



*Baya  
Woman of Algiers*

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Woman of Algiers*

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**GREY ART GALLERY**  
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Baya at the Galerie Maeght in Paris during her exhibition, 1947

## Foreword

Lynn Gumpert

In late 2015, independent curator Natasha Boas proposed that the Grey Art Gallery, New York University's fine arts museum, present the first North American solo exhibition of the work of the self-taught Algerian artist Baya Mahieddine (1931–1998) who is known by her first name. As Boas explained, Baya's colorful gouaches and engaging ceramics had enthralled the mid-20th century Parisian art world and are still appreciated in France and North Africa. Indeed, a portrait of Baya and one of her gouaches were featured on Algerian postage stamps in 2008 as part of a series of artworks from the Musée national des beaux-arts d'Alger. Although this intriguing artist has long been recognized in her country of birth, her work is not widely known on this side of the Atlantic. With this exhibition, the Grey hopes to help rectify the situation. We are very grateful to Boas for both her thorough scholarship and her insightful essay published here, which provides a contemporary lens through which to consider Baya's work within larger cultural, social, and critical contexts. Also featured in this volume are translations of key earlier texts, including one by André Breton on the occasion of Baya's first solo show at Galerie Maeght in 1947, along with a 1985 article by Assia Djebar, the renowned Algerian writer and filmmaker who served as Silver Professor of Francophone Studies at NYU from 2001 to 2014.

On a recent trip to NYU Abu Dhabi, I learned that art historian Salwa Mikdadi had, in the late 1980s, offered to organize a show at the Grey featuring works by artists from the Arab world that included a

painting by Baya. Mikdadi explained that she had discovered Baya's work through Djebar's writings. In 1993, two years after speaking with Djebar in Paris, Mikdadi set out to visit Baya, traveling with an interpreter to Blida, a town located about an hour and a half southwest of Algiers. Baya, she told me, was hesitant to answer direct questions about her work, insisting that she simply depicted her early morning dreams and that she had been born an artist. But in the late '80s neither Baya's works nor those by most of her peers were familiar to North American audiences, and funding for the project was not forthcoming.<sup>1</sup>

As Boas notes in her essay in this volume, Baya's art is not easily categorized. Mikdadi agrees, observing that Baya's background—as a young orphan who drew images in the sand, was adopted into a French intellectual family and brought to the south of France, and who not only influenced Pablo Picasso's foray into ceramics but also served as an inspiration for his series *Les Femmes d'Alger*—distracts from analyses of her work. Further complicating matters is that Baya has long been described as untrained. The designation of self-taught has often marginalized artists whose biographies, like that of Baya, overshadow assessments of their contributions. As stated in the press release for a major exhibition scheduled to open at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in late January 2018: “Their classification may have varied—from folk and primitive to naïve and visionary—but intermittently throughout the history of modern art, gates have opened, boundaries have dissolved, and those creating art on the peripheries have entered the art world.”<sup>2</sup> The show being promoted—*Outliers and American Vanguard Art*—is organized by Lynne Cook, senior curator at the National Gallery, and surveys three distinct periods in 20th-century American art when avant-garde artists, museum professionals, and critics rigorously engaged with the work of self-taught or untrained practitioners. This timely exhibition suggests that we question these terms and assumptions, that we look at the works themselves, and that we seek new ways to approach and exhibit art created outside the mainstream. In *Baya: Woman of Algiers*, Boas pursues similar strategies.

That the exhibition takes place at the Grey Art Gallery is most appropriate. The gallery serves as the repository for the Abby Weed

Grey Collection of Modern Asian and Middle Eastern Art, which Mrs. Grey donated in 1974 along with an endowment to establish the museum. Remarkably, in the early 1960s, she set out to amass a collection of contemporary art by non-Western artists, a highly unusual enterprise at the time. Exactly how and why she undertook this task is still being researched and investigated, but we do know that it resulted in superb holdings for NYU's museum. Thus it is not only very fitting but also a great privilege for the Grey to present twenty-two paintings by Baya to American audiences. We are pleased, as well, to include ceramics by Picasso from the New York University Art Collection—pieces that were made in the Madoura studio in Vallauris, where Picasso worked alongside Baya. The show concludes with *Mother Tongue*, 2002, a multi-screen video work by Zineb Sedira, which features the French Algerian artist interviewing her mother and daughter in Arabic, French, and English—an apt commentary on issues of immigration, translation, memory, and identity. Our world is richer for knowing and seeing Baya's paintings. And, happily, the time is right.

#### Notes

1. Interview by the author with Salwa Mikdadi, at New York University, Abu Dhabi, November 11, 2017. My thanks to Professor Mikdadi for generously finding time in her busy schedule to discuss her encounters with and research on Baya. All references to Mikdadi's interview in the above text derive from this session. In 1994, Mikdadi organized *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World*, an exhibition that opened at The National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., and subsequently traveled to four other venues, and which featured a gouache by Baya.

2. National Gallery of Art, press release, “American Self-Taught and Avant-Garde Art Explored in Major Traveling Exhibition,” September 27, 2017.



*Femme robe jaune et panier*  
(Woman in yellow dress with a basket), 1947  
Gouache on board  
25 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 19 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (64.6 x 49.5 cm)  
Collection of Isabelle Maeght, Paris

## *Baya: The Naked Eye* Natasha Boas

“Are they really speaking in truth as they dance, and not thinking how they’ll always have to whisper because of the eye through the peephole?”  
—Assia Djébar, *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*, 1979

“If I change my paintings, I will no longer be Baya. When I paint, I am happy and I am in another world.”  
—Baya, 1991

To write about Baya Mahieddine is to write about an artist who cannot be easily located, art historically or geographically. Baya’s work challenges national and cultural frames, as it is both connected to and disconnected from fading Maghrebi folk traditions and European modernism. Since her first exhibition in 1947 in Paris, Baya has occupied an undefined but fabled place in 20th-century art history. The midcentury fame and popularity she achieved in France as a young Algerian woman painter may illuminate the encounter between French colonizers in North Africa and the European artistic avant-garde, but it does not define her oeuvre. Baya’s images refuse any obvious decolonizing interpretation, instead celebrating the singularity that the artist herself unabashedly declared “Baya-ism.”<sup>1</sup>

Baya's works are found in private collections and museums around the world—primarily in France, Belgium, Algeria, and the Middle East. Recently, one of her paintings was prominently featured in the Barjeel Collection's *100 Masterpieces of Modern and Contemporary Arab Art* at the Musée de l'Institut du monde arabe in Paris in summer 2017. Baya's figurative work, a mash-up of Kabyle, Arab, Islamic, and French cultural heritage,<sup>2</sup> is now viewed by contemporary artists and scholars as emblematic of urgent global conversations about identities in transformation.

Baya, as she is universally called, is a foundational figure in modern Algerian art, and the Musée national des beaux-arts d'Alger currently holds the largest collection of her work, ranging from her youth in the early 1940s to her death in 1998. Using gouache as her primary medium, Baya represented a world where feminine figures meld with flora and fauna in an explosion of colors dominated by the pinks and turquoises so prevalent in the Mediterranean palette. She is listed as a Surrealist artist in the *Dictionnaire général du surréalisme et de ses environs*,<sup>3</sup> but throughout her life she rejected the labels of "Surrealist," "outsider," or "naïve" that Western and North African critics tried to impose on her. Following Algeria's independence from France in 1962, Baya was marginalized within her country's official painting scene, which at the time privileged social realist imagery along with a nostalgic return to traditional forms such as miniatures, illuminated manuscripts, and calligraphy. Later in life, Baya was grouped with both the "painters of spontaneous popular expression"<sup>4</sup> and the Aouchem group (whose name means "tattoo") founded by the Algerian artists Denis Martinez and Choukri Mesli, with whom she exhibited widely. Yet, as Nadira Laggoune, director of the Musée d'art moderne d'Alger (MAMA), emphasizes, "Baya really marked Algerian modern and contemporary art in spite of not really wanting to be part of any scene."<sup>5</sup>

Baya was born Fatma Haddad in 1931 outside Bordj el-Kiffan, a Mediterranean beach-town suburb of Algiers (called Fort de l'Eau under French rule, before 1962), to a small rural tribe of mixed Kabyle and Arab heritage that relied entirely on an oral tradition of storytelling and



*Animal*  
(Animal), 1947  
Ceramic  
15 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 13 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 9 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (39.8 x 34.7 x 24.8 cm)  
Private collection

folklore. Her father died when she was an infant, and after her mother remarried, Baya was taken in by her stepfather's family. When Baya was five years of age, her mother died, too, and she was sent to live with her paternal grandmother in Kabylia, an impoverished region described by Albert Camus in a scathing series of articles for *Alger Républicain*. Active within the Algerian People's Party, Camus (and others) decried the atrocious living conditions found among the inhabitants of the Kabylia highlands and urgently advocated for economic, educational, and political reforms.<sup>6</sup>

The French intellectual Marguerite Camina Benhoura (known simply as Marguerite in the literature on Baya),<sup>7</sup> who was married to an influential *cadi* (judge of the high courts) in Algiers, described the young Baya as a “wild and barefoot child making fascinating small animals and strange female figures out of dirt.” Baya's grandmother worked as a housekeeper for the Benhouras and at a farm owned by Marguerite's sister,<sup>8</sup> and in 1942 Marguerite officially adopted the teenaged Baya and became her surrogate mother, art history teacher, and patron. In her homes in Algiers and the south of France, Marguerite provided Baya with art materials, home schooling, and access to French and Maghrebi art-world luminaries—as well as to her collection of works by modernist masters, including Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, Alberto Magnelli, and her lifelong friend Joan Miró. Baya remained with Marguerite until 1953, when she returned to her turbulent homeland at the dawn of the Algerian War of Independence, an eight-year fight for decolonization (1954–1962). There she married, as his second wife, El Hadj Mahfoud Mahieddine, a traditional Muslim and an acclaimed “arabo-andalousian” musician thirty years her elder.

In 1945, Aimé Maeght, a prominent French art dealer who was in Algiers managing Pierre Bonnard's estate, discovered Baya through the French artist Jean Peyrissac, who was then living in the Casbah. Back in Paris, Maeght shared his enthusiasm for Baya's work with André Breton, who included one of Baya's gouaches in the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* at Galerie Maeght in Paris in July 1947. By November, Maeght was exhibiting the 16-year-old's ceramics and gouaches.

This solo exhibition was accompanied by a lavish sixth issue of

the gallery's journal, *Derrière le Miroir* (Behind the Mirror), which included texts by Breton, Peyrissac, Émile Dermenghem (“Baya et l'Afrique”), and Jacques Kober, in addition to illustrations of Baya's images and a story she had recounted (“Le grand zoiseau”). Breton celebrated Baya's work as the future of painting—a light in the dark aftermath of World War II, the start of an “age of emancipation and harmony” that broke away from the “systematic” condition of painting convention. He believed that Baya characterized the spontaneity and revolutionary freedom with which art should be pursued. Breton cited in particular her “childlike” and “primitive” style and her dreamworld depictions, so important to the Surrealist aesthetic:

An ultra-favorable coincidence indeed allows us, in this brilliant apparition under the anxious November skies of 1947 in Paris—Baya radiant inside and out in all the charms of her land—to grasp and bring together, on the one hand, what the Berber imagination today has kept alive of the traditions of Ancient Egypt, and on the other what, according to the observations of Jean Piaget, can be attributed to the sense of participation and magic practices in children.<sup>9</sup>

His text, with its references to *One Thousand and One Nights* and the notion of the artist's “purity” and “exotic” nature linking the Muslim world to the Middle Ages in Europe, echoed a pervasive fantasy of the Orient and aligned with Breton's claims to having discovered colonial outsider artists such as the “naïf” Haitian painter Hector Hyppolite. Even as Breton depicts Baya as glistening with “all the charms of her land,” Algeria remains unnamed. His references are not to Algeria, and certainly not modern Algeria, but to what “the Berber imagination today has kept alive of the traditions of Ancient Egypt,” an archaic, pre-Muslim, Pharaonic Egypt, or even further east to a mythic “Happy Arabia” (*Arabie heureuse*). He even goes so far as to compare Baya's Orientalist influence in the modern world to that of a medieval witch.

At this time, Breton was also collaborating with Jean Dubuffet in the Foyer de l'Art Brut, which became la Compagnie de l'Art Brut in



*Femme aux yeux en papillons*  
(Woman with butterfly eyes), 1947  
Gouache on board  
39 x 25 5/8 in. (99.1 x 65.1 cm)  
Collection of Adrien Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France

1948.<sup>10</sup> Dubuffet was fascinated with Baya's art and acquired many of her works during his frequent visits to Algeria. The Art Brut collection, which would later become La Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, Switzerland, is home to several works by Baya. Thus she was labeled early in her career as an "outsider artist," and to this day she continues to be associated with Dubuffet's original definition of Art Brut—which translates as "raw art" and implies that the artist is self-trained. For Dubuffet, Art Brut—which includes graffiti and the work of the insane, prisoners, children, and primitive artists—was the raw expression of vision or emotions, untrammelled by convention, academia, or tradition.

Baya's 1947 exhibition at Galerie Maeght in Paris attracted the avant-garde intellectual elite, including François Mauriac and Albert Camus, as well as a popular audience. Baya found herself suddenly fashionable, featured in the February 1948 issue of French *Vogue* with a full-page portrait and a story by Edmonde Charles-Roux: "With her prodigious ability to invent images that do not belong to any culture, [Baya's] innate sense of color finds its source in the depth of the ages."<sup>11</sup> Georges Braque hosted Baya for a week at his fabled studio in Varengeville-sur-Mer.

Thanks to her *succès fou* in Paris, Baya was invited to become an artist in residence at the Madoura ceramic studio in Vallauris, in the south of France, and from 1948 to 1952 she spent summers there with Marguerite, working side by side with Picasso, who referred to her as "La Berbère."<sup>12</sup> Unlike Picasso, after leaving Madoura, she abandoned ceramics altogether, feeling that the medium was not immediate enough for her. Discussing her relationship with Picasso, Baya recalled: "We had adjacent studios. We would talk a lot. Sometimes we would eat couscous together. He was very nice and we spent delightful time together."<sup>13</sup> Picasso cited his time at Madoura with Baya as one of the main inspirations—along with the death of Matisse, his lifelong friend and rival, and the advent of the Algerian War—for his series *Les Femmes d'Alger* (Women of Algiers, 1954–55), fifteen paintings and numerous related drawings.<sup>14</sup>

Literary critic and art historian Ranjana Khanna has noted that Baya's paintings focus almost exclusively on "moments of encounter"



—that is, of the encounters between women and nature featured in nearly all of Baya’s works.<sup>15</sup> Yet the other definition of “encounter,” meaning “to confront” or “to contend with,” also resonates throughout Baya’s work and life as she navigated through loss, new and unfamiliar environments, and war. Baya never claimed to belong to any artistic tradition and always painted at home, mostly in the kitchen. She explained, “I started painting because Marguerite painted.”<sup>16</sup> Although most scholarship on Baya refers to her as “self-taught,” Marguerite’s mentorship calls this into question. While Baya’s Algerian painter contemporaries such as M’hamed Issiakhem, Mohammed Khadda, and Abdallah Benanteur were experimenting in abstraction and Fauvism, she never abandoned figuration. Her adolescent artistic encounters attained the status of key moments in the lore of European Modernism and its cultural conduits—moments of meeting, convergence, and exchange—which would continue to affect her work even after she returned to Algeria as a married woman. In the Musée Cantini’s 1982 exhibition *Baya: L’Orient des Provençaux*, she is framed, in the discourse of that time, as the central figure in a “Mediterranean” transcultural artistic world. More recently, in the MuCEM de Marseille’s 2013 exhibition *Black and Blue: A Mediterranean Dream*, Baya was defined as neither an “insider” nor an “outsider,” but rather one whose spheres of influence were unique: Baya as sui generis.

As is evident in her biography, Baya was the product of complex processes of subject formation and identity territories, ruptures and encounters, geographic and cultural transfers and passages: from dialect to Arabic, from Arabic to French, from traditional Islamic culture to painting, from the coastal *douar* where she was born to the mountains of Kabylia where her widowed mother remained after remarrying. Then, orphaned again, back to the *douar*, only to be adopted by a family temporarily uprooted by war to Algiers. After being enthusiastically embraced by cosmopolitan Paris, she moved at age twenty back to Algeria, to Blida, a provincial town some 30 miles southeast of Algiers, where she lived for the rest of her life as a traditional housewife and mother. Perhaps it was as a result of these cultural disruptions that Baya felt compelled to create her own language during her early years,

most overtly signaled in her enigmatic signature—a sort of scribble that does not belong to any identifiable graphic system, an invented mix of modern Arabic lettering and French cursive combined into a unique mark.

Baya’s complex formation is not so very different from Nadira Laggoune’s definition of “nomadic identity” in her reflections on the exhibition *Arab Territories*, which featured emerging contemporary artists in Algeria and the Maghreb. Yet Baya’s career took place more than seventy years ago, at a time when such diasporic opportunities were much rarer:

A nomadic identity is visible today which operates as much on the “outside” as on the “inside” of countries where accelerated urbanisation has revealed sub-identities. Human mobility (migration, displacement, population movements, diasporas) has ensured that these identities have become multiple, hybrid and organised into diverse territories. . . . An example of this is provided by the artists included in the exhibition *Arab Territories*, held at the Palais de la culture Mohamed Laïd Al-Khalifa in Constantine, Algeria. They are Arab-Iraqi living in Rome or Iraqi-Kurd living in London; Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian living between France and their country of origin, Palestinian-Iraqi living in the USA, Lebanese living between France, Lebanon and so on.<sup>17</sup>

In 1962, Baya’s work drew the attention of Assia Djebar (née Fatima-Zohra Imalayen, 1936–2015), the renowned Algerian author, feminist, and filmmaker, one of North Africa’s preeminent writers and the first to be inducted into the Académie Française, in 2005. During the intoxicating days of hope following Algerian independence, Djebar visited the artist at her home in Blida, where coincidentally Djebar had briefly attended a Quranic girl’s boarding school. In her text “Le Combat de Baya” (Baya’s Struggle), Djebar cited Baya’s many challenges: Was she imprisoned in her married life, veiled as one of three wives? Was her return to Algeria at the beginning of the war a form of incarceration?

Was her adopted life in France a type of eclosion, an emergence, or just another prison? Was her stay in Blida a return to childhood in an infantilized state? In Blida, Baya stopped painting for ten years, while giving birth to and raising six children.<sup>18</sup> Her son, Othmane Mahieddine, recalls that his mother attended to her wifely and maternal duties “entirely, meticulously and without a sound: cooking, baking, painting on satin, interior decorating, housekeeping and gardening as well as tending to our education. She was a fairy.”<sup>19</sup>

Baya’s retirement from making art roughly corresponds with the Algerian War of Independence. At the time of independence, in 1962, the Musée des beaux-arts in Algiers had not yet acquired any of her work. The following year, after Jean de Maisonseul was appointed director and reopened the museum, he repatriated some of Baya’s gouaches and ceramics from France. He encouraged her to return to painting, and he included her work in *Algerian Painters*, an exhibition of emerging talent that he organized for the festivities of liberation of November 1 (with a catalogue preface by Jean Sénac). Maisonseul proceeded to organize a retrospective of Baya’s gouaches and went on to champion her work until the end of his career. Beginning in 1963, Baya—who had not shown her work since 1947—exhibited in Algeria and internationally nearly every year until her death in 1998.

Baya’s lifelong production of images of women in a world without men proposes an alternate mode of seeing. Her gouache compositions reject a “real” or outside world—they are narrative, magical, figurative, always featuring women at their center. In *Femme robe jaune cheveux bleus* (Woman with blue hair in a yellow dress, 1947), the dress itself is a garden full of peacocks; the yellow dress in *Femme robe jaune fond blanc* (Woman in a yellow dress on a white background, 1947) is a field of grasses. *Femme aux yeux en papillons* (Woman with butterfly eyes, 1947) depicts the subject’s hands and mouth as made of flowers. As Djébar writes, “Baya’s woman is equipped with a giant eye, which, agape, avidly desires flowers, fruits, sounds of lutes and guitars, complicit birds, fish in the bowl, a child on the head or shoulders of a woman in conversation with a palm tree....”<sup>20</sup> Baya’s unclear delineations, indeterminate locales, closed spaces, and floating objects lacking



*Femmes et orangers fond blanc*  
 (Women and orange trees on a white background), 1947  
 Gouache on board  
 18 7/8 x 24 3/4 in. (47.9 x 62.9 cm)  
 Collection of Isabelle Maeght, Paris

perspective or volume invite us to think more broadly about borders and boundaries: Where does the natural female body begin and end before it becomes cultural?

Baya's closed-off, idyllic female worlds are replete with urns, flowers, fish, birds, musical instruments, and, later in her life, representations of the Koran (in flower gardens). The art historian Mouny Berrah describes these pictures as *espace-haram* or harem-spaces.<sup>21</sup> Baya usually depicted her female figures' faces as flat, empty, and white, using the canvas rather than paint, and only via loose outlines floating in space, with eyes resembling the inverted Arabic character transliterated as "H." Early on, French and Maghrebi critics emphasized this singular and recurring eye—similar to Baya's one-eyed women, seen in profile—which they identified as the Egyptian Horus or hamsa eye, the protective good-luck charm or amulet that is worn in many forms, including rings, necklaces, and bracelets, throughout the Arab world. Yet Baya's use of the repetitive "one eye" may have further and more resonant significance. In an interview with the scholar Dalila Morsly, Baya explained that, when Marguerite was raising her, she took care that Baya retain her Algerian identity, insisting that she learn to write and speak modern Arabic, observe Ramadan, pray, and wear a veil.<sup>22</sup>

Baya's relationship to her own Muslim life suggests a more subversive way to view her work: as the artist's deployment of visual strategies to disrupt vanguard male imagery, the precepts of her own religion, and exoticized Western representations of North African women. In traditional Islamic art, the human figure is rarely depicted. Baya's tableaux of women with exaggerated eyes read as metaphors of a specular liberation from both the Western gaze and the traditional male Islamic gaze. As Djebbar writes, "You are there: the original eye of your liberated women smiles at the sky of birds, at the guitar, at the repopulated world of your heart."<sup>23</sup> Djebbar believed that Baya gave women a privileged place outside the major social obstacles of sex, class, and culture, stating, "Baya, the first in a chain of sequestered women, whose blindfold has, all of a sudden, fallen to the ground."<sup>24</sup> This representation does not fit the traditional male-female, French-exotic pattern, but rather woman to woman, mother to daughter, eye to eye.



*Danseuse*  
(Dancer), 1946  
Ceramic

6 ¼ x 5 ⅛ x 3 ½ in. (15.9 x 13 x 8.9 cm)

Private collection

In her paintings, Baya blazed a unique trail for North African women artists. She demonstrated a sensibility that surpassed the social boundaries of her cultural background by removing the veil of invisibility that typically shrouds women in her country. Experiencing the world of Baya is like crossing through a “feminine Algerian desert,” in Djébar’s words. Moreover, by depicting a feminine perspective and ingenuity, Baya unintentionally led a fight, a woman’s battle. For her female contemporaries, she modeled a way of building a name and an identity. Baya traces her women’s dance-like movements in indeterminate outlines, as if they are threatening to burst out of their cloistered, defined roles. Her paintings not only put forth an invented imaginary utopian territory of North Africa and the East, but also aesthetic narratives that interrogate, deconstruct, complicate, and transform in order to reach solutions that are entirely Baya’s own. Baya herself never spoke about feminism or colonialism, or the headscarf she wore consistently throughout her life. She only revealed her personal politics through her prolific and repetitive paintings of women.

Djébar, in her essay “Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound,” part of a series of essays and novellas referencing the title of Eugène Delacroix’s painting *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement* (Women of Algiers in their apartment, 1834), explains that it is taboo for Muslim women to look men in the eye, and even more taboo to look an infidel in the eye, and that thus Delacroix entered the harem transgressively, his male “eye through the peephole” serving as a “spy-eye,” something “stolen.” The women in Delacroix’s painting “neither abandon nor refuse themselves to our gaze” with their “faraway eyes.” In this essay Djébar also talks about “another eye,” the “female gaze,” the “liberated eye” of the woman who leaves the harem, unveiled, which in colloquial Arabic is the same word as “naked” or “denuded.” Djébar asks, “Is a woman—who moves around and therefore is ‘naked’—who looks, not also a threat to their exclusive right to stare, to that male prerogative?”<sup>25</sup>

Djébar further writes of a “rebirth to their own bodies,” and a reinstatement of female identity where women are unveiled and in public and thus naked to the naked eye. Baya’s paintings are of spaces that can be read as culturally subversive in this way, where women can look and

talk back to conventions of colonialism and Orientalist representation—and, maybe, even more importantly, as we look back on modernist art history from today’s vantage point, the most significant function in Baya’s work may be her step into the visible. Removing the veil of invisibility, Baya upholds the right to see and the knowledge that seeing means being visible. Being exposed to being seen is what Baya’s women do.

#### Notes

1. In an interview by Lazhari Labter in *Révolution Africaine*, no. 1199, February 20, 1987, 61.
2. The Kabyle (or Iqvayliyen) people are a Berber (or Amazigh) ethnic group native to Kabylia in the north of Algeria.
3. Cited in Jean de Maisonseul, “Baya l’enchanteresse,” in *Baya: L’Orient des Provençaux*, exh. cat. (Marseille: Musée Cantini, 1982), 16.
4. K. Melismi, “Interview avec Baya Mahieddine,” *Art et Actualité*, no. 2 (1982), 6.
5. Nadira Laggoune, interview with the author, September 2017.
6. Albert Camus writing in *Alger Républicain*, 1937–38, in a series of reports titled “The Misery of Kabylia” (Kabylia being the mountainous Berber region to the east of Algiers) and in the alarm he tried to sound in *Combat* upon returning to Algeria in 1945, when he sensed the looming crisis. His overarching theme is that, in Algeria, France betrayed its own values.
7. Ranjana Khanna, *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1930 to the Present* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 199.
8. It is unclear whether Baya was also Marguerite’s housemaid. Accounts of her and her grandmother’s early roles in Marguerite’s household differ.
9. André Breton, “Baya,” in “Exposition Baya,” special issue, *Derrière le Miroir*, no. 6 (Galerie Maeght, Paris, November 1947). Translated by Matthew Amos.
10. Hubert Damisch, “Notice sur la compagnie de l’art brut,” 1948, quoted in Jean Dubuffet, *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 1: 488.
11. The text by Edmonde Charles-Roux is reprinted in *Baya*, exh. cat. (Arles: Musée Réattu, 2003).
12. Amézian Ferhani, “Interview de Baya,” in *Trois Femmes Peintres: Baya, Chaïbia, Fabreïnissa* (Paris: Institut du monde arabe in association with Edifra, 1990), 19.
13. Katherine Conley and Pierre Taminiaux, “Surrealism and its Others,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 109 (2006), 10.
14. Musée Magnelli, Musée de la Céramique, “Baya: créatrice chez les surréalistes,” press release, July 2013.
15. Ranjana Khanna and Julie Singer, “Latent Ghosts and the Manifesto: Baya, Breton and Reading for the Future,” *Art History* 26, no. 2 (April 2003): 238–80.
16. Dalila Morsly, “Je ne sais pas, je sens...,” *Algérie Littérature/Action*, nos. 15–16 (1997), 209–14.
17. Nadira Laggoune, “Arab Territories,” *ArtAfrica*, March 8, 2016, <http://artafricamagazine.org/arab-territories-by-nadira-laggoune/>.
18. Assia Djébar, “Le Combat de Baya,” in *Trois Femmes Peintres*, 17–18.
19. Quoted in Kadidja Aboutaleb, “Pour une approche sémiotique des oeuvres picturales de Baya Mahieddine” (thesis, University Kasdi Merbah Ouargla, 2016), 15.
20. Assia Djébar, “Baya, the Flower Gaze,” in the present volume; originally published as “Baya, le regard fleur,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, January 25, 1985, 90, [http://referentiel.nouvelobs.com/archives\\_pdf/OBS1055\\_19850125/OBS1055\\_19850125\\_090.pdf](http://referentiel.nouvelobs.com/archives_pdf/OBS1055_19850125/OBS1055_19850125_090.pdf)
21. Mouny Berrah, *Désert et peinture* (Paris: Collection Musée Caminat, 1980), 10.
22. Morsly, “Je ne sais pas, je sens...,” 212.
23. Djébar, “Le Combat de Baya,” 17–18.
24. Djébar, “Baya, the Flower Gaze,” in the present volume.
25. Assia Djébar, “Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound,” in *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 133–36, 138–39.



“Exposition Baya.” Special issue, *Derrière le Miroir*, no. 6 (Galerie Maeght, Paris, November 1947). Lithograph, 15 x 11 in. (38.1 x 27.9 cm)

## *Baya* André Breton

Translated from the French by Matthew Amos

Exceptionally good fortune would have it that in Baya’s very graceful person the two currents that feed poetic thought are combined before our eyes, that at last we might find in them a common source in a being as frail as she is talented. An ultra-favorable coincidence indeed allows us, in this brilliant apparition under the anxious November skies of 1947 in Paris—Baya radiant inside and out in all the charms of her land—to grasp and bring together, on the one hand, what the Berber imagination today has kept alive of the traditions of Ancient Egypt,<sup>1</sup> and on the other what, according to the observations of Jean Piaget,<sup>2</sup> can be attributed to the sense of participation and magic practices in children. To those who, rejecting rational blinders, believe despite all evidence to the contrary in the deliverance of the world and, in order to bring it about, aspire to find anew wherever it may be the freshness of inspiration and its concomitant conceptual daring, the child that is Baya provides a glimpse into this double crucible.

Over there, already far from us, lies that old world amusingly called civilized, that world out of breath, that dragon with a hundred withered breasts, that *floored* monster whose scales are decomposing into all that the aberration of human thought has sought to enumerate in races and castes so as to set them against each other, and whose

muzzle has never stopped vomiting carnage and oppression. And *here*, profiled in the gossamer fabric of the future, Baya's hieratic silhouette lifting a corner of the veil, uncovering what the young world—united, harmonic and in love with itself—might be. Yes, she is still armed, it's true. It's undeniable that, in her bag of marvels, love potions and spells rival extracts of perfumes from the *Thousand and One Nights*. This is because human desire is in a pure state within her, allowing no obstacle to impede its satisfaction, given up, unbridled, to its need for fulfillment. The hand, which held the prism, sees it go black and, moved by an age-old drive, turns to herbs and pins. In an era like the one the Muslim world is going through, scandalously enslaved, it is perhaps natural that Baya's gesture vaguely mimics that of the young shepherdesses of the Middle Ages in Europe, but above all what is highly significant, from a sociological point of view, is that she has recourse to the same means of intervention into exterior life, which she seeks at all costs to win over. Baya's secret is not at all different than that of Michelet's heroine.<sup>3</sup> "Fairy tales," he says, "are the very heart of the people," and no one has better described the passion of the woman-child, spurring on the endless cycle of *metamorphoses*: "A woman strives, imagines, she gives birth to dreams and gods. She is a *seer* on her day: she has the infinite wing of desire and fantasy. To better count time, she observes the sky. But her heart belongs no less to the earth. Her eyes lowered onto loving flowers, young and a flower herself, she makes their personal acquaintance. A woman, she asks them to cure those she loves.... In the beginning, Woman is everything."

I speak, not like so many others to deplore an end but to promote a beginning, and over this beginning Baya is queen. The beginning of an age of emancipation and concord, radically severed from what came before and one of whose principal levers is, for man, the systematic and always greater impregnation of nature. The primer of this age is in Charles Fourier, the brand new motor has just been supplied by Malcolm de Chazal. But the rocket heralding it, I propose we call it Baya.

Baya, whose mission is to recharge with meaning those beautiful nostalgic words: *Arabia Felix*. Baya, who holds and revives the golden bough.

#### Notes

This essay was originally published as "Exposition Baya," special issue, *Derrière le Miroir*, no 6, Galerie Maeght, Paris, November 1947. It is reprinted here by gracious permission of Éditions Gallimard, Paris.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Émile Dermenghem, "Des mystères d'Isis", *Pierre à feu*, January 1947.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Piaget, *La représentation du monde chez l'enfant*, Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1926.

<sup>3</sup> *La Sorcière* (originally published 1862).



*Deux femmes*  
(Two women), 1947  
Gouache on board  
24 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 18 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (62.9 x 47.9 cm)  
Collection of Adrien Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France

## *Baya, the Flower Gaze* Assia Djebar

Translated from the French by Matthew Amos

The veiled women of Alexandria raise their enamored gaze toward Saint Mark preaching in an Oriental square—the immense canvas by the Bellini brothers, in Milan’s Brera, was recently taken down, right before this summer, for restoration.... Harem women’s first gaze, meaning in this circumstance—because Gentile is, in fact, just back from Constantinople—a shift in religious faith.... But I see them, veiled of course, but already half-liberated since they’re seated outside, discovering a vision of their own....

From the end of the Quattrocento until today, five hundred years of half-light from which emerged “the rocket I’ll call Baya,” as André Breton said on the occasion of the 1947 Maeght exhibition.... Baya, in my eyes, has a flower gaze....

For a long time, considering every painting in anticipation of the emptiness of museums, I stood not before, in the position of a first or last spectator, but behind the canvas. In an archeological time before the birth of the work, in a background beyond the ground behind, paralyzed. Sunken. Buried. Eyes veiled. No right to look at paintings. Not daring to discover them, at my leisure, nor to caress them with my gaze. One day maybe, not today, as long as someone else’s love, under the brush, under the knife, in the paint, in the oil, is drying, is lasting....

For a long time, I wasn't able to put myself truly *in front of* paintings: I felt that I was behind an irreparable zone of darkness.

I had to "turn" to film (turn, in fact, like certain movements of swirling dervishes) to get myself out of that place—but that's another story! Thirty years of normal "pictorial culture" gave me nothing but knowledge, "taste," left intact my confusion, and the ambiguity of my position....

No one has ever stated to what extent the reclusion of generations of women has led to the enucleation of an entire lineage's eye!

To come back to Baya, Baya striding over such a condemnation from the outset, as if she were taking flight, once and for all, her wings outspread. When Breton praised her, she was sixteen. The maternal friendship of a Frenchwoman lost in the colonies brought the young girl out of her ancestral seclusion.... In 1952, Baya finds herself in Blida—"city of roses" and of Gide, who once passed through—as a traditional Algerian woman: at the age of twenty-two, she is married to a musician known as the "Andalusian" (the Moorish musical inheritance of our ancient cities), is soon entangled in a brood of children, in a small house with a patio and jasmines. A universe certainly fragrant and exotic for the occasional visitors, although in reality narrow and stagnant. In this wise that is her daily life, Baya takes up her watercolors and gouaches once more: the same motifs, the same joy of hoping or losing again (and also painting again). In this new beginning, one finds ephemeral life, real life....

Baya's woman is equipped with a giant eye, which, agape, avidly desires flowers, fruits, sounds of lutes and guitars, complicit birds, fish in the bowl, a child on the head or shoulders of a woman in conversation with a palm tree.... Everything comes together and is intertwined, is involved in an exchange: fertility and innocence. Women, sometimes two of them, become sisters. More often than not, there's a solitary queen standing in a realm of flora, scents, chirping... Everything is made flush, flat, rich, moments of "gathering"; everything, except man. He would be the guardian. He would hold the keys. He would say: "No entering, no touching, no leaving...." He is beyond, he is beneath this recreated

Eden. He will never be the subject of Baya's gaze.

Baya directs her flower gaze up toward the full sky where Chagall, Le Douanier Rousseau, a limited number of elect await her.... Baya, the first in a chain of sequestered women, whose blindfold has, all of a sudden, fallen to the ground. Baya, saved by a miracle!

#### Notes

This essay was originally published as "Baya, le regard fleur," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, January 25, 1985, 90.





*Femme allongée au visage bleu*  
(Reclining woman with blue face), 1947  
Gouache on board  
19 ½ x 25 7/16 in. (49.5 x 64.6 cm)  
Collection of Isabelle Maeght, Paris

*A Tale of Maid(ens) and Color:  
Baya's "Reclining Woman with Blue Face"*  
Menna Ekram

Translated from the Arabic by the author with Omar Berrada

I still remember our first meeting. "Meeting" is not the right word; we did not even speak. Let's say it was the first time I saw her. My grandmother's apartment had the most unusual layout, and too much furniture. The door opened onto the wooden forest that was the dining room, and immediately to the left was a small corridor leading to the kitchen and a minuscule bathroom. The bathroom door was always closed. Growing up, we were often warned against opening it, that it would become a symbolic gateway to our childhood nightmares: rats, fantastical creatures that chop off children's heads, enormous spider webs, and darkness that blinds you forever.

Grandmother sat on one of the dining-room chairs, while mother knocked on the door of horrors. "Come out, don't be afraid," she would say in a soothing voice; but all that came out was the sound of gentle weeping. Again, gentle is not the word. What I mean, I think, is that its cadence was steady. This was an experienced weeper. I was flabbergasted. Who had had the courage to go into that room? Will they ever come out or are they forever disappeared?

Mother was still knocking on the door. Grandmother, holding what looked like a medicine bottle, commanded whoever was inside

to step out or they would have to face her wrath. Then there would be silence. No more wailing, or threats, or sounds of knocking. She would emerge. A seven-year-old girl wearing a pajama with washed-out colors, her hair unevenly cut, like a prisoner's. Her tiny, frail body bore marks of beatings and cigarette burns. She stood there shaking, breathing heavily, struggling to stay upright.

When Mother approached, she jumped away in fear. Mother calmly pulled her back toward her. With blue latex gloves on, she began to massage her scalp using the lice lotion granny had been holding. At no point did the girl raise her head. She was shivering, gasping for air, yet completely surrendered to Mother's treatment.

The lice comb was tearing her hair mercilessly. She strove to remain still as Mother pulled—an accordion of suppressed movement. Mother showed Grandmother what she found. Grandmother took the comb and popped the lice out and wiped them off in visible disgust: "How can there be an army of lice in so little hair?" Mother and the girl sustained the sad accordion tune, accompanied by the steady bass of popping lice Grandmother played. When the chilling ritual ended, the girl's hair was sprayed with a different substance and wrapped in a large, colorful headscarf. Heba was ordered not to take it off even in her sleep, until she bathed the next morning.

"Heba" is a synonym for my name, "Menna," which means "gift" in Arabic. I had a conversation starter! Smiling at my own wit, I waited for Mother and Grandmother to be distracted and snuck into the kitchen to find her on a wooden stool, lost in her thoughts. I called her name; she was startled and began to cry. I ran away, wondering what I had done wrong.

She lived with us from age 7 till age 22. She left when Grandmother died. I never told her that our names had the same meaning.

Looking at Baya's *Reclining Woman with Blue Face*, I am pulled back to Grandmother's kitchen in that small town on the Nile Delta. I remember Heba sleeping on two old, worn-out rugs and a small pillow. The pillowcase used to be mine. Its motifs once sparkled with the joy of

childhood; now they are nothing but washed-out blobs of color.

A feminine body in a pink dress reclines. "Pink" is not accurate; or, rather, it is muddled, with hues of grey mixed in. It appears less cheerful than hesitant, or confused—a feminine color laden with the pains of female embodiment. At the bottom of the dress is what looks like a rectangle of embroidered motifs. Their colors stage a starker drama: black, dark grey and crimson red. Compositionally, the rectangle must be there for a reason. It interrupts the flow of the dress, its straight outline contrasts with the body's curves. I am tempted to read it as the cipher of an obstacle.

Because of Heba's presence in my memory, I perceive the reclining body to be resting on a rug and an ornate pillow; two perpendicular oblong shapes of unequal sizes and apparently clashing color schemes create a distinctive visual distribution in which the grey face, blue eyes, and black hair become the painting's focal point. Drawn in, you feel the pain and the fatigue of a body that still retains some childhood in it despite the blossoming bosom.

When I was growing up Grandmother would grope my growing breasts to measure how big they had become. "They're still lemon-sized," she would say. As a teenager you grow into orange size, then as a woman you blossom into having a pair of cantaloupes. That sense of invasion, that my body was so easily violated under the pretense of motherly love, filled me with rage. Nevertheless, it provided a familiar female voice, an older, more experienced voice to accompany my journey to womanhood. Who did Baya have? Who made her understand what it means to see one's body change? Did the French lady who took her in, Marguerite, care about her first menstrual pains? Who provided her first sanitary napkins? Who told her she was now stepping into adulthood? Who was there for Baya? The old rug? The pillow? Her pain? Or was it the painting kit that Marguerite gave her?

In the few Baya paintings I have seen, all the women are standing, except in this one. They all have whimsical hairdos or hair colors or head pieces, except in this one. Here the subject is reclining, perhaps sleeping; she has uncomplicated black hair. I cannot help but think of this as a self-portrait. The young Baya lies down to sleep. She

takes in the sadness and loneliness of her condition, as orphan, as maid, and the thrill of her own blooming femininity.

The power of memory and the force of the contrast between color and form, in addition to the only black-and-white photograph I have seen of Baya, made me want to attach a story to this painting, regardless of how accurate or inaccurate it may be. Thinking of Baya I think of Heba, unless it is the other way round. If Heba means gift, what does Baya mean? And what is the meaning of the string of signs she chose to adopt as her signature?



*Femme sur fond bleu*  
(Woman on a blue background), 1947  
Gouache on board  
24 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 18 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (62.8 x 47.9 cm)  
Collection of Isabelle Maeght, Paris



*Femme robe bleue cheveux rouges*  
 (Woman with red hair in a blue dress), 1947  
 Gouache on board  
 36 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 28 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (91.9 x 71.6 cm)  
 Collection of Isabelle Maeght, Paris



*Femme et oiseau en cage*  
 (Woman with a caged bird), 1947  
 Gouache on board  
 36 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 28 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (91.9 x 71.6 cm)  
 Collection of Adrien Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France



*Femme robe jaune cheveux bleus*  
 (Woman with blue hair in a yellow dress), 1947  
 Gouache on board  
 27 5/8 x 21 1/4 in. (70.2 x 54 cm)  
 Collection Jules Maeght, San Francisco



*Femme robe jaune fond blanc*  
 (Woman in yellow dress on a white background), 1947  
 Gouache on board  
 18 1/8 x 14 7/8 in. (46 x 36.7 cm)  
 Collection of Adrien Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France



*Deux femmes fond bleu foncé*  
 (Two women on a dark blue background), 1947  
 Gouache on board  
 25 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 19 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (64.6 x 49.5 cm)  
 Collection of Adrien Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France



*Femme aux oeufs*  
 (Woman with eggs), 1947  
 Gouache on board  
 18 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 24 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (47.5 x 62.9 cm)  
 Collection of Isabelle Maeght, Paris



*Village et colline*  
(Village and hill), 1947  
Gouache on board  
19 ½ x 25 ⅝ in. (49.5 x 65.1 cm)  
Collection of Isabelle Maeght, Paris



*Femme dansant*  
(Woman dancing), 1947  
Gouache on board  
19 ½ x 25 ⅝ in. (49.5 x 65.1 cm)  
Collection of Adrien Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France



*Femme robe à chevrons*  
 (Woman in chevron-patterned dress), 1947  
 Gouache on board  
 25 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 19 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (64.6 x 49.5 cm)  
 Collection of Adrien Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France



*Femmes attablées*  
 (Women at table), 1947  
 Gouache on board  
 19 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 25 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (49.5 x 64.6 cm)  
 Collection of Adrien Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France





*Femme et enfant en bleu*  
 (Woman and child in blue), 1947  
 Gouache on board  
 22 ¾ x 17 ⅞ in. (57.8 x 45.4 cm)  
 Collection of Isabelle Maeght, Paris



*Femme robe à fleurs blanches*  
 (Woman in a white-flowered dress), 1947  
 Gouache on board  
 39 x 30 in. (99.1 x 76.2 cm)  
 Collection of Adrien Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France



*Femme fond rouge*  
 (Woman on a red background), 1940  
 Gouache on paper  
 9 5/8 x 9 1/8 in. (24.4 x 23.2 cm)  
 Courtesy of Galerie Maeght, Paris



*Femme à la robe verte*  
 (Woman in a green dress), 1940  
 Gouache on paper  
 12 3/16 x 9 7/16 in. (31 x 24 cm)  
 Courtesy of Galerie Maeght, Paris



*Femme au panier et coq rouge*  
(Woman with a basket and a red rooster), 1947  
Gouache on board  
28 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 36 in. (72.9 x 91.4 cm)  
Collection of Adrien Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France



*Femme au deux pots de fleurs*  
(Woman with two flower pots), 1947  
Gouache on board  
36 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 28 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (91.9 x 72.9 cm)  
Collection of Adrien Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France

## Selected Exhibitions

### Solo Exhibitions

- 1947 *Baya*, Galerie Maeght, Paris  
1966 Galerie Pilote, Algiers  
1967 Centre culturel français, Algiers  
1969 *Peintures et sculptures de Baya*, Centre culturel français, Algiers  
1976 Centre culturel français, Algiers  
1977 Maison de la culture, Tizi Ouzou, Algeria  
1978 Galerie Muhammad Racim, Algiers  
1979 Centre culturel français, Algiers  
1980 Centre culturel français, Algiers  
1982 *Baya: L'Orient des Provençaux*, Musée Cantini, Marseille  
Centre culturel français, Algiers  
1984 Centre culturel français, Algiers  
Centre culturel algérien, Paris  
1985 Centre culturel français, Oran, Algeria  
Galerie de l'Aurassi, Algiers  
1998 *Baya*, Galerie Maeght, Paris  
1999 *Baya*, Cloître des Cordeliers, Tarascon, France  
2000 *Baya*, Centre d'études africaines (EHESS-CNRS), Paris  
2003 *Baya*, Musée Réattu, Arles, France  
2013 *Baya: créatrice chez les surréalistes*, Musée Magnelli, Musée de la céramique, Vallauris, France  
2018 *Baya: Woman of Algiers*, Grey Art Gallery, New York University, New York

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1947 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Maeght, Paris  
1950 Salle de l'Alhambra, Maison de l'artisanat, Algiers  
1962 *Algerian Painters*, Musée des beaux-arts, Algiers  
1963 Salle Ibn Khaldoun, Algiers  
1964 Galerie 54, Algiers  
*Peintres algériens*, Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris  
1967 Galerie de l'union nationale des arts plastiques, Algiers  
1969 Galerie de l'union nationale des arts plastiques, Algiers  
1971 Galerie de l'union nationale des arts plastiques, Algiers  
1974 Galerie de l'union nationale des arts plastiques, Algiers  
Galerie des 4 Colonnes, Algiers  
Galerie Muhammad Racim, Algiers  
1978 Galerie Mohamed Racim, Algiers  
1983 Galerie de l'union nationale des arts plastiques, Algiers

- 1984 Centre culturel communal, Aubagne, France  
1987 *Algérie, expressions multiples*, Musée des arts Africains et Océaniens, Paris  
Galerie Muhammad Issiakhem, Algiers  
1988 *Bonjour Picasso*, Musée Picasso, Antibes, France  
1989 *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World*, Barbican Concourse Gallery, London  
Galerie Ipso, Brussels  
1990 Musée de l'Institut du monde arabe, Paris  
Wafabank, Casablanca  
1991 *André Breton: La beauté convulsive*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía  
1994 *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World*, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.  
1995 *Les effets du voyage: 25 artistes algériens*, Palais des congrès et de la culture, Le Mans, France  
1998 *Aux frontières de l'art brut*, Halle Sainte Pierre, Paris  
2002 *Le pluriel des singuliers*, Galerie d'art du Conseil général des Bouches-du-Rhône, Aix-en-Provence, France  
2003 *The Twentieth Century in Algerian Art*, Château Borély, Marseille and l'Orangerie du Sénat, Paris  
2006 *Centenaire Aimé Maeght: Dialogue avec le siècle*, Fondation Marguerite et Aimé Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France  
2007 *Alger capitale de la culture arabe*, Musée national des beaux-arts d'Alger, Algiers  
2009 *Flower Power*, Centro Ricerca Arte Attuale, Villa Giulia, Verbania, Italy  
2010 *Sajjil: A Century of Modern Art*, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha  
2013 *Black and Blue: A Mediterranean Dream*, MuCEM, Marseille  
*La Fondation Maeght et Vallauris: Une histoire d'amitié*, Musée Magnelli, Musée de la céramique, Vallauris, France  
*Intervening Space: From the Intimate to the World*, The Mosaic Rooms, London  
2014 *La Maison de verre, André Breton initiateur découvreur*, Musée de Cahors Henri-Martin, Cahors, France  
*Summary, Part 1*, Mathaf Collection, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha  
2017 *100 Masterpieces of Modern and Contemporary Art: The Barjeel Collection*, Musée de l'Institut du monde arabe, Paris  
*Des affinités électives II*, MUba Eugène Leroy, Tourcoing, France  
*Paysages et Portraits dans la collection du Musée*, Musée public national d'art moderne et contemporain d'Alger, Algiers

## Contributors

**Matthew Amos** specializes in the liminality of literature and philosophy in modern French thought. In 2014, he received a PhD in French Literature from NYU, where he was awarded the Andrew Dulau Dissertation Fellowship (2012–13). He is the translator of Pascal Quignard's *The Hatred of Music* (2016) and Patrick Chamoiseau's forthcoming *Migrant Brothers* (2018). Amos is currently Visiting Assistant Professor of French at Bard College.

**Omar Berrada** is a writer, translator, curator, and the director of Dar al-Ma'mûn, a library and artist residency program in Marrakech. He has edited and co-edited a number of books, including *Expanded Translation: Or, A Treason Treatise* (2010) and *The Africans* (2016). He recently co-curated the *Temporary Center for Translation* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art (2014), and curated the group exhibition *Memory Games: Ahmed Bouanani Now* for the 2016 Marrakech Biennale. Currently living in New York, Berrada is a co-editor of Sharjah Biennial's [tamawuj.org](http://tamawuj.org) and teaches at The Cooper Union.

**Natasha Boas** is a San Francisco and Paris-based art historian, curator, and critic. She holds a PhD in 20th-century French literature from Yale University. Trained in Modernist avant-garde movements with a concentration on Surrealism and Le collège de Sociologie, she currently focuses on subcultures, outsider artists, and emerging art movements. In 2014, Boas curated *Energy That Is All Around: Mission School* at the Walter and McBean Galleries, San Francisco Art Institute and NYU's Grey Art Gallery, and she has worked on exhibitions and public programs at the Centre Georges Pompidou, the San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum, and the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

The founder of surrealism, **André Breton** (1896–1966) is a renowned French writer and poet. He curated a number of exhibitions in New York and authored the *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924). Breton's extensive body of work also includes the collection of poems *L'Amour fou* (Mad Love, 1937), the novel *Nadja* (1928), and the text *Les Vases communicants* (Communicating Vessels, 1932). His ideas about accessing the unconscious and employing symbols for self-expression served as fundamental building blocks for New York artists in the 1940s.

Algerian novelist and filmmaker **Assia Djebar** (1936–2015) is one of North Africa's most influential writers. Focusing on women and their place in a male-centric Arab world, she wrote more than 15 books, including *La Soif* (The Thirst, 1957) and *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (Women of Algiers in Their Apartment, 1980). Frequently mentioned as a contender for the Nobel Prize in Literature, Djebar was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1996 and the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 2000. She was Silver Professor of Francophone Studies at NYU from 2001 to 2014.

**Menna Ekram** is a writer and director based in Egypt. She received a BA in media from Cairo University, a diploma in film subtitling from The American University in Cairo, and an MFA in cinematic arts from The Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts in Aqaba, Jordan, which is affiliated with the University of Southern California. As a writer, she has contributed to a number of short films, documentaries, TV shows, and two commercial feature films. Ekram wrote and directed *The Wheel* (2015), a short film that was shown at the 14th Dubai International Film Festival.

**Lynn Gumpert** has been director of the Grey Art Gallery at NYU since 1997, where she has organized and overseen more than 65 exhibitions. From 1980 to 1988, she was curator and then senior curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and from 1998 to 2007, she worked as an independent curator and consultant, organizing shows at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo, among others. She authored the first major monograph on French artist Christian Boltanski (1992) and has contributed essays to numerous publications.

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—Natasha Boas

