

Hassan Massoudy

Hassan MASSOUDY was born in Najef in southern Iraq in 1944.

As a boy living in a city where images were prohibited he began to practise the art of calligraphy. Then came the years of political turmoil and after many spells in prison, he left Iraq for France in 1969 and enrolled at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He exhibits regularly and has published many books. He has also created several shows with musicians and dancers (including *Métaphore* with Carolyn Carlson in 2005). He was instrumental in the revival of calligraphy in the twentieth century.

He looks for spontaneity in writing and the immediacy of expression. His dynamic work brings poetry alive and his strokes, always in phase with the meaning of the words, reflect power and rigour as well as suppleness and grace. He quotes Heraclitus: "The world is no more than a harmony of tensions."

I look for a vast, unlimited space for my calligraphies. The blank behind the word is an integral part of the form; calligraphy therefore evokes space by its absence.

The poem becomes a parallel song, an ethereal pictogram going back to the dawn of writing, in his homeland, in Sumer, five thousand years ago.

Christine Mache

Hassan MASSOUDY was born in 1944 in Najef, South of Iraq. He grew up amid the scalding heat of the desert, in a traditional Iraqi society characterised by strong religious beliefs, a high sense of solidarity and a keenness for festive gatherings. As a youngster, in this town where all images were prohibited, he fulfilled his passion for art by making drawings and calligraphies while investing all his energy to get paper and pigments. In 1961 he left for Baghdad and started working as an apprentice for various calligraphers. He visited exhibitions of modern art which fascinated him and from then on, started to dream of studying art. The unfolding political events and ensuing dictatorship prevented him to do so. He eventually left Iraq for France in 1969, freed from the oppressing regime but heartbroken. He got to the "Ecole des Beaux-Arts" of Paris where he first worked on figurative painting. But he did not stop calligraphy altogether; to pay for his studies, he was doing headlines in calligraphy for Arabic magazines. Over the years, calligraphy progressively got into his figurative painting and eventually took its place. In 1972, he created the show "Arabesque" with the actor Guy Jacquet joined a few years later by the musician HYPERLINK "<http://www.fawzymusic.com>" Fawzy Al Aiedy. Arabesque was a public performance combining music and poetry together with calligraphies being performed and projected on a large screen. They did many performances across France and Europe over a period of thirteen years. Over the years, it brought more spontaneity in his gesture and a more instantaneous way for him to express himself. This experience marked a definite turn in Hassan's work.

The drawing of his calligraphy became swifter and his gesture richer. Traditionally Arabic calligraphy is done with black ink. To better express himself, he broke from the tradition and introduced other colours particularly on his work on large size paper. While creating new pieces, he put together on his own, another show focusing on improvisations called "Calligraphie d'ombre et de lumiere" or "calligraphy of light and shade" (see details for public performance in exhibitions and events). In that new show, calligraphies are created in front of the very eyes of the spectator; black letters contrasting with light. Phrases, words and letters are projected on the screen. With calm and control, each letter takes shape flowing freely in the bright light. Then the movement accelerates, the word charged with energy eventually finds its perfect balance. The aesthetic, geometry and rhythms of the calligraphy are unveiled. The compositions are born. The dynamics of the gesture gives birth to poetry.

In 1995, he is involved in the design of the stage set for the ballet "Selim" with the dancer Kader Belarbi from the Opera de Paris and the singer Houria Aichi on a choreography from Kaleménis.

In 2005 he met the dancer and choreographer Carolyn Carlson, and the musician Kudsi Erguner. Together with three other dancers and three other musicians, they created the show "Metaphore", a harmony of music, dance and calligraphy.

Creations from Hassan Massoudy are a subtle mix of present and past, oriental and occidental art, tradition and modernity. He perpetuates

tradition while braking from it. Over the years he has purified and simplified the lines of his drawing. The words and phrases he draws come from poets and writers from all over the world or sometimes simply from popular wisdom. All his work is strongly inspired by a humanistic interest. The emotion that one may feel looking at [HYPERLINK "http://pagesperso-orange.fr/hassan.massoudy/galerie.htm"](http://pagesperso-orange.fr/hassan.massoudy/galerie.htm) his calligraphies comes from the movement of the lines, their lightness, their transparency, the balance between black, white, emptiness and fullness, the concrete and the abstract. From his training as a calligrapher in Iraq, Hassan Massoudy has kept the noble spirit of the craftsman who creates or invents his own tools and prepares his own inks.

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