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Abdallah Benanteur (Algeria), To Monet, Giverny, 1983



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An early pioneer of Algerian modernism, Abdallah Benanteur wholeheartedly defended abstraction against the claims of figurative art. Titling this work in homage to the French Impressionist painter Claude Monet and his garden at Giverny, he combines romantic Impressionism with a variety of lively gestural techniques. The painting's characteristic Algerian-blue background was reputedly inspired by the artist's love for his native country.

Benanteur spent his childhood in the port city of Mostaganem, painting and learning about

music, poetry, and mysticism from his uncle and his father. After graduating from the École des Beaux-Arts in Oran in 1948, he moved to Paris in 1953 to begin his career as a painter and stayed on to live in France. Also a noted printmaker, he produced more than 1,500 artists' books, often collaborating with Algerian poets and Sufi mystics.

Following the establishment of the new Algerian state in 1962, Benanteur opposed the government-led approach of the National Union of Plastic Art (UNAP). While disentangling art from any purpose in the revolution, he believed that history would find in what seems "gratuitous" art a testimony to the nation's real values. Referring to the postwar period as a second Arab Renaissance (Al-Nahda), he argued that it is not through art that the artist should express his concern about the public life of the nation. Rather than represent the world, the artist must live in it and engage with it in all its forms. In the 1970s, Benanteur was appointed professor at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts and the École des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. In 2003 a retrospective of his work was held at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris.