry because a “Moroccan painter must not sell. A Moroccan painter—the French must help him. They must be the ones purchasing his work for the Institut français.”<sup>409</sup> Elbaz’s sarcasm foregrounds the underlying power dynamics of the post-colonial relationship in the exhibition politics of early 1960s Morocco. Following this situation, he exhibited work at a gallery in Casablanca and was soon invited to teach as the first Moroccan professor of painting at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Casablanca by Belkahia, who had just been named director of the school.<sup>410</sup> His teaching appointment was not renewed beyond the academic year 1962-1963, and he was replaced without explanation by painters Mohammed Melehi and Mohammed Chebaâ as the school transitioned into what Elbaz calls a “nationalist phase.”<sup>411</sup>

Elbaz left Morocco in 1965 and a feature article in *L’Opinion* lamented the fact that, like Cherkaoui before him, Elbaz had left Morocco due to a lack of local opportunities and solid infrastructure to support artists. Cherkaoui had found a position via the Ministry of National

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<sup>409</sup> Andre Elbaz, interview by author, Casablanca, July 27, 2010.

<sup>410</sup> Andre Elbaz. “Biographie.” <http://www.andreelbaz.com/zenphoto/biographie.htm>, accessed 17 November 2014.

<sup>411</sup> Andre Elbaz, interview by the author, Casablanca, July 27, 2010

Education and became a middle school drawing teacher after finding “all the doors had been closed” in front of him. Elbaz, known according to *L’Opinion* as an “eminent painter known for the love of his country,” was also planning to leave for Paris then to London or New York. He explained that there were no organizations or structures for artists within Morocco. There were not museums, but there were also not studios where artists could work together because, according to Elbaz “I realize that there is hatred from some [artists] for the others.” He explains in the article that he had left the Casablanca school (in a different explanation than he gives today) because he found it too problematic to work in a school where the student at the end of his studies could never find employment, aside from architects. As he put it, only students that were able to find scholarships to pursue their studies in Europe would have a chance at making a living.<sup>412</sup>

In the chronology Elbaz offers on his current website, in 1966 he created a short film based on his drawings, shown in the fifth Biennale of Paris. He dedicated this film to “S.M. Mohamed V for the protection that his [Elbaz’s] community in Morocco enjoyed during World War II.”<sup>413</sup> The community that is referred to here is the Moroccan Jewish community, grounding this identity historically within Morocco, particularly in relation to Mohamed V, delineated with the respectful “S.M.” (Sa Majesté, or His Majesty). Mohamed V was celebrated as an anti-colonial icon, exiled from his country by the colonists based on his connections to nationalist forces when he was Sultan, then returning to become the first king of independent Morocco. During the colonial period of Vichy France, Mohamed V did actively work to keep the Vichy representatives from learning the identities of Moroccan Jews. Understood

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<sup>412</sup> “Après Cherkaoui... ANDRE ELBAZ quitte le Maroc pour l’Europe : « Rien n’apparaît pour les arts... ni les artistes.” *L’Opinion*. October 21, 1965.

<sup>413</sup> Elbaz “Biographie”

contemporaneously, this is an interesting gesture within a discursive field that focused on national culture, particularly given that this was created for a foreign audience. It seems to perform national unity for a French audience based especially on alliances that were strengthened under and against French colonialism. This is all the more striking because the film went on to represent France in the Festival du Court-métrage in Tours that year, adding a rich layer to the stories of nationalism imbuing this film with meaning. Given that this is a website that Elbaz is using now, this is furthermore an interesting framing within the contemporary moment, in which Elbaz has only recently returned to Morocco.

The select information offered about the years that followed 1967 until 1971, is all the more striking for what is not included given this 1966 gesture towards the pride and respect Elbaz has had for Morocco. The chronology Elbaz gives mentioned a 1967 Christmas special for children for which he was commissioned to make art by a French television station, and his 1969 marriage to Françoise, their honeymoon in Morocco, and their move to Montreal.<sup>414</sup> Included in the chronology was a visit to Greece in 1965, where Elbaz had met a community of Holocaust survivors that lost their families, which ultimately was closely connected to the vague history given of the following years. Elbaz elaborated on the importance of this in conversation, explaining that up until that point he had felt excluded from claiming Jewish identity, as if by avoiding persecution during World War II he was not truly Jewish. As he says, “In Paris, the French said, ‘You, you’re not Jews, you’re Arabs, but not considered as Jews, because you didn’t suffer.’” In comparison, the group of Jews he met in Greece said that it was a blessing of God that Moroccan Jews had avoided persecution based on the protection of Mohammed V.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Andre Elbaz, interview by author, Casablanca, July 27, 2010.

Following this experience in Greece, Elbaz included a yellow star in a self-portrait that he exhibited in Morocco. The Moroccan press began framing Elbaz as a Zionist, based on what he terms a “misunderstanding.” While for him, he included the Star of David as a reference to the mourning of the Holocaust, as a sign of his identity as Moroccan and Jewish, many viewers took it as a provocation meant to recall only the star on the Israeli flag. As he says now, “In painting it, I was thinking of these Jews, and of the fear each one must have felt in front of armed Nazis. In showing it, I was not making a political act, I was unaware of it as a historical act, and even less an act of Zionism.”<sup>416</sup> Jewish and Moroccan identities became incompatible here in the contemporaneous political climate, as the possible identity positions were firmly transferred to either Moroccan national identity, read primarily in connection to Islam, or Zionist identity.

Thus, in 1967, Elbaz was in Morocco in June, and despite what he called an “ambiance that was hardly favorable for exhibitions,” he was scheduled to have an exhibition open at the Théâtre Mohammed V on the second day of the Six Day War, that is, meant to open June 6, 1967. The day before the opening, in the hours leading up to the start of the war, Elbaz remembered “a huge tension reigned over Morocco.”<sup>417</sup> The Minister of the Interior, General Mohamed Oufkir, called the director of the theater the next day to recommend that the opening not happen out of concern for the probable negative repercussions. Elbaz recalls this as a great stroke of luck, as “one of the best and wisest pieces of advice that was ever given to me.”<sup>418</sup> Up until that point, Elbaz was consistently returning to Morocco to show whatever canvases he was working on at that time. Although it had arguably been his choice to leave Morocco to begin with, this was a decisive moment in the career that he was conscious to still maintain locally.

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<sup>416</sup> Andre Elbaz, interview by author, email, May 9, 2011.

<sup>417</sup> Andre Elbaz. *Tu en verras de toutes les couleurs...*, ed. Abdelkader Retnani. (Casablanca: Editions La Croisée des Chemins, 2010), 104.

<sup>418</sup> Andre Elbaz, email message to author, May 9, 2011.

After 1967, in light of the response against his work and the exclusionary structures of national identity that made Moroccan and Jewish (glossed as Zionist) identities seem mutually exclusive to him, Elbaz did not exhibit work again in Morocco until 2004.

This direct interaction between Oufkir and Elbaz foregrounds an important part of this story, that the war of 1967 took place in the midst of the Years of Lead, the time period of King Hassan II's regime marked by heavy repression, imprisonment, and disappearances. General Oufkir was originally an officer trained by the French army that was transferred from the protectorate intelligence services to the post-colonial palace, an interesting continuation of colonial security structures. Oufkir was Chief of Police and then became Minister of the Interior from 1964 until the summer of 1971. In 1959, Crown Prince Moulay Hassan (later King Hassan II) and Oufkir brutally quelled December 1958-February 1959 uprisings of Riffians in northern Morocco with an army of 15,000 men. As anthropologist Susan Slyomovics writes, "both [Moulay Hassan and Oufkir are] held responsible for napalmed villages, unknown numbers killed (estimates are between two and eight thousand), many arrested and the property of notables confiscated."<sup>419</sup> Slyomovics further describes Oufkir once he became minister of the interior as a "brutal and much-feared" public figure.<sup>420</sup> In this role, for example, Oufkir was one of the leaders of the bloody repression of the 1965 Casablanca riots. These riots led to the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of parliament. Oufkir also played a major role in the disappearance of socialist leader Mehdi Ben Barka that same year in Paris. As anthropologist Abdellah Hammoudi writes, "At that point, Oufkir became the strong man of the

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<sup>419</sup> Susan Slyomovics. *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 50

<sup>420</sup> Ibid 54

regime: the military institution was at the center of political life in the country.”<sup>421</sup> This is a significant charge, given the intensity of repression during the years that Oufkir held the role of Minister of the Interior. Oufkir then held the role of Minister of Defense from 1971 to 1972,<sup>422</sup> at which point the regime declared that he had committed suicide, though he was more likely killed. Oufkir led the attempted coup d’état in which he tried to assassinate the king’s Boeing airplane at the Kenitra airfield. As mentioned in Chapter Four, his wife and six children were then disappeared for fifteen years in secret prisons and another four years under house arrest, to be released in 1991, after almost twenty years without any information about their whereabouts, and were prohibited from leaving the country. Given the centrality of General Oufkir’s role at this point in Moroccan history, it is significant that he was the person that individually counseled the gallery to not hold Elbaz’s show. Oufkir was known and, in the words of his daughter Malika Oufkir, “respected” in Israel “because he enabled thousands of Moroccan Jews to emigrate to Israel after the Six Day War.”<sup>423</sup> This was not necessarily a popular move in the rest of Morocco, given the intensity of anti-Zionist feeling within the country, yet in Malika Oufkir’s words, it becomes one of his kindest actions. While not directly connected, beyond Oufkir’s bloody repression of opposition and the ambiguous role that he took in helping Jews to leave (or pushing them to), it is nonetheless remarkable that Elbaz characterizes such an encounter as the wisest advice he has ever received.

With the knowledge of these contemporaneous events occurring in Morocco, I want to return to the “fiches et questionnaires” on national culture in *Souffles* in late 1967, the same year

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<sup>421</sup> Abdellah Hammoudi. *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 27

<sup>422</sup> Ibid 165, n. 56

<sup>423</sup> Note that in the book the war is incorrectly placed in 1968. Malika Oufkir with Michèle Fitoussi. *Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail*. Trans. Ros Shwartz. New York: Hyperion, 1999. 262.

as the Six Days War. Issue 6, published in the second trimester of 1967, dealt with the war and Jewish identity without ever mentioning Israel. The single issue 7-8, published in the third trimester, focused on the way that Moroccan painters were building a national culture. The questionnaire was given to the most prominent Moroccan artists of the time. The best-known members of the first generation of post-colonial Moroccan painters were Farid Belkahia, Jilali Gharbaoui, Ahmed Cherkaoui, and Andre Elbaz, along with, a few years later, Mohammed Melehi and Mohammed Chebaa. Belkahia and Gharbaoui both responded to the “fiches et questionnaires” in *Souffles*, and art historian Toni Maraini reflected on Cherkaoui’s work in relationship to the questions following his very recent death. The other artists included were Mohammed Ataalah, Mohammed Bennani, Mohammed Chebaâ, Mohammed Hamidi, Mohammed Melehi, and Saad Ben Cheffaj. The selection of participants included in the questionnaire was a reflection of who were considered to be the most significant Moroccan artists, and therefore the absence of a response from Andre Elbaz is striking.

The omission of Elbaz was self-imposed, however. At the bottom of the questionnaire, there is a note that the survey was sent to Elbaz but he never responded. From Elbaz’s perspective, he received the questionnaire and felt that as a Moroccan painter that was continually moving from Paris to London, Montreal, New York, and beyond, he had not been following “what was actually happening in art and the politics of intellectuals.” He goes on, reflecting on his choice to not participate from a distance of almost 45 years. As he said, “I think that I must have had the response of a painter that tells himself, I am a very new painter, I am in the midst of learning my craft, and the questionnaire, I think, I must have taken it very

seriously.”<sup>424</sup> He does not connect it to the experience of the exhibition that did not happen a few months before or his framing within the press.

It would be impossible to reconstruct precisely or pin down the rationale for Elbaz’s choice to not respond to the questionnaire. At the point of the emails exchanges I had with Elbaz in 2011, he had been exhibiting in Morocco for seven years after the lengthy hiatus of almost forty years in which he did not show his art within the country. He had a major retrospective in 2010 simultaneously at both of the spaces owned by the Fondation ONA, the Villas des Arts of Casablanca (2 November-30 December) and Rabat (9 November-30 December). In the absence of significant national artistic structures, given that the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art did not open until late 2014, the Villas des Arts have major spaces within the country. The first Villa des Arts opened in Casablanca in 1999, and the second in Rabat in 2006. The Casablanca space was curated first by Sylvia Belhassan, who had been one of the leading forces of the modernist gallery L’Atelier (discussed at greater length in Chapter Six) and who, in this role, was interested in showing cutting-edge contemporary art from Morocco as well as from international artists. ONA is a holding company that had originally wanted their artistic space to reflect (or at least project) the hybrid global identity of the company itself. The royal family is a major shareholder, and ONA is closely linked to national economy and politics. The company changed tactics in its exhibition space, and exerted pressure upon Belhassan to show only conservative Moroccan-based exhibitions that emphasized instead the nationalist image of the corporation. In 2004, this changing ideology and increased pressure prompted Belhassan’s resignation.<sup>425</sup> It is outside the scope of this chapter to explore the ramifications of Elbaz’s major

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<sup>424</sup> Andre Elbaz, email message to author, May 9, 2011.

<sup>425</sup> Katarzyna Pieprzak. *Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 57-59.

retrospective in a space increasingly devoted to staging nationalism and contemporary national identity. It might provisionally suggest the ways that the active negotiations of *marocanité* by many activist groups in recent years have opened up some possibilities of a less unitary or singular national identity, although I am wary of attributing a liberatory ideology to the Fondation ONA.

This is important to point out, however, because Elbaz's explanation of why he chose to not respond to the *Souffles* questionnaire is coming after multiple years of being accepted again as an artist within Morocco, culminating in the major honor and recognition of this dual retrospective at a space invested in showing Moroccan national identity. This is a radically different position to be considering this questionnaire from than in 1967, following what Elbaz has described as the sense of no longer belonging or being excluded from the country.

Elbaz in his contemporary artistic practice seems to be digesting the sum of his work and life experience. Beginning in 2002, he started creating *Urns*, glass canisters of many sizes filled with ripped up shreds of his past works and installed all together. Since 2007, he has been using fragments of former works to create *Paysages éclatés* (*Exploded landscapes*). These latter wall hanging are created both through the collage of ripped up pieces and by unfining other sections, to recycle the fiber and reconstitute it as a new cloth. These works are generative, creating something new to respond to the contemporary moment. Yet I think that it is possible to read something revisionist in them as well. They exist simultaneously as new works and as a way of coming to terms with the past, not as it was, but as it seen from this moment.

I therefore think that the explanation Elbaz offers for his self-omission from the *Souffles* questionnaire, that is, of being young and disconnected from the Moroccan scene, does not preclude a reckoning with the work that is done by his absence. The larger issue of the journal

was devoted to Moroccan visual arts, and a central part of the issue was the questionnaire. Questions included how the artists situated themselves in relation to the “Moroccan plastic tradition” and how they felt they contributed to the elaboration of a national culture. In the responses to the questionnaires, religion comes up very rarely. Hamidi references Aid el-Kbir in passing as an important national cultural event.<sup>426</sup> Melehi discusses studying sculpture through crucifixes, because they were the main sculptures available to him during his study at the Académies in Seville and Madrid. He escaped this environment “not from religious prejudice” but because he was searching for physical action in the arts, rather than the static crucifixes he saw. He goes on to explain that he was able to connect to his own culture by its resonance with Zen (Buddhism), in vogue in Italy when he arrived to study there. He is the one of the artists that at this time was most willing to broadly sum up Moroccan culture (“Our culture is ultimately not a culture of sorrow. We don’t have a sense of the macabre or an obsession with death. The sense of culpability doesn’t exist here.”). As part of this, Melehi is the only artist to explicitly link the tradition of Moroccan art to that of Islamic art and “Arabo-Muslim culture.”<sup>427</sup> Given the importance of Sufism for Melehi’s work, it makes sense that he would be the one to discuss religion the most. Judaism comes up once, though indirectly. Belkahia argues that oppression is a permanent human condition. He links his experience of living in Morocco from 1950-52, thereby witnessing in the struggle for independence “the events of violence and repression for which Morocco was the theatre,” with a visit eight years later to Auschwitz.<sup>428</sup> This latter reference resonates with the position most consistently taken in *Souffles* of solidarity among oppressed peoples, more than as a comment on religion as such.

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<sup>426</sup> Mohammed Hamidi. “fiches et questionnaires.” *Souffles* N 7-8, Trimester 3-4 (1967): 48-52.

<sup>427</sup> Mohammed Melehi. “fiches et questionnaire.” *Souffles* N 7-8, Trimester 3-4 (1967): 56-68

<sup>428</sup> Farid Belkahia. “Fiches et questionnaire.” *Souffles* N 7-8, Trimester 3-4 (1967): 25-31

For whatever reason Elbaz did not feel empowered to respond to the *Souffles* questionnaire, the absence of such a major artist—and the only prominent Moroccan Jewish artist at the time—remains important. If nothing else, there is a consonance between the omission of Elbaz's voice and the reality that in the space of about twenty years, the most significant religious minority in the country decreased to one-eighth its earlier size. The attempt to create a singular Moroccan identity is necessarily closely linked to Islam, in part given not only the king's dual role as both military and political chief and commander of the faithful but the Islam-based legislation that exists for family law. I do not think it possible to fully understand the conversation about national culture—and its relationship to the performance and creation of national identity—in 1967 without considering the ramifications of the Six Day War. The simultaneous dwindling of the Jewish community and the turning towards (Muslim) Arab identity in response to the major defeats in the war necessarily affects how national identity would be expressed and experienced at that time.

## **Conclusion**

A challenge of trying to reconstruct an art history that relies so heavily on information gleaned from interviews is that recollections and their motivations are not coterminous with the original reasoning or choices artists had made, as memory fades and as subject positions alter in their relationship to the original discursive state. Similar to the anecdote of Maurice Arama (Chapter Three), who may or may not have been removed from his position as the first Moroccan director of the Ecole des Beaux Arts of Casablanca because he was Jewish, the tension

and active negotiations over national identity and its intersections with religion cannot be re-created today, and the motivations of actions cannot be verified in such a fraught emotional terrain. I bring up the case of Elbaz, however, for multiple reasons. In part, an investment in national culture was a major point of investigation for the artists of the Casablanca School. Looking at this history with the distance allowed to us today, it is possible if nothing else to begin to question what that nation looked like, who was excluded, and how the ideal of the nation changed in the years following independence.

I particularly want to highlight in this chapter, however, that the Six Days War played out in many ways in Morocco and reverberated along existing fault lines that were particular to Morocco, both in its religious demographics as well as in its political context. The upheaval of the late 1960s for the artistic scene was enormous, especially in such a small and intimate community. In the space of only a few years, as well as the deaths of Ahmed Cherkaoui and Jilali Gharbaoui, Elbaz left Morocco, and the Casablanca group was disbanded. These latter two events were both inextricably tied to the Six Day War, even though Moroccans experienced the war at a distance. Solidarity with Palestine prompted a radicalization of politics, particularly for the remaining members of the *Souffles* group, bringing to a head debates about the distinctions between cultural politics and political engagement, even as ties to Palestine became particularly targeted by the repressive regime. As the debates and community fragmented, more artists rose to prominence. Moroccan artists increasingly opened to the broader Arab world, and professional galleries began to arrive. The ways in which the Six Day War acted a flashpoint to exacerbate political, cultural, and religious tensions, however, meant that there was a distinct change between what came before and what happened after.

## CHAPTER SIX: A CONSENSUS CULTURE?: ART PRODUCTION AND PAN ARABISM

The end of the Years of Lead saw the beginning of what is often called a consensus culture, in which, for multiple reasons, the intensity of opposition seemed to quiet. In part, oppression was high and had contributed to a culture of fear of opposition. Secondly, the Green March in the disputed territory of the Western Sahara in November 1975 had been used as a spectacle meant to forge national unity around a shared goal. After the Algerian independence in 1962, there were seven years of consistent border clashes along the Moroccan-Algerian border, as well as the Sand War between Morocco and Algeria in 1963. The Polisario, the military front fighting for independence for the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (the name used to refer to the independent nation inhabiting this same territory, called the Western Sahara from the perspective of Morocco), was formed in 1972. The Green March, described vividly by Zakya Daoud in her memoir<sup>429</sup>, was a large peaceful march led by the regime into the Western Sahara to claim it as an integral part of the Moroccan nation. Many accounts tie the increasing consensus to the efficacy of this event for national pride.<sup>430</sup> According to Abdellah Hammoudi,

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<sup>429</sup> Zakya Daoud. *Les années lamalif: 1958-1988 trente ans de journalisme au Maroc*. Rabat: Tarif Editions, 2007.

<sup>430</sup> This is not to say that all opposition died out. Susan Slymovics, in her book *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco*, emphasizes the lasting opposition, including the riots and uprising in Casablanca in the early 1980s. Different accounts, including by Hammoudi and Cohen and Jaidi point out significant demonstrations in 1984, 1990, and 1991.

the date for such changes began with the reactivation of parliament in the 1976 and 1977 elections.<sup>431</sup>

By the mid-1970s, there is a significant change in the tenor of art production in Morocco. This, art, though was also in dialogue with a different political culture. For artists and within the intellectual discourse, the framework of national culture became increasingly less popular. This change in focus on the nation was simultaneously a turn towards an increasing engagement with pan-Arabism. This included strengthening the relationship between Morocco and the rest of the Maghreb, as in the 1974 Maghrebi Exhibition in Algiers (“Exposition Maghrébine d’Alger”), organized by painters from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.<sup>432</sup> There had already been relationships between these groups of artists across the Maghreb, yet what was new in the 1970s was the relationship created with the broader Arab world, and especially the Mashreq (the Middle East, as separated from the Maghreb/North Africa). Writing in 1985 for an exhibition of Moroccan painting in Grenoble, Toni Maraini argues that the “opening towards the Orient [Mashreq] was the huge event of the 70s.”<sup>433</sup> Accordingly, this chapter will trace the role of Pan-Arabism and the relationships with the broader Arab world within Morocco in the 1970s, while also showing the changing stakes of art production and exhibition strategies.

### **The Association Marocaine des Arts Plastiques and *Intégral***

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<sup>431</sup> Abdellah Hammoudi. *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. 21

<sup>432</sup> February 1974. Discussed at length in *Intégral* n. 8 (1974).

<sup>433</sup> Toni Maraini. *Ecrits sur l’Art: Choix de Textes Maroc 1967-1989*. Mohammédia, Maroc: Al Kalam, 1990. 119

Soon after the Union of Arab Artists (UAA) was created in 1971, the Association Marocaine des Arts Plastiques (AMAP), with the support of the UAA, was created in 1972. Unlike other national associations that were part of the UAA, the AMAP was an independent association that had legal standing but was not founded or organized by the Moroccan government.<sup>434</sup> The AMAP was primarily, for Toni Maraini, “a platform for an artistic inter-Arab culture,” and thus exhibited in Algiers (1974), Tunis (1975), Baghdad (1972, the first Arab Biennial in 1974), Cairo, and Beirut.<sup>435</sup> The association also helped to organize the second Arab Biennial in Rabat in 1976. It is important to note that this was not a syndicated union, but an association that provided a legalized structure in order to organize action.<sup>436</sup> While these activities were still under the auspices of a nation-based association, the nation as such becomes less central to artistic discourse with this increased focus on pan-Arab artistic collaborations.

It is generally true, as pointed out by Nada Shabout, that across the Arab world most artists and movements in the 1950s and 1960s were operating on a local or national level as opposed to in collaboration with other transnational movements. This is not entirely accurate for Morocco, as I have been mapping throughout this dissertation the breadth of transnational relationships forged by artists who were deeply grounded in their specific national context during this time period. However, it is with the growth of ideologies of at least cultural pan-Arabism that Arab artists began to increasingly work together across national lines to create a shared Arab creative culture. The Union of Arab Arts arose out of a meeting in Damascus in 1971, and the union held its first conference in Baghdad in 1973. The conference led to the biennales in Baghdad and Rabat. Shabout also points to other cultural manifestations for their pan-Arab

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<sup>434</sup> “La biennale panarabe de Rabat.” *Intégral*, n. 12-13 (1976): 2.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>436</sup> Toni Maraini. “Baghdad 1974: Première biennale arabe des arts plastiques: un compte-rendu.” *Intégral*, n. 9 (1974): 14.

ideals, including the Al-Wassity Festival in Baghdad (1972) and the creation in 1978 of the Cultural Moussem in Asilah. For Shabout, however, as Arab governments increasingly took control of the cultural landscape of their countries, seen clearly in the example of Morocco, the creative environments began to shrink.<sup>437</sup>

The most valuable resource for tracing these debates within Morocco is *Intégral*. Founded and directed by Mohammed Melehi, the journal promoted itself as Morocco's first cultural journal<sup>438</sup> and was active from 1971 to 1977. The journal was an important part of Melehi's multi-faceted engagement, which included a publishing house (*Shoof*) as well as a production company devoted to documentary films. *Souffles* was shut down by the government in 1972, and many of the contributors that were still actively participating in the review, including Abdellatif Laabi, Abraham Serfaty, and Mohammed Chebaa, were jailed. By the time that *Souffles* was shut down, however, many other members of the *Souffles* group had distanced themselves from the radical political positioning that the journal took on after the special issue on Palestine, and in its relationship to the political part Ila al-Amam. *Intégral*, opening soon before *Souffles* was closed down, reunites many of the artists and intellectuals that had been active in the earlier configurations of *Souffles* but in this new journal, the debates were confined solely to questions of art, literature, and culture.

The headquarters of *Intégral* was moreover Casablanca, unlike the Rabat-based *Souffles*. While this is a practical choice (Melehi was based in Casablanca, Laabi was based in Rabat), it also suggests a different geography for the journal. *Souffles* had as its official address 10 rue Jouinot-Gambette in Rabat, and the group often met at Laabi's own home, on rue Pasteur.

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<sup>437</sup> Nada M Shabout. *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*. Greensville, FL: UP of Florida, 2007. 30.

<sup>438</sup> This wording can be seen, for instance, in the biography included in the catalog *Melehi* (exhibition catalog) (Rabat, Galerie Bab Rouah, December 1997.)

Laabi's centrally-located home was just around the corner from Parliament, and from the Hotel Balima (the terrace café, which looks out onto Parliament, was a central meeting point for this generation of artists and intellectuals), and a short walk from the palace. Rabat is a small city, in which people were hardly anonymous and children of political rivals were still friends and attended same schools together. Malika Oufkir was the daughter of General Mohammed Oufkir, the violently repressive general responsible for the attempted coup d'état in 1972, was raised as a daughter by Kings Mohammed V and Hassan II. In her memoir, she describes going to the home of Abraham Serfaty, one of the leading voices behind *Souffles* that was ultimately jailed alongside Laabi, to see his son.<sup>439</sup> Daily interactions for Laabi, and by extension *Souffles*, were in the shadow of Parliament and the people that would be in the street included politicians. Unlike the politically charged space of downtown Rabat, the official address of *Intégral* was 21, Pierre Mignard, Casablanca. In the Palmier district of the city, it was close to the central square in Casablanca, the Place Mohammed V, and therefore to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts (though Melehi was no longer affiliated with the school). It is also close to crowded and neighborhoods inhabited by non-rich people. Casablanca is a much larger city than Rabat, and is known as a center for business and industry rather than government. *Souffles* was deeply a part of the city that it was located in, Rabat. It is symbolically rich to consider *Intégral* as a part of its city as well. The location of the journal can be read within and in relation to the space of Casablanca as separated

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<sup>439</sup> "I was a frequent guest at Maurice Serfaty's home where I met the activists visiting his father. Even though I was my father's daughter, under surveillance like him but for different reasons, Abraham Serfaty always showed me great trust because I was his son's friend. He had the intelligence not to mix up his children with politics. I was perfectly aware of his activities but it would never have occurred to me to talk to my father about them. And for his part, he would never have banned me from his house." Malika Oufkir with Michèle Fitoussi. *Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail*. Trans. Ros Schwartz. New York: Hyperion, 1999. 71.

from governmental decisions; like its city, the journal was more concerned with the culture in a large, more anonymous city, than in political critique.

### **The First Arab Biennale in Baghdad**

*Intégral* offered a wide range of coverage and reviews of the art scene in Morocco and the Arab world. In 1974 the journal published a special issue that focused primarily on the First Arab Biennale in Baghdad.<sup>440</sup> Toni Maraini describes the biennale by the Iraqi Association of Artists' initiative of public dialogue and interest in the biennale as "a space of meetings and reflection for new solutions on the scale of the Arab world, solutions that can not be envisaged without the direct engagement of the artists themselves."<sup>441</sup> Importantly, there are numerous black and white reproductions of works by artists from across the Arab world, some photographs of the installation of different national pavilions, and color reproductions of works by almost all of the Moroccan artists that participated. The installation shots feature a profusion of works. The exhibition itself was enormous, and each picture of works in situ shows artworks that are placed closely together in quick succession. The artworks in these images are also hung quite low to the ground. One photograph, taken it appears by Mohammed Melehi himself, shows a young man taking notes in the Iraqi pavilion in front of artworks identified as "Portrait du Chili" (J. Hasseb) and "Enkidou" (Madhloum), as well as an unidentified sculpture [Image 6.1]. Hasseb's large-scale figurative artwork has at its center a stylized figure holding a skull, which is in the upper left-hand corner of the canvas. Although there are visible vents within the architecture of the

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<sup>440</sup> *Intégral* n. 9 (1974)

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.* 13.



Image 6.1: Mohammed Melehi. Photograph from the First Arab Biennale in Baghdad.

*Intégral*, n. 9 (1974): 5.

space itself that undoubtedly influenced the way that the works were hung, the young man taking notes in front of the painting is almost at eye level with the skull, and would need to crouch down to see its details. I do not have records about the curatorial strategy of this exhibition, yet in the remaining photographs, the artworks do not seem to be hung to encourage this sort of close examination. The words instead seem to confront the viewer, draw the viewer into a head-on dialogue that he can't back away from – a fitting way of hanging an exhibition meant to be about public dialogue.

As Maraini describes the biennale exhibition in Baghdad, there were approximately 600 artworks shown in the Baghdad Museum of Modern Art as well as within the National Association of Iraqi Artists. Maraini provides a brief modern art history of Iraq, focusing on its different movements as well as her opinions on the contemporaneous state of Iraqi art (including ceramics and sculptures), concluding that Iraqi art was more original than the other countries' art movements on display, and that there was in Iraqi art "a very marked artistic [plastic] strength as well as an autonomous engagement working towards the elaboration of a new figuration."<sup>442</sup> This summary of the state of Iraqi art is clearly framed by concerns specific to Moroccan arts, as in a discussion of the theoretical angle held by many Iraqi artists that, Maraini argues, perhaps precluded "naïve" art from becoming popular. She praises more broadly the ways in which the biennale, for all that it lacked, presented an image of the wide variety of artistic creation across the Arab world, and allowed viewers to situate themselves within what she considers to be the prevailing debates of modernism and traditionalism. Despite Maraini's enthusiasm, she still offers critiques about the biennale in general, including the absence of Iraqi avant-garde artists

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<sup>442</sup> Toni Maraini. "Baghdad 1974: Première biennale arabe des arts plastiques: un compte-rendu." *Intégral* n. 9 (1974): 5

including Dia al-Azzawi and Mohammed Sabri. She is particularly critical throughout about the lack of documentation, debate, and meetings.

Palestine comes up as a major interest within the biennale. Interestingly, Maraini critiques the lack of a room devoted to the art of posters that might question the ways posters communicate ideologies visually given the attention Iraqi artists had given to the format (and, I would note, the attention to posters in Morocco, as described in Chapter Five). She particularly points out the necessity for a room dedicated to posters for Palestine.<sup>443</sup> Although she sees a lack of documentation of the actual struggles for Palestine, she draws attention to the participation of Palestinian artists in biennale. She points out that most of the works were figurative, explaining, “Given the particular role that art can play as a means of historical documentation, denunciation, and immediate information, in a concrete battle on all levels of experience, this [tendency towards figurative art] can be explained as a choice.”<sup>444</sup> She looks for the ways in which this is “an art of combat,” using word choices familiar to former readers of *Souffles*, although she sees a lack of theoretical framing that can position this “folkloric” art within that framework. Later in the journal, Chebaa contributes a brief article critiquing this same folkloric trend, arguing that Palestinian artists need to do research into their ancient and contemporaneous popular culture in order to present the realities of life for Palestinians and take a stronger stance against Zionism and imperialism. He ends by arguing that this art must become “finally a rich and efficient tool for the propaganda of the Revolution among the people and for the solidarity of oppressed

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid. 11.

peoples.”<sup>445</sup> In other words, there is a distinct attention paid throughout to the question of Palestine and Palestinian artists, with everyone looking for a revolutionary stance in the art.

Unsurprisingly, Maraini is very enthusiastic about the Moroccan participation within the biennale, saying that the Moroccan contingent was the only delegation that accepted as a block the ideals of public dialogue and engagement. Fourteen artists from Morocco participated<sup>446</sup>, and five went to the biennale itself, namely Belkahia, Bennani, Chebaa, Melehi, and Latifa Toujani, the only female artist from Morocco that showed there. Maraini argues that for the Moroccan contingent, this was an “art of rupture.” She writes, describing the basis of this rupture,

[...] art can sometimes be a way of being rather than a simple question of esthetics. It is within this framework [...] that we make the analysis of a situation of rupture and written engagement as the consecration of a style or of a tendency, even though the avant-garde movement that existed in Morocco did not want to create a style but propose a way of being. That is: a certain agitation and putting into question (of colonial figuration, of the manipulation of “naïve” art, or reactionary pedagogy as well as the question of exhibiting in the space of foreign cultural missions).<sup>447</sup>

While hailing this art of rupture that proposes a new way of being, as well as the research and engagement of the project of the artists, she also attempts to group the fourteen artists, with more detail and criticality than were usually seen in arts writing (including by Maraini herself) in Morocco at this time. She sees first informal or gestural work including by Hafid, Belcadi, and Bennain (that in her opinion risks being “narcissistic”); painting based on research into the materiality of the media themselves and symbolic abstractions, as in Cheffaj and Mégara, and, to some degree, Miloud; and formal, figurative painting, which she defines as autonomous forms

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<sup>445</sup> Mohammed Chebaa. “révolution palestinienne et peinture révolutionnaire.” *Intégral*. n. 9 (1974): 41.

<sup>446</sup> Aherdan, Hafid, Bennani, Belkahia, Ghattas, Hamidi, Latifa Toujani, Belkadi, Chebaa, Kacimi, Mégara, Melehi, Miloud, Cheffaj

<sup>447</sup> Toni Maraini. “Baghdad 1974: Première biennale arabe des arts plastiques: un compte-rendu.” *Intégral* n. 9 (1974): 14.

that might become symbols or totems, as in Belkahia, Hamidi, Melehi, and Ghattas.<sup>448</sup> She gestures towards two examples of “new figuration” by Toujani and Kacimi.

Following this general article, there are interviews with Chebaa and Melehi soliciting their opinions about the biennale, as well as the president of the Union of Arab Artists, the Palestinian artist Ismail Shammout, who exhibited that same year at the Municipal Gallery of Rabat along with his wife Tamam Akhal Shammout. Additionally, there is an opinion piece by Dhia al Azzaa, a manifesto for an unnamed group of Iraqi artists including Dia Azzawi, and information on Mahmoud Sabri’s ideas about Quantum Reality. In his interview, Chebaa is for the most part in agreement with Maraini’s analysis, emphasizing the strength of the Moroccan and Iraqi pavilions, and supporting the reasoning for having an Arab Biennial while critiquing its incoherence and lack of theoretical support. Part of the importance of this event for Moroccan artists also consisted of situating the Maghreb in relation to the Mashreq, and understanding the broader stakes of claiming an identity as an Arab artist within a pan-Arab context. He particularly notes the importance of having an event that clarifies the perceptions of the

Arab cultural reality, and, as a consequence, a better consciousness of the problems that are posed for the Arab artist today. This is all the more urgent, even necessary, given that the majority of our artists have an education that is almost entirely occidental, with all that this brings in the weight of alienation and preconceptions.<sup>449</sup>

In other words, Arab identity and Arab culture are all the more important because of Western cultural incursions, particularly in Western artistic education. As part of his understanding of the Arab cultural reality, Chebaa particularly points to the importance of 1967 in shaping the cultural

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<sup>448</sup> I do not agree with this classification, particularly for Melehi, but include it to show contemporaneous art criticism.

<sup>449</sup> Mohammed Chebaa and Mustafa Nissaboury. “Points de vue sur la biennale: Chebaa: ‘incohérence et manqué d’exigence face à des responsabilités importantes.’” *Intégral*. n. 9 (1974): 29.

and political landscape. I want to emphasize, however, that for Chebaa, much of this comes back to creating a relationship between Moroccan and Arab artists, revealing an underlying insecurity about claiming an equal part within a pan-Arab identity, emphasizing the alienation of Moroccan society from its Arab roots given its over-emphasis on European culture.

Belkahia, for his part, is also enthusiastic about the Iraqi pavilion, as well as the public funding in support of Iraqi artists, particularly in comparison with their Moroccan counterparts. He speaks at length about creativity in the Arab world, and also gives a lengthy comment on artists and political engagement. He repeats the idea that he had put forth in his questionnaire for *Souffles* almost word for word, that the artist is not ahead of his time but that it is society that is behind its time. Belkahia characterizes such a tendency as “terrorism,” to expect the artist to be the most engaged or the most revolutionary, saying that this question is asked all the time particularly by people who are “badly positioned” to ask it. Art, for Belkahia, is meant to be “intemporal.” In this view, artistic creation is not meant as a direct response to a specific political event but instead as a broader commentary that can stay relevant over time. For Belkahia, the artist is politically engaged insofar as any other individual is engaged. Being an artist is “a moral position,” and for Belkahia, the act of doing art is in itself engaged and generous.<sup>450</sup> Belkahia stepped down from the role of director at the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1974, the same year the first Arab biennale took place and the same year therefore this interview held. While he was never overtly politically engaged in politics tout fait, as discussed in earlier chapters, the loose idea of art as a moral position that must be defended from the “terrorism” of expecting revolutionary politics seems to bring him even farther from the critical position he held during the height of the Casablanca group. Publishing this position moreover suggests again the distance

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<sup>450</sup> Farid Belkahia and Toni Maraini. “Points de vue sur la biennale: Belkahia: nécessité d’une plateforme pour le contact et la confrontation.” *Intégral*. n. 9 (1974): 31.

between *Souffles* and *Intégral*. While *Intégral* in part publishes simply a wider variety of positions on the relation of art and politics, it is still significant to see the increasing openness towards a more decisive distance between art and politics much as this perspective is multiply contradicted by the frequent framings of the revolutionary politics of Palestinian artist.

In the same special issue of *Intégral* an interview with the Palestinian artist Ismaïl Shammout gives a history of the Union of Arab Artists, including the meeting in Damascus, the Al Wassity Festival in Baghdad, the meeting in Tunis, the Biennale of Kuwait, and the meeting in Baghdad in the years leading to the biennale in Baghdad. For Shammout, part of the importance of the union is defining “our concept of engagement, first and foremost as Arabs, and then as part of the Third World.”<sup>451</sup> This seems to flip the positioning that *Souffles* supported, that is, firstly Third World, and seemingly secondly Arab, as in the Vietnam-Palestine Committee that responded to the 1967 war through the lens of global anti-colonial movements. I do not mean to unconsciously elide the perspective of individuals that are interviewed in *Intégral* with the positioning of the journal overall, although I believe that the choice of who is interviewed, the questions that were asked, and the ways that the interviews were edited support my inclination to demonstrate the changing nature of the artistic discourse within Morocco. Shammout also highlights the challenges faced by the question of Palestine, insofar as the sincere support of Arab artists was not matched by their precise knowledge of the situation of Palestine, much less experienced on the ground. He contrasts the more formal interests of Moroccan art with his own belief that art must be created “with the goal of having a certain utility for the good of the masses and of the Arab peoples.”<sup>452</sup> This becomes clear in relation to a

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<sup>451</sup> Ismaïl Shammout and Mostafa Nissaboury. “entretien avec ismaïl shammout.” *Intégral*. n. 9 (1974): 33.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.* 36.

debate about figurative work in particular. Nonetheless, while this idea of art having a utility for the masses, and for the good of the people, is certainly similar to ideas published in later issues of *Souffles*, for Shammout by 1974 this idea is no longer seen in Moroccan art.

The importance of this first edition of the biennale is not necessarily decided. Recently more research has been done into it<sup>453</sup> and the manifestation was always included in chronologies and discussions of Arab art and the short-lived period of pan-Arabism in art. Part of the critique of the biennale comes from its relation to the Iraqi government, particularly in terms of funding. The biennale was funded primarily by political bodies due to the small budget of the Union of Arab Artists and its inability to finance an event of such magnitude. The Iraqi government contributed \$100,000 USD, in addition to smaller funds provided by a few other Arab states and the Arab League. The Ministries of Culture from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco also promised a contribution.<sup>454</sup> As Nada Shabout describes, the Iraqi Socialist Baath party came into power with the July 1968 revolution, and devoted a significant portion of its budget to supporting the arts because of its belief in cultural development. This funding went to projects including preservation and creation of museum and arts colleges. The policy encouraged relationships between Iraqi and other Arab artists via exhibitions, festivals, and foreign cultural centers, as well as providing the original funding for the Union of Arab Artists. Shabout is careful to note, however, that this policy also gave the government control over artistic production in Iraq, restricting freedom through censorship and with major support going to pro regime artists.<sup>455</sup> Some critics emphasized that this biennale was linked primarily to Iraqi government prerogatives

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<sup>453</sup> For example, Harvard Ph.D. candidate Amin Alsaden received the AMCA/Rhonda A Saad Prize for the best graduate paper in modern and contemporary art in the Arab world in 2012 for his paper “Baghdad’s 1974 Biennial: The Ba’ath, Arab Art, and Global Politics.”

<sup>454</sup> These are figures given by Shammout in *Intégral*. It is unclear in the phrasing if the Maghrebi ministries actually contributed money, or just promised to in the future. 35.

<sup>455</sup> Shabout 54.

that contributed to deleterious effects of controlling artistic production via state funding. Others, such as Anthony Gardner, highlight the ways in which its Socialist underpinnings distance this biennale from contemporaneous European biennales. Gardner thus situates the short-lived itinerant Arab Biennial within the socialist (or at least socialist-inspired) “internationale,” citing the Union’s focus on “redistribut[ing] attention, funds, and education toward and throughout the Arab world.”<sup>456</sup>

### **The Second Arab Biennale in Rabat**

The breadth of the participation of Arab countries and associations also contributed to a variety of positions on the meaning and importance of the biennale in Baghdad. This is equally seen in the varied recollections of and responses to the second Arab Biennale in Rabat, organized by the AMAP, which was led at the time by Karim Bennani, in collaboration with the UAA. The biennale included delegations from across the world, and was closely followed by a parallel exhibition done in response to the biennale, “20 ans de peinture au Maroc” (“20 Years of Painting in Morocco”). The biennale was originally planned to be organized in Casablanca, but due to disagreements with the Ministry of Culture the venue was shifted to Rabat in the Musée des Oudayas. The date of the opening was decided upon only fifteen days prior to it, a short time indeed.<sup>457</sup> The exhibition remained open for only a month between the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 1976 to the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1977. Of the Arab countries that participated in the first biennale, most were

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<sup>456</sup> Anthony Gardner. “Biennales on the Edge, or, a View of Biennales from Southern Perspectives.” *Higher Atlas: The Marrakech Biennale [4] in Context*. Ed. Carson Chan, Nadim Samman. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012. 118-120.

<sup>457</sup> “entretien avec Farid Belkahia.” *Intégral* n. 12-13 (1977): 7-8.

present, although Algeria did not respond to the invitation (perhaps unsurprisingly, as this was only one year after the Green March), and Libya and Sudan were also not represented for unspecified reasons. The organizers estimated that there were more than 60,000 visitors to the exhibition during its run in Rabat.<sup>458</sup>

Again, *Intégral* published an issue devoted primarily to debates, critiques, and interviews about the biennale.<sup>459</sup> The primary critique of the biennale from the perspective of the AMAP was a problem of organization, internal to the association, in its relationship with the Ministry of Culture, and more broadly with the UAA. The journal also raised questions about the way in which artists were selected, critiquing governmental choices that allowed for lower quality of artworks to be shown as opposed to independent selection bodies that could have made a difference in ensuring higher standards. In the introduction to the issue, the journal points out that the subjects of many of the paintings were “macabre, sad, pessimistic, [...] defeatist subjects; miserablist and populist subjects.” The experience was negative enough for many of the artists that the introduction emphasized that the most valuable response to be offered was a “constructive critique” that needed not to be forgotten, and the need to move forward toward improvement in the future editions of the biennale. Hence, they offered a questionnaire to various artists, asking at a minimum: “What do you think of the Biennale of Rabat?” and “What are the respective responsibilities of the Ministry and of the AMAP in the bad ways that this Biennale was handled?”<sup>460</sup> Most interviews also asked what artists think of the press that criticized the Moroccans for being too “Westernized.” This was indeed a sign of qualitative

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<sup>458</sup> Tahar Ben Jelloun. “Document: La deuxième biennale des peintres arabes est contestée.” First printed in *Le Monde*, 13.2.77. *Intégral*. n. 12-13 (1977):30.

<sup>459</sup> *Intégral*. n. 12-13 (1977). The issue itself lists 1978/6<sup>th</sup> year. However, knowing the context in which it was published, the number of the issue, and 1977 actually being the 6<sup>th</sup> year, I believe that this was a typo.

<sup>460</sup> “La biennale panarabe de Rabat.” *Intégral*. n. 12-13 (1977): 2-3.

change within the Moroccan cultural press since the late 1950s when the young artists were focused on gaining experience abroad, primarily in the west, and celebrated for their successes in Europe. The breadth of artists involved also shows a changing artistic scene, with more younger artists like Fouad Bellamine and Mohammed Kacimi intervening as well as the former artists of the Casablanca school.

The artists' responses in these interviews were often harsh, as when Baghdad Benass says, "In terms of the positive aspects of this event, I see very few."<sup>461</sup> Similarly, interviews with artists including Belkahia, Chebaa, Kacimi, and Miloud were overall highly critical of the mediocrity of the biennale and its poor planning. Most interviews were repetitive, critiquing the low quality of artworks and, increasingly, the bureaucracy of the association and the management. Most interviewees agreed that the only high quality pavilions were Moroccan and Iraqi, similar to their comments from the Baghdad biennale. The chosen images to accompany the issue reflect the general position of the interviewees, primarily highlighting Moroccan and Iraqi artists as separate from figurative tendencies from the rest of the Arab world. Images were included for each artist that was interviewed. There are two pages of collected works from throughout the Arab world, one of which showed artworks by two Tunisian artists (Raed Ben Abdallah, Semly), one Kuwaiti artist (Abderrassoul Salman), and one Palestinian artist (Mohammed Hijazi) [Image 6.2], which were all figurative. Salman's artwork, while not recognizable, suggests surrealist three-dimensional objects more than true abstraction. Ben Abdallah's work shows two sculpted shaking hands in stages of crumbling, and Selmy's sculpture is a group of stylized bodies walking with small amounts of luggage on their back. Hijazi's painting centers on an elderly woman covering her face in shock as the landscape

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<sup>461</sup> "entretien avec Baghdad Benass." *Intégral* n. 12-13 (1977): 9.

around her is increasingly surreal. Unlike these works, which seem to show in their sadness and disappointment the cultural realities of the defeatist mood of post-1967 in the Arab world, the Iraqi [Image 6.3] and Moroccan pavilions [Image 6.4] were much more based in abstraction. The Iraqi Pavilion images showed works by Dia Azzawi, Rafaa Nasiri, Shaker Hassan, and Mohammad Ghani Hikmat. While Hikmat's sculpture piece contained a clear image of a gun and the suggestion of a helmet on a pile of earth, it was certainly abstract in style with its meaning remaining more opaque. Shaker Hassan's Arabic scrawl was not his typical "huruffiyah" style of abstracted and stylized Arabic letters, but seems more like graffiti on a broken wall that has been left behind. 1948, the year of the creation of the state of Israel known among Palestinians as the year of Nakba (catastrophe), is visibly written in Arabic numbers, though the other letters scattered throughout the image were willfully incomplete. The installation shots of the pavilion show the dialogue between these abstract works. The images of the Moroccan pavilion were the only ones that include visitors and bystanders discussing the artworks. The works themselves were entirely abstract, but unlike in other images from the biennale, one photograph shows artists Miloud, Hassan Slaoui, and Saad Ben Cheffaj discussing an artwork, and another shows a large crowd gathered in the space. It is perhaps simplistic to read into these photographs the discourse that the Moroccan (and Iraqi) pavilions were the only national contingents that were carefully planned and well thought out, yet if nothing else, the Moroccan artists are shown as engaged and active in ways that are not paralleled for invited national contingencies.

It is through these issues of *Intégral* that the different stakes of the late 1970s versus the mid-1960s become apparent, with a focus increasingly turned on the internal workings of the AMAP and thoughts about the broader Arab world as opposed to the positions taken with regard to enable happenings on a national scale that were seen in *Souffles*, for instance, or in the ready

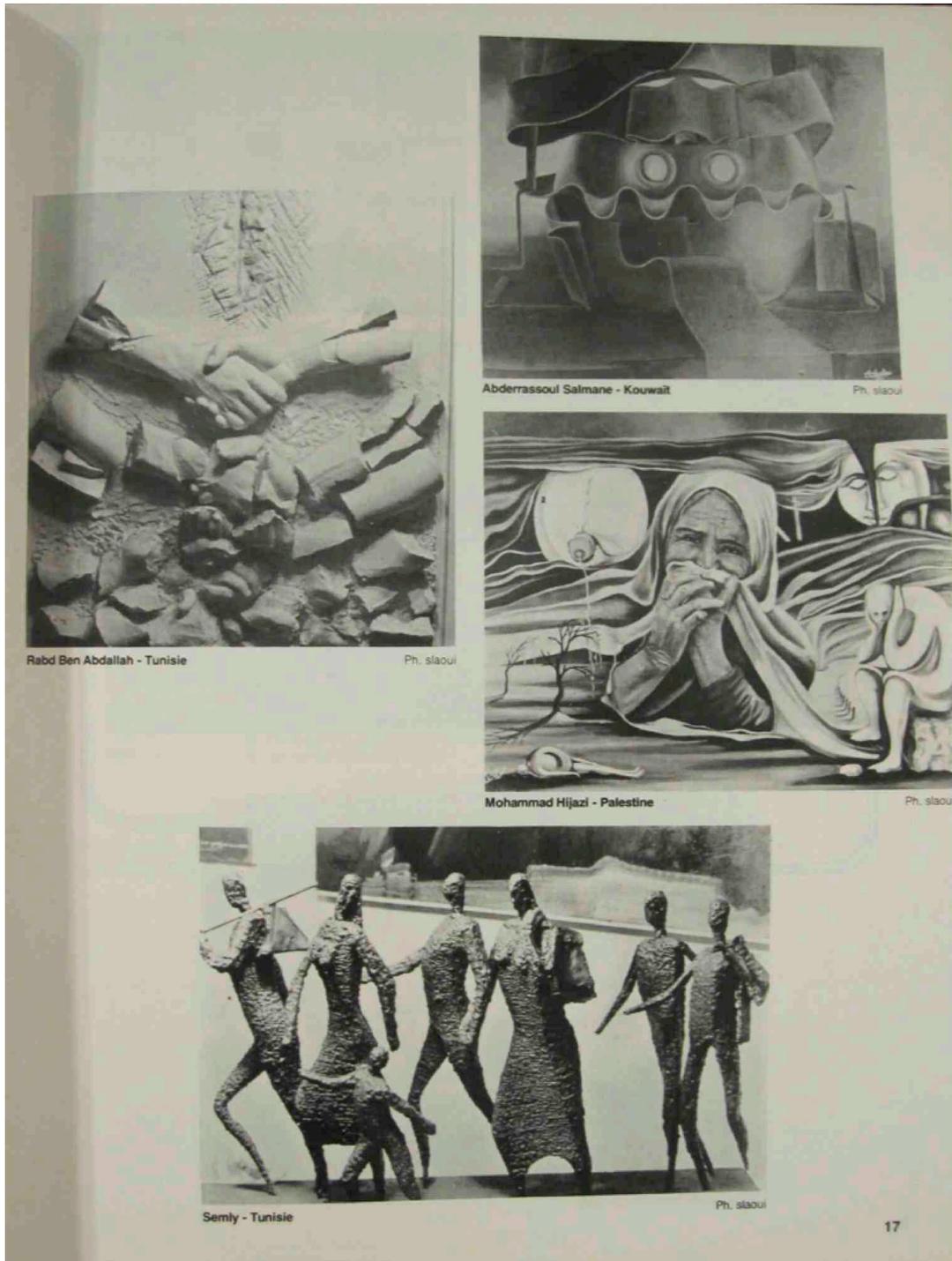


Image 6.2: Photographs by Slaoui. Selection of artworks included in the Second Arab Biennale in Rabat (Raed Ben Abdallah, Tunisia; Abderrassoul Salman, Kuwait; Mohammed Hijazi, Palestine; Semly, Tunisia).

*Intégral*, n. 12-13 (1977): 17.

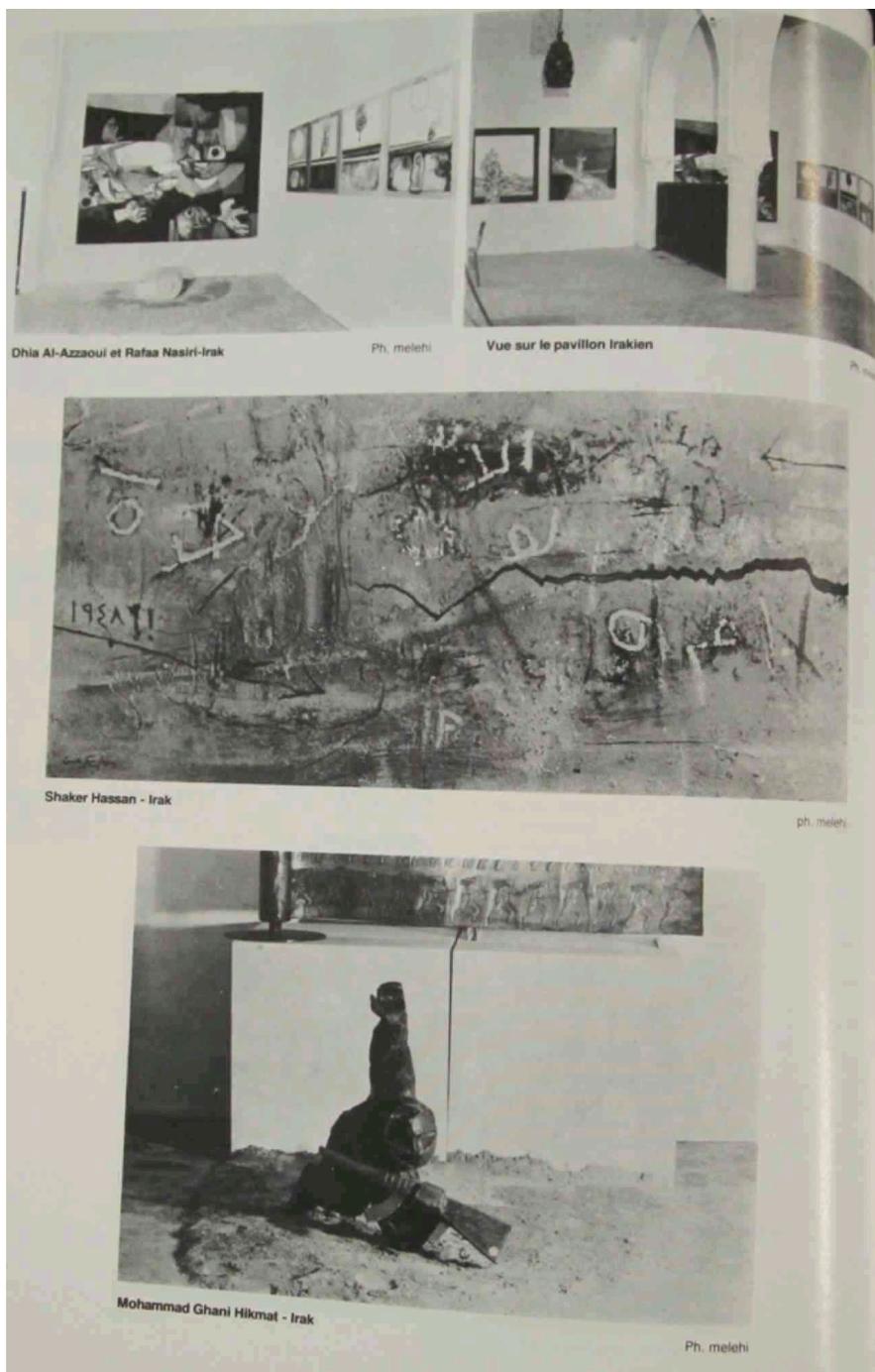


Image 6.3: Photographs by Mohammed Melehi. Photographs of the Iraqi Pavilion of the Second Arab Biennale in Rabat.

*Intégral* n 12-13 (1977): 18.

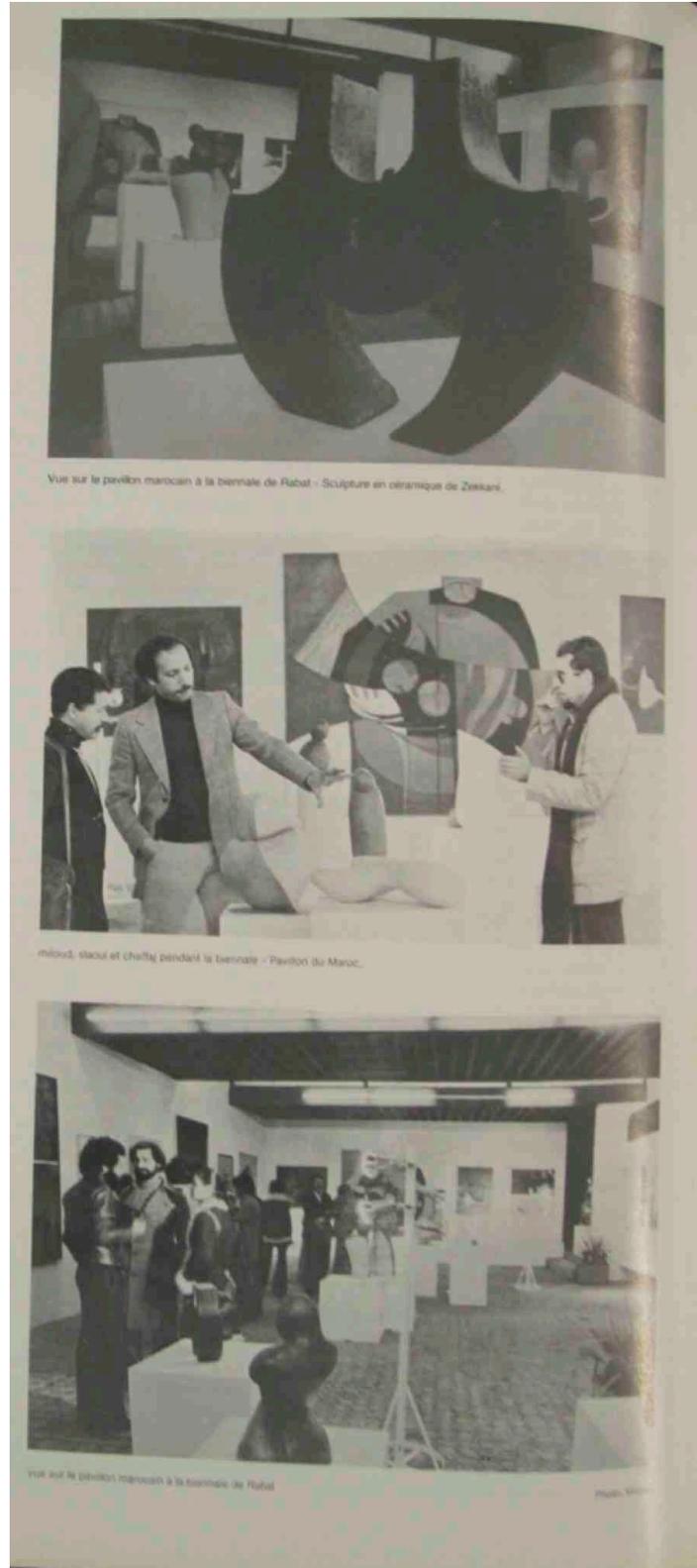


Image 6.4: Photographs of the Moroccan Pavilion of the Second Arab Biennale in Rabat. *Intégral* n 12-13 (1977): 32.

willingness of the 1960s to leave one association and start another if need be. One example of this can be seen in Belkahia's comments in the issue that focused on the second biennale. It was after this issue that Belkahia seemed to have rejoined the association, although he also described in his interview his reasons for refusing to take part in the Biennale, and why he left the AMAP. Belkahia noted that the presence of the older generation of artists (at this point around 40) prevented the younger artists from taking an active role, bringing out "paternalism" and a lack of dialogue between the two groups.<sup>462</sup> This critique is a clear sign of a changing climate, in which modernist painting was not a new field to be claimed in relation to the broader national culture, as was the case for the Casablanca school, but a well-trod field in which new artists had to negotiate their role internal to the arts community.

There is some confusion today as to whether or not the second Arab Biennale's broader theme was the Palestinian question. In interviews, as with Mohammed Hamidi, Moroccan artists suggested that this was not just a source for confusion among researchers today, but that was a question left hanging in the air then as well. From the Moroccan perspective, Palestine was not an overarching theme for the biennale, though Hamidi said that given the tenor of the era, many artists automatically turned to Palestine as an inspiring or guiding idea.<sup>463</sup> Iraqi artists in particular seem to have argued that Palestine was the over-arching theme, but according to Chebaa's interview at the time, that in reality the theme of Palestine was only true of the Iraqi pavilion.<sup>464</sup> This difference of the theme of a pavilion versus the biennale overall may motivate some of the questions that exist today.

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<sup>462</sup> "entretien avec Farid Belkahia." *Intégral* n. 12-13 (1977): 7-8.

<sup>463</sup> Mohammed Hamidi, interview by author, Casablanca, July 13, 2012.

<sup>464</sup> "entretien avec Mohammed Chebaa." *Intégral*. n. 12-13 (1977): 14.

## The Palestinian Question and Themes of Exhibitions in the 1970s

Palestine thus remains a consistent thread throughout the 1970s for Moroccan artists, showing up in articles (particularly in the Baghdad biennale) and playing a role in exhibitions that had an increasingly pan-Arab character and orientation. Events came up periodically in either newspapers or in different exhibitions' histories. For example, in August 1967, the AMAP organized an exhibition of 50 paintings by 30 artists at the Maison de la Pensée to raise money for what *L'Opinion* calls "the victims of Zionist aggression."<sup>465</sup> The artists, none of whom were from the Casablanca school, donated approximately 30 of the paintings to be sold at the exhibition of the Arab Maghreb at the end of August of 1967.<sup>466</sup> In 1968, the An-Nahda Institute organized a "Week for Palestine," which included multiple conferences and exhibitions of photography.<sup>467</sup> In 1972 a collective exhibition for Palestine was held in Rabat and included Farid Belkahlia, although very little information to be found about the exhibition itself.<sup>468</sup> Moreover, Rabat-based gallery L'Atelier, founded by Pauline de Mazières, organized shows of posters for Palestine in the early 1980s.<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> These artists were: Mohamed Amar, Ahmed Amrani, Ali Alaoui, Hassan Alaoui, Myriame Ameziane, Yazid Ben Aissa, Hamid Ben Jilali, Saad Ben Cheffaj, Omar Bouragba, Mohammed Drissi, Hassan El Glaoui, Mohamed Le Hamri, Tami El Kasri, Abdellah Fakhar, Abdeslam Guessous, Jilali Charraoui (sic, this is meant to be Cherkaoui), Mohamed Kacimi, M'Hamed Kadiri, Taib Lahlou, Ahmed Louardiri, Fatima Louardiri, Ben Mokhtar Miloud, Mekki Maghara, Ali Nakhsa, Mohamed Serghini, Mohamed Sghir, Abdelmalek R'bati, Abdellatif Zine

<sup>466</sup> "Contribution des artistes peintres marocains au profit des victimes de l'agression sioniste." *L'Opinion*, n 787, August 17, 1967.

<sup>467</sup> "Conférence sur la Palestine de M Hachem Arafat." *L'Opinion* n 973, March 22, 1968.

<sup>468</sup> This is noted in the biography of Farid Belkahlia within the catalog published by Darat al-Funun.

<sup>469</sup> The retrospective exhibition on the gallery, *L'Atelier, Itineraire d'une galerie: 1971-1991* (Rabat: Galerie Bab Rouah and the Institut Francais, 2013) included two large-scale posters

Some artists also took part in the 1978 “International art exhibition for Palestine,” organized by the Plastic Arts Section of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), an exhibition that consisted entirely of artworks donated to the PLO in order to create a “Museum of Solidarity with Palestine.” The exhibition took place in Beirut from 21 March to 5 April, and its political positioning was clearly manifested. The catalogue’s epigraph by Yasser Arafat emphasizes both pan-Arabism as well as the transnational dimension of solidarity with Palestine. Muna Soudi, who was in charge of the Plastic Arts Section of the PLO, explained in the exhibition catalogue that the fight for Palestine is multiple, necessarily armed, but also political and cultural. As she clearly stated, “The revolution is not only the struggle of Palestine and the Arab Nation, it is the struggle of free peoples all over the world.” The exhibition, meant to be the first of presumably many to come, “aim[ed] to show the civilized and human dimensions of this struggle and to stress the depth and importance of the Palestinian struggle as a fundamental issue for humanity” in order to create a “militant cultural front.” Capturing the creativity that Soudi argued has accompanied the self-confidence that has arisen from armed struggle against Israel, the exhibition also supported Palestinian culture against the colonial cultural discourse it faced.<sup>470</sup>

The exhibition featured artists from 28 countries from both the Arab world and beyond, such as Cuba, Italy, France, and Japan. Most important for this study, it also included a significant number of Moroccan artists in the exhibition, which as the catalogue suggested, relied

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about Palestine: *Palestine* (Jacek R Kowalski, 1979) and *15 années – Révolution palestinienne* (Anonymous, undated). I toured this exhibition with Pauline de Mazières, the founder of the gallery, who told me that there had been an exhibition for Palestine, although I have not been able to verify the dates or details of the exhibition. Interview by author, Rabat, November 23, 2013.

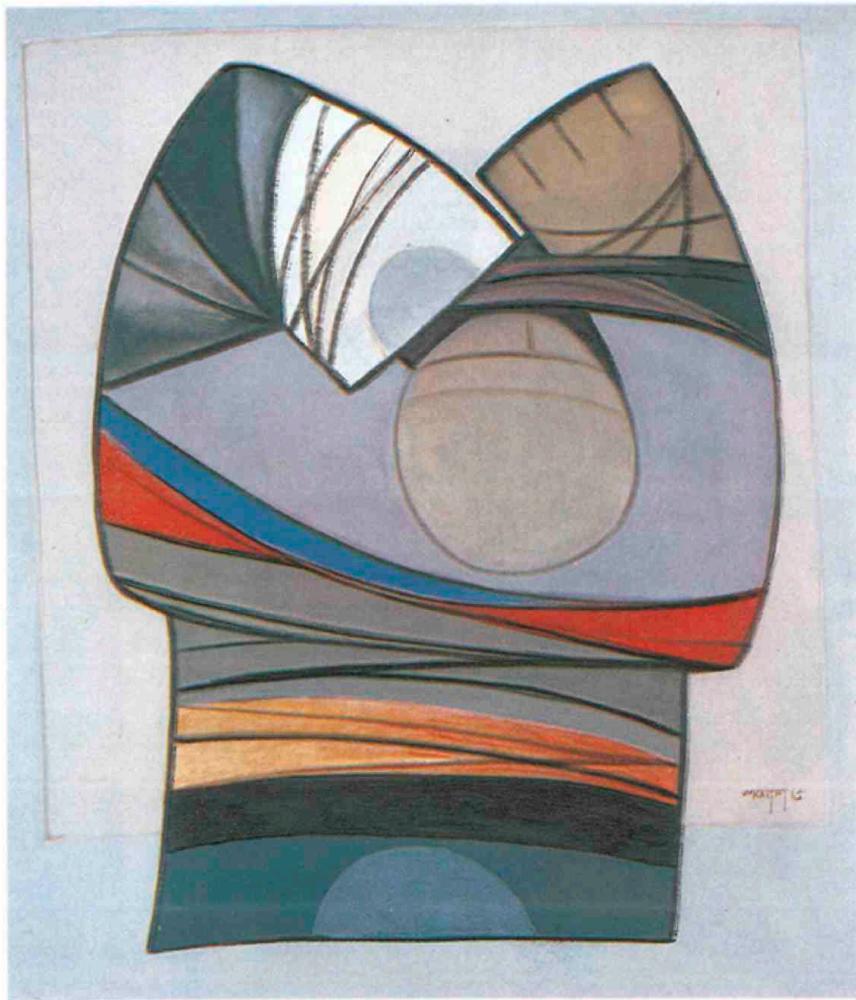
<sup>470</sup> Muna Soudi. “Art for Solidarity with Palestine.” *International Art Exhibition for Palestine* (exhibition catalogue) (Beirut: PLO Plastic Arts Section, 1978), 6-7.

heavily on Mohammed Melehi's efforts. Among other artists and institutions, Melehi was acknowledged at the beginning of the catalogue for his contributions to set up and ensure the success of the exhibition. Among the artists from Morocco that donated works and participated in the exhibition were Farid Belkahia, Fouad Bellamine, Baghdad Bennas, Mohammed Chebaa, Ahmed Cherkaoui,<sup>471</sup> Chaibia, Mohammed Hamidi, Abdellah Haririri, Mohammed Kacimi, Miloud Labied, Mohammed Melehi, and Houssein Miloud.

Most of the paintings are clearly within the existing orientation and style of the artists' broader projects. For example Belkahia's "Resistance" was a copper work that did not stray from the clear visual vocabulary of the larger body of his work, and it was only the name that connected it to Palestine as a theme. Other artworks reference cages visually or in their titles ("Palestine," Fouad Bellamine; "The cage," Baghdad Bena'as; "Embrace," Mohammed Hamidi). Mohammed Kacimi, an artist who was rising increasingly to prominence at this point, contributed his work "A woman from Tall-Zaatar." The title refers to the massacre more commonly transliterated as Tel al-Zaatar, in which many inhabitants of the Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon were, if not killed, then evicted [Image 6.5]. Although it is a brutal point in history that a variety of Arab artists have shown (the Algerian artist Rachid Koraichi, for instance, did an etching called "Tell al-Za'atar" in 1979), Kacimi's take on the history is muted. As an artist, Kacimi consistently included responses to violent political events in his work, yet his artistic language is not violent or impassioned. Here, the woman is deeply abstracted. The body is covered in stripes of muted colors with one red accent, as well as black lines that seem to reference cuts or tethers. While melancholy, the work is neither outraged nor mourning, but instead a more quiet way of paying tribute and expressing solidarity.

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<sup>471</sup> This was a donation from Mme. Monique du Gouvernair, as it was after Cherkaoui's death.



130 — Mohammed KASSIMI  
« A woman from Tall-Zaatar »  
Oil painting 69 × 79 cm

١٣٠ — محمد القاسمي  
« امرأة من تل الزعتر »  
لوحة زيتية ٦٩ × ٧٩ سم

79

Image 6.5: Mohammed Kacimi, “A woman from Tall-Zaatar.”

*International art exhibition for Palestine* (exhibition catalogue) (Beirut: PLO Plastic Arts Section, 1978): 79.

Chebaa's acrylic painting, "Palestinian Geography," stands out in being both a continuation of his work with clear lines, hard edges, and a mixture of shapes and waves, as well as taking new inspiration from the Palestinian cause. The painting includes the visual motif of a kuffiya (the black and white scarf popularized by Yasser Arafat and linked in visual culture to the Palestinian fedayin) taking up half of the large circle in the bottom right hand part of the square canvas [Image 6.6]. The black and white of the kuffiya then becomes part of the mainly primary colors of the waves, as if this profusion of colors is arising directly from this visual symbol for Palestine, the creativity of the expression inextricably linked to the cause.

### **L'Atelier: The Birth of Independent Art Spaces and Structures**

Palestine was thus a significant thread in the Moroccan artists' increasing participation in pan-Arabism, purposefully, as in the activities done for Palestine, or not, as in the Arab Biennale in Rabat. This solidarity with Palestine provoked transnational alliances that pushed artists to work outside of the boundaries of national culture by embracing an idea of Arab identity and pan-Arab culture. Yet this focus on broader solidarities also coincided with a less revolutionary stance with regard to public intervention and local cultural politics. Increasingly, the arts discourse in Morocco became less about public engagement and more linked to questions internal to the arts scene, between generations of artists and in dialogue with the arts structures that were beginning to exist.

One of the major points of criticism throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s was the lack of artistic structures in Morocco. Because they were intermittent, the actions of the Casablanca



126 — Mohammed CHEBAA  
« Palestinian Geometry »  
Acrylic 100 × 100 cm

١٢٦ — محمد شبيعة  
« هندسة فلسطينية »  
الكرليك على قماش ١٠٠ × ١٠٠ سم

Image 6.6: “Palestinian Geometry,” Mohammed Chebaa, undated.

*International art exhibition for Palestine* (exhibition catalogue) (Beirut: PLO Plastic Arts Section, 1978): 77

school (outside of the art school itself) never created a lasting structure. Artist-run associations or unions were often mired in internal fighting, and state initiatives were rare and often focused on international exhibitions. With the exception of the gallery La Découverte (run by Josie Berrada, 1962-1970<sup>472</sup>), most exhibition spaces other than the national gallery, Bab Rouah, were either hotel or theatre halls, municipal meeting spaces, or foreign cultural centers. Nonetheless, a significant change for the artistic scene of the 1970s and its professionalization and structures was the birth of the independent gallery L'Atelier in Rabat.

L'Atelier was founded in 1971 by Pauline de Mazières, who was assisted beginning in 1973 by Sylvia Belhassan. The gallery opened with an exhibition in May 1971 of Mohammed Melehi, who along with his wife at the time Toni Maraini had become good friends to de Mazières, and played a significant role in the early days of the gallery. The gallery was invested in supporting Moroccan modernism and defended the abstractions of the Casablanca School and other modernist artists -- including Melehi, Chebaa, Belkahia, Hamidi, Bellamine, Kacimi, Boujemaoui, and Miloud -- without resorting to Orientalist artworks. The gallery showed a total of 93 artists during the twenty years that it remained open, with 79 individual exhibitions and 16 collective exhibitions.<sup>473</sup> The gallery had no sponsorship or state support or interventions.

The gallery faced challenges that were familiar to artists during this time. There was not a culture of collecting of art or philanthropy, and particularly for abstract art, at the time in Morocco.<sup>474</sup> Even finding an audience or patronage for the gallery was a challenge. As Belhassan and de Mazières explained in a recent interview,

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<sup>472</sup> Toni Maraini. "L'esprit de l'Atelier." *L'Atelier, Itineraire d'une galerie: 1971-1991* (exhibition catalogue) (Rabat: Kulte Editions, 2013), n.p.

<sup>473</sup> "L'Atelier: Chronologie." Papers from the archive of Galerie L'Atelier, Pauline de Mazières.

<sup>474</sup> Many people explain the current culture of collecting by King Mohammed VI, who is an art collector and has inspired the political elite to buy art as investments.

Belhassan: Who visited us regularly? As a general rule, foreign residents.

De Mazières: Not only.

Belhassan: But primarily them. And it's only after, little by little, that there was a public of scholars, intellectuals, and friends. Then some young people from a new generation that had come back to Morocco after studying abroad. In any case, very few Moroccans bought the artworks, some of which were bold.

De Mazières: We went ourselves, armed with a bucket of glue and a brush, to hang the posters in schools, universities, or to hang them in town on fences, but to make people come was hard and to make them buy even harder.

Belhassan: People did not dare to enter. People sometimes told me, "The space is magnificent. But I don't dare cross the threshold."

De Mazières: It was maybe the side that was very rigorous, a little cold, very 'design' that scared them... Since the exhibition of the Casablanca School in Djemaa el Fna, people that did not go to the galleries were interested in art, but only outside of institutions.<sup>475</sup>

Beyond the challenges of finding a public and finding buyers, there were less binding contracts between artists and the gallery and several artists went on to show at other galleries once they had become more established within Morocco, or sold artworks privately as opposed to through the gallery.<sup>476</sup> Prices for catalogues, transport, and insurance were too high to manage given the lack of sales. In order to try to maintain the space, L'Atelier, located in downtown Rabat near the Place Pietri, also sold furniture and smaller design for some time. This must have been inspired, perhaps by the organic collaborations that Pauline de Mazières had seen and been involved in between architecture and applied visual arts, via the collaborations between her architect husband's firm and the Casablanca artists.<sup>477</sup> Aside from two significant collectors (Madame Filali, the wife of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdellatif Filali, and Abderrahim Sijelmassi,

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<sup>475</sup> Pauline de Mazières and Sylvia Belhassan. "L'Atelier, Séquences de vies." Interview organized by Driss Ksikes. *L'Atelier, Itineraire d'une galerie: 1971-1991* (exhibition catalogue) (Rabat: Kulte Editions, 2013), n.p.

<sup>476</sup> Correspondence between Pauline de Mazières and Dia Azzawi references the artist's choice to exhibit at Nadar. 1 March 1976. This idea is reiterated in the interview: Pauline de Mazières and Sylvia Belhassan. "L'Atelier, Séquences de vies." Interview organized by Driss Ksikes. (exhibition catalogue) (Rabat: Kulte Editions, 2013), n.p.

<sup>477</sup> Toni Maraini. "L'esprit de l'Atelier." *L'Atelier, Itineraire d'une galerie: 1971-1991* (exhibition catalogue) (Rabat: Kulte Editions, 2013), n.p.

an architect and well-known collector from this era), the gallery stayed open by selling furniture and lamps.<sup>478</sup> De Mazières and Belhassan were no longer able to find the time or funding to seek out artists from abroad (De Mazières previously travelled in the Maghreb and Europe to seek out new artists) and the gallery's activities began to slow down. The history of the gallery is thus one of struggling financially until finally being forced to close down in 1991 because of inability to become economically sustainable.

The importance of L'Atelier in this study is that it created a real meeting point for the modernist movement in Morocco, in which artists and intellectuals could meet and collaborate.

In the words of Toni Maraini,

In a few years, L'Atelier had become a space of reference and of informal encounters – those that create links and exchanges between artists, but not only – and engaged in many activities in Morocco and abroad [...] There were also the exhibitions done in Essaouira and Marrakech, “with the goal,” adds Pauline de Mazières, “of bringing a bit of what was being done in the two major cities, Rabat and Casablanca.” Moving the artworks and decentralizing the occasions for encounters responded to the new exigencies of opening up and cultural exchange.

Moreover, although artists had once enthusiastically and actively sought out relationships between the Maghreb and the Mashreq, for multiple reasons, according to Maraini, these exhibitions and encounters became over time more rare. However, L'Atelier maintained throughout its history a particular interest in not only showing artists from the Maghreb, such as Rachid Koraichi and Nejib Belkhodja, but also from the broader Arab world.<sup>479</sup> According to

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<sup>478</sup> Pauline de Mazières and Sylvia Belhassan. “L'Atelier, Séquences de vies.” Interview organized by Driss Ksikes. *L'Atelier, Itineraire d'une galerie: 1971-1991* (exhibition catalogue) (Rabat: Kulte Editions, 2013), n.p.

<sup>479</sup> Toni Maraini. “L'esprit de l'Atelier.” *L'Atelier, Itineraire d'une galerie: 1971-1991* (exhibition catalogue) (Rabat: Kulte Editions, 2013), n.p.

Pauline de Mazières, from the very beginning her ambition was to create a gallery that was open to the Maghreb, the Mashreq, and the Mediterranean.<sup>480</sup>

In the archives of the gallery is a personal letter to Pauline de Mazières from the well known Lebanese artist Etel Adnan, who originally exhibited at the gallery from the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 1978 to the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1979. Adnan writes that, ignoring more lucrative commercial ventures,

by the level that you demanded, by your faith, you have more been the catalyst of a real Moroccan painting. We the artists, we need serious galleries, a public that appreciates and buys works, a coherent and supportive cultural politics, to help us to be known and to continue our work. We cannot work in a vacuum, despite the obviously mysterious character of creation.<sup>481</sup>

L'Atelier thus provided not only an important artistic structure for the burgeoning scene of Moroccan modernism, but also a significant structure within the Arab world that served as a meeting point for a pan-Arab modernism. For example, the text for Adnan's catalogue was written by Tahar Ben Jelloun, who focused on the fervor of her anti-colonial militancy.<sup>482</sup> That same year, Adnan made one of her art books, *Harrouda* (1978) using a text by Ben Jelloun.<sup>483</sup> I do not know whether the relationship with Ben Jelloun preceded their collaboration at l'Atelier or if her choice to use of Ben Jelloun's text came before or after everything was already in place with the gallery. Most likely they knew each other prior to such artistic collaboration as Francophone writers and authors (Etel Adnan is also a poet) who lived for sometime in Paris. In any case, this is a small example of the transnational collaborations and encounters that were

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<sup>480</sup> Pauline de Mazières and Sylvia Belhassan. "L'Atelier, Séquences de vies." Interview organized by Driss Ksikes. *L'Atelier, Itineraire d'une galerie: 1971-1991* (exhibition catalogue) (Rabat: Kulte Editions, 2013), n.p.

<sup>481</sup> Personal letter, Etel Adnan to Pauline de Mazières, 1980. Personal papers from the archive of Galerie L'Atelier, Pauline de Mazières.

<sup>482</sup> Tahar Ben Jelloun. *Etel Adnan*. Galerie L'Atelier, 7 December 1978-6 January 1979.

<sup>483</sup> In the collection of Darat al Funun, Amman, Jordan.

increasingly encouraged through structures such as L'Atelier. In addition to a few European artists such as Carla Accardi, the gallery presented a variety of Arab artists such as Nja Mehdaoui (Tunisian, 1975 exhibition at l'Atelier), Adam Henein (Egyptian, 1979 exhibition at l'Atelier), Ghayass Akhrass (Syrian, 1980 exhibition at l'Atelier), Dia Azzawi (Iraqi), and Samir Salamat (Palestinian), as well as Turkish artist Burhan Dogancay (1985 exhibition at l'Atelier).

L'Atelier was invested in being modern, and in being a space of modernism, understood through increasingly broad geographical spaces. This was all the more true given the background of de Mazières and Belhassan. Pauline de Mazières was part of the Russian diaspora, and was born and grew up in Protectorate-era Morocco. Belhassan was Swiss, and moved to Morocco, where she got married and had a family and has built her life. As de Mazières says,

I was one of the kids of the Protectorate, even if my family did not own anything, and my eyes were opened relatively late to the stakes of decolonization. It was in 1958 in Algiers where my husband was doing his military service that I really became conscious of colonial oppression. That being said, when I heard at the beginning of L'Atelier the remarks of people that were pointing their fingers at this “stranger” that was opening a gallery in a recaptured territory, that some of them went as far as to suspect neo-colonialism, I lived it pretty badly. Because at the base, I was not doing it as a stranger, but because I was there and not elsewhere. It seemed natural to participate in the activity of the country where I lived, a country that had welcomed us, and also – in a way that was more of less conscious – as a way of prolonging a family tradition of artistic patronage.<sup>484</sup>

Within Morocco, a country that is so deeply shaped by its placement at the crossroads of multiple cultures, this raises all the more questions about nationalism, identity, and belonging. It certainly supports a cosmopolitan image of Moroccan modernism as well as the fault lines of postcolonial modernism. However, the gallery closed with some bitterness, and is only now being brought back into this art history. In 2014, for example, the Institut Francais of Rabat

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<sup>484</sup> Pauline de Mazières and Sylvia Belhassan. “L'Atelier, Séquences de vies.” Interview organized by Driss Ksikes. *L'Atelier, Itineraire d'une galerie: 1971-1991* (exhibition catalogue) (Rabat: Kulte Editions, 2013), n.p.

along with the national gallery, Bab Rouah, hosted a retrospective exhibition of the gallery, “L’Atelier, Itinéraire d’une Galerie, 1971-1991.” Given the major role that the gallery played in influencing the modernist art movement in the 1970s and 1980s, and as a vector in pan-Arab artistic exchange, the history of the space merits further research in the future, which is for now beyond the scope of this dissertation.

### **The Cultural Moussem of Asilah: Towards Professionalization**

The 1970s saw an increasing professionalization of the art scene in Morocco with the presence of galleries like L’Atelier and Nadar (Casablanca). Yet many describe this period as one of inactivity compared to the idealistic and passionate movements of the 1960s. As Khalil M’Rabet explains, following the second Arab Biennale, there was a “certain stagnation” within the arts scene. The annual arts festival in Asilah was perhaps an exception to this, especially in the beginning. While some artists stopped paintings, others, in the chronology that M’Rabet tells, remembered the “exposition manifeste” in Marrakech and wanted to reinvigorate those ideals. For M’Rabet, the problematic of the Annual Cultural Moussem of Asilah was meant to be the same as the “exposition manifeste” in Marrakech. In other words, Asilah is about how to make art accessible to the larger population by placing it in the public sphere. This was meant to be all the more accessible because of the traditional methods of applied art as a part of architecture.<sup>485</sup>

The goal of the festival was and remains fundamentally about enhancing the city through culture beyond just giving superficial decoration. Founded by Mohammed Melehi and

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<sup>485</sup> Khalil M’Rabet. *Peinture et identité: L’expérience marocaine*. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1987), 134

artist and politician Mohammed Benaïssa, the festival is known particularly for its public murals. Melehi and Benaïssa are both from Asilah, which at the time was a small, run-down town on the Atlantic coast south of Tangier. In its first edition in 1978, eleven Moroccan artists painted murals in the ocean-side city.<sup>486</sup> Originally, the festival was done primarily among friends, highlighting the work of the former Casablanca School and younger artists, most of whom studied at the School. The artists volunteered their labor with their expenses paid for by the city of Asilah. The public art was meant to awaken the population of the city to play a role in changing their city and take control of their lives. While embellishing the city to urge the inhabitants towards cleanliness, as M'Rabet describes it, the artists also saw themselves as working to defend the city against commercial tourism.<sup>487</sup>

The annual festival today is often framed as an expression of pan-Arabism.<sup>488</sup> However, although the festival particularly sought out relationships to artists across the Arab world, it was originally framed by an explicitly Third Worldist discourse. The Moussem was founded with the slogan “Culture and Art for Development.” Melehi and Benaïssa rooted the first festival in questions of Third World political, cultural, and economic identity, and a movement away from elite cultural practices. They sought a “permanent practice of popular culture” that could blend culture and development.<sup>489</sup> Benaïssa explains that the festival has presented “art as a medium to enjoy life, and also to mobilize the resources of imagination and creativity—without imagination, without creativity, without a clear vision, no matter how many means you have, you

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<sup>486</sup> Namely Belkahia, Chebaa, Hamidi, Melehi, Hassani, Hariri, Kacimi, Miloud, Miloudi, Rahoule and Zakkani.

<sup>487</sup> M'Rabet 134

<sup>488</sup> Shabout 30.

<sup>489</sup> Mohamed Benaïssa and Mohammed Melehi. “À l’arrière plan du Moussem.” *Asilah: Premier Moussem Culturel Juillet/Août 1978* (exhibition catalogue) (Casablanca: Shoof Publications, 1978): 8-10.

don't bring about sustainable, viable development." The Festival was furthermore conceived of as a site for cross-cultural dialogue.<sup>490</sup>

A point of critique for the festival, particularly for the 1978 edition, is that most artists did not change their work to be applicable to the outdoor setting but instead seemed to just enlarge their consistent aesthetic vocabulary. The artists were not affected by collaborations with inhabitants beyond directing students in precisely what to do, and the students arguably reproduced the same kinds of abstractions that were consistent with the artists' work. In M'Rabet's words,

What is striking in Asilah is that there is a geometry that surfaces as a reductive mold, a kind of steamroller for all spontaneity and all the freshness of childhood. The false idea that we make of exuberant youth... The artworks done by the adolescents of the town show themselves as copies of the artworks of the masters: geometric cut-outs, brightly colored forms, no relief or depth. Belkahia recognized that the artists were brought to put up their paintings on canvas but painted on a wall, nothing more. Some arrived with models and even ... large forms cut out of plywood... In our opinion, only Hassani knew to avoid affixing the "label" of recognition by style and adapting forms and colors to the accidental surface of the wall that he faced. Others went so far as to sign their artworks ... in Latin characters!<sup>491</sup>

M'Rabet goes on to criticize the artists that didn't realize that the blindingly white Asilah was already clean, unlike polluted Casablanca, saying that the artists pretended to engage a city that they did not know, nor did they give themselves time to know either its character or problems. He moreover argues that the work was disengaged, allowing it to create the exact kind of tourism that the artists were fighting against.

What is true is that the photographs that remain from the first edition are clearly recognizable as works by the artists in question. Belkahia's mural is the same organic shape that

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<sup>490</sup> Haupt & Binder. "Mohammed Benaïssa: Asilah Festival." *Nafas art magazine in cooperation with Universes in Universe*. June 2004. <http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2004/benaissa>. (Accessed 12/14/09).

<sup>491</sup> M'Rabet 135-136

is consistent throughout his body of work, a line that forms something of an exaggerated “W” that seems to suggest both geometric abstraction as well as something natural, either sexual or at least organically reproductive [Image 6.7]. While it wraps around the building and functions therefore in a new way, the visual language is not challenged. Melehi’s waves are cut up into multiple vertical stripes in his mural [Image 6.8]. The angle of the waves is the mirror of the straight lines shooting down, and the varied tops of the wave portions recall the different levels along the tops of the white houses of Asilah. The waves, moreover, are particularly apt in Asilah, Melehi’s hometown, because they always had a relationship to the ocean town. Nonetheless, while their placement on the building brings out new parts of the artistic project, it is not constitutively different than a painted canvas. Hamidi’s graphic lines and sexualized imagery that again seems to refer to body parts despite its deeply abstract nature is equally consistent with his larger artistic project [Image 6.9]. The shapes are larger and, given that this was on a public mural, probably less corporeally motivated than some of his canvasses. Nonetheless, the bright colors and the visual motifs themselves are like the rest of his work. The photograph of local children and adolescents working on a mural does suggest a similar conception of abstraction [Image 6.10]. The graphic abstractions and color pattern bear a resemblance to the form of abstraction practiced by the invited artists, and are not the scenes from daily life or inspirational sayings that are today found on murals in Asilah.

Yet the question remains: is it a problem that these murals seem to be a transfer of existing artistic themes from canvas to the wall, as opposed to artwork that uses a new visual language to respond to the changed circumstances of installation and exhibition? As discussed in Chapter Four with regard to the exhibition in Djemaa al Fna, art historian Miwon Kwon



Image 6.7: Mural painting in Asilah. Farid Belkahia.

*Farid Belkahia.* (exhibition catalogue) (Casablanca: Venise Cadre, 2010), 249. [In the catalogue, this is dated as 1971, however, given that the festival in Asilah was founded in 1978, I believe that is a typo.]



Image 6.8: Mural painting in Asilah (in progress), Mohammed Melehi, 1978

Khalil M'Rabet. *Peinture et identité: L'expérience marocaine*. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987),

XXVII

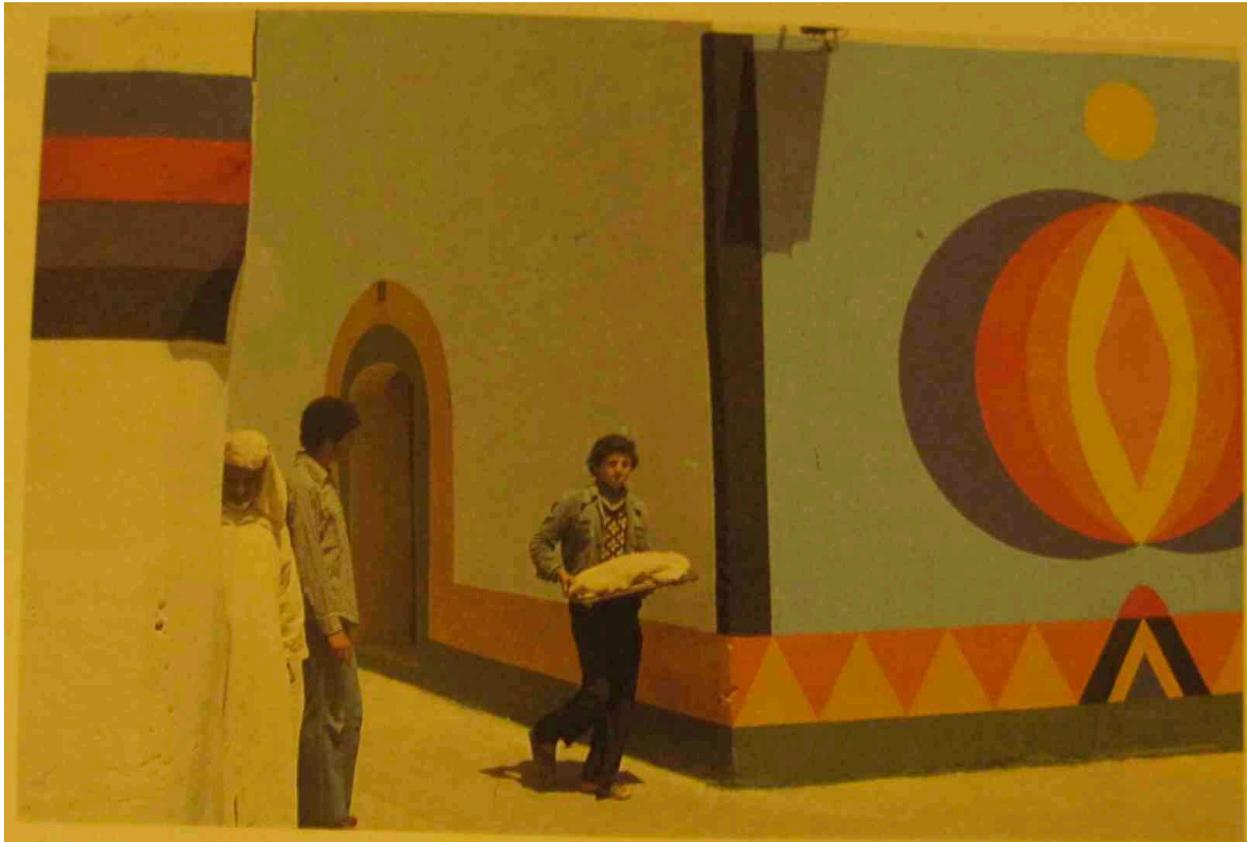


Image 6.9: Mural painting in Asilah, Mohammed Hamidi, 1978

Khalil M'Rabet. *Peinture et identité: L'expérience marocaine*. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987),

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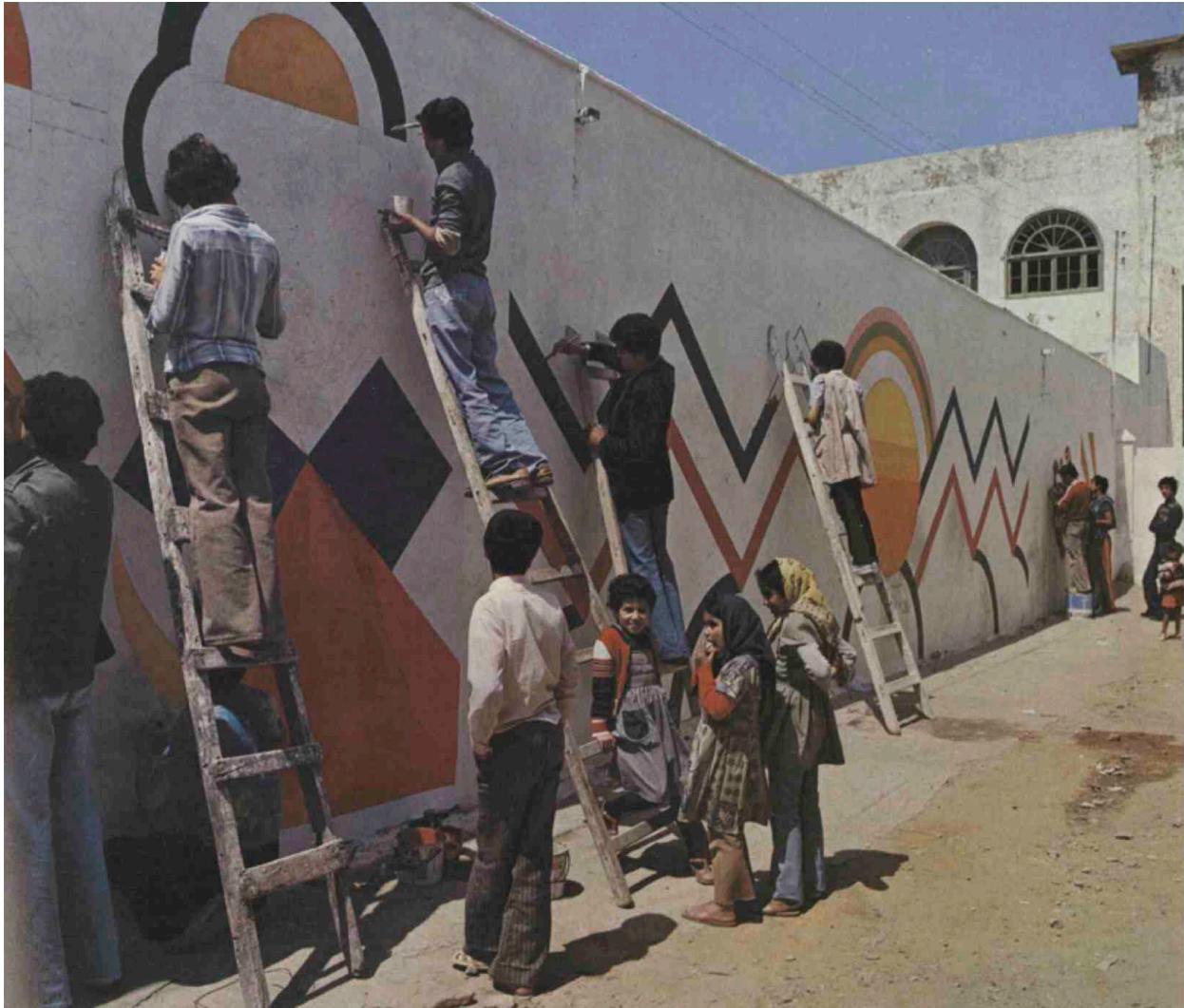


Image 6.10: Children painting mural in Asilah, 1978

*Asilah: Premier Moussem Culturel Juillet/Août 1978* (exhibition catalogue) (Casablanca: Shoof Publications, 1978)

differentiates kinds of public art. She defines one category as “art-in-public-places,” which is not public art per se; she distinguishes the latter as work in which its publicness is an intrinsic part of the work itself.<sup>492</sup> That is less accurate of the murals in Asilah than it is of the “exposition manifeste.” This is art that was created on a different scale and in relation to architecture. These were not new concerns for the artists. Throughout the 1960s, although it has not been a feature of this dissertation, Casablanca artists were working periodically with architects Patrice de Mazières (husband of Pauline de Mazières) and Abdeslam Faraoui (who together co-founded their architecture firm De Mazières-Faraoui) on repeated visual motifs from their artistic projects integrated into new architecture. These collaborations included, among other projects, integrating visual arts into the architecture of the arrival hall of the Rabat-Salé airport, and the Royal Air Maroc agencies in Marrakech, Fes, and Meknès.<sup>493</sup>

In 1968, for instance, Belkahia, Melehi, and Chebaa along with local artisans painting wooden panels all worked with de Mazières and Faraoui on the Marrakech Hôtel des Almoravides. Toni Maraini described the project as “an honest attempt at artistic integration into the line-up. The artists conceived of their work according to given space and purposes. The materials, the colors, the form were studied in order to incorporate them into the spirit of the ensemble, within its internal structure.”<sup>494</sup> Mohammed Melehi’s two installations, for example, were made out of the red clay that is ubiquitous in Marrakech alternated with other pieces of colored ceramic [Image 6.11]. The visual vocabulary is consistent across all Melehi’s different forms, despite changes necessitated by space and material.

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<sup>492</sup> Miwon Kwon. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 97.

<sup>493</sup> “Travaux d’intégration à l’architecture.” Personal papers from the archive of Galerie L’Atelier, Pauline de Mazières.

<sup>494</sup> Toni Maraini Melehi. “action plastique: hôtel des Almoravides.” *Souffles* n 12, trimestre 4 (1968): 49.

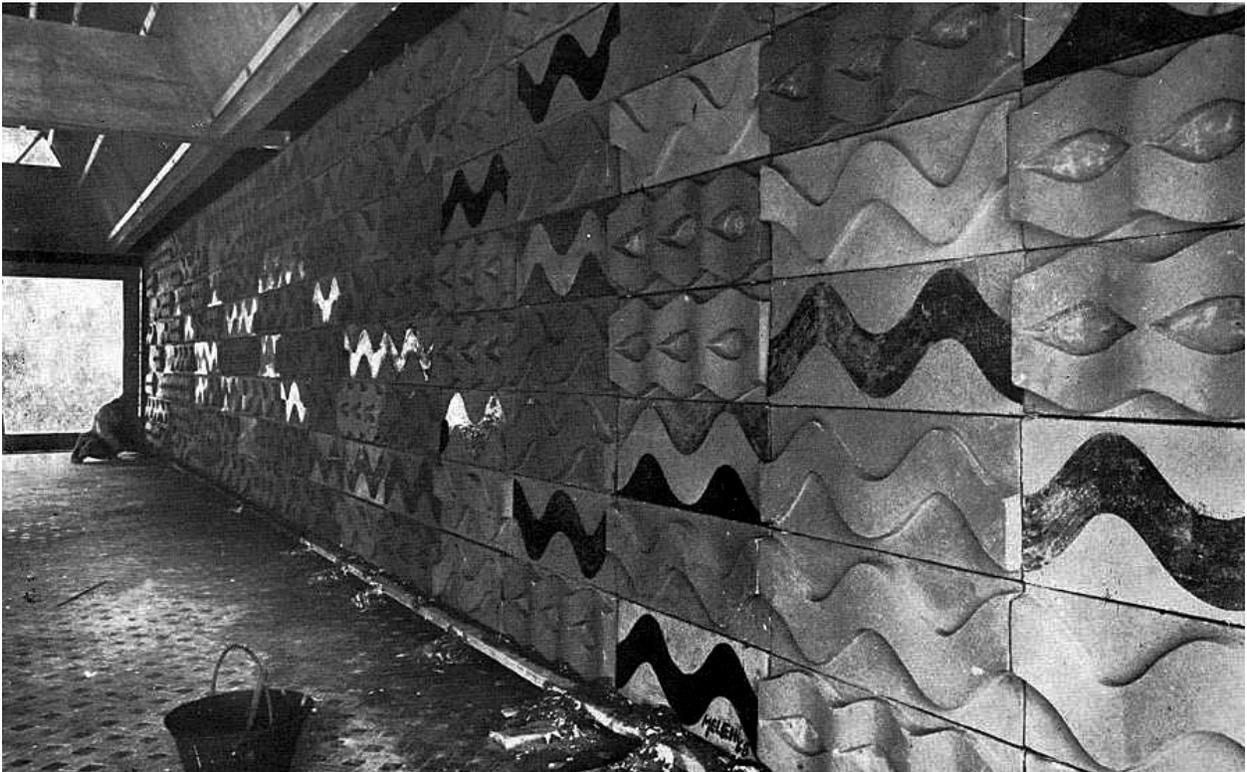


Image 6.11: Installation in the Hôtel des Almoravides, Marrakech. Mohammed Melehi.

*Souffles* n 12, trimestre 4 (1968)

The issue that the mural work produced for Asilah is consistent with the artists' larger body of work is, in other words, unsurprising given that they had experimented with these forms in art integrated into architecture in the past. Nor is that a fault in and of itself, in my opinion. I also do not expect all artists to want to open up their work to the suggestions of passersby even in public artwork, as M'Rabet seems to, and I do not consider that the mark of public art's success or otherwise. However, the afterthought of the previously quoted text, that the artists signed their work in Latin characters (as opposed to in Arabic script) seems to dovetail with a further critique M'Rabet levels against the artists:

We see individual interventions on constructed frames that serve these artworks as simple mounts, an "outdoor gallery [galerie en plein air]," as one commentator termed it on television. It does seem to in fact be a gallery for enlarged artworks not so much for the inhabitants, but for the Other that is at the door of the city ... and to whom one wishes to give a "non-folkloric" image of himself.<sup>495</sup>

Given the politics of artistic discourse in Morocco, many of these artists consistently signed their artworks in Latin characters, though it is worth noting that in Morocco, beyond class distinctions, French and Spanish are for many people native tongues in addition to Arabic. Again, that they signed these works in the same alphabet that they sign many of their works is not in my opinion cause for critique. However, it suggests the much larger and more cutting critique that follows: that this art was never for the people of the city, but was instead meant for the world stage to the detriment of the local population. This is the same discourse that is still applied to annual exhibitions like biennales that claim locality and publicness as the grounds of the exhibition, and remains equally difficult to respond to. This raises real questions about what makes an artwork public, and how public art should fit into an artists' broader body of work. The festival is

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<sup>495</sup> M'Rabet 136

grounded in international participants that are consistently invited, yet the question remains of how to analyze the impact on the city's population.

While the artwork itself is shouldering this critique, the criticism itself exists in part because of the complex role that the Moussem has played for its founders. Beyond critiques that have focused on the way that development has been directed towards an elite and especially towards tourism, at the loss of a less-privileged local population, there have often been questions about the festival as a political tool for its founders. Many critics have argued that the festival was politically instrumentalized, either from the beginning or over the years. Benaïssa was an artist and photographer in his own right, although he has also been a career politician that has ascended through the political ranks. At the time that the festival was founded, Benaïssa was acting as mayor of Asilah. He then became Minister of Culture from 1985 to 1992<sup>496</sup>, Moroccan Ambassador to the United States from 1993 to 1999, and, from 1999 to 2007, Morocco's Minister of Foreign Affairs. Melehi himself was, for a long time, arts director at the Ministry of Culture.

That a public festival has political implications is not new, nor is it unsurprising that a festival works towards the political aspirations of its founders. The connection to politics is not enough for a critique on its own, not least because it is holding Morocco to a standard different than that of international festivals that receive public funding, however small. However, two things separate Asilah and ground this critique more fully.

One factor of the criticism is that the festival continues to this day, and it is therefore judged based on how it has changed, in addition to its founding ideals. While the festival is a

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<sup>496</sup> He was heavily criticized in this role by members of the artistic community for not supporting the modernist artists more actively. For instance, Pauline de Mazières writes in a personal letter to Dia Azzawi, "Here, in spite of Mr. Benaïssa's presence at the Ministry of Culture, I cannot really say that anything is somehow better." 14 October 1986.

continuation of many of the ideas that were prevalent in the 1960s, the official nature of the festival today separates it in a fundamental way from the critical positioning that artists had previously negotiated against elite spaces. The connections being made in contemporary versions of the festival, as in the 2010 festival in which the invited guest was the United Arab Emirates, seem to cater more to political desires than purely cultural development. The presence of the UAE holds an uncomfortable resonance with the close economic relationship that has been formed by major Emirati development within Morocco. Moreover, participants are often elite politicians, again going against the idea of art as a popular venture. In the 2009 festival for instance,<sup>497</sup> participants for the inauguration of the conference included Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (President of Liberia) and John Agyekum Kufuor (former President of Ghana), as well as various ministers and government officials. Participants in the panels included academics as well as government officials including the former Prime Minister of Algeria, the Yemeni Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Angolan Minister of Foreign Relations. The line-up of international politicians makes the positioning of the festival today clear: this is not a small festival for art classes and volunteer artists, as it was when it was founded. Yet the festival as it exists today affects how the origins are analyzed. Rather than considering the festival as a work in progress that has shifted and mutated in different social and political climates, today's criticism has treated the festival as a whole as being consistent. This is not to say that such criticism is unfounded or only a recent development. To the contrary, similar criticism has been leveled against the conference throughout its history. However, unlike other events from this era that are

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<sup>497</sup> Available in full at Fondation du Forum d'Assilah. "31<sup>e</sup> Moussem Culturel International d'Assilah." Assilah Forum Foundation. 2008. <http://www.c-assilah.com/31/>. (Accessed 12/14/09.)

finished and can be seen from a critical distance, Melehi and Benaïssa are both still involved, and the analysis of the historical festival is deeply colored by what it is now.

Secondly, the relationship between art and politics within the festival, that goes back to its origins, suggests complicity with the regime of Hassan II. As discussed in Chapter Four, this is an allegation that is consistently leveled against this generation of artists which has negatively affected how their artistic interventions are currently viewed today. The criticism, in other words, is not that the Moussem had politics in its history or that it was utilized for political ends: it is that the politicians went on to have major roles in a repressive regime. It is a criticism of politics, not of the festival itself. This generation of artists had a deep and radical anti-colonial politics that was inherent in their earlier projects in Casablanca. That this is a politically motivated festival that was complicit with the regime seems to many to be a profound abnegation of earlier ideals much as it is nonetheless being presented with the same principles as the “exposition manifeste.”

It is outside of the purview of this project to take a position pro or against the festival or its viability. I nonetheless believe that the political situation under Hassan II was much more complex than the uncompromising binary offered with which complicity have been viewed by critics of the festival. If it is important to clarify the unspoken stakes of the critiques of the Moussem, it is not the role of art historical research to pass judgment in these terms. Going back to the origins of the annual festival, the goal was to remake the city, using art as a means of development and beautifying the space, in addition to enabling art and training artists. As Katarzyna Pieprzak points out this has been, in many ways, quite successful. As she writes, “One cannot, and should not, deny the festival its success as a site in which art transformed the city and created a new place of exchange.” Pieprzak retains the possibility that, whatever else the

critique, we must imagine that “the Moroccan public at large, as untrained and unaccustomed to modern art as it was, did react to the art, and that on some level, subtle, unconscious, or momentary as it might have been, the artwork changed their way of seeing.”<sup>498</sup> This study is not devoted to the reception of the artwork, but like Pieprzak, I am invested in making space for multiple readings that allow actions, exhibitions, and events to be read not as monoliths but as containing possibilities and engagements that are shifting and changing, imperfect and partial, but also much more stealthy and subtle than easy judgments permit.

## **Conclusion**

Perhaps motivated at least originally by Palestinian question then (and what it continues to mean for the Arab world), a major change in the 1970s was the opening towards the Arab world and the increasing claims of pan-Arabism. If public engagement and the debates of national culture had been hallmarks of the 1960s for the artists of the Casablanca school, in the 1970s, focus began turning towards transnational relationships between Arab artists. These links were emphasized in the multiple manifestations of the Union for Arab Artists and the Moroccan association under the umbrella of the UAA, the Association Marocain des Artistes Plasticiens, such as the Arab Biennales, as well as with the annual Cultural Moussem in Asilah and the Galerie L’Atelier.

Political engagement for artists culturally and nationally was arguably less possible by the mid-1970s, especially after the Green March and the increasingly prevalent “consensus

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<sup>498</sup> Katarzyna Pieprzak. *Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Post-colonial Morocco*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 144-146.

culture.” Public engagement and the debates of national culture lose focus as artists began to increasingly try to maneuver their positions within the AMAP and galleries. Yet as the artistic scene in Morocco gained increasing structures, the cracks between the now multiple generations of artists began to show. Overall, beyond the broader tendency towards a “consensus culture” within the elite, there was a remarkable change in the tenor of arts discourse. Khalil M’Rabet also points to a transformation of the arts. He puts a date on this change with the founding of *Intégral* in 1971. As he writes,

With this publication, the tone changes and the mutations happen. We no longer speak of Art in the street [l’Art dans la rue] that the experiences of Marrakech and of Casablanca tended towards, but instead of Art in an enclosed space [l’Art dans un lieu clos]. [...] The landslide towards the visual stabilizes... becomes academic [s’académise].<sup>499</sup>

In other words, the stakes change. The impassioned debates about engaging and creating the post-colonial national public, of making art for this public, has faded. This was replaced in art scene by personal competitiveness and interpersonal disagreements that is more and more locally known until the present. For example, by 1989, Khalil Raïs characterizes the art scene in *L’Opinion* by its “hate and jealousy” and its “dinosaurian elite.” He writes,

We know – and we have noted it – that the Moroccan visual arts sector is sullied by a certain rot, that a spirit of castes dominates more than anywhere else, that mercantilism is king, that exploitation makes the law, that each person writes his own law, that each person is out for himself and that a certain well-protected elite has the happiness of making the choices and vice-versa, that they have gone around the world with a few paintings more or less “expert.”<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> Khalil M’Rabet. *Peinture et Identité: L’expérience marocaine*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1987. 108.

<sup>500</sup> Khalil Raïs. “Un nomme par qui le scandale arriva! Raisonnement vouëtés...” 25 August, 1989. No page numbers or journal numbers because this was found in a clipping from the archive of L’Atelier.

The position of the artists has changed. Early articles in *L'Opinion* often emphasized the struggles of the artists to find support; by 1989, this article suggests a pettiness and focus on self-promotion and money that did not previously exist in the written discourse.

These documents suggest, as many people have voiced to me in interviews, that the active debates of modernism and the role of art in building a post-colonial nation slowly became lost in increasing interpersonal squabbles and criticism. Even without going that far, it is fair to say that, within a changing cultural climate, the artistic scene became focused on new and different questions. By the late 1970s and into the early 1980s, the cultural landscape of Morocco was fundamentally altered from that of the heyday of the Casablanca School.

## CONCLUSION

### *Le Maroc contemporain*

On January 31, 2015, the Moroccan daily Francophone newspaper *Aujourd'hui le Maroc* published an interview with the curator Moulim El Aroussi under the following headline: “Moulim El Aroussi: ‘Morocco is inscribed in modernity.’”<sup>501</sup> The interview was done on the occasion of the exhibition “Le Maroc contemporain” (“Contemporary Morocco”) at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, for which El Aroussi was associate curator collaborating with Jean-Hubert Martin. The exhibition was part of a “cultural season” in Paris of exhibitions on Morocco, which included “Le Maroc médiéval: Un empire de l’Afrique à l’Espagne” (“Medieval Morocco: An Empire from Africa to Spain”) at the Louvre. After Jack Lang was named director of the Institut du Monde Arabe, he heard that the Louvre was going to do this exhibition and wanted to also organize an exhibition showing the many currents of artistic production in Morocco today. As El Aroussi says, in the interview putting this idea into action was “very simple. Jack Lang spoke of it to His Majesty the King directly and he had the support of the Sovereign<sup>502</sup> to establish an event of this stature.” He goes on to explain, “The order was clear; the Moroccan authorities wanted to present the current and contemporary aspects of the country’s artistic creation.” As El Aroussi explains, the goal of the exhibition was also to “show

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<sup>501</sup> Najib Abdelhak. “Moulim El Aroussi: ‘Le Maroc est inscrit dans la modernité.’” *Aujourd'hui le Maroc*. January 31, 2015.

<sup>502</sup> This is a respectful term that refers to the king.

the young Moroccans that are mostly unknown to the French scene. People are talking about the Morocco exhibition, it's a Parisian event, even European.”

The image below the headline is of El Aroussi himself [Image 7.1]. The curator is dressed in somber winter clothing, and is standing in front of a fountain in the courtyard of the Louvre. The background includes the Louvre palace, a statue of Louis XIV on a horse, the edge of I.M. Pei's glass pyramid, and a hoard of tourists. The photograph is taken from a relatively long-range. It has not been cropped to focus on the curator's face, but instead retains the expansive and immediately recognizable location of the Louvre, particularly thanks to the inclusion of the pyramid. The portrait lays claim to a distinctly and recognizably Parisian cultural capital. Literally framed by the Louvre, El Aroussi's authority is vested not only in his knowledge of Morocco, but in the implied discursive space of high Parisian culture.

In the 2001 Institut du Monde Arabe exhibition “Le Maroc en mouvement: Créations contemporaines,” Brahim Alaoui and Nicole de Pontcharra wrote about Moroccan artists as “the face of modern Morocco, that of the freedom of thought,” and claiming that “the time has come for artistic creation to be recognized as primordial in the projects of a modern society.” As Katarzyna Pieprzak points out about this quotation, these are not new statements. She writes, “One might argue that the Moroccan state and various individuals, collectives, and corporations *have* recognized and promoted visual art as the face of their modernity since the country gained independence.”<sup>503</sup> Nonetheless, Moroccan modernity is continually being claimed anew – in this most recent example, that modernity is being reclaimed with a contemporary art exhibition. To claim modernity today, rather than claiming contemporaneity, or claiming to be a part of the

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<sup>503</sup> Katarzyna Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): 159.



Image 7.1: Portrait of Moulim El Aroussi, unlisted photographer.

Najib Abdelhak. "Moulim El Aroussi: 'Le Maroc est inscrit dans la modernité.'" *Aujourd'hui le Maroc*. January 31, 2015.

globalized world, now seems like an anachronism, and yet Moroccan modernity is nonetheless forever, seemingly, in the process of becoming.

“Le Maroc contemporain” opened October 15, 2014, one week after the opening in Rabat of the Musée Mohammed VI d’Art Moderne et Contemporain, the first modern and contemporary art museum of Morocco. Construction for this museum first broke ground in 2006, although it had been in the works for many years before that, and its creation was marked by significant delays.<sup>504</sup> The museum in Rabat is named after the current king, and its website described the museum as an initiative of the king to “create the conditions for the conservation and diffusion of our artistic heritage, while encouraging creativity and working towards cultural democratization and flourishing.”<sup>505</sup>

“Le Maroc contemporain” was similarly deeply linked to the palace, arising from a conversation between Lang and Mohammed VI and organized following the directives of the Moroccan authorities. The Institut du Monde Arabe more broadly is financed by both the French government and a variety of Arab governments (most significantly Saudi Arabia) to encourage Franco-Arab relations, and to provide a didactic space devoted to Arab culture, and it is directed by a French politician, Jack Lang. Financial support for this particular exhibition came primarily from Moroccan businesses, such as the OCP Group (which has exclusive access to the world’s largest phosphate resources in Morocco), the CDG (Caisse de Dépôt et de Gestion, a state-owned financial institution in Morocco created in 1959 that manages national financial resources), and a variety of Moroccan banks. While independently curated, the exhibition nonetheless is located within the realm of official initiatives.

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<sup>504</sup> Pieprzak 162

<sup>505</sup> “Le MMVI, une volonté royale.” *Musée Mohammed VI: Art Moderne et Contemporain*. <http://www.museemohammed6.ma/#/section/4> (accessed 22 April 2015)

The exhibition was structured broadly, with the only curatorial limitation on selection being living Moroccan artists. One Belgian artist, Eric van Hove, who now lives in Morocco was included, widening the definition of Morocco beyond national origins. The only exception is the inclusion of Farid Belkahia who was selected but died during the installation of the exhibition. The thematic section of the exhibition included section such as: fantasy, pioneers of modernity, social critique, migrants, the female body, and the Arab Spring, among others. The artworks were punctuated periodically by artisanal work, most notably rugs hung from many walls [Image 7.2]. The themes often seemed to focus on the open spirit and liberal values of today's Morocco. The contemporary politics of French support for Moroccan liberal values has larger stakes for economic investments. For example, the first and, up to now, only official visit by current French president Francois Hollande in 2013 to Morocco was described by the weekly newspaper *Le Journal de Dimanche* (and then cited on the website of *Aufait Maroc*). The political goal for Hollande was to “pay tribute to the democratic impetus and reforming spirit of the King,” while also signing a series of agreements meant to “reinforce the French presence in the territory.”<sup>506</sup> In the article, this is tantamount to a quid pro quo. This is a significant change since the time of French complicity with Hassan II's regime, as in the example of the assassination of Mehdi Ben Barka. Nonetheless, while the contemporary focus on democratic values is new, France and Morocco have retained a close political relationship since Moroccan independence. For example, Mohammed VI chose France as the destination for his first overseas State visit in 2000, and in

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<sup>506</sup> “Le président Hollande au Maroc pour ‘soutenir les réformes’ et ‘chercher la croissance’ (JDD).” *Aufait Maroc*, March 31, 2013.



Image 7.2: Installation view of “Le Maroc contemporain” at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris.

Author’s photograph.

On the right is work by contemporary Moroccan artist Faouzi Laatiris and in the passageway are seen rugs that are listed as “anonymous.” Photograph by author.

addition to being the first head of state to be received by Hollande, within a week of taking office.<sup>507</sup>

Based on this lengthy description of the context of the exhibition “Le Maroc contemporain,” it seems to me that there are numerous questions that arise that are intricately linked to the questions explored within this dissertation. Why did such significant Moroccan funds go to showing Moroccan art in Paris one week after the long-awaited opening of the modern and contemporary art museum in Rabat? Why, in light of the vast discourse disputing (however spuriously) the continued existence of a traditional artistic center and periphery, is the importance placed on artists becoming known, not in a local scene, but in a French artistic scene? Why is Moroccan contemporary art being presented alongside anonymously created rugs, when exhibitions of contemporary European art are not structured in relation to craft? Why does its central role in Parisian cultural programming in 2014-2015 confer upon Morocco its modernity anew? Why are Moroccan authorities directing the expectations of the exhibition, and why did the exhibition arise out of a meeting between politicians? More precisely: what are the political stakes for both Morocco and for France in presenting Moroccan art in Paris, and what does this reveal about the, if not neocolonial, then perhaps preferential relationship between the two countries?

Just over 50 years after “Deux Mille Ans d’Art au Maroc,” “Le Maroc contemporain” is also an exhibition of the changing political relationship between Morocco and France, and the changing expectations of what narrative about Moroccan art is expected or allowed to be told in Paris. Both were politically motivated exhibitions used to paint a picture of Moroccan history and society through its visual culture, and both raised uncomfortable questions about the

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<sup>507</sup> “Political Relations.” *France Diplomatie*. <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/morocco-285/france-and-morocco/political-relations-6306/> (Accessed 22 April 2015)

discursive construction of Morocco in the French imagination. The entangled political histories of the two countries are as much on display as the artistic production.

Another question raised by this more recent exhibition, particularly when put into dialogue with “Deux Mille Ans d’Art au Maroc,” might be whether or not there is still a place for exhibitions structured along national lines. With the inclusion of van Hove, as well as the vast Moroccan diaspora that includes artists like Mehdi-Georges Lahlou, who was born in France and lives in Brussels, the national lines have been blurred to the point that national affiliation no longer tells the story that it once did. This is all the more true because of the changing way in which artists structure the public towards which their work is aimed. In post-colonial Morocco, there was a clear and intentional engagement with the ideas and ideals of national culture. The public for that older modernist generation of artists was a nation-based public and artists theorized their work in relation to national culture and national associations. That is no longer true of contemporary art, in Morocco as throughout the world. After a period of artistic production that was not based in public engagement in the way that the Casablanca school artists were, there has been a resurgence of ideas that resonate with the art of the 1960. The public, however, has become reconfigured to be a simultaneously globalized and highly local public, and these new configurations raise questions about how exhibition politics and practices reflect or interact with contemporary artistic production.

### **Contemporary Art and New Publics**

With some exceptions, for the most part, by the late 1970s the focus of the artistic discourse in Morocco turned from public engagement to a more disengaged and personal artistic practice. Debates were connected more to associations or art spaces than to the active use of arts and culture for the benefit of society. If the role of the artist had been shaped by the idea of a wide-ranging artistic project that encompassed pedagogy, interdisciplinary alliances, curatorial interventions, and forms of public engagement, I argue that the expectations for the very role of the artist changed at this time to allow for a more confined image of the artist working on the individual artistic output. This was of course not true across the board: artist Mohammed Kacimi is a notable exception that remained engaged in cultural politics and politics as such through his art, as in his artistic responses to the first Gulf War.

Yet overall, beyond the broader tendency towards a “consensus culture” following the Green March within the elite, there was a remarkable change in the tenor of artistic discourse. Khalil M’Rabet points to a transformation of the arts, giving a precise date to this change with the founding of *Intégral* in 1971. As he writes,

With this publication, the tone changes and the mutations happen. We no longer speak of Art in the street [l’Art dans la rue] that the experiences of Marrakech and of Casablanca tended towards, but instead of Art in an enclosed space [l’Art dans un lieu clos]. [...] The landslide towards the visual stabilizes... becomes academic [s’académise].<sup>508</sup>

In other words, the stakes have changed, with the impassioned debates about engaging and creating the post-colonial national public, of making art for such public, has faded. In their place, the artistic scene began to take on the interpersonal disagreements that it is more and more locally known for up until today. For example, by 1989, Khalil Raïs in *L’Opinion* characterizes the art scene by its “hate and jealousy” and its “dinosaurian elite” in which “mercantilism is

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<sup>508</sup> Khalil M’Rabet, *Peinture et identité: L’expérience marocaine* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1987):108.

king.” The position of the artists, according to this article, changed. Early articles in *L’Opinion* often emphasized the struggles of the artists to find support – by 1989, this article suggests a pettiness and focus on self-promotion and money that did not previously exist in the written discourse.

I do not wish to take a position on this specific critique of a competitive and market-driven artistic scene, I would like to point this article out as it clearly indicates a shift in the late 1970s and into the mid- to late-1990s. This kind of discourse and personal critique did not exist in major news sources in the 1960s and early 1970s. In this earlier time period, moreover, the goal was in part to create a functioning art market as a way to support artistic creation. There was not an equivalent criticism of being financially driven (in part, of course, because these artists were not as financially viable as they went on to be). These changes in how artistic production was written about were contextualized by changes in the cultural infrastructure. *Souffles* had been shut down in 1972. *Intégral* closed in 1978. *Lamalif* closed in 1988. L’Atelier closed in 1991. Both the tenor of artistic discourse and the actual structures of artistic production changed profoundly, in part in relationship to the political and social climate.

Following these closures and changes, there was a new shift in the 1990s, in which Hassan II instituted the “années d’alternance.” This move, which shifted power within the regime, opened the government to a broader possibility of participation, especially for the opposition. This change was done with the goal to create a space for Morocco in the global system, and there are multiple rationales that scholars have given about why Hassan II did those, most showing how this was a move to continue to hold onto power. Many previously exiled intellectuals returned to the country, becoming integrated into official posts: well-known writer

Abdelkébir Khattibi, for instance, took a leadership role at the University of Rabat.<sup>509</sup> After the death of Hassan II in 1999, Mohammed VI became the king, and remains in power up to the present day. Mohammed VI, particularly early on, maintained a global image of openness that the Moroccan government has often sought to bolster.

Simultaneous with the “années d’alternance” and the changing image of Morocco under Mohammed VI, visual arts became increasingly officially recognized as politically useful. A new generation of artists became prominent in the late 1990s, many of whom were or are related to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Tétouan, where Faouzi Laatiris has been an influential teacher. In the words of curator Abdellah Karroum, who founded the artistic space l’Appartement 22 in Rabat, this generation of artists, including Younes Rahmoun, Safaa Erruas, Yto Barrada, and Mustapha Akrim, is “developing an artistic vocabulary inspired by the social realities of the 2000s in Morocco, as well as by the global context within which they are active.”<sup>510</sup> The late 1990s and early 2000s were marked by the start of multiple initiatives such as the artists’ collectives La Source du Lion (Casablanca) and the Collectif 212 (Rabat and Tétouan), as well as multiple small exhibition spaces such as L’Espace 150x295cm (Martil). This moment of the late 1990s and early 2000s constituted a cultural moment in which critique and public engagement seemed newly possible, and there was an attendant resurgence of ideas and strategies that had been typical of the Casablanca school.

With this shift in strategies for artists working in Morocco, there has been a renewed interest in engaging a larger public by siting art within physically public spaces, along with a prevalent place for an idea of “the street.” Yet the nature of this public has changed along with

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<sup>509</sup> Abdellah Karroum, “Nka Roundtable: To Begin With – Karroum,” *Nka*, September 11, 2011, <http://nkajournal.wordpress.com/2011/09/11/nka-roundtable-iv-to-begin-abdellah/>

<sup>510</sup> Abdellah Karroum, “Badiya/Madina,” *L’appartement 22*, February 14, 2012, <http://appartement22.com/spip.php?article336>

the radical formal change. The contemporary projects I address here have moved away from the notion of national culture and identity in favor of interrogating particular spaces and in collaboration with specific local communities. Simon Sheikh argues that there is a need to think of the public sphere as “fragmented, as consisting of a number of spaces and/or formations that sometimes connect, sometimes close off, and that are in conflictual and contradictory relations to each other.”<sup>511</sup> This partial yet relational notion of the public sphere is importantly linked to similar theorizations of locality.<sup>512</sup> My own interest in locality in contemporary art is in understanding the local contextually and relationally, in constellation with other locales.

These concepts are relevant in trying to understand the contemporary turn to art within physically public spaces in Morocco. These new projects engage this idea of a particular, fragmented public, rooted in individual encounters that become constitutive of the work itself. Rather than placing art objects within public spaces, as in Miwon Kwon’s model of “art-in-public-places,” the art object within contemporary examples has become secondary, and has often disappeared entirely. These projects instead are constituted by shared experience in one form or another. This dissertation includes this topic as a question of artistic discourse in Morocco. Arguably, similar to the questions I raised about “Le Maroc contemporain,” the nation is no longer an appropriate framework for these contemporary projects, given their simultaneously local and trans-national nature. I mainly focus here on the iterations of these projects within the borders of Morocco. There are important particularities to the changing socio-political context of contemporary Morocco within which these projects are created and received,

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<sup>511</sup> Simon Sheikh, “In the Place of the Public Sphere? or, The World in Fragments,” in *Situation: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Ed. Claire Doherty (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009): 137.

<sup>512</sup> For example, in writing about biennials, Sheikh argues that today, we understand place equally through its possible and impossible connections to other places as in the originality of the place itself. “Marks of Distinction, Vectors of Possibility: Questions for the Biennial,” *Open: The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon* 16 (2009): 75.

not to mention the specific artistic structures and history of artistic practice and public intervention. Yet the changing relevance of the framework of the nation is in and of itself what I am considering here.

The rehabilitation of the Casablanca park L'Hermitage is an early example of this new wave of publically situated and engaged artistic practice. The park was built under the French protectorate and has been undergoing a significant rehabilitation since 1999.<sup>513</sup> Casablanca-based collective La Source du Lion, directed by Hassan Darsi, became involved in 2002. The artistic intervention began with an 18 square meter scale model of the park. Darsi released a public declaration inviting anyone that was interested to work with him, and thirty people worked for a year on the model. The model of the park that was produced is now held by the collection of the Centre Pompidou [Image 7.3]. The project was meant to make the situation of the polluted and degraded park visible, and to provide a point around which to create a movement.<sup>514</sup> Artistic interventions also included a replica of the disfigured concrete lion and a series of conferences entitled “Passareilles artistiques,” engaging projects by international artists. The rehabilitation of the park involved collaborations between neighborhood advocacy groups, the municipal government, the city government, and La Source du Lion. The collective also formed the CPAH<sup>515</sup>, a committee for the preservation of the park that entered into talks with the government. Furthermore, partnerships were created with sister parks, including in the United States and the Netherlands. This project is hyper-local and cannot be understood—could not have been undertaken at all—without the collaboration of people from many social positions. The partnerships with international parks still situate this in a constellation of sorts with other

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<sup>513</sup> Martine Derain, *Echo Larmitaj, un chantier à Casablanca* (Casablanca: Editions Le Fennec, 2007): 147.

<sup>514</sup> Derain 57.

<sup>515</sup> Comité de Préservation et d'Animation du parc de l'Hermitage

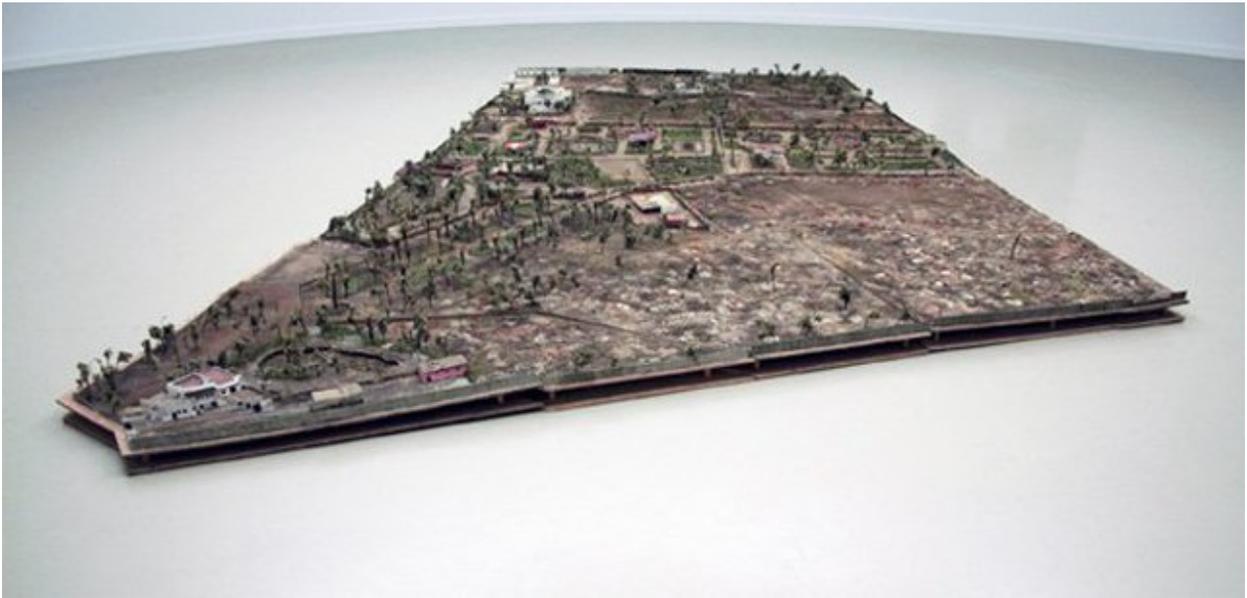


Image 7.3: Hassan Darsi, “Le Projet de la Maquette,” 2002-2003, Centre Pompidou, Paris.

Hassan Darsi, “What role can the archive play in developing and sustaining a critical and culturally located art history?” *Ibraaz*, November 6, 2013.

<http://www.ibraaz.org/platforms/6/responses/153>

localities, although here, this is a relationship of precise social spaces for the purposes of advocacy. The artistic aspect of this rehabilitation deals with visibility and with raising questions, rather than offering concrete actions to take.

The L'Hermitage project necessarily required collaboration with multiple levels of government. La Source du Lion was invested in asking what public space is and what this space could be for the neighborhood public, more than in re-making the political space. Of the projects that I will discuss here, this is the closest to explicit political intervention, although, like other contemporary projects, it also requires us to re-imagine a strict separation between cultural and political engagement.

Just as the L'Hermitage project tried to situate the collective's artistic work within the specific sociopolitical climate of Casablanca, the independent artistic space l'Appartement 22, which was founded by Abdellah Karroum in 2002, has sought to situate the exhibitions and residencies that it has hosted within the specific sociopolitical climate of Rabat. The space was formerly Karroum's own apartment, and it is located on the major central boulevard of Rabat, across the street from Parliament. The opening exhibition in October 2002 was "JF\_JH (individualités)"—JF\_JH being "Jeune Femme\_Jeune Homme," that is, "young woman\_young man (individuals)" to show the first person taking personal risks. The two artists were Safaa Erruas and Younès Rahmoun, sharing the work space as a gendered comment on what can be possible through collaborations, both showing work linked to a broader sociopolitical context. Erruas, with "Brisa" ("Breeze") used daily objects, often linked to an intimate feminine sphere, creating work that was simultaneously fragile and dangerous with razor blades on the wall. Rahmoun's work "Cafane" ("Shroud") worked with the idea of children that are oppressed in circumstances of war or famine, obliquely giving homage and performing, or making physical

and exterior, the experience of sorrow.<sup>516</sup> At the opening, a live feed projected images from the street into the entrance of the space. This exhibition can be read as a manifesto for the project of l'Appartement 22 – inviting people into the small private space attempting to locate itself in the specific location, and more broadly in “the street,” in the daily interactions and tensions of the larger sociopolitical space. This private apartment, resolutely independent from interventions initiated by the central government, thus became a space for exchanges and primarily site-specific exhibitions resulting from artists' residencies there, intending to engage art practices with action beyond a physical exhibition.

The artworks within the space often connect with the politically charged context of the boulevard the space sits upon. For example, the question of work – that is, what constitutes work, what work is, who has work – is particularly relevant within the space, because it bears witness to the daily protests of unemployed graduates in front of Parliament. The artist Mustapha Akrim has continued to experiment with this idea in the last few years, and showed his work “Article 13” in 2011 at l'Appartement 22, an installation in concrete that was showed in English and French, with an Arabic seal based on the same text. It refers to Article 13 in the last Moroccan constitution (not the new constitution since November 2011), which specifies, “All citizens have equal rights to education and to employment.” More directly, the space itself contains a camera obscura by artist Jérôme Schlomoff as part of a workshop and residency in the space (2007), bringing “the street” into the space.

Outside of Rabat, Younès Rahmoun, in collaboration with Karroum, has also sought to work with the specific public of the Rif Mountains. His large-scale outdoor installation “Ghorfa” in the Rif Mountains can be understood in dialogue with these ideas of the relationship between

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<sup>516</sup> Abdellah Karroum, *L'Appartement 22: 2002-2008* (Paris: éditions hors'champs, 2008): 32-38.

art and a public. This project is directly inspired by the “ghorfa,” or room, beneath the stairs of Rahmoun’s family house in Tétouan, which he used for many years as a space for work and meditation. In each iteration of the series which began in 2006, *Al-Âna/ Hunâ*, that is, “Now/Here,” the room is reconstructed on a one-to-one basis. Each version responds to the particularities of the specific environment with varied materials and forms in places including France, Singapore, and Rabat.<sup>517</sup> Rahmoun offers these as spaces for reflection for audience members. The fourth “ghorfa” in the series is located in Beni-Boufrah, Rahmoun’s grandparents’ village in the Rif. This version was created as part of the project MultiPistes, organized by Eline van der Vlist and Abdellah Karroum. The project, through a team of curators and nine artistic productions and events in Africa and Europe, sought to consider the creation and reception of art within local and cooperative processes and in daily life. *Al-Âna/Hunâ* numbers 4 and 5 were both part of the project: Karroum curated the fourth in the Rif, and van der Vlist curated the fifth in Amsterdam. The fourth ghorfa, unlike others, is permanent. It was made in 2007 of stone, with the help and consultation of community members, the Youth House, a stonemason, and his assistants [Image 7.4].<sup>518</sup> Directly surrounding the ghorfa are three trees Rahmoun planted with children in the community: palm, fig, and olive, calling upon Mediterranean culture as well as Qur’anic references. The extant environment has also been integrated into the work. Rahmoun suggests a particular, more challenging path by which to ascend to the ghorfa and an alternative, easier route back. To know the correct route, a visitor must arrive with Rahmoun himself or ask

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<sup>517</sup> Bérénice Saliou, “Ghorfa, Al-âna/Hunâ,” *Younès Rahmoun*. 2009.

[http://younesrahmoun.com/FR/Textes/Entr%C3%A9es/2009/10/8\\_Ghorfa%2C\\_Al-%C3%A2na\\_Hun%C3%A2.html](http://younesrahmoun.com/FR/Textes/Entr%C3%A9es/2009/10/8_Ghorfa%2C_Al-%C3%A2na_Hun%C3%A2.html).

<sup>518</sup> Cécile Bourne-Farrell, “Ghorfa—Now, Here” in *Younès Rahmoun: Ghorfa, Al-Âna/Hunâ* (exhibition catalog) (Paris: éditions hors’champs, 2009): 6.



Image 7.4: Younès Rahmoun, “Ghorfa, Al-âna/Hunâ,” 2007, photographic documentation by Younès Rahmoun.

someone within the community.<sup>519</sup> To fully engage the work, in other words, the visitor needs personal guidance. This is not a direct intention of the work—in part, it is logistical, given how far outside artistic centers in Morocco the work is situated. Yet this work is directly rooted in shared experience. The ghorfa as an object exists, but the project relies on the actual audience of people experiencing the deliberate reflection and solitude the space offers, as well as the projected audience of visitors that might come.

Beyond the international visitors to the site undertaking a sort of contemporary art “pilgrimage,” the public of this work is also the direct community, bringing these two publics together in interesting ways. Implicated in the creation of the work, the inhabitants of Beni-Boufrah moreover use this artwork as a useful space. Sited outside the village near fields where people work, the space is used to keep lunch in the shade or as a place to rest in the afternoon. The door remains open at all times, and its upkeep is communally undertaken. The room remains equally open to these multiple uses.

The international audience knows the work more by its documentation and the other ephemeral versions of the “ghorfa” that have been available in city-centers such as Rabat and Amsterdam—very few members of the international contemporary art public actually make the effort to go to Beni-Boufrah. This rural area of the Rif Mountains is almost entirely excluded from the imagined contemporary art public in Morocco (and, outside of these interventions, the imagined international contemporary art public). Arguably, given the relationship particularly of King Hassan II to the insurgent character assigned to the Rif based on historical figures such as Abdelkrim Khattabi, many Rif inhabitants have been excluded from national political publics as well. The project lays claims to publicness and relies on both an art world public and a hyper-

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<sup>519</sup> Younès Rahmoun, interview by author, Tétouan, Morocco, August 9, 2010.

local public, yet rather than emphasizing the exclusionary structures it is in dialogue with, it is conceivably open to everyone and anyone.

The newest generation of artists have only recently graduated from art school and are becoming increasingly well known, such as Younes Baba-Ali and Simohammed Fettaka, part of a younger generation than the artists that came to prominence in the 1990s. These relatively young artists continue to root their work in highly local communities and in dialogue with forms of sociopolitical engagement. Baba-Ali and Fettaka initiated the 2012 project “Proposition pour un laboratoire des pratiques artistiques et curatoriales (PLPAC)” (“Proposal for a laboratory of artistic and curatorial practice”) as an exhibition linked to residencies and workshops. Artists and intellectuals involved in the project were primarily Moroccan, though there were a variety of European people involved as well. Baba-Ali’s own contribution to the exhibition, “Carroussa Sonore,” was a sound installation that used the vending carts that primarily play and sell Qur’anic recitations to disseminate sound art pieces in the streets of Rabat [Image 7.5]. The project overall worked to root artistic production in the cultural and political space of Rabat.

Exhibition spaces as well often seem to be structured around ideas of social engagement, and there are increasing numbers of artist-led exhibition spaces and other initiatives in Morocco. The Cinémathèque de Tanger (CdT) was founded by a group of artists led by Yto Barrada (the first artistic director of the space) and Bouchra Khalili. The CdT is housed by the historical space of the Cinéma Rif, a 1938 cinema located on the Grand Socco, the large plaza at the connecting point between the old medina and the new city. When the Cinéma Rif was put up for sale, Barrada and her colleagues decided to buy the space and renovate it to create a nonprofit art house cinema, to make the films that they were seeing at international festivals available within Morocco. Simultaneous to the tightening borders following the creation of the Schengen States,



Image 7.5: Younès Baba-Ali, “Caroussa Sonore,” 2012, photographic documentation of performance in Rabat by Younès Baba-Ali.

“PLPAC in Rabat,” *Nafas*, September 2012. [http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2012/plpac\\_in\\_rabat/img/07\\_younes\\_baba\\_ali](http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2012/plpac_in_rabat/img/07_younes_baba_ali)

the number of cinemas in Morocco had dropped dramatically. The CdT was thus founded to create an international view for the city, in which 60 percent of the population is under twenty-five and many cannot relocate. The organization wanted not only to refurbish the cinema and bring films but also to create an archive, a library, and a space for editing, in addition to a café. While this is not artistic practice, per se, the interest in rooting the CdT in the local Tangier culture and working to increase public access to film can be seen as part of the same movement as the previously listed projects. Additionally, despite its emphasis on the local community, the CdT has also sought out relationships across national boundaries, as in its affiliation with NAAS (the Network of Arab Arthouse Screens) and the multinational character of its administrative board.

Similar to the ways in which the exhibition “Le Maroc contemporain” must be inscribed into a larger history of both the political relationship between France and Morocco as well as the exhibition politics going back to “Deux Mille Ans d’Art au Maroc,” this more recent art history must be put into dialogue not only with international trends in contemporary art, but with the history of socially-engaged art production within Morocco. Many of the practicing artists in Morocco do not know this broader history, however, and there is an often-repeated idea of a rupture between generations rather than allowing for a possibly shared art history that is on the one hand conflictual and full of counter-narratives and recriminations, and yet simultaneously carries with it cross-generational resonances that can enrich this story.

The role of the artist within Morocco is changing, as artists are increasingly involved in founding spaces, residencies, collectives, and collaborative projects. This has gone hand in hand with a renewed interest in Morocco in both engaging a larger public with art and in siting art within physically public spaces since the late 1990s. There are clear echoes of the theoretical

grounding of the artistic production of the Casablanca school artists, and the ideals that they too were working towards. This is not to collapse the two art historical moments. Artists and curators are moving from a focus on re-making colonial structures to creating smaller independent initiatives. There is also a different political climate today within Morocco, and different expectations of globalized culture. I argue that Third Worldism and pan-Arabism do constitute alternative globalisms, and I therefore do not believe that the globalized nature of artistic practice is an entirely new phenomenon. The expectations for global movement have expanded, however, and artists' (and curators') careers are increasingly internationally based, and artistic practices increasingly include site-specific engagement with extra-national places. The formal character of the artworks has changed, moving from art in public spaces to art practice that is constituted by its public engagement, beyond the more obvious differences in media. Moreover, the nature of this public has changed along with the radical formal change. Unlike the artistic production of the 1960s, these contemporary projects have moved away from the notion of national culture and identity in favor of interrogating particular spaces and in collaboration with specific, highly local communities. In full recognition of these significant differences, I nonetheless argue that similar to the relationships that I have shown between Casablanca school artists and their counterparts in Europe, Africa, and the Arab world, our understanding of contemporary practice is significantly enriched by placing it in dialogue with this art history.

To sum up, this dissertation has traced the art history of post-colonial modernism in Morocco, particularly with regard to the Casablanca school artists. The anti-colonial struggle was carried out in all areas of life, and these debates were particularly relevant to post-colonial cultural production. The Casablanca artists worked to ground artistic modernism in a local vernacular, while working through a variety of structures to support and to create a post-colonial

national culture. Following independence, with increased possibilities for fellowships, this generation of artists went abroad to study and establish their careers, and any success they found was hard won. Prior to the movement of modernism within the geographical boundaries of Morocco, there was already an accumulated discourse about Moroccan modernism built up through exhibitions that happened abroad while the artists themselves were abroad, preceding the movement itself as it came to exist within the country's sociopolitical strictures. The artists often chose to return to Morocco to work at the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux Arts, a municipal school, for ideological reasons. A movement of artistic modernism coalesced around this school, in part through their radical pedagogy, which was closely in line with the artists' individual artistic work, and was deeply rooted in creating a possibility of Moroccan modernism by grounding international modernism in local visual referents. I argue that at this point in their careers, their artistic projects are in fact the integrality of both their individual practice as well as their broader engagement. The artists' wide-ranging sociocultural engagements particularly include the school's intersection with the cultural journal *Souffles*, as well as the variety of pedagogical initiatives and associations that they worked to build.

The most emblematic example of public engagement was the 1969 "exposition manifeste" in Djemaa al-Fna in Marrakech. I argue that modernism for the Casablanca school as well as the *Souffles* group was located in the intersection of the local/national and the transnational. For this generation of intellectuals, Third Worldist theories and exhibitions shaped in significant theoretical and practical ways their work, despite the intense insistence on national culture and national structures. The ideology of Third Worldism encouraged artists and intellectuals in Morocco to try to foment a national culture by appealing to the nation at large, often via public events, and I consider the exhibition in Djemaa al-Fna through these terms,

putting it into the constellation of international exhibitions across the Third World. Nonetheless, the character of the events within the territorial boundaries of Morocco was deeply shaped by the political context of the “Years of Lead,” and there is a tension between the ideals of transnational theory and the exigencies of the local context.

The year 1967 marked a significant turning point in the history of the Casablanca school, and I argue that the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 profoundly shaped both national identity and the nature of and debates about national culture. For many artists, the question of solidarity with Palestine pushed a moment of radicalization, and it led to a rupture between artists interested in cultural politics and politics tout court, and the effective end of the movement of the Casablanca school. The question of Palestine (which was and continues to be central to Pan Arabism and related intellectual movements), has affected Morocco by playing a significant role in a politically charged local context. Solidarity with Palestine also urges artists towards increasingly assuming an Arab identity, leading towards the pan-Arabist events, exhibitions, and associations of the 1970s.

I have consistently argued that the multiple strands of transnational connections and relationships for the Casablanca school, namely, to European modernist movements, Third Worldism, and pan-Arabism, are essential to understanding the movement of artistic modernism within Morocco. These international networks and discourses that are then articulated within and in dialogue with a local context are constitutive of the experience of modernism within Morocco, and there is a constant tension between these two forces throughout this period. To force a solely national narrative onto Moroccan modernism is to ignore the rich intersections and explorations fomented by the globalism of these artists and their training.

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