

New Waves

Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School Archives

21 September 2019 – 5 January 2020

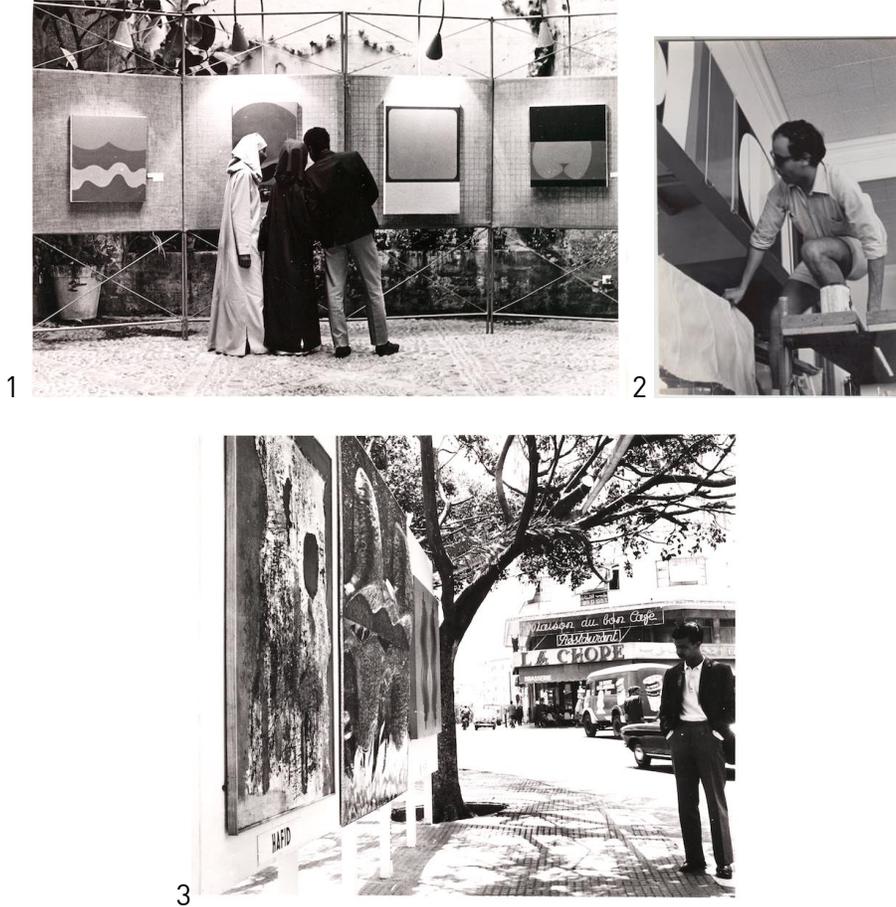


Mohamed Melehi (Morocco), *Composition*, 1970. Acrylic on board, 120 x 100 cm.
MACAAL collection © MACAAL

New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School Archives offers a chronological journey that retraces the period in the artist's career from the 1950's to the 1980's through the exploration of previously unseen works and archives. Curated by Morad Montazami for Zamân Books & Curating, developed with The Mosaic Rooms, London, the exhibition will take place from 21 September 2019 to 5 January 2020 at MACAAL.

After a first stop at The Mosaic Rooms in London, *New Waves* comes to MACAAL, retracing the three major periods in the career of a pioneer of modern Arab art and the three major locations: Rome, New York city and Casablanca.

1. 1957-1964. FROM ROME TO NEW YORK CITY: PRIMARY STRUCTURES AND SOFT EDGE PAINTING. The introduction to the exhibition takes us to Rome during the 1950s, where Melehi is one of the first artists from the African continent to show his work at avant-garde galleries such as Galleria Trastevere. The first exchanges and trips to New York, where he takes part in MoMA's 1963 exhibition, *Hard Edge and Geometric Painting*, represent another new dimension for Melehi.
2. 1964-1978. FROM NEW YORK CITY TO CASABLANCA: THOUSANDS OF WAVES IN HYPERSPACE. The return to Casablanca marks the beginning of a memorable adventure in the studios of Casablanca's École des Beaux-Arts. Here, alongside Farid Belkahia, Mohammed Chabâa, Bert Flint and Toni Maraini, Melehi led one of the most significant movements in the history of post-colonial art. This section of the exhibition also focuses upon his practice as a designer-activist and the 1969 manifesto-exhibition in Jamaa el Fna square, as well as studio work and actions undertaken at the École des Beaux-Arts.
3. The 1980s. REFRAMING THE WAVE: BETWEEN AFRO-BERBERISM AND POST-COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE. During the 1980s, Melehi developed a dynamic synthesis of all elements of his practice: he returned to African and Berber sources (notably in the painted ceilings of rural mosques), as the Casablanca group always encouraged, but also from his architectural experience in the 1970s (with the Faraoui and De Mazières firm), as well as his muralist practice, culminating in the legendary Asilah Arts Festival, which he co-founded in 1978.



1. Visitors to the M. Melehi exhibition, Galerie Bab Rouah, Rabat, 1965. Photo M. Melehi. Safieddine-Melehi archives

2. M. Melehi working on a fresco project in the cafeteria of the Minneapolis Institute of the Arts, 1962. Photo Toni Maraini. Safieddine-Melehi archives

3. Exposition manifeste/Présence plastique (Manifesto exhibition/Plastic Presence), Place du 18 Novembre, Casablanca, 1969. Photo M. Melehi. Safieddine-Melehi archives

Redesigned for the spaces of MACAAL and in consideration of its vocation, the exhibition path presents a majority of works that have rarely or never before been seen by the public, thus creating a new perspective upon the influence of Melehi and the *École de Casa*, both in and outside Morocco. An unprecedented documentary device allows spectators to plunge into this golden age of the Moroccan, Arab, and African avant-garde. To this end, original prints by Melehi in his role of documentary-photographer are on display. Specially-designed for the *New Waves* exhibition's Moroccan stop is the "Afro-Berber Museum" room: here are objects culled from the collections of the Musée Tiskiwin-Bert Flint in Marrakech as well as exceptional artworks by Malika Agueznay, Farid Belkahia, Mohammed Chabâa, and Hossein Miloudi. To further deepen understanding through historic documentation, the exhibition will conclude with

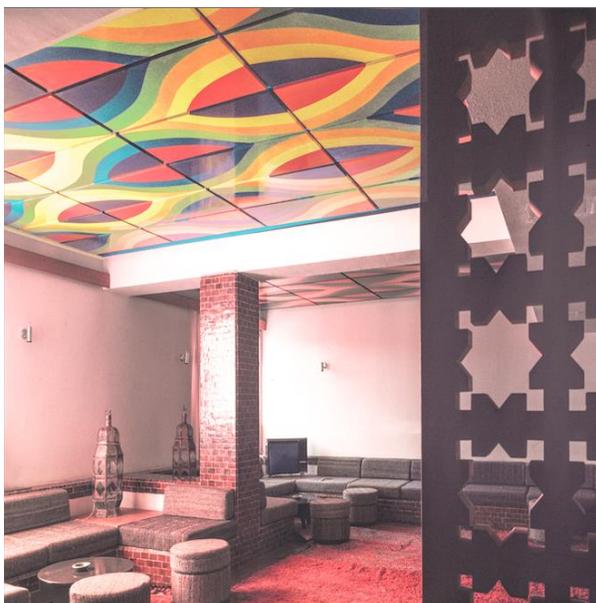
a slideshow of photographic images from the Asilah Moussem (the intersection of Mediterranean and Arab-African trajectories as imagined by Melehi) as well as a screening of the rediscovered documentary film on Melehi, produced by the Bronx Museum of the Arts (NY) in 1984. Another outstanding documentary about the artist to be discovered here, the one by Faten Safieddine, *La Vague à l'âme* (1995), co-directed with Mohammed Boualem for Moroccan TV (2M).



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1. Fresco by Mohammed Chabâa, Asilah Moussem, late 1970s. Safieddine-Melehi archives.
2. Fibula, Berber brooch, photo by M. Melehi, published in *Maghreb Art* n°1, 1965. Toni Maraini archives.
3. View of a ceiling fresco by M. Melehi. Hôtel Les Roses du Dadès, Kelaa M'Gouna, Deep South, Morocco 1971-1972. Faraoui and De Mazières Studio. Patrice de Mazières archives.

Offering a richly-documented interpretation of Melehi's work, highlighted by an original scenography, the exhibition shows us a lesser-known aspect of work that might be considered "globalised" before its time. Research led by Zamân Books & Curating - the platform specialising in Arab, African and Asian modernities - consists of retracing the steps of a path that is more complex than it might seem – extending beyond the binary schema of East and West.

Paced via scenography that draws inspiration from Melehi's colours, lines, and waves, *New Waves* proposes an appreciation of the multiple facets of this cosmopolitan artist: from his geometric experiments to the cultural revolution put in motion at the École de Casa and his key role in the development of art education in Morocco, as well as his significant work as photographer, editor, designer, graphic artist and muralist, which has largely contributed to shaping the aesthetics of post-colonial and pan-Arab artistic networks.

A programme of multidisciplinary events will be structured throughout the four months of the exhibition (conferences, round tables, publication launches, pedagogical workshops, etc.). Follow activities on: www.macaal.org



Melehi graphic design wall, exhibition *New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School*, The Mosaic Rooms, 2019. Image courtesy of The Mosaic Rooms, A.M. Qattan Foundation. Photograph by Joyce Nichols.

About the curators: Zamân Books & Curating

Morad Montazami is an art historian and curator. His research explores Arab, African, and Asian modernisms in the context of the Zamân Books & Curating platform, of which he is founder and which includes contributors such as Madeleine de Colnet, with whom he designed the *New Waves* exhibition. He has published essays notably on Farid Belkahia, Bahman Mohassess, Hamed Abdalla, Zineb Sedira, and Latif Al Ani, among others. He has curated the exhibitions *ARABÉCÉDAIRE Hamed Abdalla*, and *Behjat Sadr: Dusted Waters* at The Mosaic Rooms (2018), *Bagdad Mon Amour* at the Institut des Cultures d'Islam, Paris (2018), *Fugitive Volumes: Faouzi Laatiris and the INBA Tetouan* at the Musée Mohammed VI d'art moderne et contemporain, Rabat (2016), and co-curated the exhibition *Unedited History: Iran 1960-2014* at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris and MAXXI, Rome (2014-2015).

Madeleine de Colnet is artistic and cultural project manager. She accompanied different institutions at the time of their creation in Morocco and France. From 2007 to 2012, she developed and implemented the Fabrique du Regard, the pedagogical platform of the BAL in Paris. From 2013 to 2016, she participated as a project manager at the launch of the art space Kulte Gallery & Edition, in Rabat. Since 2017, she helps developing the platform Zamân Books & Curating.

About MACAAL and Fondation Alliances

The Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden in Marrakech is an independent, non-profit museum of contemporary art. One of the first of its kind on the continent, MACAAL is dedicated to the promotion of contemporary art through various exhibition and mediation programmes designed for broad public appeal. In addition to the permanent collection, exhibitions cast new light upon art that dialogues with the continent, presenting both emerging and established artists, of African and international origin. The Museum thus promotes the understanding of contemporary art, revealing the creative energy and cultural diversity that are characteristic of the continent.

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Created in 2009, Fondation Alliances is a non-profit association backed by Alliances Group, a leading integrated real estate group in Morocco, whose vocation is to provide support in Morocco through concrete social and cultural action. The Foundation advocates for the idea of art accessible to all, by developing significant cultural mediation in favour of all social backgrounds, thus acting to create awareness of contemporary Moroccan and African art through a rigorous approach. In addition to MACAAL, Fondation Alliances has set up three other not-for-profit initiatives:

- The *Al Maaden Sculpture Park*: inaugurated in September 2013, the Al Maaden Sculpture Park is home to monumental sculptures by Moroccan and international artists, exclusively created for the Al Maaden site in Marrakech.
- Lcc Program, launched in 2013 under the name of La Chambre Claire, is a yearly event designed to support contemporary photography through the promotion and exhibition of a selected emerging artist.
- The Passerelles Programme fosters engagement with local young people via a series of workshops and contemporary art classes as well as museum visits. The programme acts as a bridge between the local public and the wider cultural environment.
- The MACAAL Residence: a programme of residency, research and production, inaugurated in 2019.

About The Mosaic Rooms

The Mosaic Rooms commissioned the exhibition of Mohamed Melehi's work, entitled *New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School*, as part of a series of exhibitions marking the tenth anniversary of The Mosaic Rooms. The series highlighted modernists and contemporary artists from Morocco, Egypt and Iran. The exhibitions of modernist artists were curated by Morad Montazami with assistant curator Madeleine de Colnet of Zaman Books & Curating.

The Mosaic Rooms are a non-profit art gallery dedicated to supporting and promoting contemporary culture from the Arab world and beyond in London. They do this through free contemporary art exhibitions, multidisciplinary events (including performances, film screenings, current affairs talks and book launches) and their learning programme. They believe in the importance of creating a cultural space that presents new thinking and daring creativity, illuminates ideas, inspires understanding, and interrogates contemporary issues. Their vision is for a London audience with a more informed, engaged and critical understanding of Arab culture and society. The Mosaic Rooms are a project of the A.M. Qattan Foundation, a registered charity number 1029450.

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Exhibition information:

Title:	<i>New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School Archives</i>
Address:	MACAAL, Al Maaden, Sidi Youssef Ben Ali, 40000 Marrakech
Telephone:	+212 676 92 44 92
Website:	www.macaal.org
Dates:	21 September 2019 – 5 January 2020
Hours:	Tuesday – Sunday, 10AM – 6PM
Instagram:	@macaal_
Facebook:	Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden