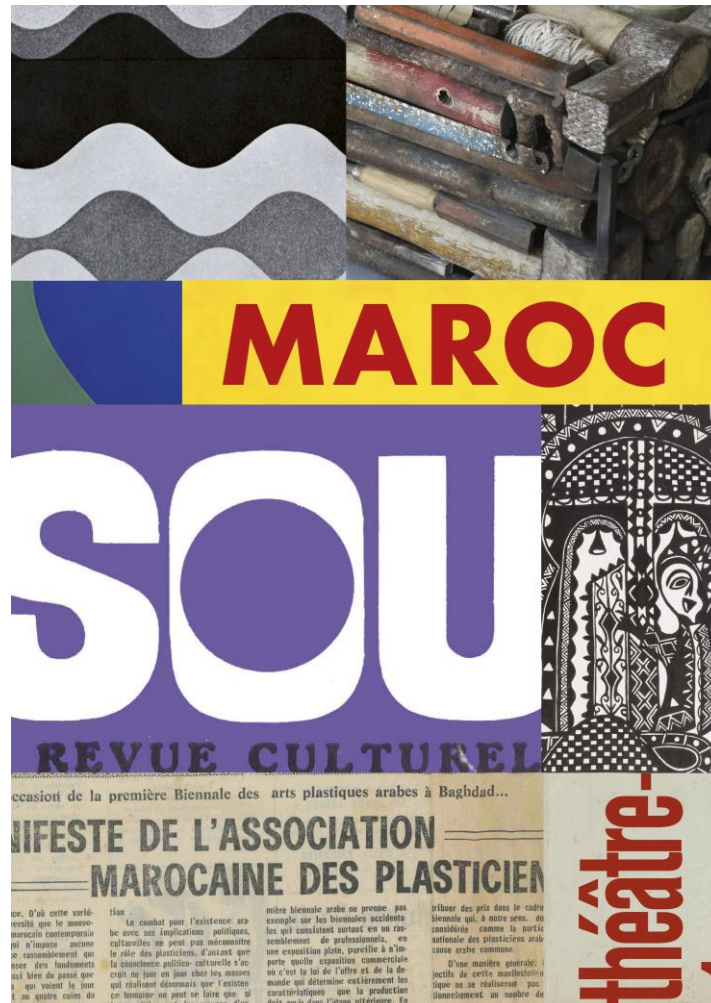


## **MOROCCAN TRILOGY 1950-2020**



**DATES:**

March 31, 2021 – September 27, 2021

**LOCATION:**

Museo Reina Sofía (Madrid). Sabatini Building, 3rd floor

**ORGANIZATION:**

An initiative of: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Ministry of Culture and Sport of the Government of Spain, and National Foundation of Museums of the Kingdom of Morocco

With the collaboration of: Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art – Qatar Museums and Qatar Foundation

**CURATORSHIP:**

Manuel Borja-Villel and Abdellah Karroum

**COORDINATION:**

Leticia Sastre

*Moroccan Trilogy 1950-2020 [Trilogía Marroquí 1950-2020]* articulates a visual dialogue that reflects artistic production at three historical moments from independence to the present day. It does so through a significant selection of artworks that show the diversity of initiatives, the vitality of artistic debate and the interdisciplinary exchanges to be found in Morocco.

This exhibition falls within the area of decolonial research, one of the central focuses of the Museum's programming. It is a first attempt to broaden the focus of these analyses by turning the gaze onto the southern shore of the Mediterranean, the cradle of western civilization, and more specifically onto Morocco, an ancient country just 14 kilometers away from Spain.

The show has been organized within the framework of the program for cultural cooperation between Spain and Morocco in the field of Museums, an initiative fostered by the National Foundation of Museums of the Kingdom of Morocco and the Ministry of Culture and Sport of the Government of Spain, in collaboration with Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art – Qatar Museums and Qatar Foundation. *Moroccan Trilogy 1950-2020* offers an account of artistic experiences in Morocco from the mid-20th century onwards, focusing particularly on the three urban centers of Tétouan, Casablanca and Tangier. The 250 works on show, produced between 1950 and 2020, combine with archive documents to illustrate a history of profuse cultural effervescence.

The exhibition shows the diversity of artistic expression in modern Morocco, highlighting the key figures of each period from the transition to independence (1950-1969) to the so-called 'Years of Lead' (1970-1999), and from then to the present day (2000-2020).



AHMED CHERKAOUI  
*Talisman rouge*, 1967  
Oil on canvas  
85,8 x 104,5 cm  
Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha  
© Ahmed Cherkaoui

After forty years under the French and Spanish protectorate, the first period covers an extremely agitated phase that extends from the years of independence until 1969. During that time, the artistic field was articulated around the debates aroused by the appearance of the nationalist movement and the imperious need to construct a discourse of identity. These two aspects made up the conceptual background to modern Moroccan art in the 1960s and 1970s, when artists started to question the traditional artistic academicism transmitted through art teaching in Morocco.

After studying and training in the world's principal artistic capitals, the first generation of Moroccan artists became impregnated with the theoretical debates then in vogue internationally. They later adopted abstraction as a means of expression suited to their national vindications and anxieties over their identity.

In this way, many artists who had started by studying at local art schools broke radically with the academic knowledge they had acquired during their training in Morocco and went to continue their studies in Europe and the United States. After their return to Morocco, artists like **Mohamed Melehi**, **Mohamed Chabâa** with **Farid Belkahia**, **Mohamed Hamidi**, **Mohamed Ataallah** and **Mustapha Hafid** profoundly transformed Moroccan artistic education at the School of Fine Arts in Casablanca,

which soon helped to open up the country's art to modernity with projects that combined craftsmanship with innovative artistic forms.

At the same time, the city of Tangier became a cosmopolitan center and a meeting place for the beat generation. From **Mohamed Choukri's** relationship with that environment came one of the starkest autobiographical narratives in Moroccan literature. During the same period, the magazine *Souffles*, edited by the poet **Abdellatif Laâbi**, opened the debate on history and the new social realities. This publication, which was born in reaction to the armed repression of the student revolt of 1965, very soon became a sounding box for critical discourse and political action.

In the second phase, years of great internal conflict, there emerged a constellation of alternative publications, festivals and biennials, often independent. The voice of dissidence, especially active in literature, poetry and theatre, was spread through the magazine *Souffles* until it was banned in 1972, and after that through *Intégral* and *Lamalif*. Also appearing in that period is a non-academic and non-intellectualized art represented by self-taught men and women with links to a living artistic dynamism, as in the case of **Chaïbia Talal** and **Fatima Hassan**.



BERNARD PLOSSU  
*Marrakech*, 1975  
Dry plate photography on paper  
18 x 24 cm  
Artist's collection  
© Bernard Plossu

In the late 1980s, a new contemporary trend began to establish itself on the Moroccan art scene. Adopting new artistic approaches, it crystallized in the 1990s with artists like **Mohamed El Baz**, **Mounir Fatmi** and **Yto Barrada**. In the last years of the 1990s, Morocco went through its transition to democracy, when some signs of openness in the media started to appear.

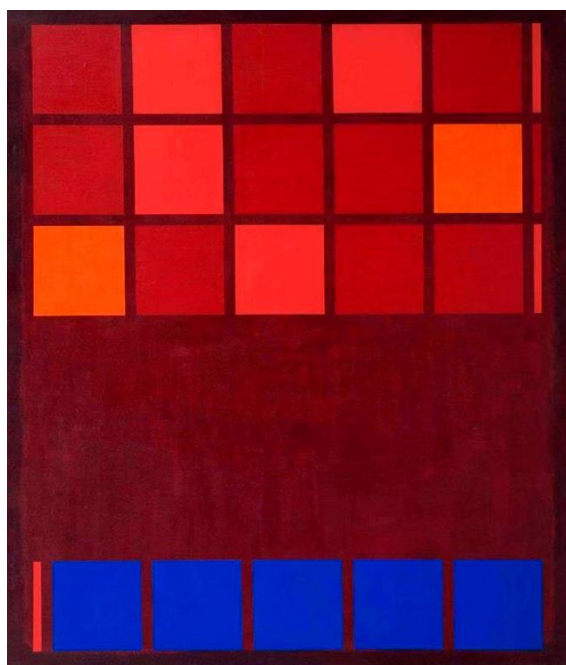
The last section of the exhibition, which covers the years 2000 to 2020, shows the work of a generation of young artists who broke off from the past on the formal, technical, symbolic and political planes of art. This generation frequented alternative venues where artists made contact on the fringes of the conventional circuits. It moreover included a large number of woman artists whose works often arouse critical reflection on feminine identity in the specific context of Moroccan society.

Each of these periods, with its formal tendencies, its ideological issues and its historical accidents, has led to gestures of significance for the next generations. The exhibition *Moroccan Trilogy 1950-2020* is a study of the artistic heritage of Morocco since the post-independence period and an analysis of its contemporary production. Through its diversity of representational forms, the active role of art in its multiple manifestations is reaffirmed with respect to the individual and society, beyond any notion of moral or ideological centrality. What art teaches us is the possibility of giving sense, imagining justice and seeking cultural, social and human progress. This segment of Morocco's history can help us understand its present and reflect on its future.



The show includes works by the following artists and film-makers: Mohamed Abouelouakar, Etel Adnan, Mohamed Afifi, Malika Agueznay, Mustapha Akrim, Ahmed Amrani, Mohamed Ataallah, Yassine Balbzioui, Yto Barrada, Farid Belkahia, Fouad Bellamine, Baghdad Benas, Hicham Benohoud, Ahmed Bouanani, Mustapha Boujemaoui, Mohamed Chabâa, Ahmed Cherkaoui, Mohamed Choukri, Hassan Darsi, Bachir Demnati, Mostafa Derkaoui, Mohamed Drissi, Moulay Ahmed Drissi, André Elbaz, Mohamed El Baz, Khalil El Ghrib, Badr El Hammami, Touhami Ennadre, Safaa Erruas, Ali Essafi, Ymane Fakhir, Mounir Fatmi, Jilali Gharbaoui, Souad Guennoun, Mustapha Hafid, Mohamed Hamidi, Mohssin Harraki, Fatima Hassan, Soukaina Joul, Mohamed Kacimi, Maria Karim, Leila Kilani, Abdellatif Laâbi, Faouzi Laatiris, Miloud Labied, Mohammed Laouli, Randa Maroufi, Najia Mehadjji, Mohamed Melehi, Abderrahman Meliani, Houssein Miloudi, Mohamed Mrabet, Sara Ouhammadou, Bernard Plossu, Rachid Ouettassi, Karim Rafi, Mohamed Larbi Rahhali, Younes Rahmoun, Abbas Saladi, Tayeb Saddiki, Chaïbia Talal and Latifa Toujani.

### After the independence



MOHAMED MELEHI  
*IBM*, 1962  
Acrylic on canvas  
152 x 130 cm  
Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha  
© Mohamed Melehi, VEGAP, Madrid 2021

The exhibition begins with a first section focused on the years 1950-1969, the pre- and post-colonial period of Morocco, a country that, from 1912 to 1956, was divided into two protectorates, under French and Spanish rule. After forty-four years, when an independent state was declared, a new period of hope thrived in the country. The generation of artists born between 1930 and 1940 had breathed the struggle of Moroccans for independence and, after its achievement, they established themselves in the avant-garde of cultural openness.

The ambition to leap forward implied a questioning of academicism, also a reassessment on ways to achieve a breakthrough that was inferred by the usage of autochthonous elements, international references and other. A few artists were self-taught, but the careers of most salient figures were associated with one of the two, sometimes both, key artistic centers: the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Tetouan and Casablanca.

In Tétouan's school the first generation of Moroccan painters was trained, including **Ahmed Amrani**, **Mohamed Ataallah**, **Mohamed Chabaa** and **Mohamed Melehi**, whose works can be seen in the first section of the exhibition. Most of the school's students would continue their fine arts education in Spanish institutions such as Madrid's Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, and some also studied in Italy, France, and the United States.

Amrani, for example, while completing his studies in Spain, spent hours at the Prado Museum, where he studied the works of Francisco de Goya and Diego Velázquez, eventually developing an expressivity clearly influenced by the painter from Zaragoza, as seen, for example, in his work *Protest* (1969). Mohamed Melehi received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1962 that brought him to the United States, where he studied at Columbia University, encountering local artists such as

Jasper Johns and Frank Stella. This was the moment when his practice took an aesthetic turn characterized by the introduction of color in an effort to balance expression and minimalism. In *IBM* (1962), *IBM-Song* (1963), *Moon landing* (1963), and *Solar Nostalgia* (1962) he seeks to foster a dialogue between art, science, and technology.

Another relevant figure of this moment was **Ahmed Cherkaoui**, whose distinctive synthesis of iconographic Moroccan traditions and modernist aesthetics made him a key forerunner of the Casablanca Group, which was active in the mid-1960s. In paintings such as *Les trois soeurs* (*The three sisters*) (1963) and *Talisman n° 3* (1966), the visitor can appreciate the influence of the tattoo tradition present in the Amazigh women in Morocco. In this first part of the exhibition, there are also present the abstraction and Arabic calligraphy characteristic of Islamic art that predominate in the work of **Jilali Gharbaoui** or the neo-figuration that moves away from the classic representations of the body that reflects *Sevisses* (1961), a painting by **Farid Belkahia**.

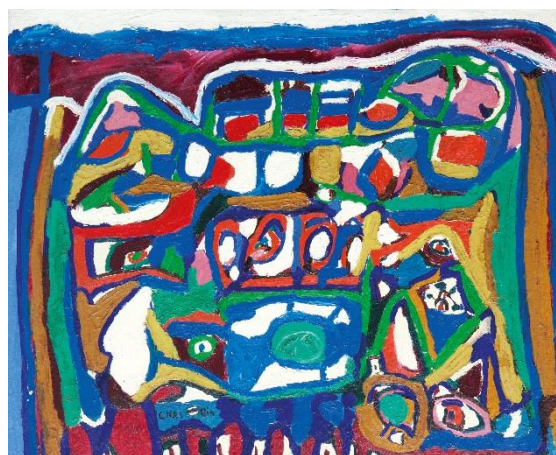
In this section it is also highlighted the moment when Moroccan cultural actors from various fields sought to use magazines and journals as part of a conspicuous effort to decolonize the country's history and conventionalisms. Publications such as *Souffles* (1966-1972), *Lamalif* (1966-1988), and *Intégral* (1971-1978) created spaces in which to debate modernity, nation-building, and other weighty issues.

### **Multidisciplinary development of the arts**

The second section of the exhibition covers a complex period, known as the "Lead Years" (1970-1999), marked by internal conflicts, a gradual Arabization of cultural life, the annexation of Western Sahara, and greater state control. This section starts with *Before the Dying of the Light* (2019), by **Ali Essafi**, a documentary about 1970s cultural life that assembles a selection of meaningful archival materials—art works, films, music, voices, and so on—to recreate the atmosphere of that convulsive time in Morocco's history.

Moroccan cultural production experienced a remarkable increase in all the fields (art, literature, theatre, cinema, music, etc.), encouraging collaborations among their key actors. Creative effervescence gained momentum through festivals, biennials, temporary group exhibitions and a constellation of independent publications as well as theatrical performances. The visual arts brought together popular heritage and crafts, figuration and abstraction, endorsement and antagonism.

From that period there are displayed works such as *The Marriage Ceremony* (1983), by **Chaïbia Talal**, an artist that often portrays women and that by brushstrokes of vibrant colors brings to light scenes of social engagement. Chaïbia disliked the term naive art, which is often used to describe the work of self-taught artists. In her opinion, the term undervalues the work of such artists, among whom are many non-Western women. Her position is shared by colleagues like **Fatima Hassan**, whose work *Scene* (1992) is also displayed in this space.



CHAÏBIA TALAL  
*Place Jamaa Lafna*, 1969  
Oil on canvas  
80 x 100 cm  
Private Collection, Marrakech  
© Chaïbia Talal

In this section of the exhibition the visitor can delve into *About Some Meaningless Events* (1974), by **Mostafa Derkaoui**, a documentary fiction that was shown only once, in Paris in 1975. In this film, the city of Casablanca becomes the set for interviews conducted by Derkaoui, and other young filmmakers, with poets, artists, actors, and people in the streets. The interrogation of what an emerging Moroccan national cinema might look like freely emerges from very different conversations. By pursuing cinema's true function, the film reflects on a society under construction.

At the end of the 80s Moroccan visual arts came to experience the breath of new practices linked to installation art as well as the use of humble materials and found objects, which strengthened the idea of process. An example of this change is *My Life* (1984-2021), an autobiographical work on **Mohamed Larbi Rahhali's** life as a fisherman, artist, and citizen of Tétouan. His works which comfortably fit in a pocket, contain miniature worlds that reflect on his personal life, cosmology, and social concerns.

## **Generation 00**

In the 1990s Morocco underwent a democratic transition and witnessed signs of an openness in the media. At the turn of century this aperture was felt in the visual arts as a radical break from the past not just in formal and technical terms, but also from a social, and geopolitical standpoint.



**YTO BARRADA**

***Le Detroit - The Strait Project Crevasse /***

Landslip Cromlegh de m'Zora, 2001

C-print mounted on aluminium

60 x 60 cm

Artist's collection. Sfeir-semmler Galley and Galerie Polaris

The term "Generation 00" alludes to the artists active in the first decade of the century, a decade that witnessed the rise of populism and technological development, Casablanca's terrorist attacks, and the so-called Arab Spring. This generation of artists operated both in Morocco and abroad, using global media information to focus on the emergence of social realities at the local and global levels to produce projects nurtured by a desire for change and social justice.

In this third section of the exhibition the visitor can observe pieces such as *Al Jazeera* (2007), by **Mounir Fatmi**, an artist that works with various media, most notably sculpture and installation, to challenge the information conveyed by images. His pieces, which subtly treat global media issues, contemporary politics, silence, and censorship, work to disrupt the ideological and technological promises that images make.



This section also displays films such as *Beau Geste* (2009), by **Yto Barrada**, who uses photographs, films, sculptures, and installations to explore social and political circumstances, as well as historical events that took place in her home city of Tangier and elsewhere in Morocco. *The Show Is Over* (2011), by **Karim Rafi**, one the most creative and visible performers when radical poetry and underground music groups began to take surface in Morocco, is also displayed in this section.

The exhibition ends with the film *Bab Sebta* [Ceuta's Gate] (2019), by **Randa Maroufi**, produced in a "garage" turned into a studio by the artist to capture the choreographed movements of people crossing Ceuta's border, to pose questions both about the ambiguity of the images and the scenes behind them.



RANDA MAROUFI  
*Bab Sebta*, 2019  
Video. 19', Color, sound  
Artist's collection  
Barney Production & Montfleuri Production

An initiative of:



With the collaboration of:

متحف mathaf  
المتحف العربي arab museum of  
للفن الحديث modern art



## **Entretanto [In the Meantime]**

### **Exhibition related activities**

Within the framework of the exhibition, a series of activities will be carried out over a period of six months with the goal of getting to know and questioning the complexity of Morocco's contemporary reality by holding talks with artists and creators from this country. Furthermore, the program aims to create a way to activate and articulate networks between the guest cultural agents from Morocco and the local communities

***Entretanto [In the Meantime]***, organized by **Medialab Prado**, **Casa Árabe** and **Museo Reina Sofía**, and curated by **Susana Moliner**, includes **round tables, conversations, lectures, workshops and performances**.

#### **For further information:**

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