

FARID AOUAD

1923-1982

The urban nomad

Farid Aouad was born in Maidan, a village in the South of Lebanon, where his father was both mayor and grocer. The Aouad family moved to Beirut when Farid was ten. During his years at the La Sagesse secondary school in Gemmayzeh, he was already less interested in his studies than he was in painting. Aouad dedicated himself fully to art at the age of twenty: in 1943, he enrolled at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts and received his diploma four years later. For many years, money was scarce – Aouad was forced to draw on paper given out for free by the Academy. However, his talent did not go unnoticed, and he received a grant to study in Paris. He entered the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in 1948, and was awakened to the artistic diversity of Paris in the studios of the Fauvist painter Othon Friesz and the Post-Cubist André Lhote. Three years later, Aouad returned to Beirut, but the powerful magnetism of Paris drew him back for good in 1959.

It is difficult to detect the mark of Aouad's Parisian mentors on his paintings, and equally hard to see in them that of contemporary abstraction; in fact, he mainly claimed the influence of the Intimist painter Pierre Bonnard. Aouad did however adopt certain Modernist ideas: the importance of self-expression, of abandoning Realism to deconstruct reality, to show and to interpret the toughest and most difficult aspects of everyday life.

In Beirut as in Paris, Aouad was largely preoccupied with depicting the urban landscape. He painted the center of Beirut and its coast, but mainly dedicated himself to immortalizing the French capital – its legendary cafés, bars, and bistros as well as the mythical Metro. In Brittany, he would paint the work of fishermen.

Working almost exclusively with charcoal, Aouad drew neither to merely document his everyday life nor to record the beauty of locales, but to describe the emotions and sensations in his surroundings and the characters that peopled them. He captured the instant, yet powerfully evoked the eternal anguish of waiting, the fear of the unknown and alienation in contemporary society. Beirutis and Parisians – alone, in couples or groups – are united in their wait for the Metro, at a pedestrian crossing, around a dining table. Together they remain solitary, barely establishing contact with one another. Aouad seems to suggest that modern life erases one's personality; his characters often turn their backs to the viewers and might be devoid of recognizable facial traits and expressions. Simply sketched, the faces are simplified

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to oval shapes with two dark spots, more like eye sockets than eyes. They are anonymous silhouettes drawn with nervous lines, or ghosts haunting the city.

Aouad demonstrates how one's surroundings can paradoxically be familiar and strange all at once, full of eerie mysteries. In his scenes of the Paris Metro, tunnels and trains, he reveals an underground world hidden by external facades – a world that could engulf us. Yet, the depths of the Metro were also a refuge: as Aouad lived in extreme poverty, he often took refuge underground to find warmth. An artist who lived only for his art and contented himself with very little, Aouad produced works that became more somber with time, until an illness overtook him in 1982.



Opera
c. 1965
Oil on canvas
120 x 150cm (47.2 x 59.1 in.)
Saleh and Hala Barakat Collection



EXHIBITIONS AND PRIZES

Farid Aouad exhibited in Lebanon, Germany, and Paris at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles and at the Galerie Raymonde Cazeneuve, as well as Rome's La Bafaccia gallery. In 1982, the Sursock Museum included many of his works in an exhibition paying homage to artists who had died since 1975.

At the Café
c. 1980

Oil on canvas
80 x 116 cm (31.5 x 45.7 in.)
Samir and Odile Andraos Collection