



Emerging Artist

With new galleries, an up-and-coming design district, and a just-opened museum dedicated to the life and work of Yves Saint Laurent, Marrakech is becoming Morocco's modern-art mecca. **By Viia Beaumanis**

Marrakech was still an exotic post-colonial outpost when Yves Saint Laurent fell in love with it in 1968, buying a house there on his first visit and adopting the “Ochre City” as his second home. Jet-setters and tastemakers followed the famed French fashion designer, helping transform Marrakech into Morocco’s creative capital and Africa’s most stylish city, an eclectic place where visitors could spend afternoons exploring its twelfth-century medina and evenings in hotels and watering holes that rivaled Paris for chic. Today, with a flurry of gallery openings and thousands flocking to its international art fairs, the city is adding another layer to its allure. “Marrakech has welcomed an amazing array of vibrant arts sites and events over the past few years, not only in its new design district, but also in its

medina and old French quarter,” says San Francisco-based Virtuoso travel advisor Michelle Murré. “It’s now as renowned for its dynamic arts scene as for its fascinating culture, history, and architecture.” Make your own sketch of Marrakech at these art-filled addresses and attractions.

DESIGN DESTINATION

Launched in October this year, the **Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech** (*vue Yves Saint Laurent*) houses a permanent retrospective of the designer’s most iconic work. With a 130-seat auditorium, gallery and event space, revolving art exhibits, a bookshop, and a 5,000-volume research library dedicated to fashion, botany, and Berber design, it’s as much a cultural space as a museum. Be sure to explore the adjacent **Jardin Majorelle** – a 2.5-acre botanical garden built by painter Jacques

Majorelle that Saint Laurent and his partner, Pierre Bergé, purchased, restored, and opened to the public – then stay for lunch in the garden’s shaded café.

FAIR PLAY

Founded in 2005 by Vanessa Branson, sister of Sir Richard and a longtime art-world doyenne, the Marrakech Biennale established the city as a global arts hub, drawing an international crowd of collectors, curators, and fans with its exhibits and installations. For 2018, the pioneering festival will be replaced by another prestigious event, the **1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair** (February 24 and 25), which selected the city for its first edition, following successful expos in London and New York. Marrakech 1:54 will take place at La Mamounia, Morocco’s most fabled hotel, which opened in 1923 and

Culture Stop



Clockwise from top: An installation by Cédrix Crespel at the Montresso Art Foundation, artist-in-residence Denis Tevekov in his Jardin Rouge studio, and *Maroons* from 1:54 featured artist Atta Kwami.

has welcomed everyone from Winston Churchill (whose watercolors of the property still line its walls) to Gwyneth Paltrow.

MEDINA MEANDER

Marrakech's walled-in historic quarter is now scattered with a wildly diverse assortment of creative enclaves. Worthy gallery stops include the buzzy, contemporary **Le 18** (18 *Derb el Ferrane, Riad Laarouss*); **Queens Collective** (27 *Azbezt, Derb el Ferrane*), a community arts space with an LGBT slant; and the Swiss-

Moroccan **Ke'ch Collective**, which presents pop-up events and exhibits that promote modern, cross-cultural work. Moroccan photographer Hassan Hajjaj's pop-art images of medina life fetch as much as \$25,000 at Christie's; a visit to his funky **Riad Yima** (52 *Derb Aarjane, Rahba Lakdima*) lets you trawl his gallery and boutique, then sip mint tea in the charming courtyard café. Afterward, grab a table at one of the stylish restaurants in the souk, such as **Café des Épices** (75 *Rahba Lakdima*), **Le Jardin** (32 *Souk Sidi Abdelaziz*),

and **Nomad** (1 *Derb Aarjane, Rahba Lakdima*), whose owner provides financial support for local exhibits and galleries.

GUÉLIZ GALLERY HOP

Built by the French in the 1920s with a wave of art deco architecture, the **Guéliz** neighborhood now showcases an abundance of galleries, all within strolling distance of each other. Check their online calendars for openings to attend while in town – a great way to mix with locals and meet the city's artists. Start with these five favorites:

- Staging exhibits, workshops, and cultural events, **Galerie Noir Sur Blanc** (48 *rue Yougoslavie*) focuses on established and emerging Moroccan talent.
- **Galerie 127** (127 *avenue Mohammed V, second floor*) showcases new and vintage photography.
- Housed in an airy two-level space, **Matisse Art Gallery** (61 *rue Yougoslavie, Passage Ghandouri*) exhibits some of Morocco's leading contemporary artists, such as Mahi Binebine and Nouredine Chater.
- Abstract paintings and sculptures by local and international artists highlight **David Bloch Gallery** (8 *bis rue des Vieux Marrakchis*), set in a fittingly modern space.
- Contemporary painting and sculpture, as well as traditional textiles, feature among the diverse exhibits at **Galerie Rê** (*Résidence al-Andalous III, rues de la Mosquée & Ibn Toubert*), which highlights works from Morocco and abroad.

Culture Stop

CREATIVE QUARTER

A once stark industrial zone 20 minutes from town, **Sidi Ghanem** has been recast as a thriving design district lined with shops, bistros, workshops, and galleries such as **Voice** (366 Zone Industrielle), a loftlike space owned by an Italian expat whose exciting contemporary exhibits have made him a favorite of local art mavens.

ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE

Noted Moroccan painter Mohamed Mourabiti runs the artist residency **Al Maqam** (Douar Lamgasse, Tahannaout), a beautiful, art-swathed property in a village just outside Marrakech. Visitors can tour its studios and chat with local artists. Spread across an olive grove 45 minutes from town, the **Montresso Art Foundation** (address upon request) resides on a 12-acre compound that's home to the **Jardin Rouge**, an artists-in-residence program that welcomes



Mariangela Levita's *Permanent Vocation* exhibit at Voice. Opposite: The *E-Mois* installation at the Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden.

MARRAKECH, CURATED

Creative stays and ways to explore the city.

STAY

Virtuoso's five Marrakech hotels include these artful options:

Built and owned by King Mohammed VI, **Royal Mansour Marrakech** features gardens filled with citrus and date trees, a three-story spa with a tea lounge and two hammams, and dining from three-Michelin-starred chef Yannick Alléno. Fifty-three *riads* (private residences with one to four bedrooms) provide views of the city or the Atlas Mountains from their **rooftop terraces**. Riads from \$1,170; *Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily, a \$100 dining credit, and private transfers (including VIP arrival and departure service) for Marrakech International Airport.*

Shaded by Marrakech's Koutoubia Mosque minaret and embellished with

arabesque sculptures and colorful *zellige* tilework, the palatial **La Mamounia** offers 209 rooms, suites, and *riads*. Stroll through its 20 acres of gardens (a wedding gift to Prince Al Mamoun in 1920 and now home to **1,200 plant species**), sip cocktails in Le Churchill bar, dine on tagines and other traditional dishes on Le Marocain's breezy terrace, and hit the spa for a hypno-massage or a private hammam experience. *Doubles from \$450; Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily, complimentary Wi-Fi, and a \$100 spa or dining credit.*

SEE

Fashion your own caftan with one of Marrakech's premier designers, take an owner-led tour of the city's top photo gallery, and join a *zellige* workshop with an expert artisan – they're just

a few of the tailor-made experiences that are available from **Heritage Tours**. Its customizable nine-day Spotlight: Marrakech tour also provides sufficient time to explore Jardin Majorelle, Ben Youssef Madrasa, and the Musée de Marrakech. Additional highlights include accommodations at either Amanjena or La Mamounia, a camel trek and dinner in the Agafay Desert, and a trip into the High Atlas Mountains for a stay at Richard Branson's **Kasbah Tamadot** hotel. *Departures: Any day through December 31, 2018; from \$5,700.*

Your travel advisor can also work with Virtuoso's on-site tour providers, **Mountain Voyage Morocco** and **Abercrombie & Kent Morocco**, to craft customized tours of Marrakech, its art scene, and Morocco at large.

TIP "The Jardin Majorelle is among the city's most beloved sites. For a look inside the estate's **Villa Oasis**, Jacques Majorelle's former home and a wonder of haute bohemian decor, check into **La Mamounia** or **Royal Mansour**. These grand hotels are the only two privileged to arrange private tours of the villa." – *Michelle Murré, Virtuoso travel advisor, San Francisco*

recognized and emerging talents who, in exchange, leave a few works to the foundation. Note: Montresso's new 14,000-square-foot gallery is not yet open to the public, so have your Virtuoso advisor contact the foundation to arrange private tours of the grounds, studios, artist workshops, and sculpture gardens.

PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

Opened in 2016 in the heart of Guéliz, the small **Marrakech Art and Culture Museum** (61 rue Yougoslavie, Passage Ghandouri) features an impressive collection centered on European artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who fell in love with Morocco's light, locals, and landscapes. Owner/collector Nabil El Mallouki's selection of paintings by Henri Le Riche, Edy Legrand, Jacques Majorelle, and more is refined and constantly expanding. Out in the Palmeraie, a posh residential area on the desert edge of town, the new **Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden** (Al Maaden, Sidi Youssef Ben Ali) extends across nearly 21,000 square feet of exhibition space and a surrounding sculpture garden; much of its work is from the personal collection of Alami Lazraq, a real estate developer on *Forbes*' "40 Richest Africans" list who's put his fortune to good use. Now in its eighth year, **Maison de la Photographie** (46 rue Souk Ahal Fassi, kaat Ben Nahid), the private foundation of photography collectors Hamid Mergani and Patrick Manac'h, exhibits vintage images of Morocco within a historic *riad* in the medina. **VT**



GUILLAUME MOLLE