

## Abderrazak Sahli (1941–2009)

### Tolerance and Peace

13th November 2016 | 6-9pm

23, Al Serkal Avenue, Dubai

Elmarsa is pleased to present the work of Abderrazak Sahli (1941–2009), one of the most important Tunisian abstract painters of the 20th century. Through a selection of paintings, sculptures and installation works, this exhibition offers to see an oeuvre that remains little known to the public at large.

Born in 1941, Abderrazak Sahli, who was educated in the Koranic school of Zeitouniyya, explored the “defiguration” and “sonorisation” of words and texts as early as 1965. From then onwards he has worked in media as varied as photography, poetry, prints, paintings, books, boxes, bamboo sticks, sculpture, installations. His early figurative paintings later led to more conceptual exhibitions in Paris; combining old photographs and texts in Latin scripts of sonor poetry; other times his works were presented as part of a performance, with paintings and sculptures. His paintings react to a variety of stimuli, mixing unconscious elements with what is conscious, vigorous, and spontaneous. By alternating between the “full” (coloured) and the “empty” (uncoloured), Sahli seems to have endowed his stary mutant creatures with a kind of cosmic energy. The very expressive strength of the lightness of the forms or the shapes and the expressive strength of the whole is well demonstrated in his installation work « Buissons Ferriques » presented by Elmarsa at Art Projects at the first edition of Art Dubai in 2007, which was made of 100 metal stakes topped with painted patterns, in steel sheet metal of 180 to 270 cm height each.

Artist and poet, Abderrazak Sahli spent the majority of his life travelling between France and Tunisia. He embarked on a career in the visual arts in the 1960s, prompted by his friend and mentor Nejib Belkhodja, founder of the Tunis School of Art.

Sahli's abstract paintings are inspired by the decorative patterns and design elements of North Africa's architecture. However, they also draw upon the Abstract Expressionist and Russian Suprematist art that he encountered in Paris.

The artist strips back his subjects to their bare essentials of shape, colour and form. He described his work thus:

"My painting is principally based on a multitude of objects and forms; it translates diversity. The clutter of objects in my canvases is nothing but a representation of the crowd, the dense crowd that is force and movement."

As presented by Ali Louati in his book "The adventure of modern art in Tunisia," Sahli is a leading figure in the art world thanks to the originality of his work, marked by the spirit and the techniques of the new figuration. A work in which he, in his own touch, intervened by "writing or color in photos" using the photographic paper and acrylic on picture.

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Invitation for Global Art Forum at Art Dubai 2008 illustrating Sahli's « Buissons Ferriques », 2007 installed at Art Projects, Art Dubai 2007.

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Or as Rachida Triki emphasises in her essay “The art of the counterpoint” in her book *Paintings at Hasdrubal*, Ed. Private Collection Hasdrubal, Tunis; the proliferation of picturesque elements, between transparency and superimposition, livens up the flatness of the work and sets up a sensorial reception mode, with his alteration of bright colours and neutral tones, the surface of his paintings are no more than pure sensations. All objects of any kind which stem out of them are mere shows reminding us of the very essence of painting seen as colour lines arranged in ordered patterns. Actually, as if by mockery, it is to the origin of painting that the artist brings us back in a subversive and outrunning way.

“All objects of any kind which stem out of them [his paintings] are mere shows reminding us of the very essence of painting seen as colour lines arranged in ordered patterns.” Rachida Triki

Else as Joël Savary sheds further light on the artist’s work in an essay published in the exhibition catalogue of Galerie Lamarque in France:

“There is room in wandering for horses that bounce from valley to summit.”  
Mahmoud Darwich [p. 245]

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Abderrazak Sahli’s last solo exhibition at the museum of the Kheirredine palace in Tunis in Novembre 2006 brilliantly demonstrated – in a succession of perfectly staged, ample galleries – to what point, over several decades, his artistic trajectory has perpetually renewed and regenerated itself. Wielding both radiant happiness and artistic mastery, the artist has developed a great diversity of forms over the years.

It is precisely this supple virtuosity that must be reconciled with both the innumerable and captivating declines of the stylistic abstraction of the arts of Islam, and the major aesthetic revolution prompted by Kasimir Malevich in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century.

“It is precisely this supple virtuosity that must be reconciled with both the innumerable and captivating declines of the stylistic abstraction of the arts of Islam, and the major aesthetic revolution prompted by Kasimir Malevich in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century.” Joël Savary

During the seventies and eighties Sahli once again carried in his paintings the mark of the vivaciously critical and analytical taste in France, fifty years after Malevich: color is plain, bare monochrome is almost in sight, constructed points of reference are rare, the counterpoint of fields of lively color is as if an accident in the service of a minimalist universe. This austere demand for the rarefaction of regard also implants itself in the grain and greyness of his photographs of this period, where only the priority of movement subsists: the furtiveness of observation as a rapid antipainting. The artist’s engravings attest to the submersion of his work in a limitless refinement where vibrate the infinitely multiplied strokes of the plate.

According to the various artistic supports he chooses, Sahli exercises his range with an elegant ease. He counters the artistic imprisonment of restrictive supports, invoking the extravagance of playful, Baroque compositions, where games of line and color manifest themselves musically. As Eugenio d’Ors, the great historian of forms, observes, “...all Baroque calligraphy tends toward music.” [p. 106]

How could we not savor the vertigo of the colored variations – always renewed, always shimmering – of the recent large paintings on canvas, where unbelievable artificial aurorae borealis surge? Birds of paradise with mutant silhouettes surround the interlacing motifs.

Traditional artistic supports spill over – without being abandoned – gaining in the process an amazing arrange of paper decoupage, ceramics, free canvases, sakhanes, trousers and metal cut-outs. Here, Sahli's virtuosic appetite mixes with a plenitude of play and visual pleasure.

How can we not also make a connection between such visual richness and lyrical and concrete poetry, like that of Mahmoud Darwich, or even the direct poetry of William Carlos Williams?

I love the white locust tree  
the sweet white locust  
How much?  
How much?  
How much does it cost  
to love the locust tree  
in bloom  
[p. 271]

### **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.

**Preview: 6 pm, Sunday 13th Novembre 2016. Exhibitions continues until Decembre 24th.**

#### Exhibition Facts

Opening Hours **Saturday -Thursday 10am-7pm**

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

Contact **+971-4-3415806, info@galerielmarsa.com**

Website **www.galerielmarsa.com**

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For press information and images

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Untitled, 1993  
Acrylic on canvas  
120 x 120 cm





Untitled IX, 2006  
Acrylic on canvas  
149x149cm



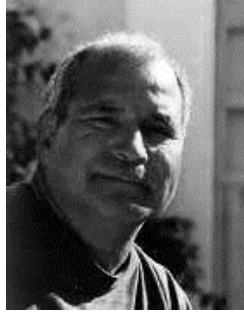
Untitled III, 2006  
Acrylic on canvas  
176x145 cm



Untitled VIII, 2006  
Acrylic on canvas  
201x150 cm



## Biography



**Abderrazak Sahli (1941–2009)**

Born in 1941 in Hammamet, Tunisia. Died in 2009 in Hammamet, Tunisia.

Lived and worked between Tunisia and France.

- 2003** Professor at the University of Fine Arts of Nabeul, Tunisia
- 2000** Professor at the University of Fine Arts of Tunis
- 1982** Studied engravings at the Superior College of Fine Arts in Paris
- 1974** Master in Visual Arts of Paris VIII Vincennes, France
- 1969** Diploma in Fine Arts School of Tunis

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2008** Exhibition at Galerie Hélène Lamarque, Paris, France
- 2007** Gulf Art Fair (Art Dubai 2007) in Art projects « Buissons Ferriques », installation of 100 metal stakes in steel sheet metal. Height: from 180 to 270 cm. Represented by Elmarsa gallery.
- 2007** Galerie Atrium, Carthage, Tunisia
- 2007** University of Fine Arts in Sfax, Tunisia
- 2006** Exhibition at the Palais Kheireddine, City Museum, La Medina, Tunis, Tunisia
- 2005** Galerie Ammar Farhat, Sidi Boud Said, Tunisia
- 2004** La Table Mobile, Cologne, Germany
- 2002** Palais Kheireddine, La Medina, Tunis, Tunisia
- 2001** Galerie Jeanine Rubeiz, Beirut, Lebanon
- 2000** Galerie Ammar Farhat, Sidi Boud Said, Tunisia
- 2000** Residence of Art in Dordogne, Musée du Périgord, Périgueux, France
- 2000** Galerie Kalyste, La Soukra, Tunisia
- 1999** Museum of Marburg, Germany
- 1998** Exhibition of ceramics at La Maison des Arts, Belvédère, Tunis, Tunisia
- 1997** Galerie Yahia, Tunis, Tunisia
- 1997** European Centre of Ceramics, Den Bosch, Holland
- 1997** Kirn, Germany
- 1996** Galerie Chiyem, Tunis, Tunisia
- 1996** Maison des Comonis, Toulon, France
- 1995** Bakou, Leighton House Museum, London, UK
- 1995** Museum of Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia
- 1991** Galerie El Mechtel, Tunis, Tunisia
- 1990** Galerie Ain Le Kram, Tunisia
- 1989** Galerie Edition Alif "El Bakou", Tunis, Tunisia
- 1989** Museum of Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia
- 1988** Galerie Arlogos, Nantes, France
- 1984** Cultural Centre of Fontenay-aux-Roses, Paris, France
- 1970** Galerie Irtisem, Tunis, Tunisia
- 1969** Galerie de l'information, Tunis, Tunisia

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2012** Intervalles, Elmarsa Gallery, La Marsa, Tunisia
- 2008** Kunstforum Arbeitsgericht Marburg, Germany
- 2008** Les pieds dans le plat, Galerie Ammar Farhat, Tunis, Tunisia
- 2008** Le rouge et le noir, Galerie le Violon Bleu, Tunis, Tunisia
- 2008** Algiers museum collection from the Institute of the Arab World, Paris, France
- 2008** Museum Collection: The twenty years of the Institute of the Arab World, Paris, France
- 2008** Expérimentale 14, Germany
- 2008** Tribute to Gorgi, Galerie Gorgi, Tunis, Tunisia
- 2008** Dubai Contemporary Art Fair (UAE), Saragosse (Spain)
- 2008** Cologne Biennial, Germany
- 2008** Art Connexion, Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia
- 2007** Galerie Gorgi, Tunis, Tunisia
- 2007** Galerie Ammar Farhat, Tunis, Tunisia
- 2007** Dar El Founoun: The Union of the Tunisian Artists Exhibition, Tunis, Tunisia
- 2007** Kunsthalle Dominikanerirche Osnabruck, Germany
- 2007** Dialogues Méditerranéens, St Tropez, France
- 2007** Gulf Art Fair Dubai, Elmarsa gallery, Tunisia
- 2006** Rencontre Internationnale 2006, Galerie Espace Top Action, Algiers, Algeria
- 2006** Cologne Biennial, Cologne town hall, Germany
- 2006** Poétique de l'Existence, Hammamet, Tunisia
- 2006** International Contemporary Art Fair, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2006** Expérimentale, 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2006, Germany
- 2006** Galerie Le Violon Bleu, Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia
- 2006** Elmarsa Gallery, La Marsa, Tunisia
- 2006** Galerie Gorgi, Le Belvédère Tunis, Tunisia
- 2005** L'Art Ephémère, Palais El Abdelliya, La Marsa, Tunisia
- 2005** Célébration, Salon 2005 in Monaco, organised by AIAP and UNESCO
- 2005** Galerie Ammar Farhat, Tunis, Tunisia
- 2005** Contemporary sculpture exhibition at Dar Kamila, the Residence of France at La Marsa; with renowned artists Bernard Venet and Bernard Pages; organised by the French Embassy in Tunisia
- 2004** Opus III, Algiers, Algeria
- 2004** Akteins Köln participation, Cologne, Germany
- 2004** Chebba Exhibitions: Hammamet and Sousse, Tunisia
- 2003** Contemporary Art Meeting (French-Tunisian Artists), Tunis City Museum, Tunisia
- 2003** Sculpture Urbaine, Opus II, Grenoble, France
- 2003** Symposium, Kunstforum at Köln (Cologne), Germany
- 2002** Exhibition at Two: Salhi and Haser, Galerie Holbein in Lindau, Germany
- 2002** Pop Art Exhibition, Geneva Fair, Switzerland
- 2002** Galerie J.J Donguy, Paris, France
- 2001** Palais Kheireddine, City Museum of Tunis, La Medina, Tunisia
- 2001** The Spring of Poets, Performance Conference, Tunis, Tunisia
- 2000** Alexandria Biennial "Jury Prize", Egypt
- 2000** Séville University Exhibition, Spain
- 2000** Exhibition and performance of Ventabren Contemporary Art, France
- 2000** The Tunisian Painter, Hannover International Fair, Germany
- 2000** On the banks of Isère, Grenoble, France
- 1999** Galerie Ammar Farhat, Tunis, Tunisia
- 1999** Art without Borders, Timotca Exhibition, UN, New York, USA
- 1998** City of Nevers, France
- 1998** Travelling exhibitions: Timotca Exhibition, Art without Borders, UNESCO in Paris, France / Exhibition for The Union of Tunisian Artists, Tunis, Tunisia / Galerie Municipale Mitra, Lisbon, Portugal / Espace Saint Séprien, Toulouse, France
- 1998** Kif Kaf Handicap event, Mahjoub Tébourba, Tunisia
- 1998** Maghreb Cultural Centre
- 1997** International Cultural Centre of Hammamet, Tunisia

- 1997 Doha Biennial, Qatar  
 1997 100 Artists of 5 Continents, Pont Lapa, Rio De Janeiro, Brazil  
 1997 Tunisian Contemporary Painting, Kuwait  
 1996 Galerie Mille Feuilles, La Marsa, Tunisia  
 1996 Galerie Plus Arts, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France  
 1996 Galerie J and J Donguy, La Roquette, Paris, France  
 1995 Tunisian Season: Spain  
 1995 Look at Tunisian Contemporary Art, Toulouse, France  
 1995 Look at Tunisian Contemporary Art, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France  
 1995 Africa 95, The Delphinium Trust Studio, London, UK  
 1995 Al Fan Kassel, Germany  
 1994 Paintings of the Maghreb, Madrid Museum of Modern Art, Spain  
 1994 Schilders Uit Maghreb (Painters from Maghreb), Gant, Belgium  
 1993 Paintings from Maghreb, Madrid, Spain  
 1992 Doha Biennial, Qatar  
 1992 Galerie Ken Bouficha, Tunisia  
 1992 Galerie Kalysté, Tunisia  
 1992 Galerie Chiyem, Tunis, Tunisia  
 1992 New Delhi Biennial, India  
 1992 Universal Exhibition, Seville, Spain  
 1990 Galerie Civaca of Contemporary Art, Marsala, Italy  
 1990 Trends of contemporary painting of the Maghreb: Travelling exhibitions at Casablanca, Morocco, Nouakchott, Mauritania, Tripoli, Lebanon and Tunisia: Galerie Chiyem, Tunis; International Centre Cultural of Hammamet, Tunisia  
 1990 Vent Jaune, Editions Alif "EL Bakou", Tunisia  
 1990 Museum of Modern Art, Paris, France  
 1980 Paris Biennial, Museum of Modern Art, Paris, France  
 1979 Galerie Lara Vinci, Paris, France  
 1979 International meetings, Grand Palais, Paris, France  
 1979 Galerie Arlogos, Nantes, France  
 1978 Arab Painters in Paris, Espace Cardin, Paris, France  
 1978 Exhibition of Young Painters, Paris, France  
 1978 Salon de Mai, Paris, France  
 1971 Paris Biennial, Museum of Modern Art, Paris, France

**PUBLIC COLLECTIONS (Selection)**

Institut du Monde Arabe (Institute of the Arab World) Paris, France  
 Tunisian Bank at Tunis and Amman, Jordan  
 The Ministry of French Culture  
 The Ministry of Tunisian Culture  
 Collection of the City of Tunis  
 Kunsthalle Dominikanerkirche, Osnabrück, German