

# Huguette Caland

## Painter, Fashion Designer

### Individual Exhibitions

- 1970 Dar al-Fan,  
Beirut  
Caland Atelier,  
Kaslik, Lebanon
- 1973 Galerie Contact,  
Beirut
- 1980 Galerie Paris,  
Paris
- 1986 Le Portrait a  
Roulettes,  
Salses, France
- 1992 Gallery 5, Santa  
Monica,  
California.  
Toepel Gallery,  
Kirkland,  
Washington.  
Bella Interiors  
Gallery, Santa  
Monica,  
California
- 1994 Gallerie Janine  
Rubeiz,  
Beirut, Lebanon

*I was excited about meeting Huguette Caland. Her background was very intimidating, being the daughter of a previous President of the Republic, a renown painter whose paintings have been exhibited in highly reputed galleries in Paris, Rome, Washington, Barcelona and Lebanon, a designer who created hand-woven silk gowns conceived and realized a fashion line for the Pierre Cardin collections of haute couture, ready-to-wear and environmental design.*

*In my interview I wanted to talk about her paintings. I was curious about her obsessive attention to bodies and notably the woman's body. So I asked.*

**Q. Why is your art so woman-oriented?**

A. They usually accuse me of being male-oriented. I paint women because I am a woman. I have the problems of women. I think change will come through women. Maturity is already here. Repression was strong for centuries, except for the exceptions of some women. There are always exceptions.

**Q. Why bodies?**

A. I had problems with my body.(1) I had to cope with it and I can; therefore, relate to other bodies. But, I never think

of it [the body in the painting]. It is part of life. Sexuality is a miracle. It doesn't work all the time. But, when it works, it is a miracle. It is something very deep and we can't treat it with lightness. It is doing and touching everything. I never focused on it, but it emerged.

**Q. Do you write?**

A. Yes, I write. I usually write in French. I am now writing in English. I chose painting because it was important. I thought I could hide much more in painting than in words.

**Q. What did you want to hide?**

A. I wanted to hide everything. I did not want to be obvious.

**Q. Why?**

A. To try to be decent. But, I never succeeded. So, I stopped trying very quickly [stopped trying to hide].

**Q. Do you paint women from a particular culture?**

A. I carry myself on my tip toes. I don't have the intention of painting anyone specifically. I don't think I am folkloric or ethnic.

**Q. You have lived in Paris and, presently, in Los Angeles. You are on a visit in Lebanon. How do you perceive of women and their issues?**

A. We share the same problems even in different cultures. But, still there are differences. In the United States, they do not solve their problems as we do. They are more lonely. Their femininity becomes more aggressive because they are competing with men and with other women. There is a big struggle. It is strange to find that the struggle of women is greater in industrial countries than in Third World countries. They will move to a point when they will be more efficient in their struggle. It is im-

Al-Raida extends special thanks to Ms. Nadine Bekdash of the Gallerie Janine Rubeiz for making this interview possible, providing us with pictures of Caland's paintings, and for helping us make contact with prominent women artists.

portant to know how we want the kids to be. I don't think we should copy other cultures and fall into a pattern of imitation. Let's aim at being creative. Economically, Arab men treat women better. They give them and buy for them, but keep them under control. I don't think men should be undermined, because we will lose them and we need their support. We need them and need to be complementary.

**Q. Does your painting entitled *La Femme Amputee* speak about violence?**

A. When I drew it, during the Lebanese war, I felt it was an uncivil war, not a civil war.

**Q. This interview will appear in our issue on violence against women. What is your understanding and perception of violence?**

A. Violence is not the same for men and women. Woman can be very violent. We have other methods of torture, far more subtle. There is a huge potential for cruelty. Violence is also creative. The worst can be with a smile. It is the most efficient.

Huguette Caland went on to discuss her views on women's empowerment and their participation in development.

I am very concerned a-

bout women and power. I am concerned about the ways and the methods they can use.

Municipalities, community services should be handled by women. Men have failed. Women are better because they are housewives and are better in administration. I wouldn't say it that way. The daily problems of countries are very similar. Very few countries make political decisions. You don't have five, you don't even have two countries which actually do politics. Daily problems which concern our lives are common everywhere. They are the same as women's problems, at home.

We should not try to change the politics between France and China for instance. We have to



Painting by Huguette Caland

***The physical reality of bodily contact is inextricably from the work of Lebanese artist Huguette Caland. Be they dancing or defensive, agitated or reclining, the bodies of Caland's paintings serve a metaphoric language that voices the forgotten mutation of our morphology - the sensations we feel, the sensuality we express through our corporeal being. The female body is her primary vehicle. Her depiction of the feminine in all its aspects - undulating breasts, curvaceous hips, the pubic triangle - daringly defined yet simultaneously ambiguous. Body parts drawn in ink, pencils, pastels or paints, convey a monochromatic tension; supple and organic yet deceptively simple. The viewer knows not if they stand revealed in their most minimal form or are characters of disguise.\****

know the facts and work according to them. We lose time trying to ana-

lyze the situation, and must work on getting out and moving on.

\* Write-up by the International Council for Women in the Arts exhibiting Caland's painting in their traveling exhibit. See al-Raida, #64, Winter 1994.

(1) In a previous interview with Helen Khal, Huguette Caland says "You know, as a young girl, I weighed 112 kilograms. I was grotesquely huge ... and that was another kind of battle I had to contend with.

Khal, Helen. 1987. **The Woman Artist in Lebanon**. Beirut: Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Beirut University College. p. 130.