

Hassan Sharif : a retrospective of his work at the MAMC

02 August 2021



If contemporary art museums seem to pay more attention to non-Western artists, few of them take the plunge and dedicate several rooms to one of them. However, this is what the Museum of Contemporary Art in Saint-Etienne has done, offering a retrospective of the work of Hassan Sharif, a name that is still little known in France.

Who is Hassan Sharif?

It is not because this name does not ring a bell that Hassan Sharif is not a renowned artist. He is now recognized as one of the most influential artists in the Arab world. Born in 1954 and deceased in 2016, he is the author of a prolific and multifaceted work, with many influences on today's Arab artists.

As a young Iranian, he emigrated to Dubai and was quickly spotted for his pencil stroke and became a political cartoonist for newspapers. In the press, he does not hesitate to criticize pan-Arabism, the oil industry or the United States. All his work is shaped by the economic and social context in which he evolves, including the discovery and marketing of oil in 1958 and the creation of the United Arab Emirates in 1971.

Even though there was a return to traditional calligraphy, Hassan Sharif proposed decadent and innovative works, very critical of the high-speed modernization movement that his country was experiencing. To give just one example: one of his most controversial works is Hair and Milk Bottle from 1984. It is an absurd performance in which he removes a pubic hair before aiming at a milk bottle on the floor.

What does this retrospective have in store for us?

First conceived by the largest museum of contemporary art in the Emirates, Sharjah Art Foundation, then presented in Germany and Sweden, it is now France's turn to host this retrospective. It is the first exhibition dedicated to an Emirati artist in France.

Hassan Sharif's work is very eclectic, so is his retrospective. Entitled I am the single work artist, we can find his drawings, his sculptures and all his performances that have been documented in photographs. No less than four decades of work are displayed together on a 1000m² exhibition space.