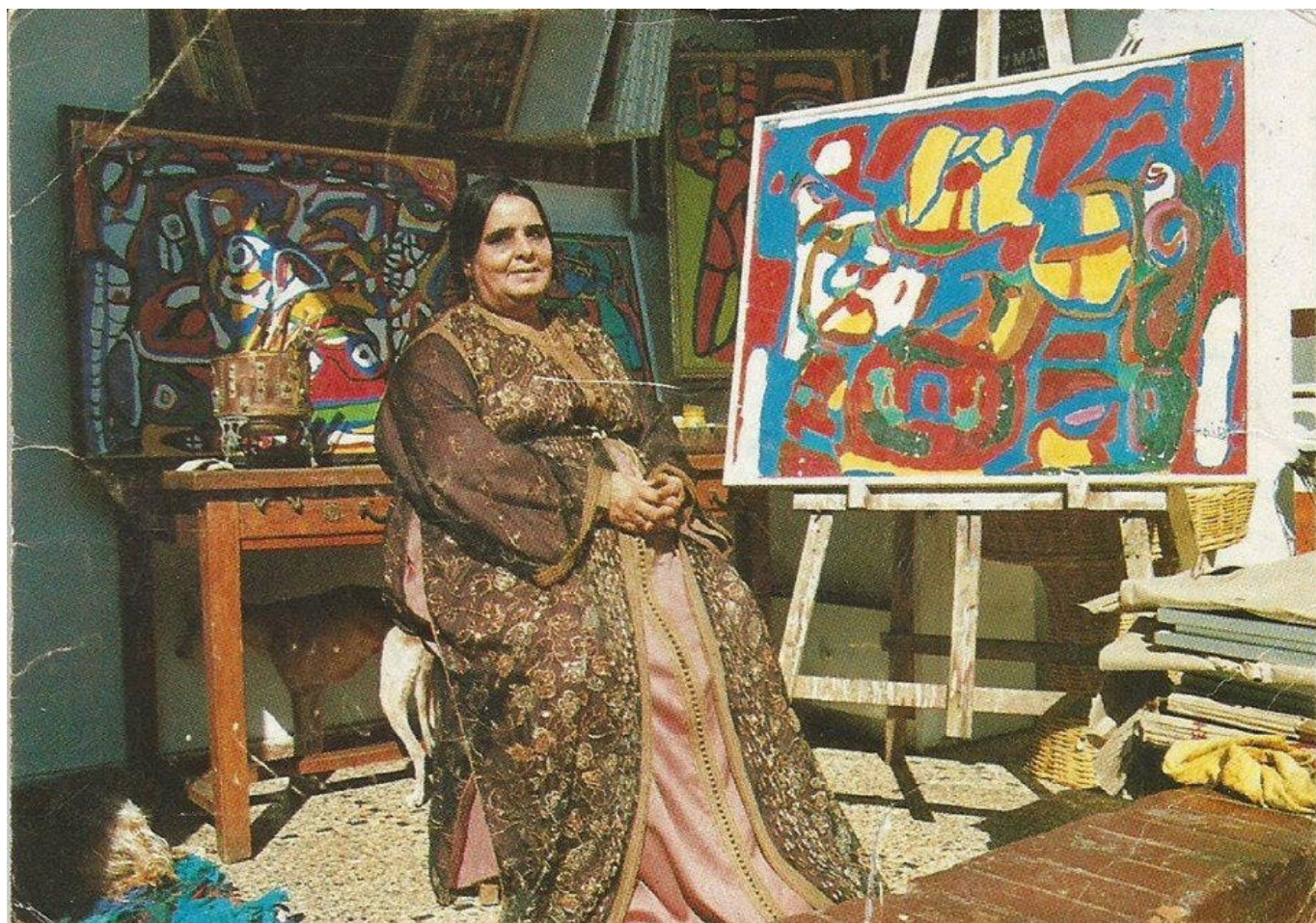


Chaibia Talal, Morocco's Most Famed 20th Century Painter

[Experiences](#) May 30, 2020 Kristin Gianaris

Married and widowed with a child by the age of 15, Chaibia Talal is the only Moroccan painter listed in the stock market.



Moroccan painter Chaibia Talal was a leading artist of her time. Photo: Aware Archives

Chaibia's door was open and candles lit up the entrance, lining the way to the garden under the night sky. Dressed in white, strange men entered her room and offered her paintbrushes and a canvas, explaining that their offerings were the tools that would color her future.

Chaibia Talal was in her 30s when she awoke from the dream of strangers greeting her with art materials and inspiring her to paint. It was this dream that would change her life and lead her toward becoming an internationally renowned painter.

The [artist](#), whose colorful and abstract works have been likened to those of [Pablo Picasso](#) and the CoBrA artists of Northern Europe, is considered one of the greatest Moroccan painters of the 20th century. Chaibia's unique style depicting women through vibrant displays of color and flowing lines eventually established her as one of Morocco's most well-known and respected artists.

As her dreamy entrance into the art world suggests, Chaibia's career as an artist was extraordinary and materialized despite the countless odds stacked against her.

Chaibia's life before she became an artist

Born in the small village of Choutka, near El Jadida, Morocco in 1929, Chaibia spent her early childhood living in a tent with her family. The local river, trees, and vast fields of daisies and poppies ignited Chaibia's imagination, inspiring her to forgo her chores for afternoons spent playing in the sand and creating flower wreaths. Villagers nicknamed her "mahbula," the holy fool, for her playful and imaginative nature, for which she was often reprimanded.

At the age of 13, Chaibia's parents sent her to Casablanca and she [forcibly married](#) a 70-year-old man. Within one year, she gave birth to their child and by the age of 15, she was widowed after her husband died in an accident.



Chaibia Talal, Mon Village, Chtouka, 1990.

Chaibia spun wool and took work as a housekeeper in French households to support herself and her son, Hossein. She was determined that Hossein would receive an education and encouraged him to put down his crayons and focus on developing academic literacy.

Chaibia never went to school and remained illiterate throughout her life.

There were two significant events that led her to her career as an artist. The first was when Chaibia met with a holy person who predicted that she would be a grace upon her village and that she possessed a hidden talent. The second was her 1963 dream of the strangers offering her painting supplies.

She considered her dream symbolic and a couple of days later purchased paints and began experimenting, using her fingers to swirl colors onto pieces of paper and wood.

From couscous to exhibitions, Chaibia's entrance in the art world was immediate and lasting

Despite Chaibia's early efforts to discourage Hossein's playful colorings, her son became an artist. In 1965 Hossein invited Moroccan painter Ahmed Cherkaoui and the director of the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, Pierre Gaudibert to his mother's home for couscous. Following their meal, Chaibia spontaneously showed off her nascent paintings alongside her son's.

Pierre Gaudibert was particularly interested in Chaibia's art and went on to support her creations and encourage her growth as an artist.

By 1966, Chaibia's works were exhibited at the Goethe-Institut in Casablanca, the Solstice Gallery in Paris, and the Museum of Modern Art in Paris. These early exhibitions were just the start of the countless displays of her work to come.

At the time, Morocco's male-dominated field of artists rejected her work and considered it a contribution to the underdeveloped image of Morocco. Meanwhile, Western art critics admired the artist's use of bright colors and imaginative portrayal of women.

Self-taught and known for breaking traditional boundaries, critics have categorized Chaibia's as part of an art brut or raw art movement. This categorization typically refers to art made outside of the conventional dictates of the art world. Also known as "outsider art," the style illustrates considerably unconventional ideas by those outside of mainstream art movements.



Chaibia Talal, La femme bleu, 1967



Chaïbia Talal, Personnage, 1966.

Throughout her career Chaibia explained that her paintings often told the story of her love for nature, recounting the sea, the fields where she grew up, rivers, flowers, and the smell of hay and fresh rain.

Chaibia's portraits seemed to be of integral concern to her artistic endeavors, reflecting her ways of perceiving people and expressing elements of culture through bold, figurative designs.

As the only Moroccan painter to be listed in the stock market, with art enthusiasts willing to invest upwards of MAD 1 million (\$100,000) for her paintings, Chaibia's unique style eventually positioned her as a leading artist of her time. She has since gained the long-overdue respect from her Moroccan counterparts and her work is widely exhibited and praised throughout the country.

In 2004 and at the age of 75, Chaibia died of a heart attack in Casablanca. Not only did she leave an abundance of joyful art, residing in both state and private collections worldwide, she also left a legacy of hope and perseverance.

Moroccan filmmaker Youssef Britel directed a documentary called "Chaibia, the Peasant of the Arts." He produced the 2015 film to send a message of hope to all women, encouraging women to overcome obstacles and challenges stacked against them.

The [Mohammed VI Museum of Contemporary Art](#) in Rabat recently displayed Chaibia's art alongside works of female artists Fatima Hassan El Farrouj and Radia Bent Lhoucine. The honorary exhibition was organized by the National Foundation of Museums and named the three artists pioneers of spontaneous artistic expression in Morocco.



Chaibia Talal, Blue Veiled Woman.

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