

## Aida Eltorie in conversation with Rachid Khimoune and The Children of the World

It was thirty years ago when the idea first came to Rachid Khimoune on *Les Enfants du Monde*. Born in France in 1953, a descendent of Berber origins, Rachid studied at L'Ecole Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris. A practicing painter before he turned to sculpture, he arrived from a generation of Algerian descendents who migrated after the Second World War. The Khimoune family, more specifically his father, worked in the mining fields in France, and Rachid as a child used to watch the abundant extraction of materials below the ground: Dug out and molded, it was a manipulation of solids by combining other means of natural remedies to create a new form. Finding it fascinating, the concept of portraits of the city arose in Rachid's mind, and he began to explore his desires of recognizing surfaces and textures that pertain to the identities of the current count of 21 cities.

Growing up in a recovering France, Khimoune believed he was French, but he was also considered an outcast to the country that brought about the causal roots of an Algerian Revolution regressing from its French counterparts. His mother, a Berber fortune-teller, used the method of pouring hot lead into water to tell the fates of her visitors; Rachid watched the wonderful liquefied substance develop into a solid form encouraging early encounters fused with his daily adoption of his own identity. The concept of an abstract form found deep within the earth's crust, carried layers of hidden treasures and futuristic revelations that brought along a promise of unusual joy and unknown truths to the common mind. Seeing his mother read the future in a completely mystical manner, allowed for the beginning of Khimoune's philosophy so seek realities that were not always easily seen. Using that same philosophy, and in passionate pursuit of spiritual encounters, Khimoune recalls Brouiere's reflections on religion: "Like a fabric – It has a front and a back," and like people, we all have sensibilities: A child returning to the slums of a poor neighborhood from his first site of a Castle, is sought to admire and agree with the simplicities of life and not its lavish oppositions.

Khimoune began to correspond with the first manufacturers of French sewer plates, and found out about the Parisian signatures on the facades of its roads. Quoting the artist, it would roughly read:



Jim, New York

*Tomorrow, if my building disappears,  
my sewage would indicate my building was here.*

Usually signed by the architect, the landmark of a monument is further ingrained in bronze and then slipped into a fabric worn by the child of its culture. Khimoune contemplated his lifetime work to be first exhibited at the Parc de la Villette (1999), where Bernard Tschumi had first developed and designed the recreational center of the park, inserting 35 red follies and breaking the standard rules to architecture by establishing new theories of monumental space. Tschumi was known for the influence brought about by Derrida's philosophy of *Deconstruction*, where there are grids and systems, created not to connect or make sense, but simply exist. The park is also located in a political standing point, whereby the people of the city were to the left and the state government to the right. A division between leftist and rightist ideologies, the park acts as a no man's land.

There were several opportunities for the realization of *Children of the World*, though not an inexpensive work, Khimoune wanted to be very selective on the type of exposure he could offer this novel sculptural project: Creating models of nations by designing its "children" out of textures familiarly found in the streets with elements such as broken asphalt, pavements, and manhole covers: It symbolized the twenty-first century and became a reminder to the rights of the child of the world.

After all, Khimoune was representing a grandiose opening into the third millennia, and it continues to travel to cities, finally arriving at Dubai's Art Sawa exhibition space this year (and Shanghai soon). Celebrating 3 decades since its musing inception, and 2 decades since its physical realization, *Les Enfants du Monde* can be seen at Le Parc de Bercy, and has become a permanent public emblem to what the future holds.

[www.rachidkhoune.com](http://www.rachidkhoune.com)



Enzo, Italy

All images are courtesy of Art Sawa Gallery