



At the Terrace  
2010  
Oil on canvas  
70 x 50 cm (27.6 x 19.7 in.)  
Tufenkjian Collection

# AMINE EL BACHA

1932

## The vagabond of Modern times

In his studio in downtown Beirut's Saifi Village, Amine El Bacha paints snapshots of life and light. Enveloped, according to his mood, with music from Handel and Mozart, or Abdel Wahab and Umm Kulthum, he abandons himself to his unbound creativity. El Bacha sculpts and paints wood, creates ceramics and tapestries, draws, sketches and more famously paints in watercolor and oil. His works are always joyful, with vibrant and daring colors, as though to convey all the passion and pleasure he derives from his artistic endeavors.

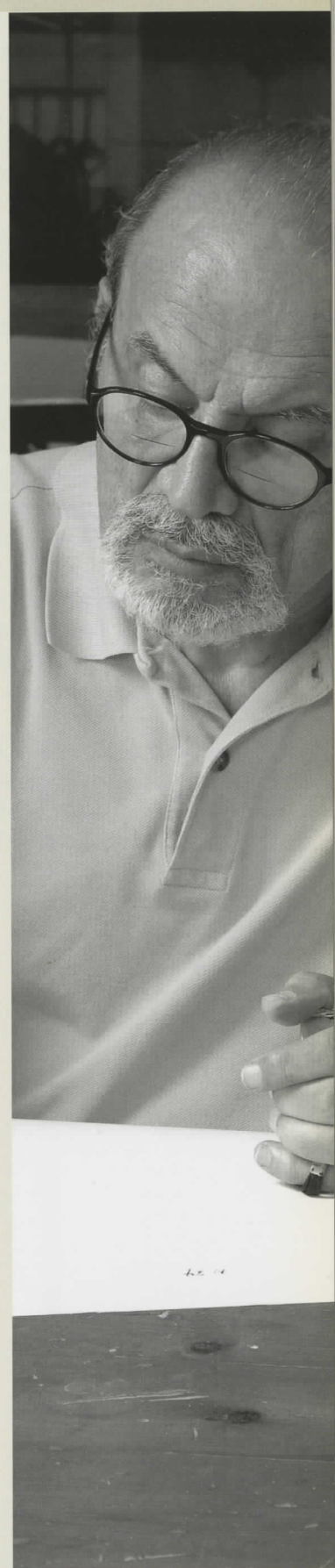
The environment in which El Bacha grew up only strengthened his enthusiasm for art. His family respected and encouraged artists: his uncle was a musician and painter, and his brother, who also dabbled in painting, became a virtuoso musician. El Bacha spent his childhood in Beirut, where he attended the Saint Sauveur School. At a very young age, he began to paint landscapes with his uncle, unaware that this was the beginning of his artistic career. Indeed, El Bacha started out by trying his hand at all kinds of jobs – he was hired by a decorator to collect pebbles and rocks from beaches to adorn shop windows in Bab Edriss, and later worked at TSF Radio-Liban.

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Nevertheless, El Bacha chose to dedicate his life to art. His influences are as diverse and eclectic as his interests, and his ways of expressing them. His peripatetic existence echoes his passion for all aspects of culture, and his curiosity for all forms of human and social interaction. After studying at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts between 1954 and 1957, he arrived in Paris on a four-month grant from the French Embassy, only to end up spending a full year and getting married there. At the beginning of the 1975 war, he was invited by an Italian foundation to reside in Italy for five years, during which he divided his time between Lebanon, France, Italy and Spain.

El Bacha paints every day – it is a vital need – and only completes a painting when, he believes, it «instructs him to no longer touch it.» When he doesn't paint, he writes and explores the close relationship between the visual arts and literature, not only in his everyday life but also by illustrating books by Léopold Sedar Senghor, Alain Jouffroy and Nadia Tueni.

El Bacha, who conceives of writing and painting as complementary, believes that the dialogue between the eye and the intellect is the very essence of visual arts. He considers painting a mental art, but this in no way stops him from improvising on canvas, one brushstroke



following another according to the feelings and sensations of the moment. Only through time does he allow the work to gain in organization and balance. Without adhering to any particular philosophy, guided solely by his intuition, El Bacha encourages viewers to listen to the painting's music and free their visual sensations.

El Bacha rejects all labels, and easily switches styles and techniques. Despite the diversity of his modes of artistic expression, one constant remains: his fascination with the human being in all its diversity. Around the world, he often draws concerts and cafés, intrigued by the social blend of the unemployed, the foreigners, the card and backgammon players, the beggars and *narguileh* smokers... In Beirut, before the war, he could often be found drawing with friend the artist Farid Aouad at the Ahwet el Ezazz cafe in downtown Beirut, sketching and drawing incessantly.

One could easily believe El Bacha finds inspiration in nature – in the trees, the sky and the sea. However, he sees in it nothing but a pretext to paint. He sees nature as a dictionary of colors and shapes, which resemble those of the human body: «The curve of the head is the earth, the sun and the moon. The horizontal is the sea and the vertical is the tree. Everything repeats itself in a different form.»

El Bacha envies Pablo Picasso, not only for his talent, but also for his successful personal and social life. He also admires Gustave Courbet, Paul Klee and, above all, the genius of Leonardo Da Vinci, preferring his lesser known works to the famous *Mona Lisa*. His ultimate inspiration nonetheless remains the female body.

With much humility, he declares paying little attention to his own heritage, claiming, «If my paintings are worthwhile, the public will remember them for a while. If not, they will die with me.» Sincerely evasive on the subject, El Bacha insists on the need for regular self-questioning, and the imperative of living every day as if painting for the first time.



**Woman**

1994

Oil on wood sculpture

20 x 13 x 2 cm (7.9 x 5.1 x 0.8 in.)

Naji and Hoda Skaff Collection

“

One can hear music while looking  
at my artwork. Amine El Bacha

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**Abstraction**

**1962**

Oil on canvas

90 x 75 cm (35.4 x 29.5 in.)

Ministry of Culture collection, Lebanon

Exhibited at the Presidential Palace, Baabda, Lebanon



## EXHIBITIONS AND PRIZES

Amine El Bacha has been exhibiting since the fifties: in Spain, in Paris (at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in 1966), in Egypt where he represented Lebanon in the 1962 Alexandria Biennale, and in London. His main solo exhibitions have taken place in Beirut, Kuwait, Spain, Jordan, Italy and Paris. He has received numerous awards, including the 1958 French Embassy Award in Beirut, a 1959 award from the Lebanese Ministry of Education, the Golden Medal of the Città Eterna of Rome in 1976, and the first prize in Italy's 1975 Macerata lithography competition.

In the Alhambra Palace

1984

China ink

49 x 59 cm (19.3 x 23.2 in.)

Ramzi and Afaf Saïdi Collection