



*famous drawing of Oum Khalthoum by Avedissian*

ARTS & CULTURE  
DIASPORA EGY

# Egyptian Chant

NOVEMBER 1, 2018

by **The Armenian**

**CAIRO** — On October 24, Egypt lost one of its best known and talented contemporary artists of Armenian origin, Chant Avedissian. He had been battling lung cancer for three years.

Avedissian was born in 1951 in Cairo, the son of Armenian refugees who had fled the Armenian Genocide. After studying fine art at the School of Art and Design in Montreal and applied arts at the National Higher School of Decorative Arts in Paris during the 1970s, Avedissian returned to Egypt.

He fused the techniques, concepts and cosmopolitan experiences acquired abroad with the heritage of his Armenian-Egyptian background to produce striking

commentaries on the world around him. His artistry ranges from photography to costume and textile design to the painted stencils seen here.

His relationship with Hassan Fathy, a well-known Egyptian architect who advocated the use of local materials and craftsmanship, challenged Avedissian to reconsider local traditions of artistry and to appreciate the properties of common materials.



*Icons of the Nile 1, 1992-1993*

Exhibited widely, Avedissian's artwork is held by the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution; the British Museum, London; the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam; the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh; and the National Gallery of Jordan.

He was a student of Nora Azadian, the former chair of the Detroit Tekeyan Chapter.

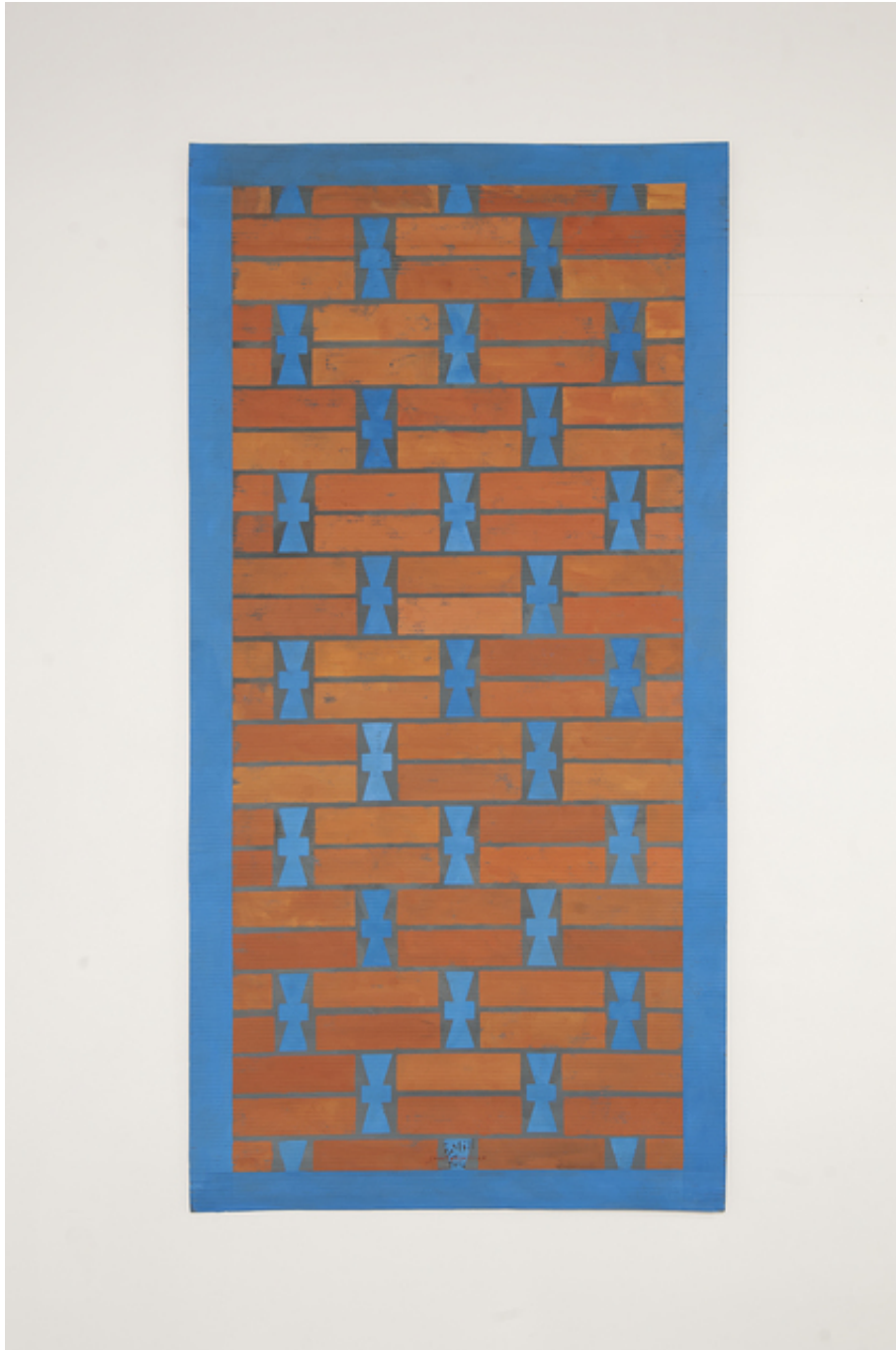
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Avedissian's works engage the viewer with a body of work that integrates images of iconic figures in Egyptian history, traditional Pharaonic iconography and art of the 1950s and 1960s. Avedissian's interests in folk art, Sufi poetry, Zen principles and aestheticism are evident in his creations, which also strike a balance with Western work processes.





*An Egyptian-themed fabric design by Avedissian*

Avedissian's art celebrates popular culture and politics in Egypt using images printed over stenciled backgrounds that are hand-painted and colored using local pigments. His work features stars from the heyday of Egyptian music and cinema — notably Umm Kalthoum, Farid Al Atrash, Abdel Halim Hafez, Faten Hamama and Asmahan. As well, political figures from between the early days of King Farouk's rule and President Gamal Abd El Nasser's death are portrayed. The influence of these cultural and political icons still resonates in Egypt today.

Avedissian also used Islamic geometric patterns, Ottoman design, hieroglyphics from magazines, advertisements and stock photos to create his bold works of art. His pieces have been exhibited around the world.

It was especially important for Avedissian to use Egyptian material, including locally made or recycled paper.

He celebrated all aspects of Egyptian life, from the arts to political and social leaders and even thieves. According to one catalog, he was intent on denouncing decadence and stressing the strength of the culture.

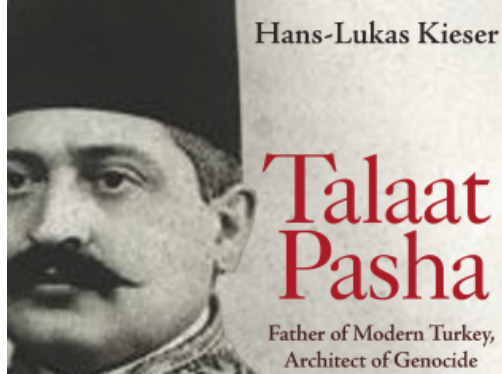
His art was also informed by his being regarded as a khawaga or foreigner in the country of his birth.

He also became fascinated with textiles based on authentic Egyptian designs as well.

He had described his art in one interview as the following: “. . . with age, I came to the point, where anything that is not traditional Japanese, or close to its spirit, is pure barbarism. The simplicity and minimalism of the ‘way’ suits my sense of beauty perfectly, . . . through this I came to appreciate more the Arab values of desert life and the nonpermanent manners of the tent dwellers, whose custom and manners in furniture (or non-furniture) are so close to the Japanese.”

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