Modern and Calligraphic Arab and Iranian Art London 23 October 2008
Session Two immediately following Session One

Auction
34–35 New Bond Street
London W1A 2AA

Exhibition
Sunday 19 October 12 noon–5 pm
Monday 20 October 9 am–4.30 pm
Tuesday 21 October 9 am–4.30 pm
Wednesday 22 October 9 am–4.30 pm

Other Auctions
Contemporary Art Evening 17 October, 7 pm
20th Century Design 18 October, 12 noon
Contemporary Day Sale 20 October, 10 am
20th Century Italian Art 20 October, 4 pm
Forthcoming Auctions

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Contemporary Art Evening
17 October 2008
London

20th Century Design
18 October 2008
London

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Following her sensational arrival in Paris in 1947 at the age of sixteen, Fatma Haddad—better known as Baya—became closely associated with the Art Brut movement of whom Jean Dubuffet was the foremost. It is said that in the summer of 1948, when Baya was creating sculptures in theMadura, France, Picasso, who frequented the workshops at the time even admired the talent of this very young artist who had never been formally taught. André Breton was also one to recognize her endowment and forever place her in the history of Algerian art. As a result in 1947 Breton dedicated his presentation to her at the exhibition at the Maeght Gallery in Paris claiming “Baya, whose mission is to put meaning back into these beautiful nostalgic words: Happy Africa, Baya, who holds and recreates the branch of gold.”

Baya’s paintings continually explore the theme of childhood, however her work was never a painful self-reflection of her own upbringing. Instead, her work revived a fantastic childhood richly nourished by the Arabian tales so familiar to her. Marrying a musician in 1953, music also played a major role in Baya’s life, with the artist subtly integrating musical instruments into her oeuvre, to the extent that the Belle were frequently transformed into musicians. In 1963 Baya returned to painting after a ten year departure; this second phase of Baya’s work proving to be the most significant, it also saw the emergence of black lines containing the blocks of vivid colours.

The Two Musicians, executed in 1966, is a fine example of the dichotomy presented in Baya’s work, influenced by the imaginary world she conjured up from her youth and referring to the traditional Arabian tales that interested her. These stories often comprised solely of females, femininity being a recurring theme in Baya’s work. Many are painted in profile, as the “bird women” portrayed with large, wistful eyes, wearing long purple and green dresses. The pieces, richly coloured in colour highlight the feminity with its depiction of birds, fish and butterflies.

Objects from every day life also feature: especially pottery, jugs, vases, basins and doilies, which further refer to female domestic life. These are precisely placed according to a false symmetry belying a seemingly empty space. Women Orange Dress Blue Hat 1947 and Women Striped Red Dress 1947 are both great examples of these motifs typical of Baya’s work with its saturated and shimmering colours such as emerald and Indian pink, complimented by tasteful arabesques of Arabian tradition.
Albert Memmi described Gorgi as a "névolois pro-dias" - apart from the few years he spent in Paris mixing with the likes of Picasso, Zadkine, Soupault and Leiris, Gorgi remained close to his roots in the "nourishing triangle" between Tune, Le Marsa and Sidi-Bou-Said. Consequently, Gorgi's work reverberates with his Tunisian background, both in its form and praxis. Gorgi's paintings and sculptures are often highly colourful and repeatedly feature motifs such as "checkers", the traditional Tunisian headgear, which act to symbolise his personal background. Gorgi was also very active in encouraging the arts within his community, designing the first Tunisian postage stamp in 1956 and establishing the Tunis School of painting which he presided over until 1985. In 2000 his efforts were repaid when the Tunisian Ministry of Culture decreed the year "Gorgi Year".

**Untitled, 2000** is the culmination of his work; the deformation and simplification of recurring forms such as the checkers, fish, conical and red heart – which is an allusion to his pictorial work of the same name The Red Heart, 1965.

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Arguably one of Lebanon’s most talented modern artists, Saliba Doushey began his career painting in the naturalistic style. After moving to New York in 1950 he became a proponent of the Colour Field movement led by Clifford Still, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman.

Doushey makes oblique yet expressive reference to nature by reducing recognisable imagery to fields and planes. In line with the ethos of the Colour Field movement, he removes superfluous details, crystallising the essence of a landscape to its bare essentials. The intellectual drive behind this was to achieve a painting without emotional energy whose impact is in its intensity allowing the observer to absorb the image as is without sentimentality or mental interference.

In Rothko’s words “We favour the simple expression of the complex thought. We are for the large shape because he has the impact of the unconventional. We wish to reassert the picture plane. We are for flat forms because they destroy illusion and reveal truth.” It is exactly this that Doushey achieves. There is something profoundly elemental about the two about which yellow rocks and lush valleys of the Lebanon’s mountain range are captured here on his clarified and stylized canvas. Remaining the baggage of his memory, Doushey represents his country of origin with an intensity that would be lost with emotional wading, and through this total reduction he packs a direct visual punch.

Utilising colour as a driving tool to achieve abstraction, the large expanses of powerful colour here are exactly in line with the Colour Field movement. Rothko emphasised the importance of colour when he said “the fact that one usually begins with drawing is already academic. We start with colour.” Rothko organised colour on his canvases as rectangles and triangles, Barnett Newman as lines or “zips”, and Doushey as resisting lines.

The present work is an outstanding example of Saliba Doushey’s work. It is entirely representative of his abstract work, and encapsulates that which he wished to achieve — simple, direct expression in the various shades of blue for which he is recognised.