



Japanese Gate

c. 1980

Wood

33 x 18 x 9 cm (13 x 7.1 x 3.5 in.)

Ramzi and Afaf Saïdi Collection

CHAOUKI CHOUKINI

1946

Sculpture's evocative powers

Native to Choukine in South-Lebanon, Chaouki Choukini studied art at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, between 1967 and 1972. A long stay in Japan in 1984 had a profound impact on his work: it introduced him to Zen philosophy and minimalism.

Choukini makes wood sculptures, as well as the occasional work in terracotta, stone, metal or plaster. The bewildering, yet simple, works display formal organization and rely on the effects of light on hollowed, carved, broken and polished wood. Choukini punctures wood with window-like openings, giving the impression that light pierces the work. Always imposing and sophisticated, his sculptures contrast the soft curves of polished wood with the dangerous cracks and crevasses within relief labyrinths.

Although far from lifelike, Choukini's sculpture is never entirely abstract – although it has sometimes been categorized as abstract Symbolism. The works are effectively symbols; they evoke objects, places, event, and characters, real or mythical. Odd, even strange at times, the works are touching rather than unsettling, even when they bring to mind the atrocities of war, as in the bronze *Cheval de Guernica*.

The works are effectively symbols: they evoke objects, places, events, and characters, real or mythical.

Choukini effortlessly switches from the historical to the contemporary, with, for instance, sculptures materializing the plight of the children of Qana or Gaza (*Petit Prince - Enfant de Gaza*), or denouncing the destruction of Palestine's olive trees. A *Pietà* becomes a symbol of Lebanon's devastation: a frail piece of cedar stands for Christ, with the Holy Virgin, symbolized by a vertical piece of wood, holding him. The works speak of emotion, music, and memories of the places that mark us, taking us, at times, as far as remote villages at the edge of the desert.

Choukini was a professor of sculpture at the Lebanese University of Tripoli between 1985 and 1987 and at the Jordanian University of Yermouk from 1989 to 1991. Today, he lives and works in Paris.

EXHIBITIONS AND PRIZES

Chaouki Choukini took part in group exhibitions in France at the Institut du Monde Arabe (1991) as well as individual and group shows at the Claude Lemand Gallery in Paris. In 2010, he won a prize from the Taylor Foundation for his work Petit Prince, Enfant de Gaza. His sculptures have been acquired by various public collections, including the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, the Fonds Départemental d'Art Contemporain of Marne-la-Vallée, the Institut du Monde Arabe and the municipality of Verrières (Yvelines) in France, as well as museums in Qatar and Jordan.