

Morocco has for a long time been held in my mind as a sight of intrigue, a place very different from my home. With the initial intension of using Morocco as a site for my dissertation research, I wished to examine the theatricality of public squares in the city of Marrakech in contrast to that of London. My subject matter has now moved away from Morocco. Yet my ability to investigate the place with less of a narrow lens has ultimately allowed me to observe the cultural in a wider sense, collect a more diverse array of observations and open up more paths of inspiration.



After a year of studying Islamic architecture through my course, it was gratifying to see the forms brought to life. Especially within the Bahia Palace, I was stunned by the intensity of the detail and the lavish colours which were deployed. However, what I came to realise was the most dynamic and compelling spaces within the city tended to be those between the buildings. The vastly diverse number of public spaces; whether that be narrow streets, vast squares, or the bustling medina, each presented widely dramatic stage sets for the flow of human performance.



I was aware of the importance of public spaces in regions with such a climate; but I was unprepared for what I can only describe as the sheer 'publicness' of these environments. In the central square, Jemaa el-Fnaa, there are people pulling teeth, barbers, others buying their vegetables, while small clusters huddle to hear dramatised fables. Quite remarkably for an exterior space, this one volume is home to so many performances, it becomes an inventory for everyday life. But the square also has a gritty toughness to its charm. The name, Jemaa el-Fnaa, having been the site of mass executions might be translated as 'The Assembly of Death'; giving the place its own sense of macabre. Much like a Shakespearian tragedy there is a violence to these forms of commerce; as a tourist one feels an underlying tension that may be the remnants of colonialisms scars. Having read, 'The Battle for Home', I was also informed of the political as well as social significance of such public squares.



Balanced with the ecstatic energy, one might chance upon a glimpse of green. As you followed the sound of trickling water, you emerge into a paradise of green. Our lecture series on *Islamic Architecture* as well as that on *Landscape Design* had emphasised the value of gardens within this arid climate, alluding to the garden's symbolic meaning of heaven. Certainly, it was astonishing to see the engineering that had been used to facilitate such vivid vegetation. Within the traditions of garden design in the Islamic world, typified by the likes of the Alhambra, it was fascinating to see how this typology had been exploited by modern landscape designers. The renowned Jardin de Majorelle, combined a simplicity of international modernism while maintaining a sincere relationship with the Moroccan vernacular, most explicitly through the bold use of cobalt blue and tangy yellow. The garden also expressed lineage with the English Picturesque, boasting the theatrical manipulation of views, to which the brilliant blue of the house would also be just in site.



Marrakech was brimming with modern architectural innovations. The Yves Saint Laurent Museum, by Studio KO recently constructed next to the Jardin de Majorelle, shows a sensitivity towards Moroccan crafts while confidently expressing originality. The use of bricks in the entrance echos the closely sewn lining evocative of YSL's jackets, as the materials are all reflective of the building's locality. The interior volumes, like the clothes within, are said by the architect to reference the "succession of delicate and bold forms that characterised the work of Yves Saint Laurent". Even from the exterior the building surges and flows, while remaining grounded and technically rigourous.



I found many more examples of Marrakech's rich architectural environment, and have been struck by how vividly the city has stuck in my consciousness. Although the visit is no longer in aid of my dissertation, I have no doubt that the trip will having a lasting effect on my design.

