Samia Touati

**Zeid, Fahrelnissa (1901- 1991)**

Fahrelnissa Zeid was a prominent and influential figure in Turkish modern art and an accomplished early female modernist Turkish painter. Later she was as influential for modern Jordanian art. Zeid addressed a variety of themes and subjects in her artworks, including scenes of everyday life and portraits of family members, relatives, and friends. In her portraits, Zeid exaggerated her subjects’ features, and in the large rounded eyes and elongated faces one detects a reminiscence of Byzantine iconography and Egyptian Fayum portraits. Her expressive brushstrokes communicate the character of her subjects. Although Zeid’s art is predominantly abstract, her style is unique and draws on Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam. Her work reflects her experimentation with watercolors, composition lithographs, collages, resin sculptures, and stained glass. After her second husband died in 1970, Zeid settled in Amman, Jordan and established the Royal Fine Art Institute of Fahrelnissa Zeid. She exhibited extensively in Europe, the U.S.A., and the Middle East and her paintings have been acquired by many museums, including the Museum of Modern Art of Paris; the museums of New York, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, of Edinburgh; the Museum of Painting and Sculpture of Istanbul, Mathaf: the Arab Museum of Modern Art, and the Museum of Hittite Art of Ankara – as well as private collections.

Born into an intellectual Ottoman family, Zeid began painting and drawing portraits in her early childhood. One of the first women to attend the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul in 1920, Zeid studied under the Turkish painter Namik Ismail. Considered as a pioneer of modern Turkish abstract painting, Zeid joined a circle of young Turkish artists known as the D-Group in 1942. In 1928, she travelled to Paris and trained in the studio of Stahlbach and Roger Bissière at the Académie Ranson. As a result of her first marriage to novelist Izzet Melih Devrim, Zeid went on several yearly visits to European cities, paving the way for her immersion in the world of modern art. Zeid took part in a generation of artists referred to as the “New École de Paris” as their exhibitions in Paris led to the emergence of various art movements.

In 1934, after divorcing Devrim, Zeid married the Hashemite Prince Zeid bin Hussein who was the youngest son of Sharif Hussein bin Ali of Mecca and at that time the Ambassador of Iraq to Ankara. As the Iraqi ambassador’s wife, Zeid travelled extensively throughout Europe, the US and the Middle East, and was exposed to more artwork from contemporary Western artists, in particular the works of Joan Miró, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso. Since her death, Zeid's immense visual legacy has continued to present a fusion of narratives that highlight the development of Modern Turkish Art.

**References Further Reading**

Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, Darat al-Funun. The Centenary of Fahrelnissa Zeid. Amman, Jordan: Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, Darat al-Funun, 2000.

Ali, Wijdan. *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity*. (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1990): 14, 18, 100, 101, 140, 211, 212.

Berktay, Fatmagul; Levent Calikoglu; Zeynep Inankur and Burcu Pehlivanoglu. Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey, Istanbul: Istanbul Modern Sanat Muzesi, 2011.

Eigner, Saeb. Art of the Middle East: Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World and Iran. London: Merrell, 2010.

Encyclopædia Britannica. “servet-i fünun.” 2014 Encyclopædia Britannica. http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/535954/Servet-i-Funun (Accessed 14 January 2014).

Fahrelnissa Zeid: Portraits et Peintures Abstraites. Exposition du 30 Mai au 24 Juin 1972. Galerie Katia Granoff, Place Beauvau, Paris, 1972.

Mikdadi, Salwa. “Fahrelnissa Zeid: The Visual legacy of an Extraordinary Life.” Forever Now: Five Anecdotes from the Permanent Collection. (Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing, 2012), 89-90.

Devrim, Shirin. A Turkish Tapestry: the Shakirs of Istanbul. London: Quartet Books, 1994.