

POTTERY

The pottery in this and the adjacent room comes from two different settings, urban and rural.

URBAN POTTERY: The 'city' pieces are the colorful lidded pot and two platters -- densely decorated, polychrome, glazed -- from the imperial capital of Fez. Their abstract designs reflect the influence of Arabia, Turkey, and, most immediately, Andalusia. Refugees from the Inquisition brought with them from Spain ancient Persian techniques of glazing as they decorated food storage containers (khabia) and serving platters (mokhfa). From the 17th through the 19th centuries the potters of Fez -- always men -- made the city the center of Moroccan pottery production. Since the 1920s the city of Safi has joined Fez as the most prolific producer of Moroccan pottery, though both sites increasingly use industrial technology.



*One of the last female artisans making traditional pots, in the Rif village of Kasbah Jamaa Bou-Driss. (Photograph courtesy of David Packer, *The Earth has Three Colors*, Mazda Publishers, 2019.)*

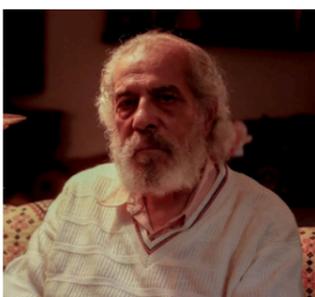
RURAL POTTERY: The 'country' pieces are minimally decorated and roughly glazed, if at all. Those on display here come from two regions, the Rif Mountains and south of the High Atlas Mountains.

The green glazed pots and brown platter were made by male potters in Tamegrout, where the Sahara begins. Tamegrout's pottery tradition, including its signature green or brown glaze, was imported in the 1600s from Fez.

The only female potters in Morocco come from the Rif. They are likely the ones who made the black vessel for pouring milk and the pots for storing olive oil, honey, grain, or even for cooking a stew. (The tea pot and the pot with a cord may come from the south of Morocco.) Rifi women, like the lady to the left, built up pots by coiling clay, made simple relief-markings like a rope, and then built a fire around each pot to burn it for a few hours. Up until the 1980s women from the Tsoul area between Fez and Taza drew black abstract designs, visible on two of these pots. Now Rifi women produce pots only for their own use, if at all. Plastic has won out.

Mohamed Fquih Regragui

(1938 Tangier -)



Regragui painted his delicate and hyper-realistic self-portrait at the age of 42, twenty-six years after he won, as a teenager, the first of many prizes for his art. Paying meticulous attention to detail -- his furrowed brow, the shadow cast on his face by the rim of his glasses -- Regragui has made a psychological study of a man who takes his art very seriously. Trained as a lawyer, Regragui studied art with Claudio Bravo in the 1970s. This Tangier-born artist displays 'métissage' or cultural mixture by counterbalancing his fez with a fashionable turtleneck or scarf, as well as by signing and dating his work in Roman script on the left and Arabic on the right.

Mohammed Hamri

(1932, Ksar el Kebir - 2000, Tangier)



Mohammed Hamri's American wife, Blanca (above), said he had "screwdriver eyes." Lacking formal training, Hamri followed the stylistic example of no one: neither other Moroccans nor the Old Masters shown him by his mentor, artist Bryon Gysin. He developed his naïve style on his own, influenced in part by his apprenticeship to a baker. He loved mixing colors of icing sugar to decorate cakes. Witnessing Hamri buying powdered colors for the first time in 1953, Gysin reported the new painter's gleeful reaction when putting them on canvas: "Why it's just like cooking!"

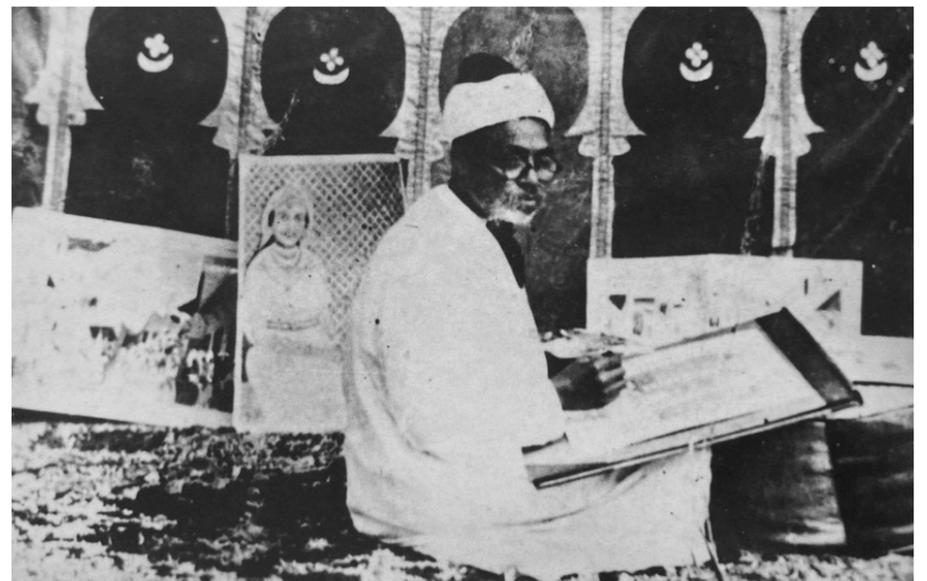
Prolific and inventive, Hamri drew on an extraordinary life: one of twenty children, he worked as a smuggler and wall painter in a brothel, before becoming a cook for Paul Bowles and for the restaurant Hamri and Gysin founded, called, perhaps ironically, 1001 Nights.

Mohamed ben ali R'bati

(1861, Rabat - 1939, Tangier)

R'bati was a pioneer: the first Moroccan to depict human figures and exhibit them in a gallery. His style reflected his personal history. As a youth attending Koranic school, he had painted on wood, tile, drums. In 1903 he became the cook for celebrated British society artist John Lavery, and learned by observing him. R'bati went on to exhibit his art in London, Rabat, and Tangier, including in a restaurant and patisserie he opened here two years before he died. Perhaps he displayed these pictures in that restaurant.

R'bati's love of abstract patterns is apparent in the frames he himself made, as well as in his paintings of repetitive archways, zellij tiles, and rows of pointed babouches. He used bold colors to portray a city where time seems to have stood still: key attributes of this International Zone city – like foreigners, automobiles, nationalist intellectuals, or women exposing their faces in public – are missing. His style, rather than his subject matter, reflects the world of change he experienced in Tangier.



Hassan el Glaoui

(1923, Marrakech - 2018, Rabat)



Hassan el Glaoui's pictures of spectacular royal power – the sultan moving through reverential crowds shaded by a parasol – hid a world of political intrigue within the makhzen (royal government) that Glaoui knew very well. Hassan's father, Thami el Glaoui, was the immensely powerful and wealthy caid (governor) of southern Morocco, a man who famously befriended Winston Churchill (and, infamously, was not always loyal to the sultan).

Thami was said not to be happy that Hassan wanted to study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1950s Paris; Churchill may have convinced him to let his son go. Hassan based his career on painting rollicking horses and fantasias, the 'powder play' of armed horsemanship meant to impress crowds. Exhibition-goers in Morocco and overseas were similarly impressed, including former US ambassador Joseph Verner Reed, who donated many Glaouis to the Legation.

Gallery Guide written by Diana Wylie,
Professor Emerita, Boston University