

# AMINE EL BACHA



*Le Jardin de Rawda*, watercolor, 1984

... We all know the distinctive watercolors of Amine el Bacha. They first brought him prominence in the 1960s and, since then, have kept him at the top of the field in that genre. No other watercolorist in Lebanon can equal his free, exuberant application of color, his startling precision of image, his subtle humor and wit in content. He paints people, at play, at work and at rest; he paints a Noah's Ark of frolicking animals; he paints the sea and mountains, trees and flowers, fish and fruits, all sparkling in Lebanon's sunlight. He paints joy not despair, laughter not tears. ■



*La plage*, oil on canvas, 150 x 100 cm, 2000

*The Daily Star*, December 1999, about an exhibition at Gallery Épreuve d'Artiste



*Le City Café*, watercolor, 1995



*Café populaire*, watercolor, 1994

Though, art may still derive its inspiration from the physical world about, few artists today work directly from nature. Most pictures are conceived and executed in the atelier, and are sophisticated products of selective memory plus intellectual modification plus specific creative purpose. A half a century of abstract experience has just about dispensed with the need of a model.

Landscapes, still lifes, nudes may still serve the academy student, but the “serious, professional artist today” more often than not finds his models in his mind.

Amine el Bacha paints landscapes, directly from nature, and in the genteel medium of watercolor. He will go out to Byblos or Tripoli or Tyre, to Petra, Aqaba or Palmyra,



sit out in the sun and wind very much like a 19<sup>th</sup> century Roberts, and paint what his eye sees. But there the resemblance ends.

The el Bacha watercolors are a very special kind of treat, and far from genteel.

Whether he paints in oils or in watercolor, Amine el Bacha is a sensualist in color. Despite a curious contradiction between his application of heavy, impasto oils on canvas and the quick diaphanous color notations on paper, both contain the same intense feeling of sunlight and transparency, the same expressive marriage of hue and tonality that is the mark of a born colorist.

Unusual also is his equal talent for graphic expression. He has his own private language of line that has nothing to do with color. But it is perhaps this strong sense of line that intuitively structures his color. I have watched him work, and his approach is fascinating. I will try to describe it.

Few of his watercolors contain line; they are all mosaic patches of color jig-sawed together to form the particular picture subject. The el Bacha visual perception is first and foremost attracted by color, and his eye leads his brush to select the color shapes that make up an object. He goes straight to the color area surface and constructs his form from there, carefully controlling the extensions of his color areas to create the outer definition of form... and in this manner arriving at a definition of white linear space. It is, then, the white lines and white spaces so beautifully controlled, so intuitively, aesthetically selected that produce such a rare pictorial vitality in a medium long

Beit Meri, watercolor, 38 x 25 cm, 1981



L'Orchestre, oil on canvas, 125 x 100 cm, 1977



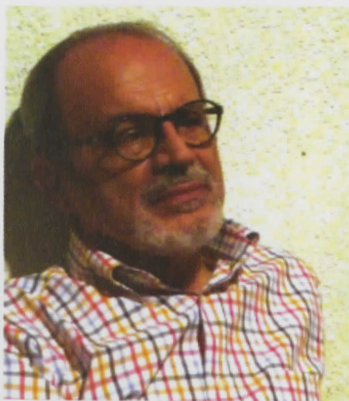
Le Couple, oil on canvas, 125 x 150 cm, 2008

accustomed to a more delicate handling. The el Bacha boldness with watercolor reminds me of the American painter, John Marin – the same boldness is there, though the expressive intention differs. ■

Monday Morning, October 30, 1984



*Le Jardin*, oil on canvas, 125 x 150 cm, 2008



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Born in Beirut in 1932 into a family of musicians, Amine El Bacha was already painting at the age of fifteen, having discarded the idea of becoming a musician.

After graduating from the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA), he pursued his studies in Paris at the *École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts* and at *La Grande Chaumière* with Henri Goetz. He won the prize of the French Embassy, and

in 1959 was honored with an award from the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts. In 1976, he received jointly with the French artist, Corneille, the *Prix Citta Eterna* of Rome. His illustrations for the poetic works of Alain Jouffroy in the early 1970's brought commissions to illustrate the work of Lebanese poet Nadia Tueni in 1983 and during his days in Italy, another commission for the Italian

version of Leopold Sedar Senghor's poetry. He spends most of his time in his studios or in cafés in Beirut, Paris, and Spain writing, drawing, and painting.

El Bacha's prolific and eclectic artistry today graces modern art museums in Spain, Italy, France, and several Arab countries as well as many private collections.