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Saloua Raouda Choucair

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{Saloua Raouda Choucair self portrait}

Saloua Raouda Choucair (1916-)

A Lebanese painter and sculptor born in Beirut, Lebanon, Saloua was the first abstract artist in Lebanon though she sold nothing here until 1962.

Salouwa Raouda Choucair had a passion for drawing portraits since her early childhood days. She always was preoccupied in class, drawing caricature versions of her friends' faces on the classrooms chalkboard for all the teachers to see, and she was often asked to draw posters for her school's events and plays.

She started painting in the studios of Lebanese painters Moustafa Farroukh (1935) and Omar Onsi (1942). But it wasn't until 1943, during an extended stay in Cairo, when she first discovered her passion for Islamic art and architecture. Her exhibition, in 1947 at the Arab Cultural Gallery in Beirut, is considered to have been the Arab world's first abstract painting exhibition.

In 1948 Saloua Raouda Choucair left Lebanon and went to Paris, where she studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts and attended Fernand Léger's studio. In 1950, she was one of the first Arab artists to participate in the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in Paris and had in 1951 a solo exhibition at Colette Allendy's gallery, which was better received in Paris than in Beirut.

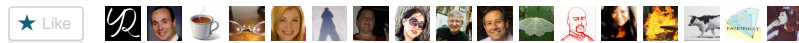
In 1959, Choucair began to concentrate on sculpture, which became her main preoccupation in 1962. In 1963, she was awarded the National Council of Tourism Prize for the execution of a stone sculpture for a public site in Beirut.

In 1974, the Lebanese Artists Association sponsored an honorary retrospective exhibition of her work at the National Council of Tourism in Beirut. And in 1985, Salwa won an appreciation prize from the General Union of Arab Painters, whereas in 1988, she was awarded a medal by the Lebanese government.

A retrospective exhibition of Saloua Raouda Choucair's work was organised by Saleh Barakat at the Beirut Exhibition Center in 2011.

Choucair's work has been considered as one of the best examples of the spirit of abstraction that is characteristic of Arabic visual art, completely disconnected from the observation of nature, and inspired by Arabic geometric art.

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