

## KHALED BEN SLIMANE

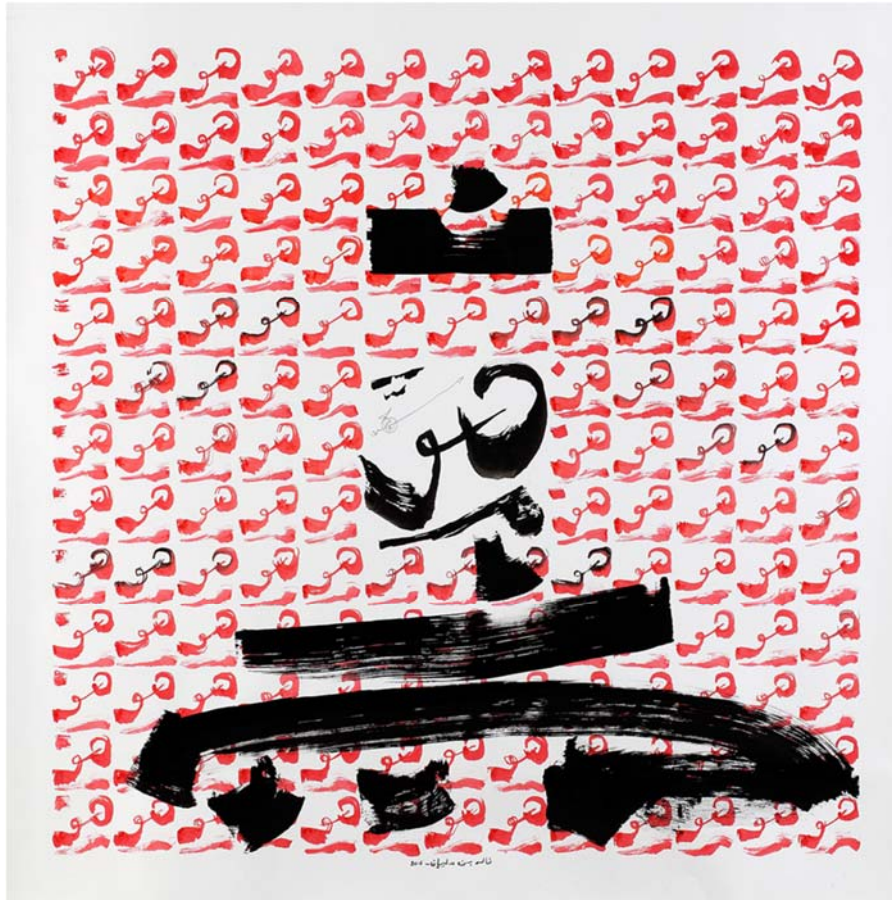
### YA LATIF

Opening March 9, 7PM  
March 9 | April 8, 2017

#23 Al Serkal Avenue, Dubai

**Elmarsa is very pleased to present Ya latif, the first solo exhibition by Tunisian painter, sculptor, and ceramist Khaled Ben Slimane in the UAE, from March 9th to April 8th 2017 at their gallery space in Alserkal Avenue, Dubai.**

This latest body of work, including paintings on paper, canvas and wood as well as ceramic pieces, highlights Ben Slimane's multi-disciplinary practice. As the title suggests, the exhibition represents a continuation in the artist's exploration of spirituality. This aspect formally links him to predecessors in the Maghreb modern art tradition, Aly Ben Salem and Abdelkader Guermaz, the two artists in Elmarsa's concurrent exhibition at Art Dubai Modern 2017. Ben Slimane invokes Sufism literally through his graphic repetition in a distinctive new style that distills diverse international influences. The combination of graffiti-like scrawl, Japanese influenced calligraphy and slashes of color come together to create an effect that transcends barriers between the spiritual and mundane worlds that are equally invoked in his works.



*Khaled Ben Slimane, Howa IV, 2016, Acrylic on Arches paper, 150 x 150 cm*

Ben Slimane's personal path offers insight into the evolution of this unique practice. His interest in ceramics emerged in the early 1970s when he would wander out of his painting classes at the School of Fine Arts in Tunis to learn the traditional craft of pottery local craftsmen reconnecting to Nabeul, the city of his birth and an area of Tunisia with a long ceramic tradition. During these same years, he also discovered the graphic arts while trying to decipher old legal manuscripts in his grandfather's house. In the catalog essay accompanying this exhibition, Lutz Becker explains that "the script fragments and signatures from his ancestor's legal papers reconnected Ben Slimane with his family history and made it part of his identity as an artist."

Ben Slimane's incorporation of Sufi chants of *Huwa\** and *Ya latif\** into his art practice originates in these family archives. As he explains, "most of the documents had a signature at the bottom, and all ended with the words *wafaqahu Allah* 'with God's blessing'. That expression then started to appear in my work, and gradually only the word Allah was retained; repeating it thousands of times in my work helped me to concentrate, and to enter a spiritual sphere, which resulted in the word Huwa 'He' being present in my artworks." In his work, the religious and legal origins of the word fade and it becomes more of a polyvalent mark. Seen through this lens, the Sufism-inspired repetition of Huwa becomes a key component to understanding Ben Slimane's facility in joining these distinct art forms into one cohesive and distinctive style. He brings a painterly treatment to ceramic surfaces through his use of space, his calligraphic brushstrokes, and the vivid ochre and blue colours and thereby joins painting with design in a manner that challenges genre categorization.

The coherence across his oeuvre speaks to a practice that is metaphysical while very much of this world: the search for identity takes the form of a spiritual journey that then becomes crystallized as an aesthetic quest for universal beauty. Ben Slimane's style evolves over several years, incorporating elements from beyond Tunisia and contact with other spiritual practices as he travels to India and Iran in the mid-70s, studies ceramics at Massana School in Barcelona in the late 70s and Japanese calligraphy and brush painting at the Idemitsu Museum of Art in Tokyo in 1982. Not only did these years raised his awareness of his own cultural heritage as a Tunisian and Muslim but they also developed his belief in universal beauty.

\* Khaled Ben-Slimane often introduces in his paintings the Arabic letter words Huwa, meaning Him, and Ya Latif, as a reference to one of the "99 names of God" in Islam, and indicating God in the Sufi language.

**The artist will be in attendance for the opening on March 9th and will be available for interviews.**

#### **About the artist:**

Born in 1951, ceramicist, sculptor, and painter Khaled Ben Slimane is considered one of the most outstanding contemporary ceramists in the world today. Between 1977 and 1979, he studied at the Fine Arts and Architecture School of Tunis and at the Escuela Massana in Barcelona. Since his first solo exhibition in Tunisia in 1982, he has been exhibiting extensively around the world including Galerie Le Passage in Berlin (1988), The National Museum of Literature both in Prague and Bratislava (1989), the Leighton House Museum in London (1995) and the Museu de Ceramica of Barcelona (2001), Seto City Art Museum in Japan (2005), his exhibition "From Earth to the Sky - Ceramics and Paintings" at the Karlsruhe Badisches Landsmuseum in 2004, travelled to five different museums in Germany (2005-6). He took part in the exhibition "Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle-East" curated by the British Museum in London (2006-2008). He received numerous distinctions and awards such as membership in the International Academy of Ceramics, in Geneva since 1990, the National Cultural Award of Tunisia and in 1991 the Honour Prize at the 3rd Worldwide Triennial of Ceramics in Zagreb, ex-Yugoslavia. In 2010, he took part in the itinerant exhibition from the World Culture Treasures collection of the British Museum in London and at the exhibition Kingdom of Vandals at the Badisches Landesmuseum in Karlsruhe, Germany. His ceramic works were exhibited in 2016 at the Majolika Museum and Badischen Landesmuseums in Karlsruhe. In addition, he is regularly represented at international art fairs such as in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Marrakech and Paris by Elmarsa.

**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.

**Exhibition Facts:**

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

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

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Khaled Ben Slimane, Les Soleils, 2016, Mixed media on wood, 202 x 202 x 13.5 cm





Khaled Ben Slimane, White Rotund, 2016, Ceramics, H.58 x 50 x 50 cm



Khaled Ben Slimane, Howa IX, 2015, Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 300 cm



Khaled Ben Slimane, Ascension I, 2016, Acrylic on Arches paper, 50.3 x 66 cm