

Chaouki Choukini: Poetry in Wood



It's a pleasure to find a gallery with the confidence to show 3D work, especially crafted work with the lyricism that Chaouki Choukini brings to his art. He works with wood, polishing the grain and moulding the variety of shapes that fold and unfold under his hand. Smooth planes give way to jagged ridges, and small, deft gouges are etched into soft wood like nicks

and cuts in skin.



Above: Lieu 2, 2014. Top: Dame de coeur, 2007

For Choukini,, sculpture offers a window back to what he refers to as the “landscape of childhood” – to the people, places, and memories of South Lebanon. The works in this show cover four decades, from 1972 to 2016, and so present an impressive cross-section through Choukini’s ever-evolving sculptural practice.

Some of the pieces look Cubist, others resemble giant Kufic characters folded in on themselves; there are abstracted, silent faces, cityscapes and mountains, tribal tattoos and impossible thin, elegant lines that belie the limitations of the material.

It is this tension – between corners and edges, form and function, and, most importantly, positive and negative space – that has come to define Choukini’s work. In a nod to Japanese minimalism he typically removes from the piece rather than adding to it. He lets in light, and that in turn becomes an integral part of the sculpture.

The process often begins with a sketch before Choukini starts to work with the wood, and he will always finish a piece to near completion before moving on to another. As a result the process can sometimes take years to realise.

Light and space are also evident in Choukini's delicate watercolours, counterpoints to the sculptures that blur the image through the haze of memory. They evoke shimmering translucent cities, revealing themselves to us through layers of cloud and swirling sandstorms.

Choukini was born in 1946 in Choukine, Lebanon, and was awarded the Prix for Young Sculpture in 1978 followed; he taught sculpture in the Lebanese University of Tripoli and the Jordan University of Yarmouk. His works are in several major collections including Mathaf, the Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha as well as several French institutions – among them the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Val de Marne, the Institut du Monde Arabe, and the Centre National Des Arts Plastique, France.

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