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PRESS RELEASE

MOHAMED MELEHI

Arabian Moucharabieh
Cromwell Place, London
5 - 11 October, 2020

Lawrie Shabibi is proud to be taking part in the inaugural programme of exhibitions taking place at Cromwell Place London with *Arabian Moucharabieh*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Moroccan artist Mohamed Melehi (b.1936).

Melehi is regarded as a major figure for postcolonial Moroccan art and of modernism in the Global South. Professor of painting, sculpture and photography at the Casablanca School of Fine Arts from 1964 to 1969, Melehi contributed to the cultural scene of Post-Independence Morocco on a grand scale: from public murals, to teaching, to publishing, to architecture. Melehi's work forms a dialogue between Moroccan-Berber traditional and popular craft and the Hard Edge painters of the 1960s. He is known for his jubilant palette, buoyant patterns and his multiple variations on the colourful, undulating lines of the wave that have become central to Melehi's work.

For *Arabian Moucharabieh*, Melehi presents eight new paintings from his *Moucharabieh* series. This series is reminiscent of his bold graphic compositions from the early 1970s where he produced the now-familiar *wave* motif in block colours. The motif of the *wave* is, for Melehi, all about movement and change, their dynamic compositions continuously evolving. At times we see in them the curves of a human figure or outlines made by water at others magnetic signs or electronic signals, and when vertical they become a flame. In the *Moucharabieh* series, Melehi strips away the *waves* to their bare essentials - they become all-over diagonal compositions, giving emphasis to the curved line, hyper-graphism and a clear chromatic palette.

Arabian Moucharabieh is the artist's first gallery exhibition in London and comes hot on the heels of his critically-acclaimed show *New Waves: Mohamed Melehi and the Casablanca Art School* at London's Mosaic Rooms in 2019. Since then the exhibition has had further iterations in Marrakesh, at the Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL) and Dubai, at Alserkal Avenue Foundation, where it is currently on-view. He is presently part of *Op Art In Focus*, on view at Tate Liverpool, and recently featured in *Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950s-1980s* at the Grey Art Gallery, New York.

Cromwell Place is the first-of-its-kind hub for the arts in the heart of South Kensington, offering a distinctive exhibition and working space for art professionals with a row of newly renovated listed buildings at 1-5 Cromwell Place, South Kensington. Its launch has been much anticipated and comes after original date was postponed due to COVID-19. We are delighted to be part of its inauguration. The VIP previews take place from Monday 5 October - Friday 9 October 2020 and the exhibition continues until 25 October. In order to allow you to experience the exhibitions in a safe environment and within the government's safety guidelines, the exhibition will have registered time slots for visitors. Please register for your slot here.

ARTIST BIO

Mohamed Melehi (b. 1936, Morocco) graduated from the École des Beaux-Arts, Tétouan, Morocco, in 1955. He continued his studies abroad, learning fine art in Seville and Madrid, sculpture in Rome, and engraving in Paris. In the early 1960s he travelled to the United States, where he studied at Columbia University (with a scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation) for two years before returning to Morocco in 1964. It was during this time that Melehi began

to explore his cultural heritage as a primary source of inspiration and started using a bolder, more brilliant colour palette.

Melehi was Professor of Painting, Sculpture and Photography at the Casablanca School of Fine Arts from 1964 to 1969. In 1969, he organized the first open-air group exhibition, held in Marrakesh medina's Jemaa el-Fna Square. Eliciting much acclaim from the public and art critics, this exhibition radicalized the country's contemporary art scene. In 1978 Melehi and Mohamed Benaissa created the Al Mouhit Cultural Association, a non-political organization with purely cultural objectives. The result of this venture is the Asilah Cultural Moussem, an annual festival held every summer. A highlight of the festival is the mural painting event, first held in April 1978, a project which has revitalized the formerly dilapidated appearance of the artist's birthplace. Asilah is now celebrated for its vividly coloured murals, many of which have been created by Melehi.

Melehi is the President of the Moroccan Association of Plastic Arts. He is former Director of Arts for the Ministry of Culture (1985 – 1992), and ex cultural consultant to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Co-operations (1999 to 2002) of Morocco.

He has held numerous solo exhibitions including a retrospective at the Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL), Marrakech (2019), the Mosaic Rooms London (2019), Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (1995), and the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (1984). He has participated in group shows in Casablanca, Tangiers, Rabat, Marrakech, Baghdad, Algiers, Dubai, London, Paris, Rome, Zurich, New York, Chicago and Montreal.

His work is held in international museum collections such as: Tate, London; British Museum, London; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; MoMA, New York; and, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.

Melehi currently lives and works in between Marrakesh and Tangiers.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Lawrie Shabibi was founded in 2010 and opened its doors in early 2011 in Alserkal Avenue, located within the light industrial warehouse district of Al Quoz in Dubai. Following the relocation of several renowned galleries, this quickly became the hub of contemporary art in the region. We support the long-term development of the careers of young international contemporary artists, with a focus on those from the Middle East and North Africa, and more recently diasporic artists within the UK. We have also organized art historical exhibitions, working with an older generation of artists from the Middle East and North Africa region. By holding a regular programme of exhibitions, screenings and talks, publishing catalogues and participating in international art fairs, in the space of nine years we have been a forerunner in the development of the contemporary art scene in Dubai.

For more information on Lawrie Shabibi please visit: <http://www.lawrieshabibi.com>

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