

Nja Mahdaoui

## Trance

14 March | 30 April 2016

Elmarsa at Alserkal Avenue, Dubai



EVENT OF | فضاء فنون



Under the patronage of His Excellency Abdul Rahman Al Owais,  
Minister of Health & Prevention and  
Chairman of the Dubai Culture & Arts Authority

Elmarsa gallery is proud to present the exhibition “Trance” by Tunisian artist Nja Mahdaoui at its new gallery space in Alserkal Avenue, Dubai. The exhibition will focus on the unique distinctive work by one of the major figures of Arab art whose international career has been hugely productive for more than four decades. The exhibition will present the richness of his spiritual and aesthetic practice throughout his creative engagement and the variety of his output. Through a wide array of new works, the presentation will focus on the diverse aspects of his contemporary calligraphic medium, showing his formal inventiveness and his versatility in the handling of materials, which includes parchment, bronze, vellum and wood. While his use of the Arabic script reveals the pure artistic dimension of the letter, his calligraphy also exposes the depth of his emotional and conceptual consideration of the most free and spiritual notions of art.

## Nja Mahdaoui

(b.1937, Tunisia)

Nja Mahdaoui lives and works in Tunisia. Graduated from the Academia Santa Andrea in Rome and the Ecole du Louvre (Department of Oriental Antiquities) in 1967. He pursued his academic training at the Cite International des Arts in Paris with a scholarship from the Tunisian Government. Nja has been a Jury member and honorary guest at many international events and biennales such as at Sharjah and Tehran and he is also a member of the International Jury for the UNESCO Arts Prize. He has received a number of distinctions and international awards, such as the Grand Prix des Arts et des Lettres of Tunisia and the ArtCraft UNESCO prize in Paris, France.

Nja Mahdaoui is a visual artist, an explorer of signs. He has been portrayed as a 'Choreographer of Letters'. His work inspired by Arabic calligraphy is remarkably innovative as the aesthetic dimension of letters brings forth a sense of the poetic - highly rhythmic - arresting us with its rich abstract compositions. Thus, the concept beyond the works reveals how the ideas are conveyed creatively through the artist choice of materials and medium.

He has designed monumental artworks such as sculptures and tapestries in Jeddah and Riyadh airports, Aramco head office in Dahrhan, KAUST University Campus Mosque in Saudi Arabia, Gulf Air aircrafts (50th Anniversary) and created many logos, designs and posters for theater plays, books, companies, and organizations such as Amnesty International.

Nja participated in numerous exhibitions worldwide including "Word into Air" at the British Museum, "The Brush dances & the Ink Signs" at the Hermitage Museum, "Perspectives: Arab & Iranian modern master" at the Saatchi Gallery, and the "Arab Book Art" at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, only to mention a few.

His works can be found in many private and public collections such as the British Museum in London, the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC, Mathaf - Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, the Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA) in Paris, the National Gallery of Kuala Lumpur. He is considered as a notable Arab contemporary artist.

### **Museum and Gallery Collections**

Sharjah Biennial for the Art of Arabic Calligraphy (Exhibition & Guest of honour), UAE

"Perspectives: Arab & Iranian Modern masters", Saatchi Gallery, London, UK

Word Into Art, British Museum, Dubai, UAE

Meem Gallery, Dubai, UAE

Montcalm Gallery, Gatineau, Canada

Institut Du Monde Arabe, Paris, France

Etc.

## About Elmarsa:

Founded in 1994 in Tunis, Elmarsa is a contemporary and modern art gallery based in Tunis and newly in Dubai. The gallery aims at looking to the future, whilst embracing the past art practices and the impact of the Mediterranean, African and Arab heritage on the arts from the region. While interest is growing in art from North Africa, the gallery offers established artists as well as emerging talents an opportunity to showcase, network and exchange at the regional and international level. In line with its activities in Tunis, the new gallery space will continue providing the artists with a greater reach and a more global audience. The gallery's exhibition program reflects on its mission to generate interest in Arab art, inspire dialogue between cultural, social and artistic leaders, and to develop international connections through its interest in fostering relationships between art and people.

## Contact

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**Trance, 2013**  
Mixed media on linen canvas  
300 x 700 cm



**Astar 1, 2015**  
Mixed media on linen canvas  
140 x 200 cm



**Douroub, 2015**

Mixed media on drum vellum and wood  
Installation of 30 drums

Ten double membrane drums, Diam. 70 cm x Width 38 cm each  
Ten double membrane drums, Diam. 43 cm x Width 29 cm each  
Ten single membrane 'Bendirs', Diam. 43 cm x Width 14 cm each



Eshq 1, 2014  
Mixed media on linen canvas  
Diameter 180 cm



**Azimuth II, 2012**  
Mixed media on Arches vellum paper  
114 x 300 cm



**Maqam Essafa, 2011**

Gold leaf gilded bronze  
H. 85 x L.78 x W. 60 cm

Base patina rolled brass 0.6x55.5x80 cm

Edition of 4

**Executed at Susse Foundry, Paris & Ateliers Gohard, Paris**