



# breaking the mold

*Examining the practices of three disparate sculptors showing work at Dallas Art Fair.*

**L**andscape, light, and memory are carved into Chaouki Choukini's sculpture. Using the French word for place, *lieu*, Choukini visually describes metaphysical landscapes. "These are not real places, but places where man has vanished. There are traces that man was here and has left. It is such ideas that I always try to represent with my sculpture."

Choukini's use of light creates a sense of buoyancy to his substantial forms. Whether recalling the human figure or the natural environment, light, in many ways, is an additional medium within the work. This is a deliberate choice, as he says, "I open windows to let light go across the sculpture." For Yasmin Atassi, the director of the Green Art Gallery, this is one of the many appealing features of Choukini's work. The Dubai-based gallery will feature his sculpture at this year's Dallas Art Fair. Atassi says, "The artist masterfully plays with the light within the space of abstract forms, creating a delicately balanced dance which can be seen in each sculpture."

Embedded in all of the work is the human figure. Often, Choukini recounts, "Man is hidden inside the sculpture, without regards to anatomy or proportions." The use of a thin wooden cord is another hallmark of Choukini's work. This cord, whether horizontal or vertical, provides a sense of tension to his elongated poetic forms. For him, "It is like a ray of light."

Choukini moved to France from his native Lebanon in 1967. He studied in Paris, graduating from the *École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts*, where the curriculum included sculpting from live models. "I soon left models and began to work with my imagination and geometric forms," he recalls. His interest, however, remains rooted within tradition. "I want to do something new to connect to my experience, to my thoughts, but I respect all the grand sculptors," he says. His combined love of the Lebanese landscape with the French academic sculptural tradition results in an artistic oeuvre that

is uniquely his own.

His introduction to Fumio Otani, a Japanese sculptor living in Paris, enriched Choukini's academic training. "He made me love working in wood. He worked with Japanese tools and Japanese techniques of working in wood," Choukini says. Choukini's favored use of African woods such as Wenge and Iroko allows him to work on a large scale. Measuring anywhere from 20 to 30 inches in diameter, this medium allows him to create reveries whose titles reflect the recurring themes in his work.

While Choukini's work has been exhibited all over the world, the installation at the Dallas Art Fair will mark his debut in the United States. After seeing the Eduardo Chillida exhibition at the Meadows Museum last year, Atassi was inspired to bring Choukini's work to Dallas. "We decided to include Chaouki in our presentation keeping in mind that Dallas has strong historical connections to modernist sculptural practices," she acknowledges, adding, "Choukini's work corresponds perfectly to the local art scene and will be an interesting discovery for collectors and art professionals in Dallas."

Atassi also discusses the timeless quality inherent in this work: "Behind each sculpture is the life that is present. Sometimes Chaouki can come back to the work after a decade and add a final touch to complete the sculpture. His work is very honest and personal. He records his memories through his sculptures: people, places, and things that meant something to him." For viewers, Choukini's melding of the celestial and terrestrial brings the two together in timeless cosmic harmony or, as Atassi eloquently states, "Every time the viewer looks at his sculptures, there is something new to discover, completing Chaouki's mission to take the viewer on a journey of peaceful dreams."

Chaouki Choukini, *Tendance carrée*, 1997, Ebène vert wood, 20.27 x 3.34 x 18.30 in. Saleh Baracat Collection. Courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery.



Artist Chaouki Choukini at work. Courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery, Dubai.



Chaouki Choukini, *Lyrique 2*, 2011, 21.65 x 15.74 x 63 in. Courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery, Dubai.

# chaouki choukini

*at the green gallery*

BY NANCY COHEN ISRAEL



Chaouki Choukini, *porte du désert*, 1995, Ebène vert wood, 10.23 x 16.33 x 11.02 in. Courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery, Dubai.



Chaouki Choukini, *Pavillon de Lumière*, 2014, Iroko wood, 24.4 x 7.87 x 7.87 in. Photograph by Alex Wolfe. Courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery, Dubai.