

## Culture

— Stealing the scene

Morocco has long been a magnet for artists who have drawn inspiration from its multifarious landscapes, hazy light and artistic heritage. And yet, it's only since the mid-2000s that African art – especially that created in the past century – has begun to receive the recognition it deserves.

Since the 1950s a clutch of commercial galleries has opened in the city, particularly in the modern neighbourhood of Gueliz. Together with the advent of world-class museums such as the Musée Yves Saint Laurent and Macaal, and the arrival of 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair on home soil, these have shifted the focus of the art market from Casablanca and Rabat to Marrakech.

Of course, the higgledy-piggledy medina is also home to a range of artistic ventures, including one or two foundations promoting Moroccan culture through diverse exhibitions and events. Sadly the live-music scene here leaves a lot to be desired – rather than smooth jazz, think cabaret and neon lights. So skip that and get your cultural fix from the visual-arts offering instead.

### Museums and public galleries Weighty institutions



1  
Macaal, Annakhil  
*Creative mission*

The Musée d'Art Contemporain Africain Al Maaden (Macaal) has been shaking up the art scene since it was founded in 2016 by property magnate Alami Lazraq and his son Othman (see page 124). The ethos: this is a private museum with a very public vision. Macaal is dedicated to bringing contemporary African art to a broader audience through rotating exhibitions of its ever-growing collection, which the family began amassing some 40 years ago, and a diverse education programme.

Designed by French architect Didier Lefort, the geometric building is an architectural feat with a naturally lit interior and a sculpture garden that doubles as a cinema. Macaal is an extension of the family's not-for-profit association Fondation Alliances, which supports cultural development in Morocco. *Al Maaden, Sidi Youssef, Ben Ali +212 (0)6 7692 4492 macaal.org*

#### Art to the fore

Next door to Macaal is the Parc de Sculptures Al Maaden, another initiative by Fondation Alliances. Peppered throughout the golf course are site-specific, large-scale sculptures made by artists who hail from Morocco, China, India, Argentina and more. *almaaden.golf*



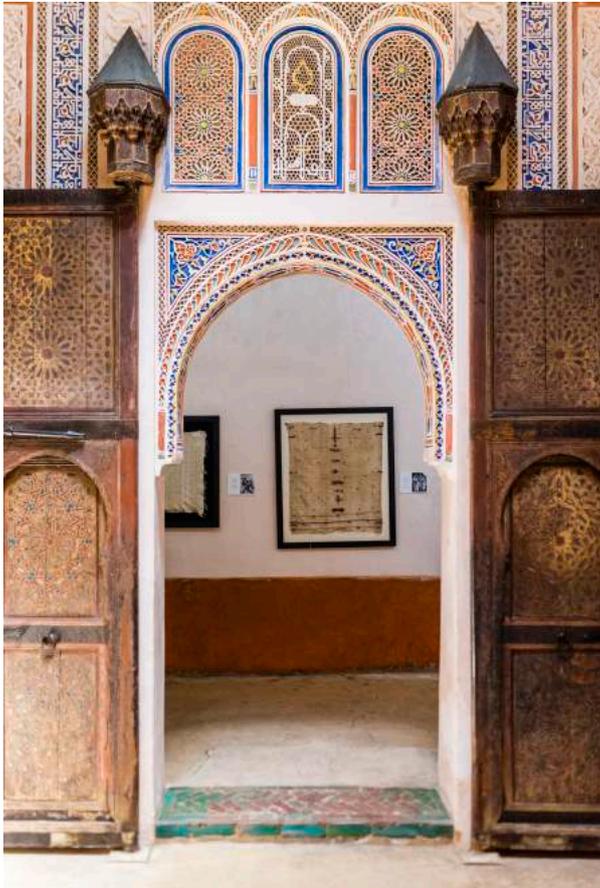
2  
Musée Mathaf Farid Belkhaia, Annakhil  
*Artistic legacy*

If you plan to visit the Musée de la Palmeraie (see page 81) – which is worth it for the jaw-dropping cactus garden alone – be sure to pop into this museum devoted to the late Moroccan artist Farid Belkhaia. A taxi from the city centre takes roughly 20 minutes.

Belkhaia was born into a bourgeois family in Marrakech and grew up surrounded by art and those who create it. He went on to study at various academies in Europe and became one of Morocco's most distinguished modern artists.

On permanent display at Musée Mathaf Farid Belkhaia – housed within the studio where the artist worked for almost 30 years – is a vast selection of his works, from paintings and metalwork to naturally dyed leather. *Dar Tounsi, BP 649 Marrakech Principale, Palmeraie Nord +212 (0)5 2432 8959 fondationfaridbelkhaia.com*





3 Musée de Mouassine, Medina  
*Original home*

This museum may be dedicated to the arts of Morocco but it's also architecturally intriguing, located in a traditional residence built in the 17th century and originally split into two parts (public and private). Painstakingly restored between 2012 and 2014, the awe-inspiring structure retains many of its original elements, including multi-coloured tiled floors, intricately carved wooden doors and pink plaster walls in the central courtyard.

The museum is inextricably linked to the painter Abdelhay Mellakh, who was born in the house in 1947 and whose studio remains intact. Exhibitions have focused on themes such as decorative art and 16th-century architecture, while musical evenings take place from October to May.

4-5 Derb El Hammam,  
Rue Mouassine  
+212 (0)5 2438 5721  
[museudemouassine.com](http://museudemouassine.com)



4 Macma, Gueliz  
*Passion project*

Founded in 2016 by art collector Nabil El Mallouki, the Musée d'Art et de Culture de Marrakech (Macma) was built upon a collection of Moroccan artefacts and orientalist paintings. El Mallouki worked in banking before leaving his job and founding the nearby Matisse Art Gallery (see page 66) in 1999. "The bank was my job; art is my passion," he says. In 2018 he established The Orientalist Museum too.

Alongside a permanent collection, Macma hosts temporary exhibitions that celebrate subjects including the history of Moroccan photography and film posters.

Passage Ghandouri,  
61 Rue Yougoslavie  
+212 (0)7 0024 2572  
[museemacma.com](http://museemacma.com)



5 Maison de la Photographie, Medina  
*House of cards*

Opened by Hamid Mergani and Patrick Manac'h in 2009, Maison de la Photographie presents some 10,000 photographs taken between 1870 and 1960. Highlights include a series of 1960s postcards showcasing typical scenes in Marrakech, while Daniel Chicault's documentary colour photographs and a rare set of 800 glass plates capture the wild landscape of the High Atlas and their Berber residents.

Exhibitions have explored everything from palm groves to Moroccan women. Draw back the curtains that conceal the doorways to each room – like an old-school photographer dipping beneath a hood – and be sure to pick up a couple of prints and postcards before you leave.

46 Rue Souk Ahal Fassi  
+212 (0)5 2438 5721  
[maisondelaphotographie.ma](http://maisondelaphotographie.ma)





6 Musée Berbère, Majorelle  
*Traditional beauty*

Tucked away in the lush oasis of the Jardin Majorelle (see page 80), the Musée Berbère shines a spotlight on Berber art and culture. Yves Saint Laurent's business partner and great love of 50 years, Pierre Bergé, founded the museum in 2011, six years before he established the nearby Musée Yves Saint Laurent (see right).

The permanent exhibition features more than 600 objects, from the 18th century to the 1960s, that provide a window onto the north African indigenous tribes found between the Rif and the Sahara. Traditional craftsmanship skills are on display in everyday and ceremonial artefacts, while the rituals of the Berbers are expressed through festive costumes. A highlight is the mirrored room of jewels: the starry ceiling adds to the sense of bedazzlement as you admire silver necklaces and wrist cuffs studded with amber and coral.

Rue Yves Saint Laurent  
+212 (0)5 2429 8686  
jardinmajorelle.com



7 Musée Yves Saint Laurent, Majorelle  
*House design*

Though Yves Saint Laurent was steeped in the exquisite world of Parisian haute couture, he spent much of his time in Morocco. "While Paris is about creation, this is about emotion and inspiration," says Björn Dahlström, the Casablanca-born director of the Musée Yves Saint Laurent. "It was here he discovered colour: the pinks, reds and oranges he was known for."

This hugely popular museum was designed by Paris-based architecture firm Studio KO (see pages 72 to 73) and opened in 2017. The black interior of the permanent exhibit is lined with documents and photographs from the designer's life, as well as projections of catwalk models marching like newly shod ponies showing off his creations.

Rue Yves Saint Laurent  
+212 (0)5 2429 8686  
museeysmarrakech.com



**Commercial galleries**  
Trading places



1 Galerie 127, Gueliz  
*Talenti incubator*

It's easy to miss Nathalie Locatelli's photography gallery, located on the second floor of a mixed-purpose building on Avenue Mohammed V. Erected in 1922, the art deco complex was originally divided into apartments and is now also home to various medical practices. "Yes, it's an unusual mix," she says with a smile.

Locatelli founded Gallery 127 in 2006 and, to this day, it's the only gallery dedicated to photography in Morocco. "There still isn't a great demand for photography in Africa and it's my aim to change that," says Locatelli. Her approach centres around forging relationships with artists at the outset of their careers and sticking with them as their style develops – she's been with some for more than a decade. "It's a real passion."  
2F, 127 Avenue Mohammed V  
+212 (0)5 2443 2667  
galerie127.com

2 Comptoir des Mines Galerie, Gueliz  
*Artistic residence*

This peach-coloured art gallery is the most recent offering from Hicham Daoudi, president of Art Holding Morocco, who started out in agriculture before trading crops for canvases. In 2002 he established CMOOA (an auction house in Casablanca) and in 2009 launched Diptyk (see page 71), Morocco's first contemporary-art magazine. He went on to found Comptoir des Mines Galerie in 2016.

The gallery is sprawled across an art deco building (see page 74). It focuses on contemporary Moroccan art, collaborating with artists – who are often invited to stay on-site – from initial concept to realisation. The exhibitions change every two months and run the gamut of paintings and sculptures to installations.

62 Rue Yougoslavie  
+212 (0)6 6301 0191  
comptoirdesminesgalerie.com





4 Matisse Art Gallery, Gueliz  
*Mixed exhibits*

Matisse Art Gallery opened in 1999 in the Passage Ghandouri, a stone's throw from Macma (see page 63). Ever since, the two floors behind its black-marble façade have played host to some of the most renowned names on the Moroccan art scene – including Farid Belkahlia, Mahi Binebine and Hassan El Glaoui – as well as up-and-coming artists. *Passage Ghandouri, 61 Rue Yougoslavie +212 (0)5 2444 8326*



3 David Bloch Gallery, Gueliz  
*Spirited collaboration*

The sleek façade of this ground-floor Gueliz gallery is lined with floor-to-ceiling windows that provide a good view of the contemporary art within. Inside, white walls are paired with a polished concrete floor. The building was abandoned before David Bloch, who first came to Marrakech on holiday in the 1990s, bought and refurbished it in time for the opening of his gallery in 2010.

“We’re a promotion gallery,” says Bloch, “meaning we foster long-term collaborations with artists.” Some 20 international names are represented – both emerging and established – and they’re given free rein when it comes to solo exhibitions. *8 Bis Rue des Vieux Marrakchis +212 (0)5 2445 7595 davidblochgallery.com*



**Solo show**

Tucked away in the heart of the medina, Riad Yima is the studio, gallery, shop and tea room of Hassan Hajjaj. Every surface is covered with the well-known artist's work, from photographs that capture Arab life to furniture made from recycled African signs. *riadyima.com*



5 Voice Gallery, Ménara  
*Breeding ground*

For Italian Rocco Orlacchio (pictured), running a gallery is about creating a community of talent from disparate backgrounds. He works with local and international artists, most of whom are young and engaged with what’s going on around the world, be it politically, environmentally or socially. Moroccan artist M’Barek Bouhchichi, for example, creates artwork from leftover plastic.

Orlacchio chose Marrakech because at the time, in 2011, its art scene was in flux – and that’s the kind of shaky ground on which great art is often made. In 2019 the gallery moved into this giant former jam factory. *Rue Salah Eddine Al Ayoubi +212 (0)6 5848 2800 voicegallery.net*



**Fair game**

It wasn’t until Vanessa Branson (sister to Richard) set up the Marrakech Biennale in 2004 that a spotlight, albeit a rather patchy one, began to shine on the Moroccan art scene. It sparked a dialogue between local and international art communities, and promoted cultural venues across the city.

When the seventh edition, due to be held in February 2018, was cancelled due to a lack of funds, it was a big disappointment. But the arrival of Moroccan native Touria El Glaoui’s 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair that same month lessened the blow. With a solid reputation in global art centres, 1-54 attracts collectors from all over. *marrakechbiennale.org; 1-54.com/marrakech*

**Foundations and cultural centres**  
Ambitious aims



**1** Montresso Art Foundation, Ouidane  
*Artist retreat*

Getting to this vibrant art foundation is a bit of a mission: though only 20km from the city, it's well and truly off the beaten track, at the heart of an olive grove. Established by Jean-Louis Haguenauer in 1981, it promotes Moroccan art and culture through the Jardin Rouge artists residency and the Montresso Art Space.

The Jardin Rouge was established in 2009 and welcomes up to 30 international artists a year, allowing them to develop and experiment while receiving support. The gallery space – a magnificent modern structure – was founded in 2016 and hosts contemporary art exhibitions. It's open by appointment on Fridays and Saturdays; sign up for a tour of the entire complex, including the studios. Douar Ouled Zbir, Route de Fès +212 (0)5 2980 1592 [montresso.com](http://montresso.com)



**2** Le 18, Medina  
*Contemporary meets traditional*

Laila Hida (pictured) was born in Casablanca, studied in Paris and worked as a photographer and producer before setting up Le 18 in 2013. Her foundation started out as an experimental space for the odd exhibition as well as talks about art, society and politics. It now offers a consistent annual programme.

The setting is a renovated riad in the medina – a far cry from the white-cube galleries of Gueliz. It offers a different perspective on contemporary art. “We want to move forward with our history,” says Hida. Le 18 puts on four exhibitions a year and also has a rolling residency programme.

18 Derb El Ferrane  
+212 (0)5 2438 9864  
[le18marrakech.com](http://le18marrakech.com)

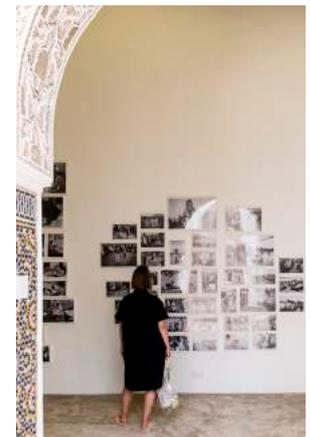


**3** Dar Bellarj, Medina  
*Flight of fancy*

A pocket of calm in the medina, Dar Bellarj has a schedule stuffed with wide-ranging events. Temporary exhibitions have taken on themes such as embroidery, scents and the art of stucco. Workshops might hone in on calligraphy or theatre, and past concerts have presented Sufi music.

The building too has been through many iterations – hospital, private residence, school – and is even said to have once been a sanctuary for injured storks (hence the name *bellarj*, which translates as “stork” in Arabic). In the early 2000s the complex was bought by Swiss architects Susanna Biedermann and Max Alioth, who set up the foundation.

There's no entrance fee and during Ramadan the institution hosts evening concerts in its central courtyard. 7-9 Toulal Zaouiat Lahdar +212 (0)5 2444 4555



**Cinemas**  
Take a picture



**2**  
Cinéma le Colisée, Gueliz  
*Curtain call*

This cinema has a lot to live up to: it was built in 1953 according to a design by Georges Peynet, the French architect behind Parisian cinemas such as Max Linder Panorama and Vendôme-Opéra. The entrance features a ribbed ceiling that resembles a swept-back curtain – a nod to the revelatory nature of the screening rooms within.

Refurbished in 1995, Cinéma le Colisée offers a varied programme of films often shown in their original language, including English, with French subtitles. It's also one of the hosts of the Festival International du Film de Marrakech (see page 138).

Boulevard Mohammed Zerktouni  
+212 (0)5 2444 8893



**1**  
Cinéma Leila Alaoui,  
Camp El Ghoul  
*Different perspectives*

A collaboration between the Fondation Leila Alaoui – established to preserve the humanitarian efforts of the late French-Moroccan video artist and photographer – and the Institut Français de Marrakech, the Cinéma Leila Alaoui was inaugurated in 2017. The former theatre of the institute has been transformed into a picture house that showcases French arthouse cinema, documentary films and international flicks.

In line with Alaoui's work – which explores themes such as the construction of identity and migration – the cinema aims to foster cultural diversity through imagery and film. Route de la Targa Jbel Guéliz  
+212 (0)5 2444 6930  
if-maroc.org



**Movie night**

The Musée Yves Saint Laurent's (see page 64) Ciné-Club screens the fashion designer's favourite films at 19.00 every Thursday. Expect 20th-century classics by the likes of Jean Cocteau and Orson Welles.  
museeslmarrakech.com



**Media round-up**  
What to read



**1**  
Media  
*Fresh pages*

Morocco may have its fair share of French and Arabic papers but many are state-owned and, as such, restricted when it comes to news coverage. Imprisonment and persecution of independent journalists who question the government is commonplace.

Our round-up of the best titles to peruse is focused on French-language publications produced across the country.

Founded by Hassan Alaoui in 2015, **1** *Maroc Diplomatique* is a monthly newspaper filled with reports, interviews and surveys on various social, political and cultural issues. **2** *L'Économiste*, the independent sister publication of Arabic daily *Assabah*, provides a regular dose of economic and financial news. **3** *L'Opinion* is another

daily – but published in Rabat – focusing on general news, economics and politics. Casablanca-based **4** *Le Matin*, which first hit presses in 1971 and is perhaps the most accessible of the French-language papers, brings together sport, world news, economics, celebrity gossip, politics and general-interest topics. Another politically independent, general-interest daily is **5** *Aujourd'hui*.

Weekly magazine **6** *Tel Quel* is marked by its brave coverage of the politics of the day and its investigative reporting, plus its progressive take on international relations, economics and culture.

Founded in 1995, **7** *Femmes du Maroc* is a monthly magazine published in Casablanca and directed by Moroccan journalist Aisha Zaïmi Sakhri, a big supporter of women's rights. It features fashion and beauty pages

and also interviews with politicians and artists, as well as reports on the Moroccan social scene. **8** *VH magazine*, short for “Version Homme”, was established as a monthly lifestyle and culture magazine for men in 2002.

**9** *Diptyk* is the country's premier arts title, dedicated to documenting Arabic and African contemporary art. Six issues a year cover major events in both the Moroccan and international art world, with reviews and artist profiles. And finally we have **10** *Chergui*, an in-house journal published twice a year by cultural foundation Le 18 (see page 69). An extension of the physical space, it takes on a different theme each time and features writing from contributors around the world in various languages.