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Marrakech -
Ancient city,
modern art

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SCOTLAND'S LARGEST CIRCULATION ART MAGAZINE

Marrakech expressions

The ancient 'pink city' has a lively modern art scene, writes **Ian Sclater**

It has been a century since Moroccan art – or at least art made in Morocco – was last celebrated on the international scene, when the 'Orientalist' period saw European artists depict traditional scenes in often romanticised ways. Even Winston Churchill immortalised Morocco in watercolour from his base at the opulent Mamounia Hotel in Marrakech.

Nearly a hundred years later Morocco, and Marrakech in particular, is beginning to make a new impression on the art world. Recently, the first Marrakech Art Fair took place (www.marrakechartfair.com) and Arts in Marrakech, the biennial organised by Vanessa Branson (sister of Richard), is coming round again in November 2011 (www.aibliennale.org).

Artmag hit the alleyways of Marrakech's medieval old town, or medina, and the broad streets of Gueliz, the French-built 'new town', to check out both the city's established galleries and a clutch of new ones.

Often described in the tourist literature as a 'literary cafe', conjuring up scenes of lively debate and poetry readings, **Dar Charifa** is in fact one of the most serene places we found in Marrakech, its soaring stone columns rising to the ceiling of a beautifully restored 15th century riad (courtyard house).



Dar Charifa



Katie Gabel, *Impression Marocaine* (Lawrence Arnott Gallery)

Contemporary Moroccan art covers the walls and soft white sofas are arranged around a central, petal-strewn water feature. You'll find it in the Mouassine district of the medina.

At the **David Bloch Gallery** in Gueliz, director David Bloch sees a new beginning for the contemporary art scene in Marrakech, as the young Moroccan market takes an increasing interest in western art. Artmag saw Sebastian Preschoux's brilliantly executed spirographs and 1960s-style pop art by the French artist Profecy. Prices ranged from 800–12,000€. www.davidblochgallery.com

Opened in 2006, **Galerie 127** is the first gallery in Morocco exclusively devoted to exhibiting contemporary photography. Alongside works by internationally acclaimed photographers are those by African, particularly Moroccan, artists. www.galerie127.blogspot.com

Named after the Egyptian sun god Ra, **Galerie Ré** is a work of art in itself, inspired by the temple of Hetshepsut in Thebes, right down to the central stairway leading to the



Soo, Mastone 2 (Galerie 127)

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PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

"inner sanctum" (where the god was). A ceiling curved like textile completes the design.

Gallery director Lucien Viola, who oversaw the gallery's construction, explains: "No art is created without sun or light. A gallery is light, sound and walls. The point to me was to see every single artwork when you come in." He continues: "I like colours and



Galerie R6

abstraction generally. There is no school. It's just a personal collection." www.galerie.ro

At Galerie Tindouf director Hadia Temli says: "We go for artists who are a little on the edge." These include Hassou El Glaoud, who holds the record price for a Moroccan artist, and our cover artist, Lalla Essaydi, the only Moroccan artist whose work has been purchased by the Louvre. Reflecting a bit of a renaissance of the Orientalist period, the gallery has an exquisite selection of antiques and contemporary art. www.gallerytindouf.com



Mist, Ebuitions (David Bloch Gallery)

Celebrating its first birthday in 2010, La Maison de la Photographie is the private



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MARRAKECH ART FAIR

Hichame Daudi, director of the Marrakech Art Fair, told Artmag: "The Marrakech art scene is beginning to change. People are starting to give credit to Moroccan artists. Buyers' views are starting to change from buying something which was completely decorative to understanding it as art. At the same time, tastes are changing from very figurative to every style"

"We have to take this to the next level. We

must mix Moroccan artists with international art to get them into the international market. That's the main purpose of the Fair, to see Moroccan artists in an international context. The market is recognising modern art more and more. There is a kind of dynamism happening." This year's Marrakech Art Fair was hosted by the sumptuous **Es Saadi Palace** hotel.

www.marrakechfair.com, www.essaadi.com



In the heart of the Marrakech medina, **Riad Linda** is a traditional Moroccan house (riad) with rooms arranged around an interior courtyard and a rooftop terrace. Restored and operated by an Edinburgh couple, it combines local craftsmanship and decorative features with modern comfort. Rates are from £60 per person per night, including breakfast. www.riadlinda.com



collection of director Patrick Manac'h and Hamid Mergani. The museum's rooftop terrace cafe offers some of the best views in the whole city of Marrakech and the Atlas Mountains. See **PHOTO-CALL**, p60.

www.maison-delaphotographie.com

From their bright, modern gallery, long-time Morocco (and before that London) gallerists Philip Arnott and John Lawrence count the King himself, a prolific collector, among their clients. The **Lawrence-Arnott Gallery** presents important international painters living and working in Morocco as well as representing some of Morocco's leading artists and new talents. The gallery has also published some important art books on Morocco.

Philip and John say there is a greater interest than ever in the arts among young Moroccan professionals. No longer content with viewing art in galleries, they now want it for their homes. Private and business collectors are also increasingly seeing the investment potential. www.arnott-lawrence.com

With its luminous interior behind a sleek black facade in a smart shopping arcade in the new town, the **Matisse Art Gallery** specialises in contemporary Arabic art. Cited as the first true art gallery in Marrakech, it might be considered the best contemporary gallery in town. We enjoyed Phillipe



Ministero del Gusto

Pasquat's remarkable *Vanité* and Laurence Kenkell's *Bonbon bleu*.

www.matisse-art-gallery.com

In the same arcade as Matisse **Galerie Majorelle** has a small selection of mainly traditional Moroccan scenes.

On the edge of the souks (covered markets) and entered through La Maison des Kaifanes, the wonderful and quite eccentric **Ministero del Gusto** (Italian: the Ministry of Taste) is part art gallery, design studio and shop. Think Gaudi meets Berber. The 'Ministry' is run by Italians Alessandra Lippini, a former Vogue editor, and furniture designer Fabrizio Bizzarri, who as interior designers have a client book packed with eye-popping makeovers of local dwellings for wealthy incomers. There is an eclectic, offbeat collection of furniture, art and crafts by artists and makers from around the world. www.ministerodelgusto.com

HOW TO GET THERE

Ryanair flies Tuesdays and Saturdays to Marrakech from Edinburgh. Rates from £29.99, incl. taxes and charges.

www.ryanair.com

Philip Pasquat, *Vanité*, (Matisse Gallery)

