

March 31st — July 31st 2022

Silsila

Le voyage des regards

Artists

Himat M. Ali, M'barka Amor, Ouassila Arras,
Sabrina Belouaar, Yasmina Benabderrahmane,
Rachid Boukharta, Dalila Dalléas Bouzar,
Ymane Fakhir, Randa Maroufi, Katâyoun Rouhi,
Maya-Inès Touam, Rayan Yasmineh, Haythem Zakaria

Curator and Artistic Director

Béréenice Saliou

Managing Director

Stéphanie Chazalon



Cyrus and the Smell of Lily © Rayan Yasmineh

Introduction

At a time when attempts to stifle free thought are on the increase, the exhibition *Silsila, le voyage des regards*, which will be held from March 31st to July 31st, 2022 by the Institut des Cultures d'Islam, will explore in depth the notions of transmission and representation through the works of artists who live in France, but whose personal and family histories are connected with a migratory past.

Silsila ('chain' in Arabic) evokes the ties between living beings or events, a series of unique but indissociable links, like so many intertwined destinies.

Subtly intertwining the 'strands' of their origins, the artists use different mediums and registers, adopting figurative and abstract approaches, to create images associated with the intimate and memories, symbols, and rituals. They explore the history of art and poetry, analyse their heritage literally and figuratively, and express shifting female identities, transcending the norms of tradition. Between the past and the present—both in France and in their countries of origin—their works invite the viewer to embark on a journey.

Poetics of exile

Poetic writing is at the heart of the works presented here. The title of Katâyoun Rouhi's series *Where is the Friend's House* is borrowed from the eponymous text by Sohrâb Sepehri, a great Iranian poet and painter of the mid-twentieth century, which was also the inspiration for the film that made Abbas Kiarostami famous. As in Kiarostami's work, the figure of the child is omnipresent in Rouhi's mysterious paintings. Figures of solitary little girls and boys, sometimes hidden under surrealist animal masks, define the artist's early years in Iran and then her daughter's early years in France. Intimate writings are finely calligraphed in reverse within the large negative spaces of the canvas. These writings shape poem-trees that discreetly attest to a life molded in exile — much like Himat M. Ali's *Dialogues* series, which catches the eye and draws the viewer into an abstract and vibrating universe filled with colored layers. Each layer of ink stands out yet also contributes to an invisible whole, while partially legible verses in the background, mostly quotes from the great contemporary Arab poet Adonis' book *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene*, create whispers about the perennial journey of the displaced and uprooted.



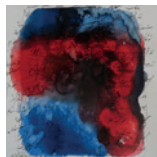
Katâyoun Rouhi
Where is the Friend's House,
2020
© Katâyoun Rouhi,
ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Katâyoun Rouhi
Deus sive Natura, 2020
© Katâyoun Rouhi,
ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Katâyoun Rouhi
Sui Generis, Shiraz, 2021
© Katâyoun Rouhi,
ADAGP, Paris, 2022

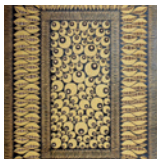


Himat M. Ali
with the poems of Adonis,
Dialogues, 2020-2021
© Himat M. Ali

Symbolic Reinterpretations

These artists draw from the materials, gestures and symbols of their culture of origin whilst freeing them from their traditional context. Rachid Boukharta shifts the geometric forms of an Amazigh carpet, pulling the shapes towards an organic and sensual universe. Haythem Zakaria reworks the figure of the magic square, with reference to industrial drawing and esoteric language, in a cabalistic series inspired by the book *Talisman - Shams Al Ma'arif* of Ibn Ahmad Al-bûnî, a thirteenth century Sufi alchemist.

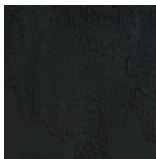
For Sabrina Belouaar another protective ritual, the application of henna, becomes the subject of a monochrome, by recasting this substance used by Maghrebi women during religious festivals and family ceremonies, the artist defies social conventions as well as a medium associated with modern and contemporary Western art. In this respect her work is reminiscent of Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, who breaks with the traditional practice of self-portraits in oil by representing her face and body covered with war paint to create a critical embodiment of the relationships of domination, from patriarchy to colonialism. Finally, the tremulous images of a henna make-up scene, the fervor of a prayer and the weaving of a carpet appear then fade away in Yasmina Benabderrahmane's video installation, juxtaposing fragments of family life in both Morocco and France.



Rachid Boukharta
Tapestry of a broken landscape, 2016
© Rachid Boukharta, courtesy Studio Hermits



Haythem Zakaria
Talisman of the Alif, The poetics of ether II series, 2019
© Haythem Zakaria, courtesy Valérie Delaunay



Sabrina Belouaar
Henna, 2022
© Sabrina Belouaar, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Dalila Dalléas Bouzar
Untitled #8, ma demeure series, 2021 © Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, courtesy Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, ADAGP, Paris, 2022

Silence as a legacy

Family heritage is the focus of these three works, evoking the transmission of heritage, words unspoken and taboos. Through the dignified eyes of a widow, *The Lion's Share* by Ymane Fakhir highlights the complex and unequal distribution of property according to Moroccan law, itself inspired by Muslim texts. The work is based on imagined configurations illustrating different cases, with a mathematical system using colored dots to symbolize what is due to each person according to their family ties, in an almost abstract manner.

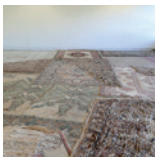
On the ground, the work *Family Photos* is a tribute by Ouassila Arras to her weaver mother. With this tangle of unraveled carpets, the artist symbolically pulls at the threads of stories kept silent by her relatives in Algeria and in France — forcing the viewer to tread with care as she does, navigating through what is left unspoken or omitted. In her video installation *The Great Safae*, Randa Maroufi also explores an intimate story shrouded in mystery. Mixing reality and fiction, she reenacts the story and perception of a housekeeper, who worked for her family in the 1980s and whose gender identity raised questions.



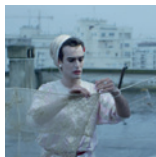
Ymane Fakhir
The widow,
The Lion's Share series, 2017
 © Ymane Fakhir,
 ADAGP, Paris, 2022
 Collection du Frac
 Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur



Ymane Fakhir
 Abdelkader,
The Lion's Share series, 2017
 © Ymane Fakhir,
 ADAGP, Paris, 2022
 Collection du Frac
 Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur



Ouassila Arras
Family Photos, 2018
 © Ouassila Arras



Randa Maroufi
The Great Safae, 2014
 © Le Fresnoy - Randa Maroufi

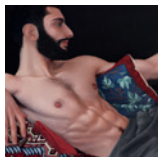
Art History: Questioning representations

These three artists skillfully reference the traditions of art history, both upholding and breaking with conventions. In her *Altarpiece — Delights of Time*, Maya-Inès Touam adapts a format typical of traditional fifteenth century Christian art, pushing it into the secular domain to outline a migratory journey from sub-Saharan Africa to France. She illustrates the steps of the journey in the manner of a still life, bringing together diverse objects and cultures, deliberately blurring the line between painting and photography.

The manifestation of plural identity is also expressed in the work of Rayan Yasmineh with a subversion of Orientalist iconography (*The Dream of Gilgamesh*) and of Persian miniatures (*Cyrus and the Smell of Lily*). By sowing anachronistic and Western references in the abundance of ornamental details and by using oil painting to emulate the Flemish masters, he mixes techniques and representations from supposedly opposite worlds. The same critical distancing is introduced by M'barka Amor in her series *The Orientals*. Using colored drips, she prolongs stylized motifs found on packets of consumer products such as henna, harissa or semolina, and highlights how these symbols continue to convey the image of an exotic Orient to this day.



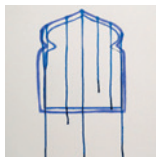
Maya-Inès Touam
Delights of Time, 2021
© Maya-Inès Touam,
courtesy Fondation H,
ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Rayan Yasmineh
The Dream of Gilgamesh,
2021
© Rayan Yasmineh



M'barka Amor
The Orientals, 2021
© M'barka Amor,
courtesy Regards Suds,
ADAGP, Paris, 2022



M'barka Amor
The Orientals, 2021
© M'barka Amor,
courtesy Regards Suds,
ADAGP, Paris, 2022