



Zentrum Paul Klee
Bern

Founded by
Maurice E. and Martha Müller
and the heirs of Paul Klee

Press kit
18 January 2024

FOKUS: Hamed Abdalla (1917–1985)
27.1.–26.5.2024



Hamed Abdalla (1917–1985) was a pioneer of modern Egyptian art. The Zentrum Paul Klee is showing a small presentation of his work in the FOKUS series. FOKUS is a space within the permanent exhibition *Kosmos Klee* dedicated to particular aspects of Paul Klee's work or contributions to the global reception of the artist.

Egyptian artist Hamed Abdalla (1917–1985) is for the first time exhibited in Switzerland. Abdalla was born into a modest peasant family residing in Upper Egypt and has not attend any art academies. The self-taught artist rose to international prominence early in his career. His place of origin, especially the villages and landscapes of the Nubian region, as well as the smoky cafes of Cairo were his motives in the beginning of his career. With around 50 works, the exhibition shows various key aspects of Abdalla's oeuvre.

War Memory

From the 1950s, Abdalla lived in Copenhagen and Paris. Nonetheless, he continued to refer to the hectic political situation of his homeland in his work. His art sought an expression that would give a new voice to the hopeless and the oppressed, far beyond Egypt. In his works, he comments on his examination of war and suppression by using universal symbols such as figures of mothers holding their children or fragments of bodies.

“Creative words” and lovers

As an artist of the Hurufiyya movement, which developed the artistic potential of the Arabic alphabet, he invented his own “creative words”: written words expressed in paint, merging the figurative and the abstract, the secular and the sacred as well as the poetic and the political. Furthermore, Abdalla experimented with different techniques and materials such as crumpled paper, cracked surfaces or silk paper.

Throughout his creative years, Abdalla produced numerous paintings depicting figures in the act of love or the word “desire” (*Hob*).

People of the caves

Towards the end of his life, Abdalla’s abiding fascination for prehistoric caves led him to a visual meditation on subterranean worlds. In the series *Gens de cavernes* (1975–1976) he manifests his wanderings in the caves of southern France and the rocks of Nubia during his youth and connects them with texts from the Quran.

Kosmos Klee

Abdalla engaged intensively with European modern art, in particular with Paul Klee and the ways in which the latter incorporated non-European imagery such as Mesoamerican formal elements or Egyptian hieroglyphs into his art. Abdalla took on a new perspective on Klee, identifying and pointing to the elements in which the Bauhaus artist had appropriated non-European motives. With his research in the field of visual expression and its history as well as with his art, Abdalla debunked orientalist canons and challenged Western Modernism.

The works of Hamed Abdalla are being shown in the context of the series FOKUS. The room is part of the dynamic permanent exhibition *Kosmos Klee. The Collection*, which offers visitors a chronological survey of Klee’s artistic career and presents some seventy works as well as biographical material and items from the archive that are regularly changed.

Opening

The opening of the exhibition will take place on
Friday, 26 January 2024, from 6 pm.
Admission to the exhibition is free on this evening.

Curators

Zamân Books & Curating: Morad Montazami, Madeleine de Colnet

With the support of

Kanton Bern, Burgergemeinde Bern, Bundesamt für Kultur BAK

Media preview

We cordially invite you to the media preview with Fabienne Eggelhöfer as well as the curating team Morad Montazami and Madeleine de Colnet on **Thursday, 25 January 2024 at 10 am at the Zentrum Paul Klee.**

Please register via press@zpk.org.

Contact

Martina Witschi, Communication & Media relations
press@zpk.org, +41 31 328 09 93

Individual visit of the exhibition



We are looking forward to your individual visit to the exhibition. Admission to all exhibitions at the Zentrum Paul Klee is free for media representatives with a valid press card. Please fill in the digital accreditation form which you can either access via zpk.org/press or by screening the QR-Code before your visit.

Accompanying programme

Guided Tours in English

Sunday, **28 January 2024**, 3 pm

Sunday, **7 April 2024**, 3 pm

Press images

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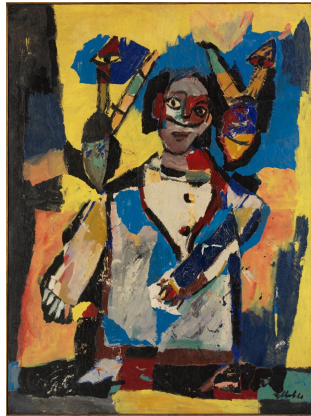
01

Hamed Abdalla
Les Amants de Shemm Ennessim, 1953
Gouache on silk paper on cardboard
39 x 30 cm
Artist estate
Photo: Emmanuel Littot
© Artist estate



02

Hamed Abdalla
Poem, 1970
Acrylic on canvas
101 x 73 cm
Artist estate
Photo: Emmanuel Littot
© Artist estate



03

Hamed Abdalla
Asfour, 1955
Mixed media on tissue paper and masonite
130 x 97 cm
Artist estate
Photo: Emmanuel Littot
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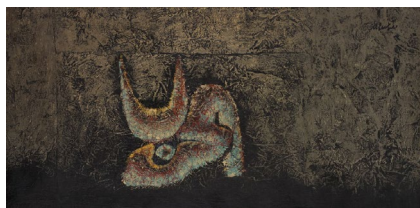
04

Hamed Abdalla
Gens des cavernes, 1975-1976
Acrylic on paper
39,8 x 29,7 cm
Artist estate
Photo: Faouzi Massrali
© Artist estate

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05

Hamed Abdalla

Al Harb, 1963

Mixed media on Japanese paper on Isorel

130 x 250 cm

Artist estate

Photo: Emmanuel Littot

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06

Hamed Abdalla in Copenhagen, 1959

© Artist estate



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