



Hassan El Glaoui.  
*Cavalier*. 1977.  
Gouache on paper.  
Collection de l'artiste

# A MOROCCAN *master*

*The Moroccan artist's public and private life is remembered in a major exhibition at Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rabat revealing several little-known works, writes Rebecca Anne Proctor*

Hassan El Glaoui

A regal procession of men clad in white garments stands at the edge of a town and surrounds several men, also dressed in white, on horseback. One lone man dons the traditional red wool “fez” hat and we immediately know that the site of the scene is in Morocco. Entitled *Sortie du Roi* and painted in 2007 by the revered painter Hassan El Glaoui, the work sold for GBP137,500 above an estimate of GBP80,000-120,000 at Sotheby’s Modern & Contemporary African Art sale in London on 2 April 2019. The painting captures a typical scene by revered painter: the national celebration of the king’s ascension to the throne, an event that is still celebrated today and known as the Fête du Trône or Throne Day. “Painting horse, particularly Tbouriba, the practice of synchronized horse riders was central to my father’s work,” says his daughter Touria El Glaoui, the founder and director of 1-54: Contemporary African Art Fair. “Painting horses was one of his passions and he frequently depicted ancient Berber equestrians that continue to be alive in Morocco today. But there is much more to his work.” The same day as the auction, *Hassan El Glaoui: Le Sel de ma Terre (Hassan El Glaoui: The Salt of my Earth)* opened at the Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rabat.

The expressive works on display, painted in the artist’s signature manner of employing movement and emotion through abstract figuration and filled with warm and earthy colours referencing the landscape of Morocco, showcase the paintings of one of Morocco’s most revered modernists. Born in 1924 to the last Pasha of Marrakach, Thami El Glaoui, throughout his career Hassan brushed shoulders with some of the most prominent statesmen, including British Prime Minister Winston Churchill whom the artist credited as convincing his father to let him pursue his artistic career. “My grandfather was a very powerful man in Morocco,” says Touria El Glaoui. “Basically he was letting my father do something that had not often been done before in Morocco. Moreover, my grandfather didn’t have a lot of successful references of people who had made it as an artist.”

The exhibition in Rabat explores both the artist’s public and private life displaying large quantity of works from his time in Paris and also of his family in Morocco. After his



From above: *Portrait d'une femme dans un jardin*, 1950. Collection de l'artiste; *Sortie du Roi*, 1977. Gouache on paper. Collection de l'artiste

father’s death, his family’s wealth was confiscated and the artist found himself jailed. Upon release he moved to a suburb of Paris where he lived with his French wife in a small apartment. From the early 1950s El Glaoui then trained at the École des Beaux-Arts where he studied with professor Jean Souverbie as well as the artist Emilie Charmy, two influences that remained with him throughout his life. In 1965, after 15 years in France, he returned to Morocco.

In *Le Sel de ma Terre* depictions of a host of prominent political figures, including the King of Morocco, are displayed. Then there are the abstract portraits of his family, Berber men and women and country and city life in Morocco and of course, countless renderings of the ancient Berber equestrian tradition of simulated military assaults that take the form of parades and are still very much practiced in Morocco today. “Showing my father’s work at the museum shows how crucial his art was for modern Moroccan art,” adds Touria. “I also feel it is important for him to be in a museum that is starting to do more for the modern artists of the country. I was also very happy to show an intimate side of my father’s work as he is mostly known for his paintings of horses and this show features a variety of landscapes and portraits. We wanted to focus on a different aspect of his life and art through his sketches and drawings.”

The artist’s career as a portraitist comes to the fore in this exhibition. Here is the intimate, soft, deeply profound side to his life and painting—the other side to his proud men on horseback regally dressed. Exhibited are also countless scenes of life in Morocco during the 1940s and 1950s, many unveiled for the first time for *Le Sel de ma Terre*. There’s the charming essence of a soul that is still present through his art, a warm, colourful and deeply intuitive soul that captured Moroccan society over the better half of the 20th century. The exhibition also commemorates the painter who passed away on 21 June 2018. As Touria writes in her father’s memory: “[...]The man paints

and the child dreams, unless it is the other way round. Glowing peace still reigns today in my father’s studio together with a bewitching spell that invites me to bring the faint outlines of the imagination into existence.” ■

*Le Sel De Ma Terre* runs until 31 August at the Musée Mohammed VI d’Art Moderne et Contemporain in Rabat.