

## The Power of Culture

### Farid Belkahia on the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris

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A new museum of anthropology was opened in Paris late in June 2006: the *Musée des Arts Premiers*, known as the MQB. The museum will most probably be named after its founder, Jacques Chirac. The spectacular building by Jean Nouvel shines on the bank of the Seine. The light inside is dusk-like. Collections from old anthropological museums have been brought to the museum, where thousands of cultural artifacts from outside of Europe are displayed. The objective: to reinstate the glory of the 'first' arts. European visitors may (re-) experience exotic journeys. Others will discover homes from the distant past. Despite the management's silver tongue, a wave of criticism erupted at the opening: the MQB is said to be a neo-colonial project of prestige that hides its true nature behind idealistic vocabulary.



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I visited the museum together with Moroccan visual artist Farid Belkahia (1934). In spite of all the uproar, he is positive. "No one can truly be against saving memories. Of course this museum is a political project. President Chirac's agenda is strategic. Understandably so: the importance of saving the dominant culture is enormous. Politicians use art when there is a problem. The existence of a cultural countermovement is tangible. My prediction is that Western society will be reformed through what are referred to as the 'first' cultures. The museum can bridge the gap between those traditional cultures and the here and now."



**Farid Belkahia, photo Brahim Alaoui**

How would Belkahia do it? “First the actuality must gain its rightful place in the ethnographic museums. I also believe that young artists should be made aware of their cultural identity. Globalisation seems to be pressuring them into catering to the Western art world. The result is dull and uniform. Each individual has his own history, and that diversity is a treasure to be cherished.”

*Daphne Pappers*