

Yesterday is tomorrow's memory: a group show of work from North Africa

16 May – 30 July 2016

23, Al Serkal Avenue, Dubai

The third exhibition in their Dubai space in Alserkal Avenue, this May Elmarsa presents a group exhibition of key works by major artists who have played an important role in the history of modern and contemporary Arab art from the Maghreb. Spanning the late 1960s to the present day, this selection aims to tell the story of art produced in North Africa during the past half century, demonstrating richness and variety and a shared formal language across the generations.

The title “Yesterday is tomorrow’s memory” plays with a quotation from Kahlil Gibran’s The Prophet and highlights the affiliation contemporary artists working in the region have with past masters. There is currently a resurgence of interest in modern art produced in the second half of the century which has been as reflected in the Modern section of Art Dubai and growing collections such as the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah and Mathaf, Doha. It is a delight to learn more about **Hatim Elmekki**, a prominent Tunisian painter and **M’Hamed Issiakhem** dubbed the father of Algerian painting, both of them preoccupied with the human figure to varying degrees of abstraction. Their works have an affinity in their ambiguity with the mixed media canvases of **Thameur Mejri**, despite the young Tunisian inserting symbols of the modern digital age alongside his timeless figures.

Many, such as **Abdelkader Guermaz**, immigrated to France in the 1960s and became affiliated with the School of Paris. Guermaz’s textured, monochromatic paintings still speak to artists from the Maghreb, there is a clear connection with the meditative, shimmering paintings of the Tunisian **Emna Masmoudi**, who also studied and lived in Paris.

Masmoudi is part of a strong group of female artists from the region. Her contemporaries **Asma M’Naouar** and **Meriem Bouderbala** share a fascination with European tradition. M’Naouar is influenced by American action painting in her scratched paintings executed in vivid red. Bouderbala’s Bedouinas depict floating, ghostly sculptural forms created by adding white fabric to her canvases, reminiscent of a typically female tradition of working with textiles, reflecting on the very nature of representation and construction of contemporary identity.

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Algerian **Thilleli Rahmoun's** *Entre les femmes d'Alger* from 2012 is a prime example of a contemporary artist rooted within a wider art history. It is a joy to see her work alongside the colourful, expressive works of fellow Algerian female artist from the last century, **Baya**. The exotic female and ideas of beauty were first examined in the decorative, busy works of **Aly Ben Salem**.

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The surreal, alternative world of **Halim Karabibene**, the whirling, busy compositions of **Gouider Triki's** engravings and the more geometric structures in **Mahjoub Ben Bella's** works all share a colourful exuberance and offer the chance of escape. **Nejib Belkhodia's** practice, also marked by its vivid blocks of colour, through its focus on specific architectural shapes found in the medina has an affinity with the calligraphic swirls on **Khaled Ben Slimane's** ceramics, **Rachid Koraichi's** sculptures and **Nja Mahdaoui's** canvases. **Farid Belkahia** from Morocco shares Koraichi and Mahdaoui's fascination with symbols and works on vellum. A younger Moroccan **Mohammed Rachdi** gives a contemporary take on the circular works of Mahdaoui and abstract patterns; drawing hugging forms in the centre of fragile paper doilies.

As Tunisia and its neighbours face ongoing political unrest, its artists are producing important new work that is reflective of the current situation but is also situated within a wider context. **Omar Bey** attesting pieces expose the vulnerability of the human condition. **Slimane Elkamel** and **Atef Maatallah** investigate the everyday: their works act as windows onto the current generation of youth trying to make some sense of the world, a smile or other sign of recognition and friendship between figures offer up a glimmer of hope for the future.

Exhibiting artists

Aly Ben Salem (Tunisia, 1910-2001), Hatim Elmekki (Tunisia, 1918-2003), Abdelkader Guermaz (Algeria, 1919-1996), M'Hamed Issiakhem (Algeria, 1928-1985), Mohammed Khadda (Algeria, 1930-1991), Baya (Algeria, 1931-1998), Nejib Belkhodja (Tunisia, 1933-2007), Farid Belkahia (Morocco, 1934-2014), Nja Mahdaoui (Tunisia, b. 1937), Mahjoub Benbella (Algeria, b.1946), Rachid Koraichi (Algeria, b. 1947), Gouider Triki (Tunisia, b. 1949), Khaled Ben Slimane (Tunisia, b. 1951), Meriem Bouderbala (Tunisia, b. 1960), Halim Karabibene (Tunisia, b. 1962), Mohamed Rachdi (Morocco, b. 1964), Emna Masmoudi (Tunisia, b. 1964), Asma M'Naouar (Tunisia, b. 1965), Omar Bey (Tunisia, b. 1973), Thilleli Rahmoun (Algeria, b. 1978), Atef Maatallah (Tunisia, b. 1981), Thameur Mejri (Tunisia, b. 1982), Slimen Elkamel (Tunisia, b. 1983)

About Elmarsa

One of the most established galleries in the region, Elmarsa has been operating in Tunis since 1994 and opened their Dubai gallery in Alserkal Avenue in 2015. The gallery's mission has always been to generate interest in Arab art from North Africa, specializing in both modern and contemporary practice. They have participated in every edition of Art Dubai since 2007 as well as a number of other prominent international art fairs and frequently publish monographs on their artists.

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Preview: 7 pm, Monday 16th May 2016. Exhibitions continues until July 30th.

Exhibition Facts

Opening Hours Saturday -Thursday 10am-7pm

Location 23, Al Serkal Avenue, Al Quoz 1, Dubai, UAE

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