

Arab Presences

Modern Art and Decolonisation: Paris 1908 – 1988

5 April – 25 August 2024



The Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris is inviting visitors to rediscover the diversity of 20th-century Arab modernism and to take a fresh look at the history of art scenes still little known in Europe. Through a selection of over 200 works, most of which have never before been exhibited in France, the exhibition *Modern Art and Decolonization: Paris 1908 – 1988* focuses on the relationship between Arab artists and Paris throughout the 20th century.

The exhibition explores a different history of modern art, illuminated by a wealth of historical audio and visual archive material. Organised chronologically, it begins in 1908, the year in which the Lebanese poet and artist Gibran Khalil Gibran arrived in Paris and the opening of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Cairo. The period ended in 1988, with the first exhibition devoted to contemporary Arab artists at the Institut du Monde Arabe (officially opened a few months earlier) in Paris and with the exhibition *Singuliers: bruts ou naïfs*, featuring among others Moroccan artist Chaïbia Tallal and Tunisian artist Jaber Al-Mahjoub, at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris.

As art historian Silvia Naef writes in the catalogue for the *Arab Presences* exhibition at the MAM, "How can we create a modern Arab art? A real aesthetic project was set up in the course of the 20th century, one that broke away from academic art, echoed the Western avant-gardes and was conceived within the framework of a specific national identity, without returning to an Islamic art form."

PRESS RELEASE

Museum Director

Fabrice Hergott

Curators

Musée d'Art Moderne :

Odile Burlaux

Zamân Books & Curating :

Morad Montazami

Madeleine de Colnet

zamanbc.com

Follow MAM



mam.paris.fr

Huguette Caland

Espace blanc I / White Space I

1984

Oil on canvas

200 x 200 cm

© Huguette Caland / Photo Jack Hems

Courtesy of the artist, David Zwirner

Visitor information

Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris

11, Avenue du Président Wilson

75116 Paris

Tél. 01 53 67 40 00

www.mam.paris.fr

Open Tuesday – Sunday

10am – 6pm

Open Thursdays until 9.30pm

Ticketing

Admission : 12 €

Concessions : 10 €

Cultural activities

Information and bookings

Tél. 01 53 67 40 80

Press Officer

Maud Ohana

maud.ohana@paris.fr

Tél. 01 53 67 40 51

The exhibition foregrounds over 130 rarely shown artists whose works make an essential contribution to the Arab avant-garde and the history of modern art in the 20th century. It also highlights the essential role played by Paris. Described as the "capital of the Third World" by the historian Michael Goebel, the city was seen from the 1920s onwards as a breeding ground for anti-colonial networks and the home of the new cosmopolitan modernities.

The exhibition is structured around the differing careers of artists who studied at local art schools before moving to Paris to continue their training. Throughout the twentieth century, Paris was a place where modernity was embraced, colonialism was criticised and numerous encounters took place. The Musée d'Art Moderne itself played an important role in the post-war period through its exhibitions (Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, Salon de la Jeune Peinture, Biennale des Jeunes Artistes de Paris, etc.) and the acquisitions it made from the 1960s onwards.

The exhibition is divided into four chronological sections:

1. Nahda: Between Arab cultural renaissance and Western influence, 1908–1937

Faced with Western influence, the Arab cultural renaissance known as Nahda developed particularly in Egypt, Lebanon and Algeria, notably thanks to art schools and the press. At the same time, the great so-called universal exhibitions in Paris,, and most notably the Colonial Exhibition of 1931, included artists from colonised countries.

2. Farewell to Orientalism: the avant-garde strikes back.

The burgeoning of independence: Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria in 1937–1956

This was the time of the first independence movements, notably in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria, with artists in Egypt and Tunisia renouncing imported and imposed references in favour of artistic expression rooted in local history, while also connecting directly with the European avant-garde. In Paris, the modernist salons were promoting abstraction and welcomed Arab artists.

3. Decolonisation: Modern art between local and global

The challenge of the second wave of independence: Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, 1956–1967

In a period marked by the violence and enthusiasm of national independence, particularly in North Africa – Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia – modern Arab art went global. Exhibitions in Paris, such as the biennial of young artists, largely reflected this new dynamic.

4. Art and political struggle: From the Palestinian cause to the "Arab apocalypse". 1967-1988

The "Young Painters Salon" in Paris was dominated by political issues and international anti-imperialist struggles, from the Vietnam War to the Palestinian cause. In 1980 Lebanese artist Etel Adnan published her major poetic text Arab Apocalypse in Paris. Our exhibition closes with the subject of how Arab immigration to France has been addressed by Paris museums (1980s).

The works:

From major regional collections: Mathaf, Doha, (Qatar); Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, (United Arab Emirates); Ibrahimi Collection, Amman, (Jordan); Museum of Modern Art, Cairo, (Egypt), Musée National des Beaux-Arts, Algiers (Algeria). And from private and public French collections (MNAM, CNAP, Fonds d'art contemporain-Paris collections, Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, Institut du Monde Arabe, Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, etc.). The selection of over 200 works, most of which have never been exhibited in France (including paintings, sculptures, photographs, etc.), is accompanied by historical sound and audiovisual archives.

The exhibition catalogue brings together largely unpublished documentation and images covering the major chapters of modern Arab art in Paris; numerous essays, thematic notes and transnational chronologies; and articles by leading authors including Michael Goebel, Emilie Goudal, Morad Montazami and Silvia Naef.

Participating artists

Shafic ABBOUD, ABOU NADDARA, Hamed ABDALLA, Youssef ABDELKE, Amal ABDENOUR, Boubaker ADJALI, Etel ADNAN, Maliheh AFNAN, Mohamed AKSOUH, Hala ALABDALLA, Farid AOUAD, Fatma ARARGI, Mohamed ATAALLAH, Jean-Michel ATLAN, Amine EL-BACHA, Simone BALTAXÉ, Michel BASBOUS, Ala BASHIR, Fatma Haddad-Mahieddine (dite BAYA), Souhila BEL BAHAR, Farid BELKAHIA, Nejib BELKHODJA, Fouad BELLAMINE, Mahjoub BEN BELLA, Aly BEN SALEM, Abdallah BENANTEUR, Djamila BENT MOHAMED, Samta BENYAHIA, Maurice BISMOUTH, Etienne BOUCHAUD, Pierre BOUCHERLE, Kamal BOULLATA, Huguette CALAND, Mohammed CHABAA, Nasser CHAURA, Ahmed CHERKAOUI, Saloua Raouda CHOUCAIR, Chaouki CHOUKINI, collectif CINÉMÉTÈQUE, Inji EFFLATOUN, André ELBAZ, Fouad ELKOURY, Errò, Ammar FARHAT, Safia FARHAT, Djamel FARÈS, Moustapha FARROUK, Dias FERHAT, André FOUGERON, Émile GAUDISSARD, Abdel Hadi EL-GAZZAR, Jilali GHARBAOUI, Gibran Khalil GIBRAN, Abdelaziz GORGI, Abdelkader GUERMAZ, Abraham HADAD, Marie HADAD, Khadim HAIDER, Ahmed HAJERI, Jamil HAMOUDI, Francis HARBURGER, Faik HASSAN, Mona HATOUM, Adam HENEIN, Georges HENEIN, Mohamed ISSIAKHEM, Marwan KASSAB BACHI (dit MARWAN), Mahjoub AL-JABER (dit JABER), Abdul Kader EL-JANABI, Henri Gustave JOSSOT, Fouad KAMEL, Fêla KÉFI-LEROUX, Mohammed KHADDA, Rachid KHIMOUNE, Rachid KORAÏCHI, Georges KOSKAS, Mohamed KOUACI, Claude LAZAR, Ahmed LOUARDIRI, Nja MAHDAOUI, Jean de MAISONSEUL, Azouaou MAMMERI, Maria MANTON, Denis MARTINEZ, Antoine MALLIARAKIS dit MAYO., Hassan MASSOUDY, Hatem EL-MEKKI, Mohamed MELEHI, Rabah MELLAL, Choukri MESLI, Mireille MIAIHLE, Mahmoud MOKHTAR, Fateh MOUDARRES, Philippe MOURANI, Mehdi MOUTASHAR, Laila MURAYWID, Nazir NABAA, Edgar NACCACHE, Effat NAGHI, Mohammed Bey NAGHI, Marguerite NAKHLA, Rafa NASIRI, Ahmad NAWACH, Amy NIMR, Leila NSEIR, Mohammed RACIM, Omar RACIM, Samir RAFI, Aref EL-RAYESS, Jocelyne SAAB, Georges Hanna SABBAGH, Valentine de SAINT-POINT, Shakir Hassan AL-SAID, Mahmoud SAÏD, Nadia SAIKALI, Samir SALAMEH, Mona SAUDI, Jewad SELIM, Jean SÉNAC, Juliana SERAPHIM, Ibrahim SHADHA, Gazbia SIRRY, Chaïbia TALLAL, Kamel EL-TELMISANY, Gouider TRIKI, Yahia TURKI, Madiha UMAR, Seif WANLY, Nil YALTER, Ramsès YOUNAN, Salah YOUSRY, Fahrelnissa ZEID, Bibi ZOGBÉ