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# JELLAL BEN ABDALLAH

MINIATURES



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Imbued with poetry and tradition, Jellal Ben Abdallah's miniatures intricately capture the very essence of Tunisian culture. A colourful and rich world contained within paintings that, despite their condensed size, open the doors to an infinite realm.

In Persian and Turkish cultures, miniatures, which once visually depicted beliefs, worldviews and ways of life, served to illustrate books or to retrace pages of the past. This tradition immensely inspired Ben Abdallah in his creative process, and in his entry into this artistic discipline, which he perpetuated through his creations.

The art of miniature painting is a tradition passed down from a mentor to his apprentice, and Jellal Ben Abdallah was one of the acolytes of the initiator of miniatures in the Maghreb, Mohammed Al Racim, who, it should be noted, established the Algerian School of Miniature and has trained generations of artists in the Arab world.

Jellal Ben Abdallah's works are distinguished by their refinement and their meticulous attention to details. They depict quotidian scenes of Tunisian families in all their simplicity, and with an unparalleled authenticity, using a palette of vibrant colours and balanced compositions that integrate intricate decorative elements and geometric patterns. Ben Abdallah has also extensively highlighted the beauty of Tunisian women, drawing inspiration from the Byzantine era, as evidenced by one of his works that bears its name. Their jewellery, beauty, and costumes are illustrated with great sensitivity and poetry. Yet the artist did not confine himself to this alone; he ventured into various horizons and techniques, such as still life. The sea and its environment deeply fascinated the artist. As a result, his works illustrate the traditions of coastal cities, and even the shells from the depths of the oceans.

Ben Abdallah has approached many themes, always revolving around translation and details. The common thread among his artworks remains constantly ingrained in poetry and sensitivity.

His delicate miniatures have profoundly marked the world of art in Tunisia and the Arab world, ceaselessly inspiring the dawn of new artist generations. Through his work, he has demonstrated the importance of preserving and rejuvenating artistic traditions; his miniatures are concrete examples of how traditional art can be reinterpreted in a contemporary context, beckoning young artists to follow a path of expressing their own cultural heritage.

*Essia Hamdi*

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*Translated by Racha Khemiri*

# JELLAL BEN ABDALLAH

1921-2017 / Born in Tunis, Tunisia

Tunisian artist Jellal Ben Abdallah draws on his ancestral imagination to honour fragments from his Mediterranean and Tunisian surroundings. He proceeds with a technical and delicate minuteness in depicting animate and inanimate subjects altogether. A painter of "feminine ritual", women in traditional Tunisian attires, as well as motifs from domestic interiors largely occupy his frames, as he captures them with a substance of nobility and divinity. Intricate patterns, graceful and idyllic figures, and ethereal landscapes are constructed through the miniaturist's lens authentically and nostalgically.

After studying at the Lycée Carnot, he settled in Sidi Bou Saïd in 1939 where his painting journey started. Since then, he has never lived anywhere else or pursued any other profession.

His inaugural exhibition dates back to 1939, which became an annual tradition as he has held one every year (including during the war years, to quote him). Beyond the shores of Tunisia, Jellal Ben Abdallah has personally exhibited in Stockholm, Paris, Madrid and Cairo and in most major capitals.

In addition to painting, Jellal Ben Abdallah has worked on building decoration (Tunisian Pavilion, Cité Universitaire of Paris, Brussels Universal Exhibition 1958), mosaics, stained glass, murals and ceramics. Several television programs have been dedicated to him (RTT, A2 - RAI...). He has also designed several series of postage stamps.