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 ranging from scenes of the everyday life to 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. Most importantly, Zeid’s expressive brushstrokes captured the depth of her subjects. Although Zeid’s art is predominantly abstract, her style is unique and draws on Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, and 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, U.S.A. and the Middle East and her paintings have been acquired by several museums, including the Museum of Modern Art of Paris, the museums of New York, of Cincinnati, of Edinburgh, of Pittsburgh, the Museum of Painting and Sculpture of Istanbul, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Hittite Art of Ankara, and 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 Ecole 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 of contemporary Western artists, in particular those of Joan Miró, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso. After her death, Zeid's immense visual legacy continues to present an amalgam of narratives which highlight the development of Modern Turkish Art.

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