



المرسى  
EL MARSA

Baya







La Femme aux poissons - 1954  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
63 x 48 cm

Elmarsa gallery is proud to present an exhibition of unique works by BAYA, who is considered as one of the most talented and influential Algerian woman artists. The exhibition highlights works from the 1940's until the 1990's.

Baya as a major figure of Arab art paved the way to contemporary painting not only in Algeria but in the whole region, with other painter of her generation such as Khadda or Issiakhem. She has established a unique way of painting and unparalleled style, strongly oriented towards a deep-rooted striving for peace and harmony.

The art of Baya could incarnate Nietzsche's notion of the eternal return: a return on her childhood, on her wounds and on an imaginary world buried inside her. She managed to create a world filled with dazzling colors generating exquisite discernable forms. Baya draws us into a perfect world without tension and conflicts. Since the beginning of her career, her work was driven by an obsession with the process of the color and its ability to convey frankness and precision in the patterns she painted. Baya's work emphasizes different shades of joyfulness. It underlines a childhood fantasy and provides a blissful feeling.





« Baya is in very good hands. Her exhibition was a success and a well deserved success. I greatly admire the kind of miracle that each of her works testifies. In this black and frightened Paris, it is a joy to the eyes and the heart. I admired the repulsive feeling her posture reflected in the crowd at the opening: it was the princess in the midst of barbarians. Thank you anyway for allowing me to meet her. For the rest, have no fear. Yours faithfully. »

Albert Camus

Letter from Albert Camus to Jean Sénac, 1947, with whom BAYA collaborated to translate all «boukalet» (small Algerian poems) which she illustrated and published in the journal «SUN» of April 1950

Femme et papillons - 1986  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
100 x 49.8 cm







Femme à la robe rose - 1945  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
59 x 47 cm

# Baya

Baya Mahieddine whose real name is Fatma Haddad was born on 12th December 1931 in Bordj el-Kiffan, Algeria, in a poor family of two children. She tragically lost her parents at the age of eight and was raised by her grand-mother who lived in a farm, owned by a French woman, Simone. Entirely self-taught, Baya showed passion and skills for drawing from an early age. In 1942, she was adopted by Simone's sister, Marguerite Caminat who brought her to Algiers. Marguerite's husband, Frank McEwen who was a British Painter encouraged Baya to pursue her natural talents. At the age of thirteen she draws, paints and sculpts. Such talent could not be unnoticed any longer.

Indeed, she attracted the attention of Aimé Maeght, a French art dealer, during a visit in Algiers. She was fascinated by her ability to use forms and colors in the same way Matisse did and decided to bring her to Paris. Convinced by Baya's talent, Aimé and her husband organized an exhibition of her works at the prestigious Galerie Maeght in Paris, in November 1947. André Breton, French poet, who is known best as the founder of Surrealism, wrote the preface of the catalogue where he referred to her as a "queen". She was only sixteen.





Algeria - Djamaâ Djdid Mosque - postcard

The exhibition and Breton's enthusiasm gave Baya international recognition by surrealists. Confident of this experience, she moved to Vallauris in France where she made ceramics at the pottery studio Madoura and met Pablo Picasso. Their complicity and admiration for each other's work allowed Baya to penetrate the fantastic world of Picasso, to discover his studio and wrap her mind around his works. She managed to attract his curiosity. He was often visiting her studio to contemplate her works. He, who spent his life trying to draw like a child was fascinated by Baya's skill. Her relationship with Picasso is said to have inspired Picasso's "Women of Algiers" series. There was no doubt that the start of her career looked quite favorable and gave the feeling that she was born under an auspicious star.

Back in Algeria in 1953 she got married in Blida and stopped painting to devote herself to her family. From 1954 to 1967 she ceased all artistic activity. This could be interpreted as a way to demonstrate solidarity to the situation of her country. Algeria was then a French colony. Baya was willing to live the same hurdles that her country was living. However, in 1963, after Algeria took over its independence, Baya was celebrated by an important exhibition at the Musée national des Beaux-Arts in Algiers. Ten years later she was back at the center of attention. But it seemed like there was nothing to do about it, Baya won't be painting again. It felt like the soul of the artist within her has left.

The pressure of the Algerian society in the 60's forced Baya to see herself as a mother and a wife. There was no room for the painter. It is only when her husband died that she came back to painting. The death of her husband seemed to have galvanized her. It almost felt like she deliberately retreated into silence to give birth to an intense creativity. In the early 80's, the Musée Cantini in Marseille organized a retrospective of her work, followed by Musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris and Musée des Arts Bruts in Lausanne. Undoubtedly, her return to the art scene was punctuated with international recognition and she started to produce an impressive amount of gouaches, almost like revenge to those long years of silence.



Cover of the exhibition catalogue *Derrière le Miroir*; Gallery Maeght, Paris, November 1947



Poster of the exhibition *L'orient des provençaux* BAYA at the Musée Cantini in Marseille, 1982-1983



In 2008, the Algerian post produced two stamps representing a portrait and a painting of BAYA

Baya's paintings are characterized by their captivating combination of figurative depiction and mesmerizing childlike quality whose spatial composition transgresses all rules of order. Through her paintings she was almost creating a new enigmatic language in its own right where dancing women, flowers, exotic birds and musical instruments are the alphabet. Her work allows us to contemplate the possibility of looking at the world through children's eyes; leaving the rough world we are living in behind us.

Baya could be referred to as the Frida Kahlo of the Arab world. She rejected classifying her art as surrealist or as naïve art or imposing any Western definitions and terminology on it. Her work is rich in symbols and ornamentation ranging from mystical to pagan to Islamic in origin, a reflection of her Arab-Berber identity. She managed to grasp the culture and the aura of her country in her art through the beauty of a child's eyes. She was extremely discreet and cautious. In a quest to fulfill her passion; she chose to show us a vision of a 'happy Algeria'. Among her early admirers were Pablo Picasso, Paul Brach and Henri Matisse, as well as André Breton.

Baya's work has been part of numerous exhibitions worldwide. More than sixty years after she left us, she is still celebrated around the world, the Musée Magnelli in Vallauris held the exhibition "BAYA" in 2013 including artists such as Georges Braque, Joan Miró, Alexander Calder and Alberto Giacometti. Among other prestigious exhibitions, her paintings were exhibited in 'Paintings, Sculptures and Projects Garden' at the Mathaf - Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha in 2013.

Above all, this is the story of a woman who always looked for her mother in her paintings. There is no wonder that Baya's mother loss has made her art spontaneous and powerful. Baya had an exceptional fate. Her life was punctuated by all sorts of emotions, surprising encounters and successive breakthroughs which shaped her to become such a remarkable artist.





Femme aux paons - 1986  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
65 x 50 cm





Femme avec vase fleuri et oiseaux - 1945  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
48 x 59 cm



Femme chevauchant une girafe - 1945  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
59 x 47cm





Deux femmes et un paon - 1944  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
43 x 55 cm





Joueuse de mandore - 1986  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
63 x 48 cm







Femme à la robe verte - 1945  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
62.5 x 48 cm





Le Paon - 1946  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
59 x 47 cm



Femme aux deux paons - 1997  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
100 x 75 cm







Untitled - 1986  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
59 x 47 cm





**Baya**  
(1931-1998)

## EXHIBITIONS

- 1947 *BAYA*, Galerie Maeght, Paris
- 1964 French Cultural Center, Algiers (also in 1967, 1969, 1976, 1979, 1982 and 1984)
- 1966 Galerie Pilote, Algiers
- 1967 Galerie de l'Union nationale des Arts plastiques (also in 1970)
- 1971 2<sup>nd</sup> prize of the National Union of Visual Arts (UNAP)
- 1977 Galerie Racim, Algiers  
Maison de la Culture (Art Center), Tizi-Ouzou
- 1978 French Cultural Center, Annaba
- 1982 Musée Cantini, Marseille
- 1984 Algerian Cultural Center, Paris
- 1985 Galerie de l'Aurassi, Algiers  
French Cultural Center, Oran
- 1986 2<sup>nd</sup> Biennale of La Havana, Cuba
- 1987/88 *Baya, Issiakhem, Khadda*, Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, Quai Branly, Paris.  
This exhibition later travelled to Centre de la Vieille Charité, Marseille
- 1988 Palais des Congrès, Perpignan
- 1990 *Baya, Chaïba, Fahrelnissa*, Arab World Institution (IMA), Paris  
Al Zahra, Kuwait
- 1991 Galerie Maître Albert, Paris
- 1993 Galerie M, Algiers
- 1994 Cultural French Center, Rabat, Marrakech, Meknes and Tetouan
- 1996 Espace Molière, Agde
- 1998 Galerie Maeght, Paris
- 1999 Les Parasols, Rungis  
*Hommage à Baya (A Tribute to Baya)*, Galerie Asselah, Algiers

## PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Paris, Arab World Institute (IMA)  
Algiers, Musée national des beaux-arts d'Alger  
Switzerland, Lausanne, The Collection de l'art brut  
Bamako, Musée national du Mali  
Algerian Embassy in Washington

## PUBLICATIONS

André Breton and Emile Dermenghem, *Baya, Derrière le Miroir*, Galerie Maeght, Paris, 1947.  
Gaston Defferre and Jean de Maisonseul, *Baya*, Musée Cantini, Marseille, 1982.  
Henri Marchal, Kateb Yacine, Jean Pélégri, Jean de Maisonseul, Benamar Mediene and Michel-Georges Bernard, Algérie, *Expressions multiples (Baya, M'hamed Issiakhem, Mohammed Khadda)*, Cahiers de l'ADEIAO no 5, Paris, 1987.  
André Breton, Assia Djebar, Mouny Berrah and Jean Maisonseul, *Baya*, Éditions Bouchène, Algiers, 1988.  
Dalila Morsly, André Breton, Jean de Maisonseul, Ali Silem, Hassen Bouabdellah, Jean Pélégri, Djilali Kadid and Lucette Albarret, *Baya parmi nous*, in *Algérie Littérature/Action* no 15-16, Marsa éditions, Paris, 1997.  
Frank Maubert and Jean Peyrissac, *Baya*, Maeght éditeur, Paris, 1998.



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