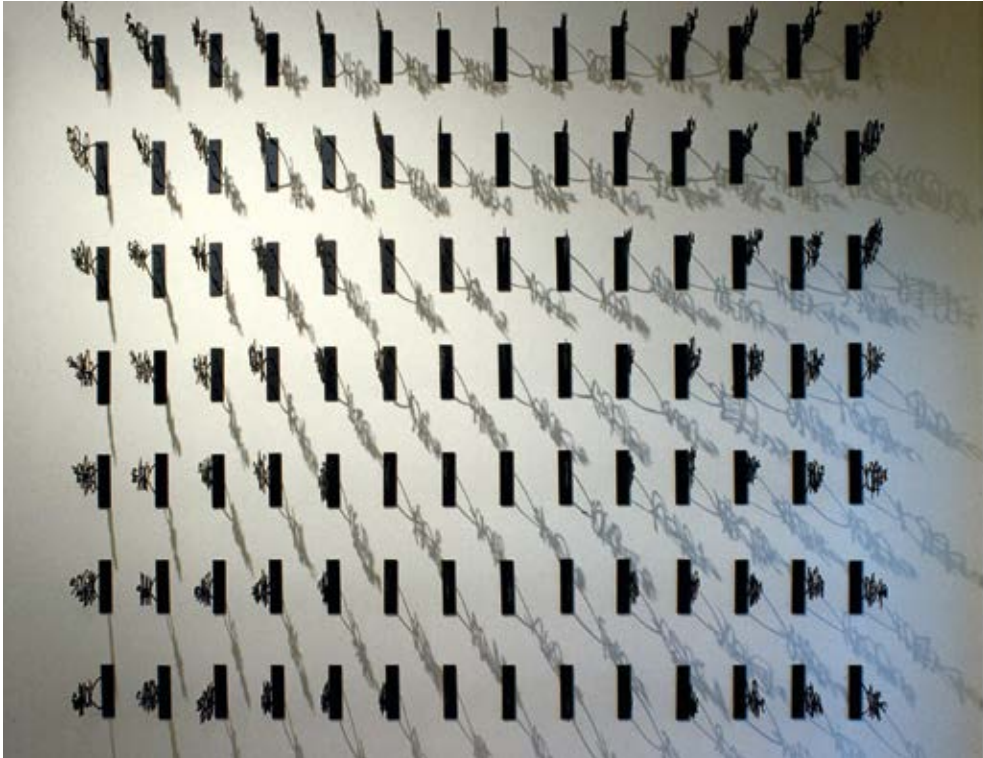


R A C H I D
K O R A Ī C H I :
T H E R O A D
T O T H E P A T H
O F R O S E S

Salah M. Hassan

I knew my word would reach both the East and the West

Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi¹



Path of Roses, Installation shot, The Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art,
Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 2002-2003.

The rich body of work of the Algerian artist Rachid Koraïchi speaks eloquently of the multiplicity of textured experiences that undergird his intellectual roots as a conceptualist apart. The wide range of his production provides a powerful testimony to an encounter that is at once pleasurable and complex. Experiencing the pleasurable in Koraïchi's work, in all its vibrancy, subtlety, materiality, craftsmanship, and scale of execution, is both aesthetically and visually overwhelming. The work's complexity derives primarily from its markedly nuanced expression and the multiplicity of references that underlie its conception and execution. Much of the existing literature on Koraïchi tends to underestimate these nuances and complexities, and one result of this has been a reductively oversimplified representation of his production.

Similarly, the more celebratory readings of his work have been largely informed by mainstream Western liberal approaches to contemporary art practices outside the West. The primacy given to the role of Koraïchi's "Muslim Sufi" upbringing (for which, after 9/11, read "moderate Islam") in shaping his artistic production risks the reduction of his artistic talents by superimposing narrowly-framed Western notions onto the contemporary art practices of North African and Middle Eastern artists. It is worth repeating here that such readings offer "a kind of prophylaxis to the veil, gender inequality, violence and fundamentalist Islam," and that the picture that emerges "is selective not only in terms of content, but of genre, media, and the subjectivity of the artists."² Moreover, the emphasis on Koraïchi's depth of knowledge of traditional crafts and on his collaboration with master craftsmen in the execution of his work has been de-coupled from the essence of his work, in which such energies are redirected within a cutting-edge artistic practice.

In resisting such readings one must emphasise that Koraïchi's attention to aesthetics, his evocation of calligraphic formations and signs, and his use of classical and traditional crafts illuminate a conceptualist tendency informed by the latest discourses of postmodernist practices in art and by a serious engagement with progressive politics and larger humanist concerns. It is precisely that engagement which has been the driving force behind his production, a production that he continues to pursue with a brilliant sensitivity and subtlety that set him apart from his peers in the contemporary art arena.

Appreciating the extraordinary in Koraïchi's work is compounded by the circumstances of the aftermath of 9/11, an event that has been a defining factor in re-awakening dormant Western anxieties about the Islamic world. Reluctance and apprehension in emotionally saturated atmospheres about things "Islamic" preclude serious engagement with the work of artists like Koraïchi. Elsewhere I have noted that the picture that has emerged post-9/11 speaks mostly about Western anxieties concerning the region and Islam, rather than evincing any genuine desire to understand the region's complex history, inter-

nal dynamics, and artistic development from socio-cultural and aesthetic perspectives.³ In this context, it is important to argue for a new reading of Koraïchi's work outside of the limited realm of mainstream art criticism. Unraveling the judgmentally preconceived notions with which Koraïchi's work has been approached is a necessary first step to deconstructing the representations and critiques of an extraordinary conceptualist and avant-garde artist whose work's significance lies in its positioning within transnational contemporary art discourses.

Understanding Koraïchi's creativity requires attention to details as well as to the perspectives that foreground his work. His commitment to his opulent artistic heritage as an Algerian has fostered his appreciation for the craftsmanship and rigor of the classical traditions. The fusion with these traditions in the conception and production of his work leaves no straightforward way of disentangling the interwoven strands of the personal narrative that is reflected in artistic tapestries that are both aesthetically and politically inseparable. A proper framing of Koraïchi's work, therefore, would benefit greatly from being positioned within a broader understanding of postmodernist discourses in contemporary art practices. Although Koraïchi's masterpiece *The Path of Roses* (*Tariq al-Ward*) is the focus of this essay, it is important to address this work in the larger context of his production as a whole.

To accomplish such a task, certain aspects of Koraïchi's life and accomplishments will have to be brought to the fore. First of all, the fact that he is a cosmopolitan artist who speaks to a universal audience. His aesthetic is deeply rooted in rigorous artistic training and in his own multi-faceted life experiences, alongside keen awareness of the most recent currents in the global contemporary art scene.⁴ Like many Algerian compatriot artists and intellectuals



Path of Roses, Installation shot, The Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 2002-2003.



Path of Roses, Installation shot, Authentic/ Ex-centric-African in and out of Africa at the 49th Venice Biennale, 2001

of his generation, Koraïchi continues to endure the exertions of nomadic life, moving between Paris and Algiers in addition to dealing with the intricacies of living in Tunis and other parts of the world.

Koraïchi's work continues to be analyzed within a narrow calligraphic/religious mode in which primacy has been given to the written word within Islam's aesthetic tradition and its presumed aniconistic stand as a major influence on his artistic production. This mode of analysis must be taken into consideration but it should not be accepted at face value. As his family name Koraïchi (Quraishi) indicates, he was born into an enlightened religious Sufi family that traces its long genealogical line of descent to the Quraish, the Meccan based "tribe" to which the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself belonged. Hence, it is argued, his fascination with Arabic calligraphic signs and symbols came naturally, as if it "ran in the family." Certainly, Koraïchi's early childhood experience, immersed in writing, talismans, illuminated pages, calligraphy reeds, traditional ink, parchment paper, clay, and wooden boards has influenced his artistic endeavor. The tradition of the Sufi sect to which his family belongs, their rituals and elaborate performances of prayers known as *zikr* (remembrance) accompanied by dance and fragrant incense, must have left indelible marks on his sensibilities and pervaded his aesthetic taste.

In the large scheme of commentaries on Koraïchi's work, his broader repertoire of signs and symbols has received repeated mention, but not sufficiently so as to account for its originality and creativity. This repertoire, which includes signs and symbols whose genesis goes back long before the rise of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions, encompasses traditions that were largely extraneous to the Islamic world. Indeed, in the words of Rose Issa, Koraïchi's works "evoke a scenography saturated by signs and writings."⁵ The signs and symbols range from Arabic to Berber to the Tuareg *Tifinagh* characters, magic squares, and talismanic numbers. It even encompasses traces of the elegant strokes, scenes, and rhythmic signs of the ancient rock painting of *Tassili n'Ajjer* in Algeria.

Koraïchi's art should not be reduced to its calligraphic signs or symbols alone. As Okwui Enwezor argues, "His investment in signs and symbols means that he has also worked assiduously to decompose the script, to turn its cursive elegance into personal codes and concrete poetry."⁶ Abstracted, deconstructed, and recreated into a new visual vocabulary, these signs and symbols have been referred to by Koraïchi himself as an "alphabet of memory" that transcends the boundaries of space and time, an alphabet in which the sacred and the profane converge so that "secular objects become liturgical instruments at one and the same time."⁷

What, then, is at stake when the particularity of the calligraphic mode is not accorded the depth of understanding it deserves? Calligraphism or the use of calligraphic abstractions must be understood within the larger modernist quest for a new visual language that emerged in the context of decolonisation in the Arab and Middle Eastern worlds. In this context, calligraphic compositions must be understood within the quest for a formalist language of abstraction that is rooted in Islamic discursive traditions.⁸ As Iftikhar Dadi convincingly argues,

Earlier attitudes to classical Arabic calligraphy were not only decisively modified, but modern Western genres such as academic realism in portraiture, landscape, and still-life (which were still in vogue in the 1950s) were also reshaped by a renewed concern with the abstract and expressive possibilities of the Arabic script. The Arabic script was not simply utilised in a classical manner to beautifully render a religious verse or endow it with ornamental form; rather, the script was often imbued with figuration and abstraction to a degree that mitigated [*sic*] against a straightforward literal or narrative meaning.⁹

The intersection of such calligraphic modes with the Western abstraction to which such artists were exposed through their academic training has resulted in a broader, more complex movement in the Arab World and the Middle East, a movement known in some circles as *Al hurufiyya* or the Letterist movement. Artists within this broad movement have shared in an active quest to rework calligraphic motifs and signs into an innovative new language with universal appeal.

In a similar vein, Koraïchi's individual experimentation with a broad range of calligraphic signs and talismanic symbols has been groundbreaking in its critical engagement with Western modernist abstraction. Confident of his strong lines and strokes, Koraïchi employs calligraphy in an abstract symbolic manner, turning such visual alphabets, simultaneously, into aesthetic and ideological acts. He accomplishes these pursuits using a bewildering variety of media and techniques, including paper, silk, glass, ceramic, bronze engravings, steel, tapestry and scroll-like silk banners, thus moving far beyond the boundaries of the painted canvas alone. In this regard, his work is dominated by dramatic contrasts of black and white or blue and gold and monochromic engraved black steel. Beneath such dazzling strokes and complex abstractions, we find contemporary political writings and poetry superimposed and surrounded by talismanic and cabalistic designs, circles, and crosses. Koraïchi's works range from elegant statements of beauty to humanistic references that combine to enable a universal visual language, which, as he once proclaimed, is a "comprehensive one, readable by an Inuit, a Mesopotamian or an African."

In appreciating the multiplicity of references in Koraïchi's work, one has to emphasise his identification with a generation of Arab modernist artists who are destined to break with the past, and who are determined to create a new discourse and rearrange the way that, from their earliest years, artistic production has been organised. His is a generation that aspires to work within a cosmopolitan context and has been open to all impulses within contemporary global art practices.

What sets Koraïchi apart from his compatriots is his deference towards traditional craftsmen and the collective memory that is embedded in their skills, whether they are blacksmiths, embroiderers, weavers, or potters. He takes pride in collaborating with them, as he has done in several series of large hanging silkscreens as well as in large-scale dyed and embroidered banners. In most cases, Koraïchi personally prepared the precise graphics with golden acrylic painting to rigidify the space for the patterns before leaving them for the skilled specialist to embroider. In other cases, he observed and fully participated in the dyeing processes from preparation to execution. The final products of such participatory processes become for him a re-routing of classical techniques and traditional skills within modernist and postmodernist contexts. Examples of this creative re-channelling of such energy are the hanging banners in *The Path of Roses*, in which Koraïchi collaborated with the Moroccan artist and fashion designer Fadila Berrada. Of great consequence is the performative aspect of Koraïchi's works, which likewise reflect his appreciation of craftsmanship in the related arena of performance, including music, dance, and costume. His landmark work, *Nights of Incense*, which he executed in the old amphitheatre of Carthage in Tunis in 1993, included Tuareg singers and dancers together with Spanish and Corsican dancers, who performed against a backdrop of texts by Algerian writers, Inca rain sticks, silk tapestries, and obelisks of his own conception. The result was the creation of a carnivalesque atmosphere of contrasting colors, movements, and sounds.¹⁰



Nights of Incense,
Installation shot,
Antique Theatre, Car-
thage, Tunisia, 1993.

In reading Koraïchi's work, a systematic effort should be made not to downplay its political intent in favour of its visual and aesthetic appeal. For him, politics and aesthetics are not mutually exclusive, as they resist separability and compartmentalisation. This position stems from his commitment to progressive politics and humanistic concerns as well as from his active involvement in the struggle for justice, democracy, and human dignity in Algeria and elsewhere. He is part of a generation of Algerian intellectuals whose life and early youth were forever impacted by the Algerian revolution and by the tremendous energy it generated in Pan-African and Pan-Arab circles, as well as by the larger quest for decolonisation. Koraïchi's artistic collaborations with a diverse group of progressive Arab and Western intellectuals have included work with such luminaries as Mohammed Dib, Soheib Bencheikh, René Char, and Michel Butor. Important books and artworks developed out of these collaborative projects as their most obvious products. Such encounters are indicative of the larger-than-life world of Koraïchi, where his passion for and immersion within the "written word" goes far beyond a supposed obsession with Sufi mysticism and the formalist concerns of the Letterists and other calligraphic modernists. In other words, for Koraïchi, the political context always translates into an aesthetic one inseparable from its formalist rendering or materiality.



Beirut's Poem / A Nation in Exile, 1989, Installation shot at The Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 2002-2003.



A Nation in Exile (detail of lithographs).
Photography Jonathan Greet.



A Nation in Exile
(detail of lithographs).
Photography Jonathan Greet.



Abdelkebir Khatibi, Rachid Koraïchi, Elias Sanbar, and Mahmoud Darwish, 1988



Mahmoud Darwish, Rachid Koraïchi, Hager Bahri, and Aïsha Koraïchi (child) at La Marsa, Tunisia, February 1981.

To understand further this intersection of politics, aesthetics, and craftsmanship in Koraïchi's work, a word on his collaboration with the great Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish is in order. This collaboration resulted in two series of works and a companion publication entitled *A Nation in Exile*. The first series features forty-two prints (of which twenty-one were etchings by Koraïchi) based on Darwish's famous epic, *Beirut's Poem*, which had been written during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the siege of Beirut in 1982. The second is composed of an earlier series of forty-two prints (again, twenty-one by Koraïchi) based on selected poems by Darwish entitled *A Nation in Exile*.¹¹ The partnership between the two Arab icons, Koraïchi and Darwish, continues to be of contemporary relevance today.

Koraïchi's visually and textually rich series of works based on Darwish's poems pay homage to the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples' resistance and their fight for independence and nationhood. Artistically speaking, this collaboration brought in a classical dimension of Arabic calligraphy, exemplified in the work of the late Egyptian master calligrapher Kamel Ibrahim. The hand of this former director of the Alexandria School of Calligraphy rendered *Beirut's Poem* in traditional Arabic Kufic style, forming an integral part of Koraïchi's masterpiece. The process embedded in the final installation is what Abdelkebir Khatibi has referred to as possessing a lens capable of deciphering the visible according to "three registers."¹² Here, Khatibi argues, we find a poem "suspended in the act of calligraphy," a calligraphy reflected by the painter, who is in turn portraying Darwish's poems according to the art of engraving. An inter-poetic register circles between the poems, the calligraphy, and the prints, forming the essential trope of this visually vibrant, richly textured, and multi-layered ensemble.¹³

At the level of large-scale installations, it is *The Path of Roses* which has brilliantly brought together all the complex registers in Koraïchi's diverse body of work.¹⁴ *The Path of Roses* iconises the journey of the 13th-century philosopher and Sufi poet Jalal al-Din al-Rûmî from his homeland in today's Tajikistan to Konya, Turkey, through exquisite ceramic ablution basins, brilliantly designed gold embroidered linens, and large metal sculptures. The three elements of the installation are laid out with geometric and mathematical precision, echoing Sufi mystical numerological systems (*'Ilm Al-huruf*), in which certain letters and numbers are associated with the divine. The silk embroidered banners hang along two of the installation walls, while the third wall is dedicated to one hundred and ninety-six metal sculptures arranged and lit in a specific manner in order to create shadows that echo their designs in a highly dramatic fashion. On a raised platform or dais, the ablution basins, filled with perfumed water and red rose petals, are laid out in corresponding geometric fashion, intersecting with a set of larger metal sculptures, similar in their rendering to the miniature versions on the wall. The result of such an arrangement is a

breathtaking and magnificent environment in which invocations of the mystical and the divine combine to generate a dazzling multi-sensory effect.

The Path of Roses was conceived as part of a trilogy, as the sequel to Koraïchi's earlier homage to the Andalusian Sufi philosopher Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi and the great Persian poet Farid al-Din al-'Attar, who had considerable influence on al-Rûmî. It was originally seen as the culmination of an imagined encounter between two Sufi masters – al-Rûmî and Ibn 'Arabi – and of their journeys across several continents. (Though impossible to verify, legend has it that al-Rûmî met ibn 'Arabi in Konya.) *The Path of Roses* was also intended as an homage to and an embodiment of al-Rûmî's idea of the inseparability of aesthetics and metaphysics, where art unites with the divine. In this context, Koraïchi's evocation of the idea of *safar* (travel and transcendence) in Islamic Sufi thought is invoked by recalling these encounter, as well as the artist's personal journey in pursuit of the ideas of these mystics and philosophers.

As Maryline Lostia has suggested, the encounter of a contemporary artist such as Koraïchi with the world of al-Rûmî

is one of a culmination of many long journeys, rich in deviations and travel companions. One might say that Koraïchi is a good artist to go 'on the road' with, a companion who makes the way more beautiful, narrowing it through a game of mirrors until one place indicates another point of departure, which is in turn enriched by a new encounter. On his way to Rumi [al-Rûmî], Koraïchi is accompanied by two other Sufi thinkers: Ibn 'Arabi and al-'Attar.¹⁵



Letters of Clay, Khalid Shoman Foundation, Darat al-Funu, Amman, Jordan, 1998

Letters of Clay Homage to Ibn 'Arabi, Detail Olive Jar, 1995



The Gardens of Paradise, (Homage to Farid Al-Din Al-Attar's poem *Conference of the Birds*). Installation shot at Chaumont-sur-Loire Festival, France, 1998

The Gardens of Paradise, (Homage to Farid Al-Din Al-Attar's poem *Conference of the Birds*). Detail of ceramic bowl, Chaumont-sur-Loire Festival, France, 1998



The road to *The Path of Roses* has passed through two earlier installations dedicated to Ibn 'Arabi and al-'Attar. For Ibn 'Arabi, Koraïchi accomplished a magnificent large-scale work, *Letters of Clay* (1995), and to al-'Attar, he dedicated *The Gardens of Paradise*, a public installation in the gardens of Chaumont, France in 1998. Both works show Koraïchi's earlier meditation on the power of words as expressed in letters and calligraphic signs brought to life in *Letters of Clay*, where fragmented texts taken from Ibn 'Arabi's famous book *al-Futuhat al Makkiyya* [Meccan Revelations] were burned into the surface of large-scale earthenware pottery produced in collaboration with traditional Tunisian potters in the village of Djerba. As Lostia notes, "Koraïchi's aspirations extend much further. To appropriate the words of Ibn 'Arabi is indeed to reinvigorate a form of existence through which he expresses himself anew."¹⁶

The political message uniting the three installations should be further emphasised. The symbolic journey of the artist with the three travelling Sufi poets echoes their own journeys across centuries and the regions of Europe, Asia, and Northern Africa. For instance, Ibn 'Arabi lived in Andalusia, in today's Spain, where Islam and Muslims were part of Europe for more than eight centuries, and where a model of mutual enrichment and co-existence of Jews, Muslims, and Christians prevailed in a manner that is certainly lost in today's xenophobic and Islamophobic Europe. *The Path of Roses* offers a subtle critique of contemporary European realities and the narrative of a pure Europe and solitary western civilisation invoked by the far right, neo-conservative politicians, and neo-Nazi groups.

The complex manner in which Koraïchi's aesthetic and artistic impulses operate in the public and political sphere is also brought to bear in his permanent public installation *Garden of the Orient*. This work was conceived as a commemorative garden and mausoleum on the grounds of the royal castle of Amboise, one of the jewels of the Loire Valley, in order to honor the legacy of Emir Abd-el-Kader, the heroic nationalist leader of the mid-19th century anti-colonial struggle against French occupation. Abd-el-Kader ('Abd al-Qadir Ibn Muhyiddin al-Jaza'iri) was born in 1808 in Mascara, Algeria and died in 1883 in Damascus in what is today Syria. There he spent the last years of his life as a prolific scholar, following a period of exile and incarceration in France between 1848-1852, during which he lived at the Château d'Amboise. During that forced residence, more than twenty members of his family and retinue perished, the majority due to a short-lived epidemic, and were buried in an unmarked collective grave in the castle courtyard.

Born into a learned Sufi family to a scholar father who became an inducted sheikh in the Qadiri sect of Sufi Islam, Emir Abd-el-Kader was himself a learned man who travelled widely to the great centers of Islamic scholarship in Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus before returning to lead the resistance against French occupation. These places left an indelible impression on his intellectual development, both as a nationalist and as a thinker who was impacted by the reforms and renaissance he had witnessed in 19th-century Egypt.

Such details would prove to be important elements in the conception of *Garden of the Orient* and in the process leading up to the making and installation of the work. They are also indicative of the conceptualist framework of Koraïchi's artistic practice. This process is certainly reflective not only of Koraïchi's personal affinity with Emir Abd-el-Kader as a learned Sufi, but also of the seriousness and rigor with which he approaches his work from conception to execution. The unfolding process is itself performative in its re-enactment of Emir Abd-el-Kader's life and in mirroring his journeys across three continents in a voluntary search for knowledge despite the exigencies of forced exile.



Garden of the Orient. Installation shot at Châteaux d'Amboise, Loire, France, 2005.



Garden of the Orient, Detail of Headstones Châteaux d'Amboise, Loire, France, 2005

Conceived as a site-specific installation in the famous gardens of the Renaissance castle of Château Royale d'Amboise in 2005, *Garden of the Orient* was a public commission initiated with the active support of the Amboise City Council. The twenty-one carved marble stones serving as tombstones are engraved with four verses from the Qur'an (*Surat al-Fajr*: Chapter 89: 27-30) that are popularly known for eulogising the soul of the departed believer.¹⁷

Each of the twenty-one tombs is topped with a shining sand-cast bronze finial bearing the name of one of the women and men from the family of Emir Abdel-Kader who were buried, prematurely and in great haste, between 1848 and 1852. The twenty-one marble stones are geometrically aligned in three rows of seven, each facing east, that is, symbolically aligned towards Mecca, which serves to orient the direction of Muslim prayers around the world. Three rows

of seven cedar trees surround the tombstones on three sides, the total echoing the number of tombstones, and create a frame for the garden conceived in an Islamic style. The interior of the garden itself is crossed by a row of carefully selected small shrubs which cuts across the area of the tombstones. Both trees and shrubs were deliberately chosen from species that are particular to Islamic gardens and representative of the conception of Paradise in the Muslim cosmology. The final result is an exquisite and multi-layered landscape in which natural elements blend with manufactured ones to create perspectives of breathtaking scenery in a visually stunning environment. The sculptural elements become even more dynamic with seasonal changes. As the sunlight moves across the garden throughout the day, it casts ornamental shadows on the landscape, creating another superimposed layer of design. These complex elements are not accidental, but emphasise premeditated effects that add to the visual impact of the work as a whole.

Not to be underestimated is the symbolic dimension of this work and the renewed energy it has brought to the Château d'Amboise. Koraïchi's intervention transformed this site into a meeting point between a 21st-century Algerian artist and his heroic 19th-century antecedent, set in the gardens of a Renaissance castle in the heart of Europe where another legendary master, Leonardo da Vinci, is also buried. The ironies are not lost here, but more important still were the meetings between artisans and craftsmen from Algeria, Amboise, and Damascus (where Emir Abd-el-Kader was originally interred before his remains were returned for reburial in postcolonial Algeria). The long process of making this work mimics Emir Abd-el-Kader's life journey. Damascus, where he lived the last years of his life, is where the marbled tombstones were cut and chiseled by local stone carvers who mastered the centuries-old tradition in creative collaboration with the artist. The garden and its other sculptural features bear witness to the combined labor of the artisans brought together through Koraïchi's installation.

In *Garden of the Orient*, Koraïchi has created a place of reconciliation where France can come to terms with the violence of its colonial past. It is a place for Algerians to mourn, to remember, and to find closure to a tragic and sad chapter in their history. It is also a place for Koraïchi, Algeria's faithful son, to pay homage to ancestors who perished anonymously in an alien environment, an environment to which he has given renewed energy through this respectfully conceived and considerably inclusive multi-layered work of art. *Garden of the Orient* continues Koraïchi's innovative exploration of calligraphic abstraction, enriched by the multiple array of visual vocabularies that have come to shape the complex aspects of his work. Most important is the way in which it reinforces the universal humanist leanings demonstrated in *The Path of Roses* and influenced by the Sufi concept of the inseparability of aesthetics and metaphysics, in which art unites with the divine as the ultimate act of

devotion, beauty, and intellect. Koraïchi's compositions on silk banners, metal sculptures, or stone engravings are rooted in the calligraphic significations witnessed in earlier works, and their ordering by numbers and consistent symbolism suggest a transcendent link between human beings and the divine order.

To summarise, the creative process in Koraïchi's work, beginning with its conception, whether as drawings or sketches, and leading to the final product as multi-media installation, reflects the intersection of intellect, aesthetics, and politics from which his artistic explorations derive. Envisaged within an exceptional and unique conceptual mode, the works discussed above highlight the cutting-edge side of Koraïchi's practice and speak directly of issues of memory, diaspora, and exile as well as other facets of his own existential experience. Bringing *The Path of Roses* together with the works that preceded it, and to which it serves as a sequel, is a testimony to the versatility, tremendous energy, and dynamism of Rachid Koraïchi.



*Garden of the Orient,
Detail of Headstones
Châteaux d'Ambroise,
Loire, France, 2005.*



Garden of the Orient. Installation shot at Châteaux d'Amboise, Loire, France, 2005.

1 Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi, *al futuhat al makkiyyah [Arabic]* (1165-1240), Nabu Press, 1923, reprinted 2010.

2 Salah M. Hassan, "Contemporary 'Islamic' Art: Western Curatorial Politics of Representation in Post 9/11" in: catalogue of *The Future of Tradition - The Tradition of Future: 100 Years after the Exhibition "Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art" in Munich*, Prestel and Haus de Kunst, Munich, 2010, p.38.

3 *ibid.*

4 His artistic training includes diplomas from the Higher Institute of Fine Art in Algeria, the Superior National School of Arts, the National School of Decorative Arts, and the School of Urban Studies in Paris.

5 See Rose Issa, *Signs, Traces and Calligraphy*, Barbican Gallery, London, 1995.

6 Okwui Enwezor, "Where, What, Who, When: A Few Notes on 'African' Conceptualism" in: Philomena Mariani (ed.), *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, Queens Museum of Art, New York, 1999.

7 Issa, *Signs, Traces and Calligraphy*.

8 Iftikhar Dadi, "Ibrahim El Salahi: Calligraphic Modernism in Comparative Perspectives," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 109:3 Summer 2010, p.555.

9 *Ibid.* p. 556. For further exploration of the Letterist movement in the Arab world see Wijdan Ali, *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 1997, chapters 15 and 16; Nada Shabout *Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2007; and Sharbal Dagher, *Al Hurufiyah Al-Arabiyyah: Fan wa Hawiyah*. Sharikat al-Matbu'at Lil Twazi' wa Al-Nashr, Beirut, 1990.

10 The term "carnavalesque" is used here in the Bakhtinian meaning of the word.

11 In assessing Arabic poetry of the second half of the 20th century, there is no doubt that the late Mahmoud Darwish stood as one of the most influential voices in shaping its development. Throughout his remarkable career as a political activist and literary figure, Darwish's poetry continued to grow richer in metaphor, language, style, and complexity. See: Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1987, p.30.

12 See Abdelkebir Khatibi's essay in *A Nation in Exile*, Darat al-Funun, Amman, 1997, p.3 (English text).

13 *Ibid.*

14 Conceived as a trilogy, this work was featured in the 49th Venice Biennale as part of the exhibition *Authentic/Ex-Centric*, organised by the Forum for African Arts. For more comprehensive analysis of this work see: Salah M. Hassan and Olu Oguibe (eds.), *Authentic Ex-Centric: Conceptualism in Contemporary African Art*, Prince Claus Fund Library, New York, 2001.

15 Maryline Lostia, "Rachid Koräichi; Celestial Architecture," in: Salah M. Hassan and Olu Oguibe (eds.), *Authentic Ex-Centric*.

16 *Ibid.*

17 The four Qur'anic verses read as follows: *Ya ayatuha al nafs al mutma'inna; Arja'ila rabiki radhayatun mardhia; fa adkhuli fi 'ibadi; wa adkhuli janati* (Oh reassured soul; Return to your Lord, well pleased [content and contented] and pleasing [to Him]; And enter among My righteous servants; And enter My Paradise.). See: *Rachid Koräichi: Garden of the Orient*. Association Schams, 2005.

