



**L'ABSTRACTION
CALLIGRAPHIQUE DANS
L'ÉCOLE DE PARIS**

**CALLIGRAPHIC
ABSTRACTION IN THE
SCHOOL OF PARIS**

**Grosvenor
Gallery**



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20-23 MARCH 2019

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L'ABSTRACTION CALLIGRAPHIQUE DANS L'ÉCOLE DE PARIS

CALLIGRAPHIC ABSTRACTION IN THE SCHOOL OF PARIS

The importance of the École de Paris on the development of artistic practice in the 20th century cannot be overestimated. It was to a city still heavily influenced by this movement that many of these artists moved in the 1960s, bringing foreign narratives and indigenously produced aesthetics, blending them with the prevailing movements of the day.

As part of this exhibition we are showing the work of four International artists, whose aesthetic preoccupation was calligraphy:
Jean-Michel Atlan (1913–60), Dia Azzawi (b.1939),
Syed Sadequain (1930–87) and
Charles Hossein Zenderoudi (b.1937).

JEAN-MICHEL ATLAN

The Algerian artist Jean-Michel Atlan died young in 1960, which led to a retrospective Musée National d'Art Moderne. A self-taught painter, he was also a poet and philosopher, and friendly with Gertrude Stein and Gaston Bachelard. Atlan was part of the 'Nouvelle École de Paris' in the mid-1950s and received much acclaim for his sensuous and colourful paintings. During the ten years prior to his death, Atlan's works were characterised by the use of strong, black, winding lines, enclosing coloured areas, evoking strong organic and vegetal associations, as well as North African calligraphy.

Gertrude Stein (writer and collector): *'Then, one day, I saw Atlan's paintings. I was struck by the fact that he didn't paint what his eyes had seen. He had an abstract view of the world and if there was anything concrete, it crept in as an emotion, but fundamentally it was as abstract as writing music and architecture are abstract, and yet it pleased the eye, not his eyes, but my eye.'*

DIA AZZAWI

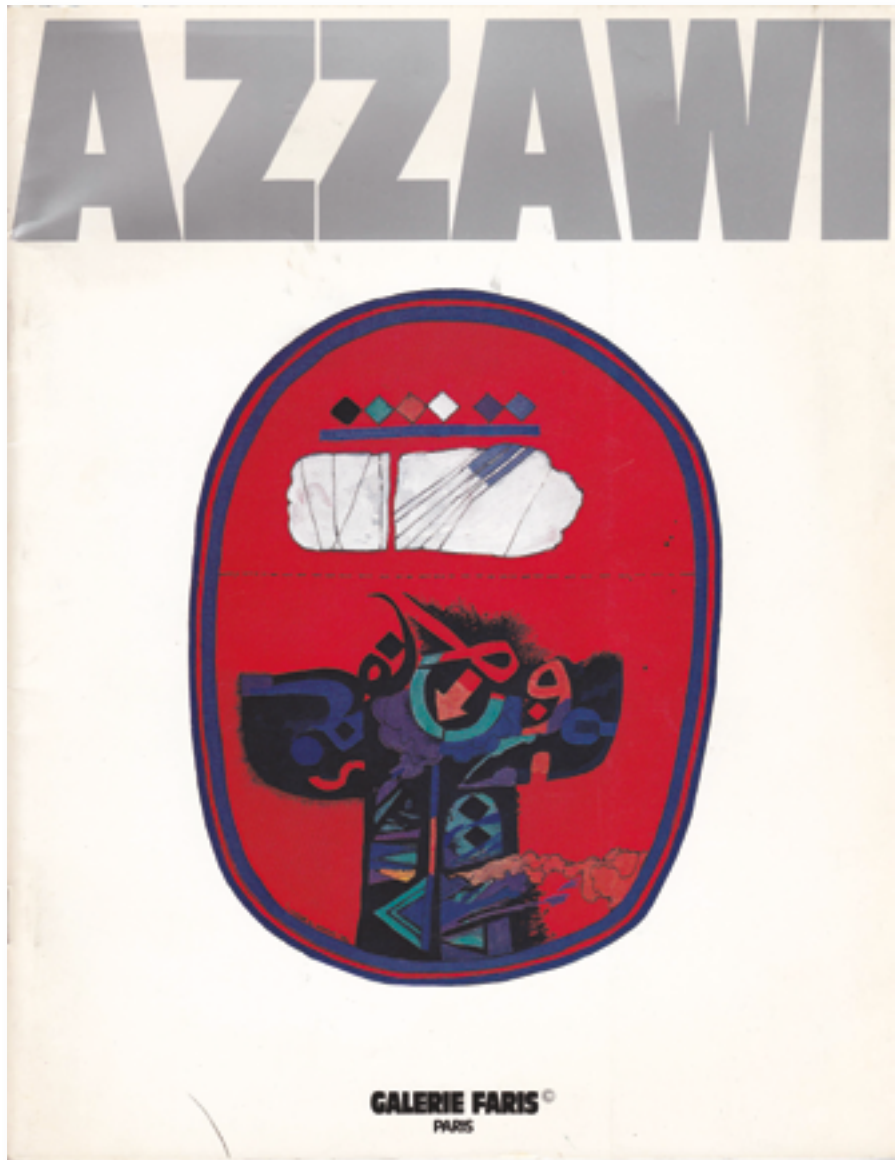
Dia Azzawi is considered to be one of the most important and influential Middle Eastern artists of the 20th century. A member of various artists' groups in the 1960s and 70s, Azzawi eventually settled in London in 1976. He exhibited numerous times at the influential Galerie Faris in Paris, creating contemporary manifestations of Arabic calligraphy, often suffused with political references and strong historical references.

His work from the early 1980s is more exuberant and colourful than some of his earlier canvases. This period also sees the artist explore different media, whilst simultaneously remaining faithful to his artistic tenet of the veneration of Iraq and its artistic legacy. In 2002 Azzawi's work was the subject of a retrospective at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris.

In his 1983 book 'The Grass Roots of Iraqi Art', Jabra I Jabra wrote of the artist: *"Dia al Azzawi is another artist who has already found in Islamic signs and symbols a springboard for his imagination, and in more recent years treated Arabic letters creatively, though with greater formalism than [Shakir] al Said, and later to an altogether different effect. Poetry remains one of the main sources of his inspiration: in his graphics whole poems – amorous or heroic, but never his own – are sometimes written round and through, his hallucinatory figures, which reminds one sometimes of William Blake's poem-pictures. For Azzawi, this is a modernization of a method once employed by medieval Arab scribes and illustrators. In fact, his historical consciousness, as he has studied both art and archaeology, goes as far back as the Sumerians, in whose sculpture he has found an idiom to be employed in his painting, often to startling effect. In love, also, with popular art, with the Arabian Nights, with modern Palestinian poetry, he gives his work, quite spontaneously, a richness of metaphor and allusion which could only be found in Jawad Selim – who had a healthy influence on Azzawi in his early years. "Azzawi's work – ranging from small delicate drawings to vast multiple canvases – has been in its development a gradual resolution of a problem: how to use Islamic signs and symbols without seeming precious or merely folkloric, how to hark back to Sumerian sculpture and Babylonian myth, employing both in their own right, or as a ground for the convolutions of freely scripted poems, without seeming to be a merely an illustrator, how to merge all these with the spontaneity of a dreamer in whose visions emerge shapes and figures of inexplicable power. His painting thus functions on a multiplicity of levels: historical, literary, religious, all subjected to the severe discipline of a modern sensibility."*

—*The Grass Roots of Iraqi Art*, Jabra I. Jabra, St Helier, Jersey, 1983, pp.26–28





Catalogue cover: AZZAWI, Galerie Faris, Paris, 1980



Islamic symbolism in Azzawi's 1966 work *Islamic Compositions*

SYED SADEQUAIN

In 1961 Sadequain won a scholarship to live and work in Paris. By the mid 1960's, he was enjoying critical and artistic success in the city, with several exhibitions under his belt. Sadequain, like his forebears and his peers came to Paris to become part of the avant-garde.

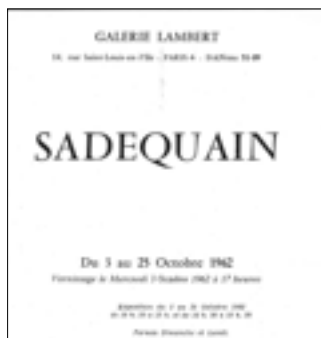
In his work of the early 1960s the landscape of Paris was distorted and made abstract in his paintings and monochrome drawings. Frenzied towers and banks of spikes build up the scene, often suggestive of Islamic calligraphy or reclining nudes. These paintings would be executed at speed, giving the works a furious and intense quality, often with the paint scratched away to reveal the form.

In 1961 he participated in the Biennale of Paris and was awarded the 'Laureat Biennale de Paris' by the international jury of critics for his painting *The Last Supper*. This accolade was soon followed by solo-exhibitions in Le Havre and Paris, at Galerie's Lambert and Presbourg. This led to the magazine 'Le Monde et La Vie' to report that, "*The multiplicity of Sadequain's gifts is reminiscent of Picasso*".

In 1964 he was awarded the commission to illustrate a new edition of the iconic existentialist novel by Albert Camus; *L'Étranger*, produced by the automobile club of France. This was a major commission, and saw the artist produce a great many studies for what can be considered one of the masterpieces of his early career.

Before he left in 1967 he painted a suite of works in Paris in late 1966 early 1967, depicting characteristic Parisian scenes; Dancers, Acrobats, Figures in the Street, and the artist at work, recalling Leger's, Cirque series, or Picasso and Matisse's Dancer series.

The palette of greys and blues, as well as the application of paint combined with the scratching away of the surface are a continuation of Sadequain's technique from the late 50's and early 60's. However these works mark a departure to a more fluid, and abstract style, nevertheless determined by human scale and figurative elements. This looseness is the result of Sadequain living and working in Paris and the rubbing of shoulders with artists of the École de Paris, such as Atlan, Soulages, Poliakoff, Michaux etc.



Catalogue for Galerie Lambert exhibition of Sadequain's work in Paris, 1962



Six Figures, 1960



Figure at a Table, 1962



Three Abstract Figures, 1962



Detail: *The Aerodynamics of a Skyscape, 1967*

CHARLES HOSSEIN ZENDEROUDI

Persian modernism was born in the 1960s, with the Saqqa-khaneh movement. Saqqa-khaneh are small public fountains found in the old part of every town and village in Iran. Established as an act of benevolence in memory of Imam Hosayn, grandson of the Prophet, who after a 7th century battle with the Umayyad army was tortured for two days. These sites are considered holy places where candles are often burnt and green and black drapes are hung, while protective iron grills and calligraphic panels were engraved with decorative motifs and Koranic verses.

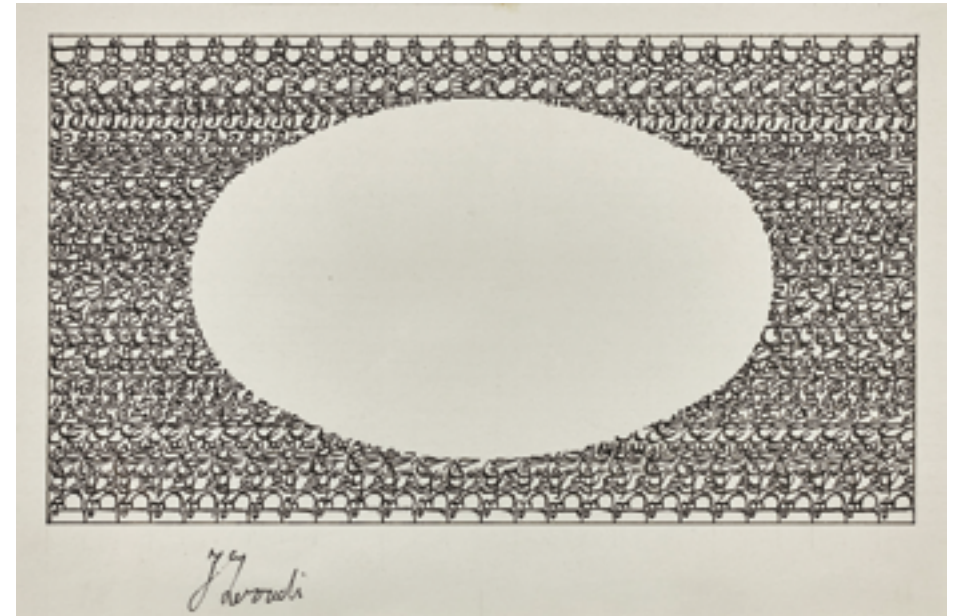
The Saqqah-khaneh school of artists took inspiration from a wide variety of classical Persian sources; including cults, rituals and products of folk culture. Some of the best known artists associated with the school are Parviz Tanavoli, Faramarz Pilaram, Massoud Arabshahi and Sadegh Tabrizi. One of the founders and main proponents was Charles Hossein Zenderoudi. A prize-winner at the Paris Biennale of 1959, Zenderoudi settled in Paris in 1961, where he continues to live and work.

His work embodies an amalgam of national, religious and personal mythologies, always with calligraphy central to the aesthetic. Saqqakhaneh artists sought to bring a contemporary vernacular to Iranian artistic practice, to create indigenously produced forms playing with ancient influences and contemporary media.

In the late 1960s Zenderoudi compiled illustrations for a new translation of the Quran, published in 1972 by Club du Livre, Paris. The text was translated by Jean Grosjean and the book edited by Philippe Lebaud and preceded by a study by the French Islamic scholar and sociologist, Jacques Berque. Zenderoudi created 42 illustrations which were published alongside the text in both colour and black and white.



Le Coran, 1972



Zenderoudi's original Illustrations from '*Le Coran, c.1970*'

JEAN-MICHEL ATLAN
1913-60



Composition
c.1958

Oil on canvas
Signed along lower edge 'Atlan'
100.2 x 65.3 cm (39 1/2 x 25 3/4 in)

Provenance:
Galerie Arditti, Paris, 1958
Private collection, France

DIA AZZAWI
b. 1939



Dia Azzawi and Western style Originality,
Published: Al-Nahar Arab and International,
15 Haziran [June] 1980 (*Arabic Letter No.1* illustrated)

Arabic Letter No.1
1980

Gouache on paper
Signed and dated along lower edge
70 x 122 cm (27 1/2 x 48 1/8 in)

Provenance:
Private collection, Paris

Exhibited:
AZZAWI, Galerie Faris, Paris, 27 May-21 June 1980

Published:
Al-Nahar Arab and International, 15 Haziran [June] 1980



*The spontaneity of a dreamer in whose visions
emerge shapes and figures of inexplicable power.*
—Jabra I. Jabra

DIA AZZAWI

b. 1939

In 1976 Azzawi made around forty drawings in response to the siege of Tel al-Zaatar that took place during the Lebanese Civil War. This work is one of a suite of 16 prints published from these drawings in 1979, which were initially exhibited in Rabat and Baghdad. The suite was again exhibited in its entirety at Azzawi's 2018 retrospective at the Institut du Monde Arab in Paris.



Nasheed Al Jassad (Bodily Anthem) Tel el Zaatar
1979

Silkscreen on white vellum
numbered 20/100
signed, dated and titled in pencil
Sheet: 65 x 65 cm (25 5/8 x 25 5/8 in)
Image: 50 x 50 cm (19 3/4 x 19 3/4 in)

Provenance:
Private collection, Paris

SYED SADEQUAIN

1930-87

“Another Parisian influence was the scratched surface which looked much more intricate than the cobweb... Sadequain applied the technique to his figurative paintings and used the sharp point of a split shaving blade to scratch the painted surface for similar effects. He had found a way to add volume and to amplify the flatness of his paintings, and with scratched lines he gave his figures their full bodies. This technique also had a profound influence on the way he drew subsequently, and it gave him a much better understanding of hatching and cross-hatching, which could now be used as plastic tools of enquiry.”

—Akbar Naqvi, *Image and Identity*

Four Figures Sitting in Paris
1967

Oil on canvas
Signed and dated 'Sadequain 16.1.67'
lower left, reverse signed, titled
and inscribed 'Painted at Paris'

211 x 150 cm (83 ¼ x 59 ¼ in)

Provenance:
The Dutilleul family collection, Paris





Dancers
1966

Oil on canvas
Reverse signed, titled, dated 9/9/66
and inscribed 'Painted at Paris'
90 x 115cm (35 ³/₈ x 45 ¹/₄ in)

Provenance:
The Dutilleul family collection, Paris



Three Figures
1966

Oil on canvas
Reverse signed, titled, dated 9/10/66
and inscribed 'Painted at Paris'
90 x 115cm (35 ³/₈ x 45 ¹/₄ in)

Provenance:
The Dutilleul family collection, Paris



Untitled (Abstract Figure)
c.1964

Oil on canvas,
24 x 19.5 cm (9 ½ x 7 ¾ in)

Provenance:
Galerie Presbourg, Paris
Collection François Forges, Paris



Untitled (Seated Figure)
c.1964

Oil on canvas
24 x 19.5 cm (9 ½ x 7 ¾ in)

Provenance:
Galerie Presbourg, Paris
Collection François Forges, Paris



opposite
Venus and the Three Graces
c.1963

Ink on paper
51 x 36.5 cm (20 1/8 x 14 3/8 in)

Provenance:
Galerie Presbourg, Paris
Collection François Forges, Paris

above
Untitled (Self-Portrait with Model in the Studio)
c.1963

Ink on paper
36.5 x 51 cm (14 3/8 x 20 1/8 in)

Provenance:
Galerie Presbourg, Paris
Collection François Forges, Paris

Standing Woman (Caryatid)
c.1963

Ink on paper, verso a pencil study for the *Three Graces*
51 x 36.5 cm (20 1/8 x 14 3/8 in)

Provenance:
Galerie Presbourg, Paris
Collection François Forges, Paris



ALBERT CAMUS

(1913-60)

L'Étranger

Illustrations by
SYED SADEQUAIN

Text by Albert Camus, original lithographs by Syed Sadequain, published by Les Bibliophiles de l'Automobile-Club de France, printed on 'velin de Rives' with deckled edges and issued loose in green cloth portfolio with gilt title on spine and contained in a matching cloth box, pp. 146 with 35 original lithographs, 22 of which are in colour and 3 are double-page, this edition number 33, issued to M. Philippe Clement, Paris

35 x 27 x 5.5 cm (13 3/4 x 10 1/2 x 2 1/4 in)

Provenance:
Acquired by M. Philippe Clement, Paris, 27 October 1966

L'Étranger was launched in Paris on the 27 October 1966 at a gala dinner held at the Place de la Concorde. The lithograph menu for that dinner was also illustrated by Sadequain, and features an image of Meursault, Marie and Raymond that does not appear in the book.

For further discussion on Sadequain's time in Paris, in particular the *L'Étranger* commission see Grosvenor Gallery's 2015 catalogue 'Sadequain in Paris'.

below:
Camus, *L'Étranger*

right:
Detail, Sadequain, *Meursault, Marie and Raymond*
1966, copy of the menu for the gala dinner



CHARLES HOSSEIN ZENDEROUDI

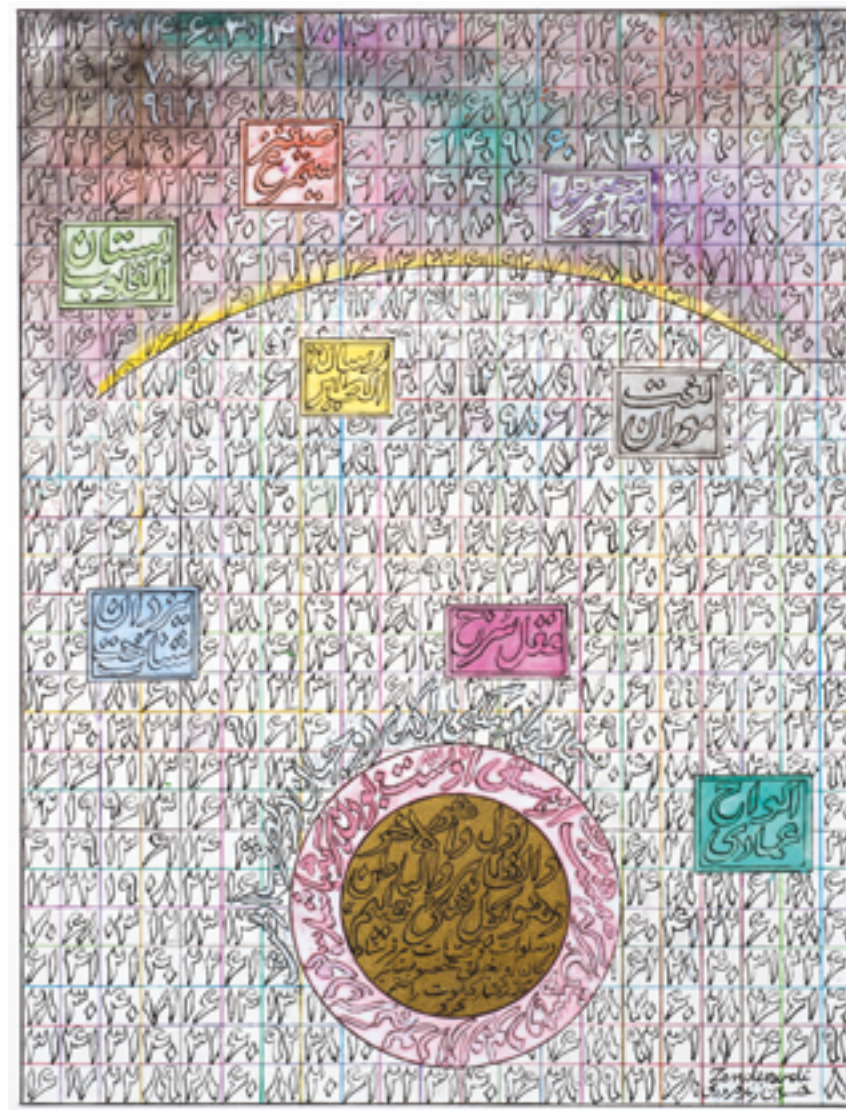
b. 1937

Saffir-E Simorgh is a work very much connected with the ideals of the Saqqa-khaneh school and the early works of the artist. The grid of numbers, cartouches and roundels of calligraphy are arranged like stamps, or as on a Safavid talismanic shirt. The talismanic shirt was believed to be imbued with protective powers and may have been meant to be worn under armour in battle.

The title of the work relates to the final scene from Attar of Nishapur's epic 'The Conference of the Birds', where the surviving 30 Hoopoe birds learn that upon arriving at the abode of the Simorgh, that they themselves are the mythical creature – which translates as thirty birds: si (thirty) morph (birds). They come to understand that the majesty of god is like the sun, that can be seen reflected in a mirror. Yet, whoever looks in to the mirror will also behold his or her own image. The piece is considered one of the most accomplished expressions of Persian mysticism.



Detail of a talismanic shirt in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Saffir-E Simorgh
c.1968

Ink, watercolor and gold paint on paper
Signed lower right
28 x 21 cm (11 1/8 x 8 1/4 in)

Provenance:
Private collection, Paris

CHARLES HOSSEIN ZENDEROUDI

b. 1937

Le Coran, 1972

29 x 23 x 9,5 cm (11 ½ x 9 x 3 ¾ in)

Provenance:

Private collection, France

Published in four volumes, the boxes contain Jean Grosjean's French translation of the Quran in two volumes, which feature 42 illustrations by Charles Hossein Zenderoudi and are preceded by a study by the French Islamic scholar and sociologist, Jacques Berque. A separate canvas box includes a facsimile reproduction of the unique manuscript of the Quran by Ibn Bawwab, and a booklet of commentary on the manuscript by D. S. Rice. Ibn Bawwab's Quran is an exact printed copy of his handwritten version finished in 1001 AD which is part of the collection of Chester Beatty Museum in Dublin, Ireland.



L'ABSTRACTION CALLIGRAPHIQUE DANS L'ÉCOLE DE PARIS

CALLIGRAPHIC ABSTRACTION IN THE SCHOOL OF PARIS

L'importance de l'École de Paris pour le développement de la pratique artistique au XXe siècle ne saurait être surestimée. C'est dans une ville encore fortement influencée par ce mouvement que nombre de ces artistes se sont déplacés dans les années 1960, apportant des récits étrangers et une esthétique produite de manière indigène, en les mélangeant avec les mouvements dominants de l'époque.

Dans le cadre de cette exposition, nous exposons le travail de quatre artistes internationaux, dont la calligraphie était la préoccupation esthétique:

Jean-Michel Atlan (1913–60), Dia Azzawi (1939),
Syed Sadequain (1930–87) et Charles Hossein Zenderoudi. (b.1937).

JEAN-MICHEL ATLAN

L'artiste algérien Jean-Michel Atlan est décédé jeune en 1960, ce qui a conduit à une rétrospective du Musée national d'art moderne. Peintre autodidacte, il était aussi un poète et philosophe, ami de Gertrude Stein et de Gaston Bachelard. Atlan faisait partie de la 'Nouvelle École de Paris' au milieu des années 50 et fut très applaudi pour ses peintures sensuelles et colorées. Au cours des dix années qui ont précédé sa mort, les œuvres d'Atlan étaient caractérisées par l'utilisation de lignes noires, fortes et sinueuses, délimitant des zones colorées, évoquant de fortes associations organiques et végétales, ainsi que la calligraphie nord-africaine.

Gertrude Stein (écrivain et collectionneur): *“Puis, un jour, j'ai vu les peintures d'Atlan. J'ai été frappé par le fait qu'il n'a pas peint ce que ses yeux avaient vu. Il avait une vision abstraite du monde et s'il existait quelque chose de concret, c'était une émotion, mais au fond, c'était aussi abstrait que la musique et l'architecture étaient abstraites, et pourtant cela plaisait à l'œil, pas à ses yeux, mais à moi.”*

DIA AZZAWI

Dia Azzawi est considéré comme l'un des artistes les plus importants et les plus influents du Moyen-Orient du 20^{ème} siècle. Membre de divers groupes d'artistes des années 1960 et 1970, Azzawi finit par s'installer à Londres en 1976. Il expose à de nombreuses reprises à la influente Galerie Faris à Paris, créant des manifestations contemporaines de la calligraphie arabe, souvent imprégnées de références politiques et de références historiques fortes.

Son travail du début des années 1980 est plus exubérant et coloré que certaines de ses toiles antérieures. Cette période voit également l'artiste explorer différents médias, tout en restant fidèle à son principe artistique de vénération de l'Irak et de son héritage artistique. En 2002, les travaux d'Azzawi ont fait l'objet d'une rétrospective à l'Institut du Monde Arabe, à Paris.

Dans son livre de 1983 intitulé 'Les racines de l'art Irakien', Jabra I Jabra écrivait à propos de l'artiste: *“Dia al Azzawi est un autre artiste qui a déjà trouvé dans les signes et symboles islamiques un tremplin pour son imagination et qui a traité l'arabe plus récemment. lettres de manière créative, mais avec un plus grand “formalisme” que [Shakir] al Said, et plus tard avec un effet tout à fait différent. La poésie reste l'une des sources principales de son inspiration: dans ses graphismes, des poèmes entiers – amoureux ou héroïques, mais jamais les siens – s'écrivent parfois tour à tour, ses figures hallucinatoires, qui rappellent parfois les images de poèmes de William Blake. Pour Azzawi, il s'agit d'une modernisation d'une méthode autrefois employée par les scribes et les illustrateurs arabes du Moyen Age. En fait, sa conscience historique, puisqu'il a étudié l'art et l'archéologie, remonte aussi loin que les Sumériens, dans la sculpture desquels il a trouvé un idiome qu'il a employé dans sa peinture, souvent avec un effet surprenant. Amoureux aussi des arts populaires, des Mille et une nuits, de la poésie palestinienne moderne, il donne spontanément à son travail une richesse de métaphore et d'allusion qui n'a pu être trouvée que dans Jawad Selim – qui a eu une saine influence sur Azzawi dans ses premières années.*

“Le travail d'Azzawi – allant de petits dessins délicats à de multiples toiles de vases – a été, dans son développement, la résolution progressive d'un problème: comment utiliser des signes et des symboles islamiques sans avoir l'air précieux ou simplement folklorique, comment revenir à la sculpture sumérienne et au mythe babylonien, employant les deux de leur propre chef, ou comme fondement des convolutions de poèmes librement écrits, sans paraître être un simple illustrateur, comment fusionner tout cela avec la spontanéité d'un rêveur dans les visions desquelles émergent des formes et des figures d'un pouvoir inexplicable. Sa peinture fonctionne ainsi à une multiplicité de niveaux: historique, littéraire, religieux, tous soumis à la sévère discipline d'une sensibilité moderne.”

—'Grassroots of Iraqi Art', Jabra I. Jabra, St Hellier, Jersey, 1983, pp.26-28

SYED SADEQUAIN

En 1961, Sadequain obtint une bourse pour vivre et travailler à Paris. Au milieu des années 1960, il connaît un succès critique et artistique dans la ville, avec plusieurs expositions à son actif. Sadequain, comme ses ancêtres et ses pairs, est venu à Paris pour faire partie de l'avant-garde.

Au début des années 1960, le paysage Parisien était déformé et rendu abstrait par ses peintures et ses dessins monochromes. Les tours frénétiques et les banques d'épis construisent la scène, suggérant souvent une calligraphie Islamique ou des nus allongés. Ces peintures seraient exécutées rapidement, donnant aux œuvres une qualité furieuse et intense, souvent avec la peinture rayée pour révéler la forme.

En 1961, il participe à la Biennale de Paris et se voit attribuer le 'Laureat Biennale de Paris' par le jury international de critiques pour son tableau 'Le Dernier Souper'. Cette distinction a rapidement été suivie par des expositions personnelles au Havre et à Paris, aux galeries Lambert et Presbourg. Cela a conduit le magazine 'Le Monde et La Vie' à signaler que; *“La multiplicité des dons de Sadequain rappelle Picasso”.*

En 1964, il reçoit la commission pour illustrer une nouvelle édition du roman existentialiste emblématique d'Albert Camus; L'Etranger, produit par l'automobile club de France. Il s'agissait d'une mission majeure et a vu l'artiste produire un grand nombre d'études sur ce qui peut être considéré comme l'un des chefs-d'œuvre de son début de carrière.

Avant son départ en 1967, il a peint à Paris fin 1966 et début 1967 une suite d'œuvres illustrant des scènes parisiennes caractéristiques. Danseurs, acrobates, personnages dans la rue et l'artiste au travail, rappelant les séries de Léger, Cirque ou Picasso et Matisse.

La palette de gris et de bleus, ainsi que l'application de peinture combinée au grattage superficiel sont une continuation de la technique de Sadequain de la fin des années 50 et du début des années 60. Cependant, ces œuvres marquent une rupture avec un style plus fluide et abstrait, néanmoins déterminé par la taille humaine et les éléments figuratifs. Ce relâchement est le résultat de la vie et du travail saptain à Paris et du frottement des épaules avec des artistes de l'École de Paris, tels qu'Atlan, Soulages, Poliakoff, Michaux, etc.

CHARLES HOSSEIN ZENDEROU DI

Le modernisme Persan est né dans les années 1960 avec le mouvement Saqqa-khaneh. Les Saqqa-khaneh sont de petites fontaines publiques trouvées dans la vieille ville de chaque ville et village d'Iran. Fondé comme un acte de bienveillance à la mémoire de l'imam Hosayn, petit-fils du prophète, qui après une bataille au VII^e siècle avec l'armée des Omeyyades a été torturé pendant deux jours. Ces sites sont considérés comme des lieux saints où les bougies sont souvent brûlées et où des tentures vertes et noires sont suspendues, tandis que des grilles de protection en fer et des panneaux calligraphiques étaient gravés de motifs décoratifs et de versets coraniques.

L'école d'artistes Saqqah-khaneh s'est inspirée d'une grande variété de sources classiques persanes; y compris les cultes, les rituels et les produits de la culture populaire. Parmi les artistes les plus connus associés à cette école sont Parviz Tanavoli, Faramarz Pilaram, Massoud Arabshahi, Sadegh Tabrizi. L'un des fondateurs et principaux partisans était Charles Hossein Zenderoudi (né en 1939). Lauréat du prix de la Biennale de Paris en 1959, Zenderoudi s'est installé à Paris en 1961, où il vit et travaille toujours.

Son travail incarne un amalgame de mythologies nationales, religieuses et personnelles, toujours avec la calligraphie au centre de l'esthétique. Les artistes de Saqqakhaneh ont cherché à intégrer une langue vernaculaire contemporaine à la pratique artistique iranienne, à créer des formes produites de manière indigène et à l'aide d'influences anciennes et de médias contemporains.

À la fin des années 1960, Zenderoudi a compilé des illustrations pour une nouvelle traduction du Coran, publiée en 1972 par le Club du Livre, Paris. Le texte a été traduit par Jean Grosjean et le livre édité par (éd. Philippe Lebaud et précédé par une étude de l'érudit Islamique Français et sociologue, Jacques Berque. Zenderoudi a créé 42 illustrations qui ont été publiées à côté du texte en couleur et en noir et blanc.

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