

musée
YVES SAINT LAURENT
marrakech



BERT FLINT

21 October 2020 – 1 August 2021



FONDATION
JARDIN MAJORELLE

The Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech is pleased to present an exhibition that offers a portrait of the life's work of Bert Flint, a passionate observer and self-taught cultural anthropologist with a deep affinity for Moroccan and sub-Saharan cultures. Through more than 60 years of dedicated observation of rural peoples and the objects they create, Flint has been able to access underlying paradigms of motifs, materials and techniques shared across tribes and geography.

This exhibition brings together works from his personal collection that bear witness to his vision of the diversity and richness of Berber traditions that have flourished from the Atlas to the Anti-Atlas and from the Sahara to the Sahel.

In 1996, Flint founded the Tiskiwin Museum in Marrakech, a small museum bearing his personal stamp, to share with the public his collection of jewels, textiles, pottery, ceramics and more, and to reveal the deep, and often forgotten, ties that unite Moroccan traditions to those of the Saharan world and to the broader African continent.

Conceived as a vast visual poem to the enveloping beauty of the objects themselves, the exhibition emphasizes the formal language of objects used by Bert Flint in his research and his role as *regardeur*. It is our hope that viewers will make their own observations, finding links between various cultures, regions, tribes and communities.

As if to guide visitors on an imaginary journey that begins in Marrakech, the exhibition is organized to take us across territories from the Middle Atlas to the Anti-Atlas, from the Rif to Tafilalet, and on to the sub-Saharan regions of Mali and Mauritania. In each region, one emblematic craft is highlighted, so that basketry, pottery, ornaments, amulets, textiles or leather goods are all presented in the same exhibition space, with examples hailing from each of the sites on this journey. Each stage in the route is linked to a region whose history has intersected with nomadic or seminomadic populations with which it has come in contact. In this way, these objects invite us to rethink our conventional approach to artistic production in these different territories. We are able to see how sub-Saharan populations and cultures have enriched and transformed different regions of Morocco, while the latter has likewise influenced other lands through this exchange. Each object exhibited bears witness to, and leaves a trace of, shared cultural practices, attesting to the presence of a common cultural heritage.

The multifaceted mosaic that appears from Morocco to the Sahel, as seen through these objects, leads us to consider these different worlds as a single cultural and artistic entity. This perspective is Bert Flint's interpretation of the works and the worlds they suggest. The works engage in a visual dialogue with one another, providing us with a particular aesthetic geography. The exchanges and influences—whether east-west or north-south—appear as cultural links.

Through an interplay of references and harmonies of decoration, symbolism and techniques, the exhibition provides a fresh perspective on these cultures and reveals the interconnected contributions of a multitude of designs and patterns.

This exhibition reflects a long history of friendship, admiration and collaboration between the Fondation Jardin Majorelle and Bert Flint. In 2018, the Foundation published a volume titled African-Berber Culture: Neolithic Traditions of the Sahara in North Africa and the Sahel Region in recognition of a generous donation of textiles that Flint gave to the Pierre Bergé Museum of Berber Arts (formerly the Berber Museum) in 2015. This exhibition is another way in which the Foundation is pleased to honor the work of this extraordinary man. Opening a window onto the territories Flint has crossed and the cultures he loves, this exhibition draws strength from the way in which it connects territories and people across communities, landscapes and national boundaries, while at the same time recognizing the unique diversity of each.

Mouna Mekouar
Curator

Marie-Christine Lebascle
Associate curator

BERT FLINT, MARRAKECH, 1957

How My Understanding of Moroccan Culture Has Evolved

I was born in 1931 in the Netherlands, where I later studied Spanish language and literature. It was a visit to the Alhambra in Granada that sparked my interest in the history of Muslim Spain and the civilization of Al-Andalus.

During my first trip to Morocco, in 1954, I saw that the architecture and decoration of many private residences in the ancient cities of Morocco heralded from the same artistic tradition as that which had inspired the Alhambra. I was amazed to see that the inhabitants of these residences led a life guided by a daily quest for beauty and a refined elegance. I saw that the Andalusian tradition, as lived in Morocco, was a model way of life. The desire to initiate myself in the different aspects of this consummate urban tradition led me to settle in Marrakech in 1957.

In 1960, I traveled to the Middle East to study the region's artistic production at the beginning of the 7th century, at the advent of Islam. During my journey, I had the opportunity to contemplate masterpieces of Byzantine art in Ravenna and Istanbul, and I visited recent archaeological excavations in Egypt. Objects exhibited in museums were evidence of the perfection of artistic achievement during the Neolithic era and in the agrarian empires of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt. In the latter, I recognized the foundation of artistic activity as an interaction between material, technique and function.

When I returned to Morocco, the visual and musical manifestations of the Moroccan rural world gradually caught my attention. The tradition inherited from Al-Andalus ended up appearing to me as a gaze toward the past, while on the contrary, Moroccan rural culture seemed to me to contain the vital energy necessary to build the future of Morocco.

I taught at the École des Beaux-Arts in Casablanca from 1965 to 1968, an avant-garde period in the field of art education. At the Casablanca school, this involved questioning the teaching methods used in Europe and assigning an aesthetic value to the traditional arts of Morocco. My own research had led me to recognize in the material expressions of rural culture evidence of an experience of space and time that depended on lifestyle, whether nomadic or sedentary, and on means of production, whether depending on livestock or agriculture.

During the 1970s, a growing international interest in my research led me to participate in numerous exhibitions and conferences in museums and universities throughout Europe and the United States.

In 1981, I decided to leave teaching and devote myself to developing my own creative work. In particular, I sought to present a contemporary interpretation of clothing using traditional Moroccan weaving methods, which I showed in Paris under the title "Variations on a Fold."

In 1990, I co-founded the Agadir Museum of Amazigh Culture, where a large part of my collection of objects from the Berber regions where Shilha is spoken remained on display until 2000. During the 1990s, I made my first trips to Mauritania and the countries of the Sahel. It was in the Sahel that I began my research on the relationship between a certain type of jewelry worn by the Tuaregs

along the Niger River and the bed posts used by these same people.

At my house in Marrakech, which became the Tiskiwin Museum in 1996, I organized my collections in order to show that the populations that had spread from southern Morocco to the Sahel are all part of the same cultural community, sharing similar natural environments and common traditions largely inherited from prehistory. I was encouraged to expand on this theme at my museum in Marrakech following my participation in the exhibition *Africa, the Art of a Continent* in 1995 at the Royal Academy of Arts, in London.

My recent creation of a collection of Neolithic objects, and the journeys I have made in recent years—from Morocco to Niger—have reinforced my initial conviction: that Morocco has been intimately linked, since prehistoric times, to the sub-Saharan world. This is what I wish to underscore with my museum and through this exhibition.

Bert Flint

BERT FLINT BIOGRAPHY

Bert Flint (b. 1931), a native of the Netherlands and graduate of the University of Utrecht, has lived since 1957 in Marrakech, where he came to teach Spanish. Out of a passion for traditional Moroccan art, Flint has been researching different aspects of Berber culture and collecting objects and fragments for more than sixty years. An ardent advocate for Moroccan rural culture, in 1996 he opened his own museum in Marrakech, The Tiskiwin Museum, which he maintains at his own expense, and where he shares with the public his collection of apparel, jewelry, furniture, carpets and textiles, mainly from the Souss Valley and the sub-Saharan region of the Kingdom. Through his collection, Flint has revealed the meaningful ties that connect Morocco and its culture with the sub-Saharan world.

BERT FLINT: KEY DATES

1931 — Born in The Netherlands.

1951–1955 — Studies Spanish at the Universities of Utrecht and Amsterdam.

1955 — During his first visit to Morocco, he meets Mohamed Benaïssa and Mohamed Melehi, cofounders of the Asilah Arts Festival.

1957 — Teaches Spanish at the Mohammed V High School in Marrakech.

1958 — Discovers rural Morocco and studies carpets from the Chichaoua region.

1960–1961 — Spends a year traveling in Italy and the Middle East. On his return trip, he reflects for the first time on the “Africanity” of Moroccan culture.

1962 — Begins collecting objects representative of rural Moroccan culture: jewelry, pottery, carpets, weavings and other works.

1965–1968 — Is professor at the École des Beaux-Arts in Casablanca; publishes his first essays in the periodical *Maghreb Art*.

1973–1974 — Publishes *Forme et symbole dans les arts du Maroc*.

1975–1988 — Travels to the countries of the Sahel region: Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger.

1981 — Opens Tiskiwin, a clothing and fabric boutique.

1989 — Mounts the exhibition *Matière et Manière* at Dar Tiskiwin, his house in Marrakech; stores a part of his collection at the Museum of Amazigh Culture in Agadir.

1996 — Opens the Musée Tiskiwin in Marrakech.

2000 — Sells his collection of the Agadir Museum.

2006 — Donates the two Musée Tiskiwin buildings and the objects displayed within them to the Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakech.

2015 — Donates textiles and fabrics from his personal collection to the Berber Museum, which is overseen by the Fondation Jardin Majorelle.

2018 — Éditions Jardin Majorelle publishes *African-Berber Culture: Neolithic Traditions of the Sahara in North Africa and the Sahel Region*, a synthesis of Bert Flint's research and travels.

Mouna Mekouar is a curator and art critic. She held curatorial positions at the Centre Pompidou-Metz, Metz (2008–2010) and at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2011–2013). She has curated several exhibitions, including a group show at the Punta della Dogana in Venice (March–December 2019) entitled *Luogo e Segni*; an exhibition with the artist Christo titled *Femmes 1962–1968* at the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech (March–June 2019); *Garden of Memory*, an installation by Etel Adnan, Simone Fattal and Bob Wilson at the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech (2018), and Phillipe Parreno's *Carte Blanche Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World* at the Palais de Tokyo (2013). She also curated *Tino Sehgal* à Marrakech, an out-of-the-ordinary project seen at the Jemâa el-Fna Square in Marrakech in 2016.



1



2

1. RAM'S HEAD-SHAPED FIBULA

Metal.
Western High Atlas, Morocco.
n.d. 14 x 9 cm



3

2. ENAMELED FIBULA

Metal, enamel and glass.
Djebel Bani, Morocco.
n.d. 19 x 12 cm



4

3. SUGAR HAMMER

Engraved wood.
Northern Middle Atlas,
Morocco.
n.d. 31 X 19 X 5 cm

4. SUGAR HAMMER

Engraved wood.
Northern Middle Atlas,
Morocco.
n.d. 31 x 18 x 3 cm



5

5. MAKEUP CONTAINER

Wood.
Taliouine region,
Morocco.
n.d. 8 x 0.7 cm



6

6. MAKEUP CONTAINER

Carved wood.
Taliouine, Morocco.
n.d. 11 x 3 cm



7



8



9



10

7. WEDDING SPOON

Carved wood.
Abalak, Niger Valley.
n.d. 23 x 6 cm

8. AMULET HOLDER

Leather.
Tuareg, Niger.
n.d. 19 x 38 cm

9. BED STAKE

Wood.
Tuareg, West of the Niger Valley.
n.d. 141 x 20.5 cm

10. LUGGAGE COVER

Tuareg, Mauritania.
n.d. 100 x 63 cm

Next pages:

Bert Flint exhibition views, Musée
Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech,
2020–2021





The Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech

The Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech (mYSLm), which opened its doors in the fall of 2017, is a vibrant cultural center built around a central exhibition hall that showcases the work of the renowned couturier on a permanent basis. Much more than a simple retrospective of the iconic dresses YSL designed, one is led on a journey, with its focal point in Marrakech, through the many themes that inspired him. The fifty or so magnificent garments displayed—many rarely seen by the public—offer us an original reading of Yves Saint Laurent’s oeuvre and of his importance to the history of fashion. The dresses and other haute couture pieces are rotated every ten months to ensure their conservation as well as to offer the visitor a panorama that evolves on a regular basis.

The mYSLm also includes a hall for temporary exhibitions, a photography gallery, an auditorium, a research library, a bookshop and a café-restaurant. The basement of the building houses the museum’s collection and a state-of-the-art preventive conservation center.

The hall used for temporary exhibitions at the mYSLm was conceived as a cultural and artistic showcase. It is where the museum displays talent from all over the world, with a special emphasis on contemporary Moroccan artists.

www.museeyslmarakech.com

The Fondation Jardin Majorelle

The Fondation Jardin Majorelle is a unique cultural initiative in Morocco, situated on seven acres in the heart of Marrakech, dedicated to botany, Berber culture, fashion, and contemporary and decorative arts. The complex encompasses the Jardin Majorelle, the Pierre Bergé Museum of Berber Arts, and the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech. The Fondation Jardin Majorelle is a nonprofit Moroccan institution that funds its own projects and reinvests its resources into cultural, educational and social programs throughout the Kingdom.

www.jardinmajorelle.com

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