

Critics' choice

Life&Arts

6 April/7 April 2019

Visual arts Jackie Wullschläger

Mike Nelson:

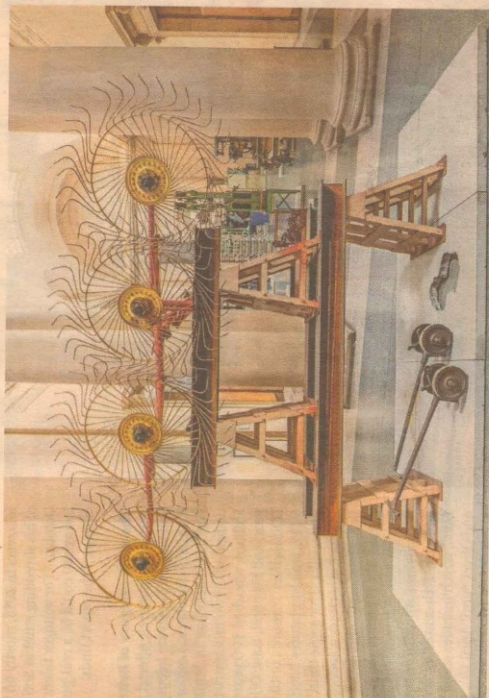
The Asset Strippers
Tate Britain, London

This is the best, most affecting installation in Tate's towering main space

since the Duveen commissions began this century. Mike Nelson both engages with Tate's collection, its twin concern with art and social history, and has created an entirely original contemporary work. A hay rake's giant coiling metal discs, with yellow-gold centres, imitate "The Sunflowers" in Tate's Van Gogh exhibition (see right). A faded green loom, topped by a wire mesh, calls to mind Anthony Caro's steel net and flat bright green plane "The Window" in the permanent collection. In brief and forlorn grandeur, a power drill outdoes Jacob Epstein's iconic "Rock Drill".

Nelson's idea is brilliantly simple: from company liquidation auctions and salvage yards, he sourced obsolete factory items – fork-lift, cement mixer, scales – and arranged them on makeshift plinths (trestle tables, wooden palettes) in a

A detail from Mike Nelson's "The Asset Strippers" at Tate Britain
Tate/Matt Greenwood



sculptural installation. Framed by desperately evocative doors from an NHS hospital, the display of industrial archaeology, rough, rusting and shabby, punctuated by woodwork from an army barracks and a housing estate's graffitied awnings, challenges the

Duveen neoclassical pomp yet takes from it historical seriousness. Nelson's conceptual masterpiece provokes complex responses. You want to stay for hours – the level of detail excites: sequins, spools, the patina of wooden surfaces, a

caterpillar tyre's baroque loops. So well modulated is the show that you veer between melancholy for past industrial glory, guilty nostalgia (dare we regret factory existence, or were these noble machines worked by proud, skilled labour?), delight at man's

inventiveness, and pleasure at the play of form allied to function, texture, materiality – joys we associate with abstract paintings, installations and performances around themes of displacement and the social problems of globalisation. A market wunderkind in the early 2010s, he sold paintings for

Van Gogh and Britain
Tate Britain, London

Van Gogh's final Provence paintings – the Musée d'Orsay's "Starry Night", "Madame Roulin Rocking a Cradle" from Amsterdam's Stedelijk, Washington's searing "Self-Portrait" – are the sunnys here.

Arguments for influence between Van Gogh and Britain don't persuade and British works included are weak, but the show is unmissable: Van Gogh's violent expressiveness, intense lucidity, high colour and rhythmic free forms, foundations of modern art, never stale. *tate.org.uk, to August 11*

Oscar Murillo:
Violent Amnesia
Kettle's Yard, Cambridge

Colombia-born, London-educated Murillo makes large-scale densely textured, abstract paintings, installations and performances around themes of displacement and the social problems of globalisation. A market wunderkind in the early 2010s, he sold paintings for

of art school but has had a quieter profile recently. This is his first public gallery show since 2013. *kettleyard.co.uk, April 9-June 23*

Mary Quant

Victoria & Albert Museum, London
British counterpart to the V&A's Dior show, Quant invented the miniskirt (customers would say: "shorter, shorter") and hot pants, transforming 1960s British fashion – and social life. This show features 200 garments and accessories – from Peter Pan collars to yellow polyvinyl ankle boots – photographs (Twiggy, the Mary Quant "Beauty Bus" Routemaster) and pieces from Quant's personal archive. *vam.ac.uk, to February 16*

New Waves: Mohamed Melhi and the Casablanca Art School

The Mosaic Rooms, London
First UK exhibition of Moroccan modernist painter Mohamed Melhi, who in the 1960s appropriated a singular style of hard-edged abstraction, often using the wave motif as a starting

point, and was also inspired by images of space travel. *mosaicrooms.org, April 12-June 22*

William Eggleston: 2%

David Zwirner, London
The American photographer acclaimed for his use of saturated colour shot the series here in 1970s California using a two-and-a-quarter-inch square-format camera to depict people, cars, parking lots and stores, conveying the uniformity of postwar material culture but also the individualism of those engaged in it. *davidzwirner.com, April 12-June 1*

Joe Tilson

Marlborough, London
Tilson, 91 this year, continues to make his alluring, formally precise, sensuous, utterly distinctive painting series "The Stones of Venice", inspired by particular building façades and stone floor patterns – "Ca Foscari", "San Cristoforo", "Sant'Alipio" – observed in the city where he lives part-time. A joy. *marlboroughlondon.com, April 10-May 18*

Art

Edited by Eddy Frankel
@timeoutart

SHOW OF THE WEEK

'New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School'

★★★★★



IT'S ALWAYS NICE when art comes along and rips you out of your comfort zone, drags you out of your knowledge bubble and tears you from the established canon. You get so used to your ideas about art coming from books and museums, and being so proscriptive as a result, that it can all get a little staid sometimes. But then something like this Mohamed Melehi exhibition shows up and gives you a bit of a jolt.

Melehi is a Moroccan modernist. He spent time in New York's '60s art scene, but went back to North Africa to help develop a new abstract language: one that would reflect his culture, and help shape it too. The result is a body of work full of curved lines and intersecting shapes, sun-drenched colours and patterned meanderings.

The bulk of the work ripples with blues and yellows and purples and pinks. In the arcing compositions you can see hints of Arabic calligraphy and shimmering heat haze. Melehi is passionately obsessed with the history of the Maghreb's visual culture – the pendants and earrings, the rugs and clothing – and you can see its influence on everything here.

The show's a bit of a mess, though. The rooms are too packed and screens filled with documentation

WHAT IS IT...
Gorgeous modernist paintings from an unsung Moroccan great.

WHY GO...
They're gorgeous, engrossing and full of symbolism.

→ The Mosaic Rooms,
↻ Earls Court. Until
Jun 22. Free.



MOHAMED MELEHI, 'NAME' (1979) AND UNTITLED (1975). IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST. FELICITY HAMMOND COPYRIGHT THE ARTIST. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GALLERY

block your view of the work – you just wish they'd let the art breathe a little.

But thankfully, the paintings and prints themselves are absolute stunners. It's such a wonderful testament to the power of abstraction and modernism that with this simple collection of curving lines and shapes, Melehi is able to create paintings so full of references and allusions that they couldn't be anyone's but his, and they couldn't be from anywhere but there. This is brilliant Moroccan modernism, and we should be damn thankful that we know that that's actually a thing. ■



By Eddy Frankel

Who once went to Morocco to find himself, and was VERY disappointed with the results.

Find more shows to see at
timeout.com/art



Felicity Hammond



'SITE-SPECIFIC' is a term that gets tossed around so much it's lost all meaning. Felicity Hammond's new installation, however, is genuinely worthy of that two-word descriptor.

Occupying the entire one-room space of the Arebyte Gallery, the wood-and-metal artwork presents a fractured modern cityscape, the type of wipe-clean corporate banality found in cities across the globe. In between the blocky structures are black pools, not dissimilar to the type of urban water feature that used to be at, say, the More London complex near the Mayor's office.

The architecture pictured not only fits neatly with the gallery space and its ceiling maze of fat metallic pipes – it perfectly mirrors the built environment outside the main doors.

Arebyte is part of London City Island, a blob of land the River Lea (a tributary of the Thames) squidges around like squeezed-out toothpaste. Currently partly a building site, the area is being rapidly redeveloped into 'an exclusive island neighbourhood'. The London City Island website sells a vision of urban paradise where bobble-hatted Londoners making money in the creative industries work, rest and play in a 'twelve-acre micro-Manhattan'.

This hasn't always been the case. LCI used to go by the much less attractive name of 'Bog Island' because it often flooded. The pools of water in Hammond's installation actually reference the Great Thames flood of 1928 when the area got submerged.

Hammond's installation doesn't simply criticise or satirise what's happening around Arebyte and in London more widely. Instead, it subtly and cleverly draws your attention to just how disconcerting and weird these hyper-sterilised international Nowherevilles are. And, precisely because they're so ultra-samey, you almost don't notice their bacteria-like spread until you're standing smack-up against an elite-living block of flats dribbling cold brew down your chin. Go visit, but don't be surprised if the little red bridge across to Canning Town tube suddenly feels like a lifeline back to somewhere far less strange. ■ Rosemary Waugh

WHAT IS IT...



An immersive, water-logged attack on gentrification.

WHY GO...

It's powerful stuff, and brilliantly presented.

→ Arebyte. ↻ Canning Town. Until May 18. Free.

New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School

Art  The Mosaic Rooms, Carls Court  Friday April 12 2019 - Saturday June 22 2019



Mohamed Melehi 'Untitled' (1975). Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, photographed by CapitalD.

TIME OUT SAYS

DETAILS

DATES AND TIMES

USERS SAY

First ever UK exhibition of works by Mohamed Melehi. The show charts the whole of the Moroccan artist's career, including his early experiments with hard edge painting and his pivotal involvement with the École des Beaux-Arts of Casablanca.

First UK solo exhibition by Moroccan artist Mohamed Melehi opens at The Mosaic Rooms in London



Mohamed Melehi, *Flamme*, (1975). Cellulose paint on wood, 109.5 x 95.5cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

LONDON.- To complete the tenth anniversary modernist series [The Mosaic Rooms](#) presents *New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School*, the first exhibition in the UK dedicated to Moroccan artist Mohamed Melehi (b. 1936). This display of unseen paintings, posters, photographs and archival material will look at three significant periods of Melehi's career.

Firstly the exhibition explores the period 1957 to 1963 during the artist's encounter with a cosmopolitan post-war art scene principally between Rome and New York, two cities where Melehi sharpens his very singular appropriation of hard edge painting.

The exhibition moves on to the period 1963 to 1975 when, fulfilled by his participation in the New York art scene, Melehi nevertheless chooses to return to a post-colonial Morocco. There he triggers a cultural and artistic revolution at the École des Beaux-Arts of Casablanca with artists Farid Belkhalia (1934–2014) and Mohamed Chabâa (1935–2013).

Finally the exhibition investigates the 1980s when the artist's knowledge of Moroccan popular craft and architecture is invested in a series of pivotal works "reframing" the waves through neo-decorative structures and panels.

The exhibition will reveal Melehi's key role in the local development of art pedagogy and experimental practices in Morocco as well as his significant work in graphic design and mural painting which has contributed heavily in shaping the aesthetics of significant artistic networks and political causes throughout the Maghreb and the Pan-Arab alliances.

Melehi's work has featured in numerous solo exhibitions including a retrospective at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, 1995 and the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, 1984. He has participated in group shows in Casablanca, Tangiers, Rabat, Marrakech, Baghdad, Algiers, London, Paris, Rome, Zurich, New York, Chicago and Montreal as well as the Marrakech Biennale 2016. His work is held in international museum collections such as Centre Georges Pompidou, Beaubourg, Paris, Tate Modern, London, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, MOMA, New York, and Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha.

New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School is the final exhibition in a series at The Mosaic Rooms highlighting modernists from the Arab world and Iran, entitled *Cosmic Roads: Relocating Modernism*, curated by Morad Montazami with assistant curator Madeleine de Colnet.

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Image of the Day



Untitled, Mohamed Melehi, 1975

April 12, 2019

Untitled, Mohamed Melehi, 1975

Get stuck into Moroccan modernism via the work of Mohamed Melehi, who was born in 1936. This series of brightly-coloured paintings featuring undulating waves and rainbow curves, was produced in the 1970s, and results from a dialogue between Moroccan traditional and popular craft. The Mosaic Rooms in London presents the first UK exhibition dedicated to Melehi, which presents a selection of key works from the 1950s to 1980s and opens today.

Interview

Give us a swirl: How Mohamed Melehi became Morocco's modernist master**Oliver Basciano**

His psychedelic paintings linked the Bauhaus to Islamic art - and brought the radicalism of the late 60s to Morocco. Now, at 82, the world is set to rediscover his vibrant visions



▲ Hard-edge painting ... Untitled, 1975, by Mohamed Melehi. Photograph: Capital D/Barjeel Art Foundation

In 1969, a group of Moroccan artists known as the Casablanca school travelled to Marrakech to stage an exhibition in the streets. The paintings, hung on the city's dusty walls, were a riot of colour and pattern. They owed much to the aesthetic of [Bauhaus in Germany](#) or “hard-edge” painting from New York by Frank Stella or Elsworth Kelly; but they also tapped into the long lineage of abstraction in Arabic art. Exposition-Manifeste took place near the city's medina and was intended as a snub to an official “salon” of Moroccan art that was happening at the same time.

“We took a position against the government,” recalls [Mohamed Melehi](#), one of the leading artists of the radical new group, now 82. “Our works were in Jemaa el-Fnaa square for a week, exposed to the sun and wind. It was an ideological message about what art could be.”



▲ Mohamed Melehi at the street exhibition in Jemaa-el-Fnaa square, Marrakech, in 1969.
Photograph: Chabâa family archives



Like many of his peers, Melehi had spent time abroad. He trained as an artist at the Royal Academy of Arts in Seville, though museums in Rome and New York provided a greater education. In 1962, he received a scholarship to study at Columbia University in New York. His studio there was on the floor below the pop artist Jim Dine. He met Stella and hung out with a fashionable crowd that congregated around the Leo Castelli gallery as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns were getting their first shows.

Until this point, Melehi's work had been austere. A 1960 painting titled Vertical, one of several that will go on show in a new solo exhibition at London's Mosaic Rooms, consists of a thick red line painted in acrylic, slightly curved, stretching from the bottom of the canvas to the top. By the time he left America, however, his work was characterised by a kaleidoscope of colour, as patterns were overlaid on the canvas with a feeling of psychedelic freedom. He started to incorporate wavy parallel lines, a motif he has returned to throughout his career.



The terms of Melehi's scholarship dictated that international students returned to their home country after their studies. Bound up in cold war diplomacy, his funding was part of a strategy to spread modern American values to the developing world or, as one internal document of the time phrased it, "to unite, to maintain and enlarge the friendly solidarity which united or should unite all civilised beings".

Back home, eight years after independence, Melehi found Morocco in a state of emergency as King Hassan II hung on to power. "The political atmosphere was very tense. People were trying to claim their freedom and their right to live in democracy." He felt art had a role to play in this. It also provided a safe way of protest. "The authorities did not see the link between art and politics."

Melehi, with fellow innovators Farid Belkahia and Mohammed Chabâa, sought to develop a modernism that did not simply parrot the western aesthetics they had seen abroad, but was ingrained and owed as much to the local culture. In America, Melehi had been included in the 1963 exhibition *Hard Edge and Geometric Painting and Sculpture* at MoMA. "Hard-edge painting made me rediscover the abstraction inherent in Islamic art," he says. "Moroccan art was always hard edge." Taking a teaching post at the art school in Casablanca, where Belkahia was director, Melehi encouraged his students to go on field trips to study Berber crafts and architecture. "My question was, what could we find in Morocco that was an expression of modernism?"



▲ Moroccan modernism ... *Solar Nostalgia*, 1962, by Mohamed Melehi. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist



Belkahia turned to the craft traditions of the medina, using natural dyes painted on to calf skin. Chabâa undertook several mural commissions, often incorporating Arabic calligraphy. In the 1970s, Melehi became transfixed by the political significance of using car paint instead of his usual acrylic: “I wanted to use materials that weren’t removed from the working classes.” Strikes and riots were spreading across the country to protest against the brutal autocracy of Hassan. “I started to use cellulose paint in solidarity.”

The artist came to the attention of communist poet and activist Abdellatif Laâbi who, in 1966, founded Souffles, a radical journal which became a beacon of leftist action. Melehi was the designer. His first cover was emblazoned with a black sun, the masthead written in a futuristic sans serif typeface. A 1969 issue championed Palestinian resistance and issue 19 featured Malcolm X on the cover. By 1972, the quarterly magazine was banned, however, and Laâbi was imprisoned and tortured.

Melehi continued to work outdoors, seeking an audience away from the rarefied confines of the museum. He started to paint on wood and undertook several collaborations with architects seeking to create “postcolonial architecture”. His paintings have long entertained a small group of scholars, yet, more importantly, with his joyful palette and confident patterns, the artist sought as wide an audience as possible. It is the sensuousness of his work, and the easy manner in which it straddles modernity and tradition, that still proves radical.

- New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School is at the Mosaic Rooms, London, until 22 June.

The Art Show to See This Weekend



If our [April Agenda](#) has left you with an appetite for more art, then head to The Mosaic Rooms in Kensington for further cultural fuel – via **Mohamed Melehi** and the newly-curated, *New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School exhibition*.

Three galleries lend themselves as home to the first UK solo exhibition by the Moroccan visionary. The show is steeped in modernist history and explores post-colonial Morocco through a bright colour palette of optimism via archival material, as well as photographs and unseen paintings, which tell the story of an artist's journey through political fluctuations.

Characterised by his vivid and graphically-inclined style, Melehi became moved by cultural differences when travelling to Rome and New York in the mid-1900s. These trips paved the way for his abstract eye to trigger an artistic revolution in his hometown of Asilah, Morocco, years later – thus leading to a distinct pivotal approach to art that embodies the twists and turns of life.

An exhibition which also features fellow Moroccan artists Farid Belkhaia (1934–2014) and Mohamed Chabâa (1935–2013), **this show makes for a can't miss on the April cultural calendar.**

New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School review

Art The Mosaic Rooms, Earls Court Until Saturday June 22 2019 ★★★★★



Mohamed Melehi 'Untitled' (1975). Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, photographed by CapitalD.

TIME OUT SAYS

★★★★★

DETAILS

DATES AND TIMES

USERS SAY

It's always nice when art comes along and rips you out of your comfort zone, drags you out of your knowledge bubble and tears you from the established canon. You get so used to your idea art coming from books and museums, and being so proscriptive as a result, that it can all get a little staid sometimes. But then something like this Mohamed Melehi exhibition shows up and gives you a bit of a jolt.

Melehi is a Moroccan modernist. He spent time in New York's '60s art scene alongside all the big kahunas of the age, but came back to North Africa to help develop a new abstract language: one that would reflect his culture, and help shape it too. The result is a body of work full of curved lines and intersecting shapes, sun-drenched colours and patterned visual meanderings.

The bulk of the work ripples with blues and yellows and purples and pinks. In the arcing compositions you can see hints of Arabic calligraphy and shimmering heat haze. Melehi was passionately obsessed with the history of the Maghreb's visual culture – the pendants and earrings, the rugs and clothing – and you can see its influence on everything here.

The show's a bit of a mess, though. The rooms are too packed and screens filled with documentation block your view of the work – you just wish they'd let the art breathe a little.

But thankfully, the paintings and prints themselves are absolute stunners. It's such a wonderful testament to the power of abstraction and modernism that with just this simple collection of curving lines and shapes, Melehi is able to create paintings so full of references and allusions that they couldn't be anyone's but his, and they couldn't be from anywhere but there. This is brilliant Moroccan modernism, and we should be damn thankful that we know that's actually a thing.

By: Eddy Frankel

Free art in London

See great free art in London without splashing the cash on an admission fee



By Time Out London Art | Posted: Friday April 25 2019

Looking at great art needn't cost the same as buying great art. With a shed-load of free art exhibitions in London, wandering through sculptures, being blinded by neon or admiring some of the best **photography in London** needn't cost a penny. Here's our pick of the best free **art exhibitions this week** and beyond.

Free art exhibitions in London



Mohamed Melehi 'Untitled' (1975). Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, photographed by CapitalD.

Art

New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School

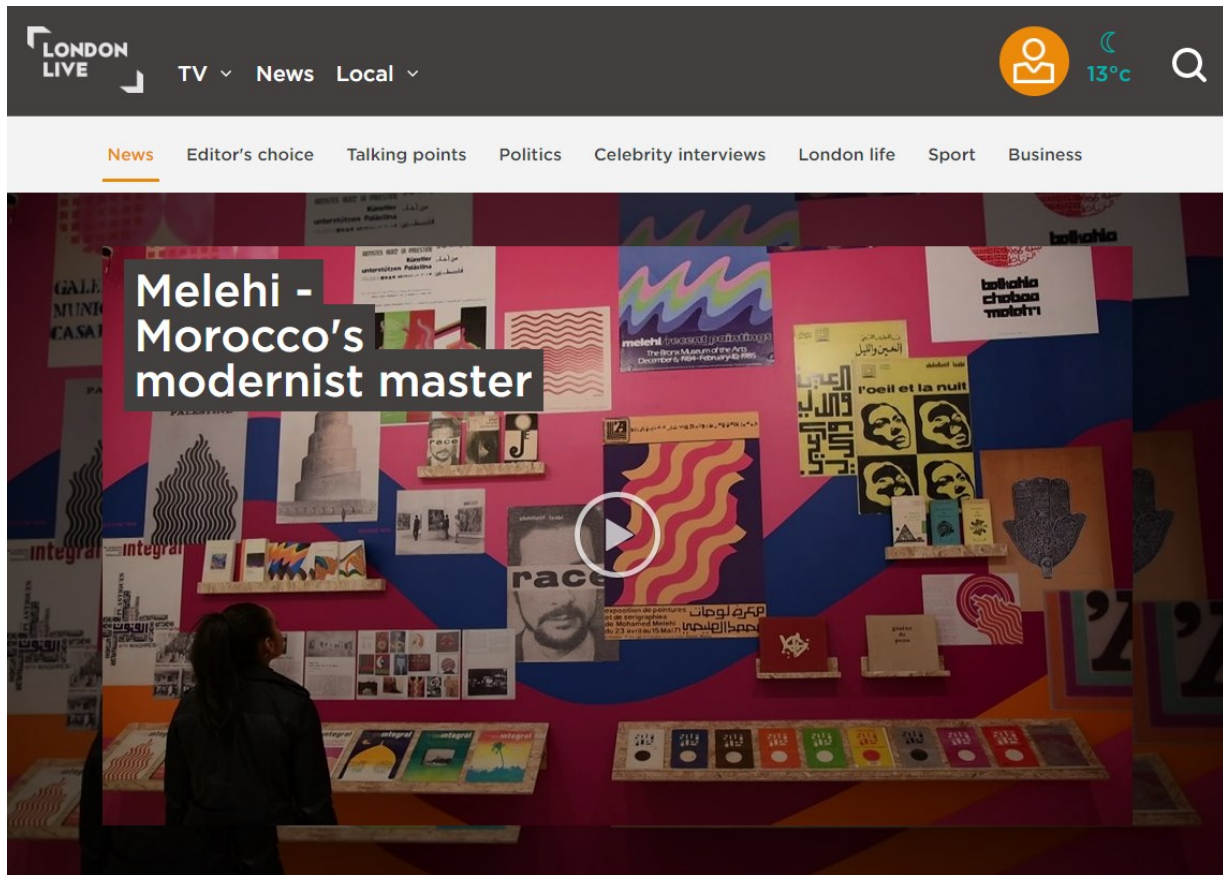
📍 The Mosaic Rooms, Earls Court

📅 Apr 30 2019-Jun 22 2019

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TIME OUT SAYS ★ ★ ★ ★

[Read more](#)



Link to the video:

<https://www.londonlive.co.uk/news/2019-04-29/melehi-morocco-s-modernist-master>

VISUAL ARTS / GALLERIES / ARTICLE

Revisiting the birth of Modern Art in Morocco

BY DEVORAH LAUTER | JUNE 06, 2019



Mohamed Melehi, *Composition*, (1970). Acrylic on panel, 120x100cm.
(Courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, photographed by Capital D.)

RELATED

VENUES

Barjeel Art Foundation

A few years after Morocco's independence, the Casablanca Art School began introducing radical modern art practice and theory into its curriculum, spurring its own movement that drew inspiration from Moroccan artistic heritage, international art and a grassroots approach that opposed the colonial establishment. The school's efforts helped build an important crossroads for artists and thinkers of the region.

Leading the way was a hard-edged Moroccan artist and teacher at the school, Mohamed Melehi (born 1936), whose work is currently on display, along with never-before-exhibited documentation illustrating the scope and vision of the Casablanca movement he helped lead between 1962 and 1974. The exhibition is on view at the Mosaic Rooms in London until June 22, 2019.

"The Casablanca Art School made this great rupture from the colonial mindset—which undermined Moroccan artists at the time—by exhibiting their paintings in the street, in a very popular square [the Jemaa el-Fnaa square, Marrakesh in 1969], where the outdoor presence and display of the paintings reconnected the issues of Moroccan avant-garde with the everyday, with the street," said the curator, Morad Montazami. The now legendary street exhibit, "Presence Plastique," was a natural alternative to a museum for Melehi and fellow teachers at the Casablanca Art School, who wanted to thwart colonial dogma. Melehi's cohort included the artists Farid Belkhabia, Mohamed Chabaa, as well as the theoreticians, Toni Maraini and Bert Flint.

The Mosaic Rooms show is the last in a series of exhibitions on modern artists from Egypt, Iran and Morocco underscoring how, "art history should explore new links between different, more peripheral places of modernity, that I try to relocate as central hubs," said Montazami, who curated the series. With Morocco as, "one of the first places for independent art spaces in the Global South," the Casablanca Art School was critical, but "remained very much undocumented and unseen from a museum point of view, until now," he added.

Though independence was won in 1956, colonial-established salons still dismissed Moroccan creators as naive folk artists. In response, Melehi and his collaborators at the Casablanca Art School looked for inspiration in the region's cultural past. They led their students on research expeditions to rural villages where they discovered the geometric patterns and artwork of Berber tribespeople on traditional rugs, jewelry, tattoos, pre-Islamic mosques and other architecture. Other important influences on the movement included international artistic impulses, such as Bauhaus abstract geometrization, or hard-edge paintings from America.

This particular decade at the Casablanca school "encapsulated a lot of experimental issues that Middle Eastern and North African artists are still debating," said Montazami. "Be it the issue of neo-calligraphic experiment, plastic experiment over calligraphy, or the combination of performative, site-specific works with abstract experimentation, and so many practices that today take a new, relevant signification."

Nevertheless, none of the students during this unusual period reached the kind of international recognition that the movement's leaders were able to achieve.

Photographs of the school's exhibits, classes, expeditions, sketches and samples of exceptional Berber creations are included in the show. Their connection is thus made particularly tangible to the exhibit's central figure: Melehi and his warm, colorful wave motifs and crisp, geometric pattern paintings, some of which shift into their own, psychedelic realm, lighting up the room.

Rarely seen Melehi works were loaned by the artist and private collections, while work from his prolific career as a graphic designer, muralist, sculptor, painter are also on display. In addition, the exhibit explores his role as a leftist political activist who shaped art networks in the Maghreb and Pan-Arab world. Due to the absence of institutional archives, historic documentation about the movement was gathered from witnesses and individuals involved, in what the curator described as an endless research process.

It is no accident if the show portrays a sense of being overwhelmed. "It's too excessive for a museum display, too unorthodox," and was designed purposefully as "a reminder of the hectic and infinite research behind it," said Montazami. "I want [the exhibit] to be basically like fireworks. I want it to explode on the wall."

After building his career within the post-war art scenes of Rome and New York (including participation in the 1963 exhibit "Formalists" at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art with artists Josef Albers and Frank Stella), Melehi returned to Morocco in 1964, where he joined the teaching staff at the Casablanca Art School. Today Melehi lives and works between Marrakech and Tangier.

"New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School," is on view until June 22, 2019 at The Mosaic Rooms in London.

More information: www.mosaicrooms.org