

ART & DESIGN | ART REVIEW

Saloua Raouda Choucair, a Modernist Explored

By ROBERTA SMITH DEC. 17, 2015

This sparkling exhibition gives New York its first in-depth look at the wide-ranging activities of Saloua Raouda Choucair, a pioneer of Lebanese modernism who spent four years in Paris after World War II, has worked most of her life in Beirut, and will turn 100 in 2016. It reminds us that modernism proceeds at different speeds not only around the globe but also within the efforts of individual artists.

The 32 works of painting, sculpture, tapestry and design here date from 1947 to 2014. They look variously behind, in step with or ahead of their times. Most prescient is Ms. Choucair's refusal to distinguish between functioning and nonfunctioning objects. Equally engaging are an infallible feel for materials — especially wood — and scale, and a brilliant fusing of organic and geometric form. Small maquettes succeed as full-fledged works of art.

In Paris, Ms. Choucair (pronounced shoo-CARE) studied with Fernand Léger, and came to admire the architecture of Le Corbusier. She was also inspired by Arabic calligraphy and Arabic poetry, stanzas of which traditionally are often interchangeable. Several pieces involve interlocking forms, whether a terra cotta model for a curving park bench or relatively simple two-part sculptures, some

made of fiberglass. The American artists with whom Ms. Choucair's work connects include Isamu Noguchi, Eva Hesse and Raoul Hague, the Abstract Expressionist carver of wood, as well as the neglected German-born sculptor Ruth Vollmer (1903-1982), who, like Ms. Choucair, was fascinated with science and mathematics.

Despite its size and scope, this exhibition barely scratches the surface of Ms. Choucair's prolific career, but it's a welcome start.

Saloua Raouda Choucair

CRG Gallery

195 Chrystie Street near Stanton Street, Lower East Side

Through Sunday

A version of this review appears in print on December 18, 2015, on Page C27 of the New York edition with the headline: Saloua Raouda Choucair, a Modernist Explored.

© 2017 The New York Times Company