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Smooth operator: a new show highlights Alfred Basbous' unique command of line and form

ART / 21 FEB 2017 / BY NATALIE RIGG



Gold, 1982. Courtesy of the artist and Sophia Contemporary Gallery

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Visit any city in Lebanon and it's highly likely that you'll come across one of Alfred Basbous' magnificent sculptures. The late Lebanese artist is widely regarded as a vanguard of modernism in the Middle East and his abstract works are a great source of pride for the region. Now, as a considerable new survey of his work goes on display at Sophia Contemporary Gallery in London, visitors are able to witness his trailblazing output in an entirely new light.

Featuring 20 sculptures and ten drawings executed between 1970 and 2000, the show offers a rare window into Basbous' world, highlighting his unique command of line and form, and enduring affinity for the female body. 'His works oscillated between figuration and abstraction, but we selected pieces that are abstract to show the development of sculpture in Lebanon through the career of Basbous,' says Vassili Tsarenkov, co-founder and director of the space.

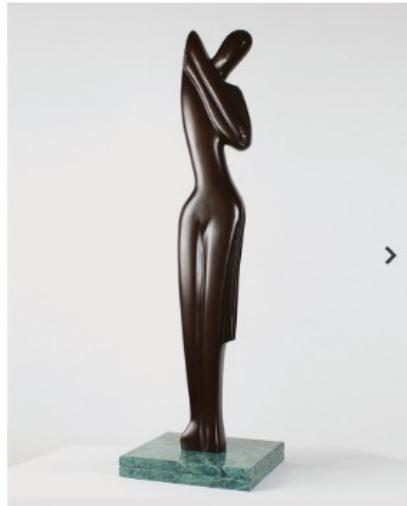
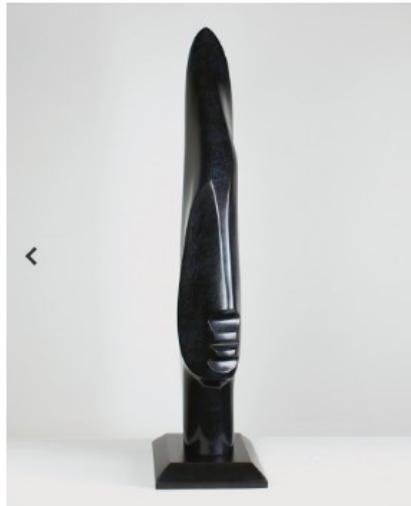


'Desire', by Alfred Basbous, 1987. Courtesy of the artist and Sophia Contemporary Gallery

Basbous famously strived to 'work with the material and not push against it', and the sublime, seemingly effortless expressions on display – fluidly carved from marble, bronze and testa (a local Lebanese stone) – articulate this pursuit with aplomb. 'Every piece, regardless of shape, size or medium are connected in one universe with profound harmony,' notes Alfred's son Fadi Basbous, who co-curated the exhibition and directs his father's estate. On closer inspection, the assorted works certainly do possess a collective synergy – from the pneumatic marble *Woman Nude* (2001) to the sleek bronze *Accolade* (1993).

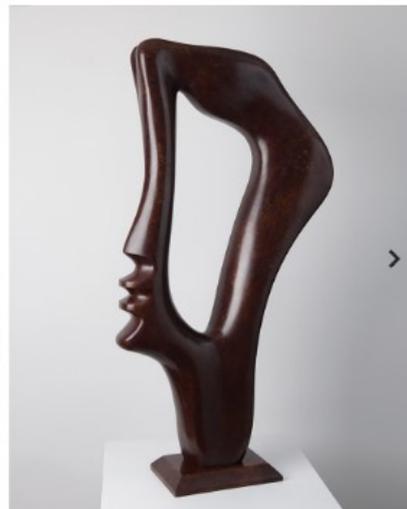
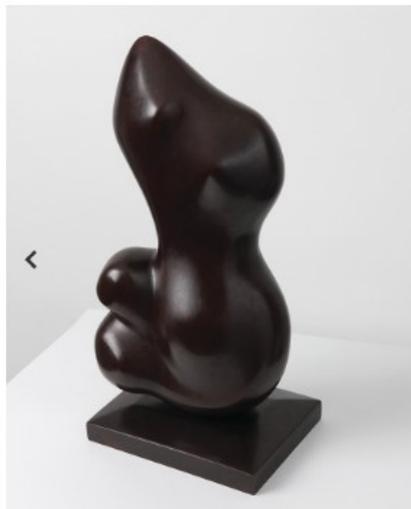
Basbous drew from a diverse bank of influences throughout his career. The sculptural echoes of Constantin Brâncuși, Henry Moore and Jean Arp – three artists whom he greatly admired – are clear to see. Yet there are also subtle nuances at play. 'He also merged antique Phoenician culture, Lebanese folk arts and Christian Maronite iconography,' notes Tsarenkov. 'And in turn, he created an idiosyncratic language of his very own.'

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Left, *Phoenician Head*, 2003. Right, *Accolade*, 1993

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Left, *Seated Woman*, 1997. Right, *Profile*, 2004

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Femme Alongee, 1985

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Syrène Maquette, 1980-85

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