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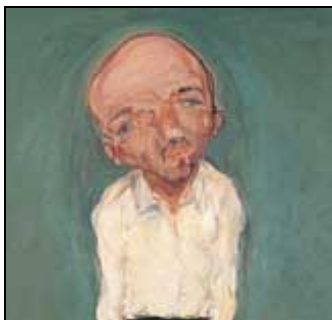


marwan kassab bachi
a tribute

Marwan was born in Damascus on 31 January 1934 under his birth name, Marwan Kassab Bachi. After studying Arabic literature at the University of Damascus, he was planning to move to Paris - as all young Syrian and Lebanese artists did then - but in 1957 his path led him instead to Berlin, where he was to live for the rest of his life. He studied there at the Academy of Fine Arts, where he later taught, and it was in the then walled-off city of Berlin that he became friends with a group of postwar artists of the early 1960s. He was particularly close to Georg Baselitz and Eugen Schönebeck from that circle. The three worked and studied alongside each other, as well as exhibiting together at Galerie Rudolf Springer. This group of post-war German Neo-Expressionists was painting the human person, its energy, its thorough and existentialist attitude. They all influenced each other in a Zeitgeist of the Neo-Expressionist German way of working. Marwan's early works were figurative yet surreal representations of people, reflecting on both the shattered reality his generation was facing and also on his own struggle to retrieve an identity - his own identity.



His constant search for the inner self is what haunted his paintings. With the belief that the face was the key to the deepest inner self, from the early 1970s onwards, he started focusing more and more on the face, and with a Sufi approach, he would paint it over and over again in many, many layers on one canvas. A single canvas would carry many faces on top of each other, and one painting would often need several years of work before it was considered finished by the artist. In a transcendental act, he would try to capture his soul on the canvas. He focused increasingly on this aspect until it became his sole subject. His devotion to the face, and his repeated layering of colour and brushstrokes, created a mystifying three-dimensionality, with the image appearing and withdrawing. The faces were initially modeled after himself, however; the individual self disappears into the vast landscape of the painting, with the artist finding himself in the process only to be lost in the spiritual intensity and depth of his work. His spirit has been, and always will be, in each stroke on every canvas he has made.



TEXT BY THOMAS KELLEIN

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