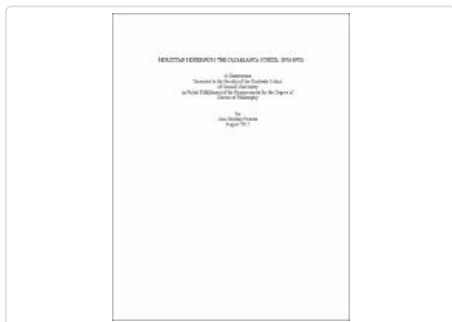




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Moroccan Modernism: The Casablanca School (1956-1978)



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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on artistic modernism in Morocco. It articulates the local iteration of transnational discourses, considering how these broader movements played out in the confines of a local context and its exigencies. The nationalist movement and the struggle for decolonization in all areas of Moroccan life, especially culture and the arts, played a central part in the shaping of such modernist movements. I focus in this dissertation on artists of the Casablanca school during the period between 1956 (the year of Moroccan independence) and 1978. The artists at the Casablanca Ecole des Beaux Arts under the direction of Farid Belkahlia (1962-1974), through their activism, engagement, and varied interventions brought energy to the movement of Moroccan modernism, and were at the center of these national discourses. The methodology used for this work relied heavily on interviews with artists and arts practitioners in Morocco, as well as archival work in personal archives throughout Morocco and in Lebanon, the media archive of the Bibliothèque Nationale du Royaume du Maroc (Rabat), the Centre Cinématographique Marocain (Rabat), the Bibliothèque Kandinsky (Paris), and The Khalid Shoman Foundation-Darat al Funun (Amman). I argue that the pedagogy, structural engagements, and transnational solidarities of this generation of artists form an intrinsic part of their broader artistic projects and are grounded in the same ideology and stakes. The actual art objects only make up one part of multifaceted, consistent, and wide-ranging artistic projects, and must be analyzed in relation to these other activities as well as the network of institutions with which the artists engaged. Moreover, I argue for a reading of Moroccan modernism that is deeply rooted in a contemporaneous national context yet that arises from a cosmopolitan foundation in dialogue with transnational, anti-colonial and pan-Arab intellectual movements and networks. This does not suggest that there was a center of global modernism that was being copied, but instead that global discourses were played out, staged and experienced within specific historic, political, and cultural contexts. Rather than explaining away these transnational connections, they are perceived to be at the crux of modernism itself, and particularly the Moroccan experience of modernism. To force a solely national narrative onto Moroccan modernism is to ignore the rich intersections and explorations fomented by the cosmopolitanism of these artists and their training.

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SUBJECT

Morocco, post-colonial, modernism, art; Third Worldism, Pan-Arabism

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DEGREE DISCIPLINE

History of Art & Archaeology

DEGREE NAME

Ph.D. of History of Art & Archaeology

DEGREE LEVEL

Doctor of Philosophy

TYPE

dissertation or thesis

Statistics

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