**Cherkaoui, Ahmed (1934-1967)**

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Ahmed Cherkaoui is one of the leading Modernist painters of Moroccan art during the period following independence in 1956. Cherkaoui large-scale abstract and symbolic canvases negotiated a number of references from his personal life and education: Amazighi folk-art, Roger Bissière**,** Paul Klee and Surrealism. He used predominantly dark colors in his work before 1965, that were transformed in later work into lighter colors with his use of additional media including fiber, gouache and watercolor and a new approach to space. Highly interested in calligraphy and the motifs of popular talismans, and at the same time exposed to 20th century western modern art, Cherkaoui combines features of tradition and modernity, negotiating between the aesthetic and abstract nature of the signs and symbols which highlight Islamic art, and innovative modernist techniques. However, Cherkaoui’s resort to signs and shapes including triangles, circles, lozenges, dots and broken and curved lines goes beyond ornamental purposes. Cherkaoui lived between Europe and North Africa, and died suddenly after returning to Casablanca. After his death, his work was featured in a series of retrospective shows entitled *Hommage à Cherkaoui* organized at the Biennale de Paris and also at the Salon of Sacred Art in Paris; followed by the Biennale Exhibit of New Delhi in 1968 in India.

Born in the small town of Boujad in the Chaouia plain in central Morocco, Cherkaoui's fascination with signs began with his curiosity about the shapes and meaning of his mother’s tattoos. Cherkaoui received degrees from the École des Metiers d’Art de Paris where he studied graphics during 1956 and 1959, and from the Aujame Atelier at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris. In 1961, Cherkaoui moved to Warsaw where he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts. Back in Paris, Cherkaoui was awarded a research grant from UNESCO to study signs and symbols in Amazighi art and Arab calligraphy. Following his studies, Cherkaoui taught drawing classes at the Technical College in Beaumont-sur-Oise.

Cherkaoui’s work during the sixties captured visually complex forms which highlight Morocco's cultural heritage through various forms of tattoos, jewelry, pottery, weaving and motifs on handicraft ware. Cherkaoui used a system of geometric signs and symbols inspired from the Amazighi tradition, and from the Zayanes tribe known for women’s traditionally woven wool textiles and other handicrafts.

Cherkaoui participated in many solo exhibitions including his one-man show at the Ursula Girardon’s Gallery in 1962 in Paris; and numerous collective exhibitions, including “20 Peintres étrangers” in the Parisian Musée de l’Art Moderne in 1963. He won the bronze medal at the 10th “Salon Interministériel” in 1962 and took part regularly in the Salon de Mai in Paris.

**References and Further Reading**

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