



CULTURAL CROSSROADS

# Alfred Basbous and the Rise of Modernist Sculpture in Lebanon

PAR ROXANE ZAND | 02 MARS 2017

**S**culpture made a rather late entry into the canon of Middle Eastern art production. Islamic art was primarily focused on two-dimensional paper art: illustrations, miniatures, manuscripts and calligraphy. Three-dimensional art, sometimes interpreted as un-Islamic because it 'recreates' in the image of God, particularly where it references the human form, was not developed in the same way as these other art forms.



Alfred Basbous in his studio in Rachana, Lebanon in the 1970s, courtesy of the Alfred Basbous Foundation

The post-war era finally saw the evolution of the legacy of Islamic art into modern expressions that very much departed from all the earlier, religious influences. Along this path, sculpture was born in the true sense of the word. It is therefore encouraging when great sculpture is made by artists from Iran or the Arab countries, and more so when it comes to the market.



Alfred Basbous, 2004, *Profile*, Bronze 3/8, 115 x 15 x 60 cm, courtesy of the artist and Sophia Contemporary Gallery

Sophia Contemporary Gallery has just revealed a survey of the work of Alfred Basbous, a major pioneer of Modernist sculpture. Influenced by Jean Arp, Brancusi, and Henry Moore, Basbous created stone and bronze sculptures of often monumental proportions. The series of sculptures in the current show date from the 70s to the 2000s, which demonstrate Basbous's exploration of the relationship between form and material. A selection of preparatory drawings complement the show meaningfully, as it is always most revealing to understand the artist's process.



Alfred Basbous, 1985, *Syrene*, Bronze, 66 x 105 x 30 cm, courtesy of the artist and Sophia Contemporary Gallery

Born in Rachana near Beirut, Basbous was a key contributor to the development of modernism in the Arab Middle East during the last half of the twentieth century. During this period he developed a sculptural language that experimented with figurative and abstracted elements of the human figure, especially the female body, in combination with organic lines. The works in this exhibition feature sculptures in marble, bronze, and testa, a local Lebanese stone. His inspirations range from Greek mythology to ancient Phoenician forms, always speaking to an elegant and sophisticated aesthetic. Well worth a visit to Mayfair just to catch this!

*Alfred Basbous: Modernist Pioneer – Selected Works* is at the Sophia Contemporary Gallery until 22 April 2017.