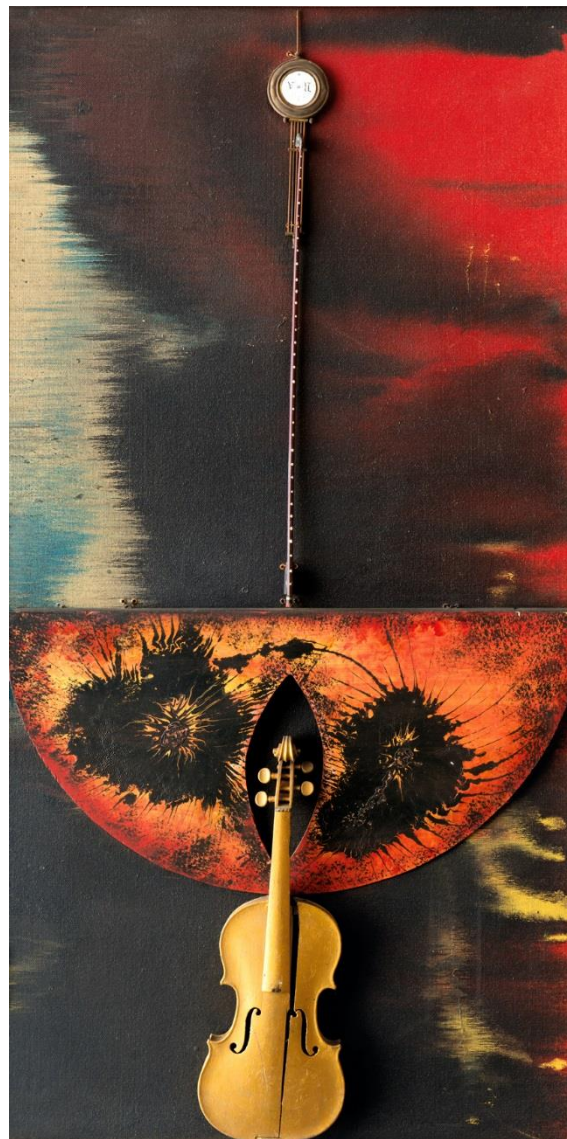


Nja Mahdaoui

AWJ : Rétrospective Nja Mahdaoui 1966 - 2018

23 February | 7 April 2018

Elmarsa Tunis is very pleased to present **AWJ – Retrospective Nja Mahdaoui**, a solo exhibition of the works by leading Tunisian artist **Nja Mahdaoui**, spanning from 1966 to 2018, on show from February 23rd to April 7th 2018 at their gallery space in **La Marsa, Tunisia**.



Hommage à Paganini, 1966, Mixed media, objects mounted on canvas and hardboard, 150 x 78 cm

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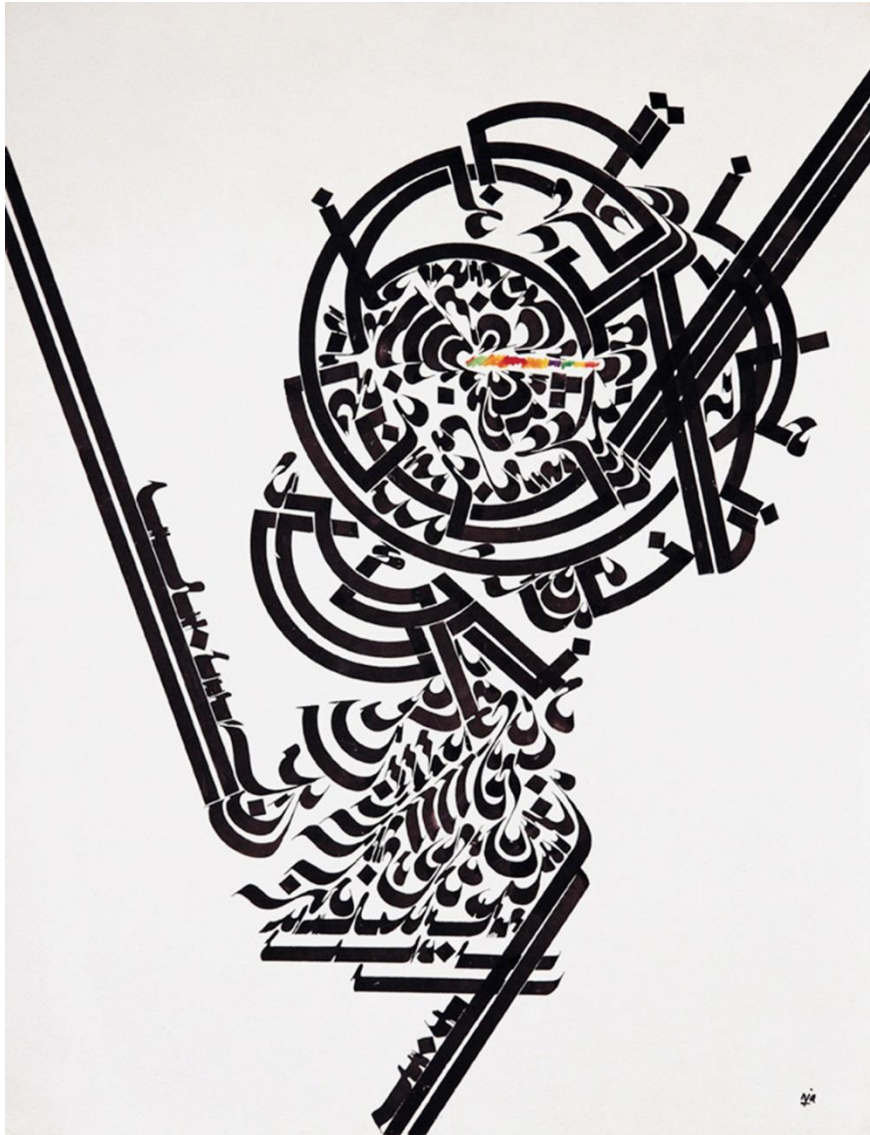


Concrétion 5, 1972-75, Lacquered oil on linen canvas, 150 x 150 cm

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Graphic Study 4, 1975, Indian ink and gouache on paper, 65 x 50 cm

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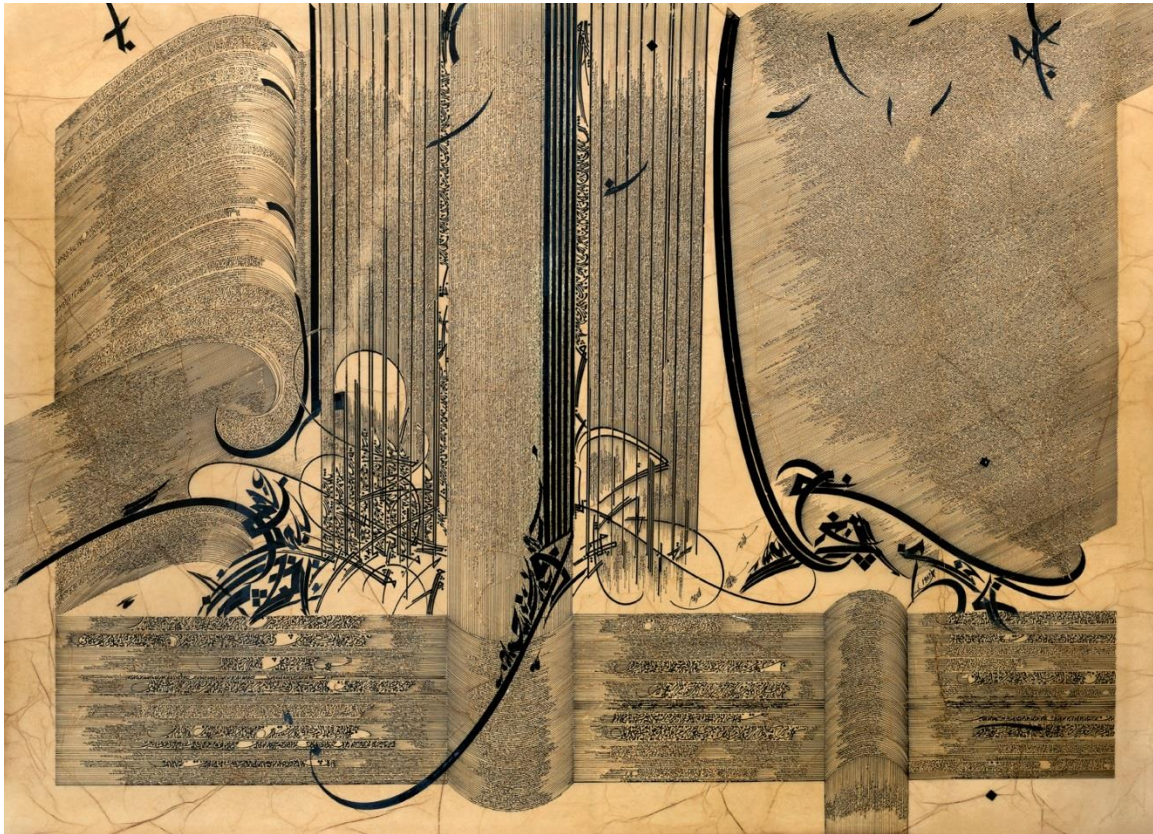


Vibration 8, 1982, Acrylic on paper, 70 x 100 cm

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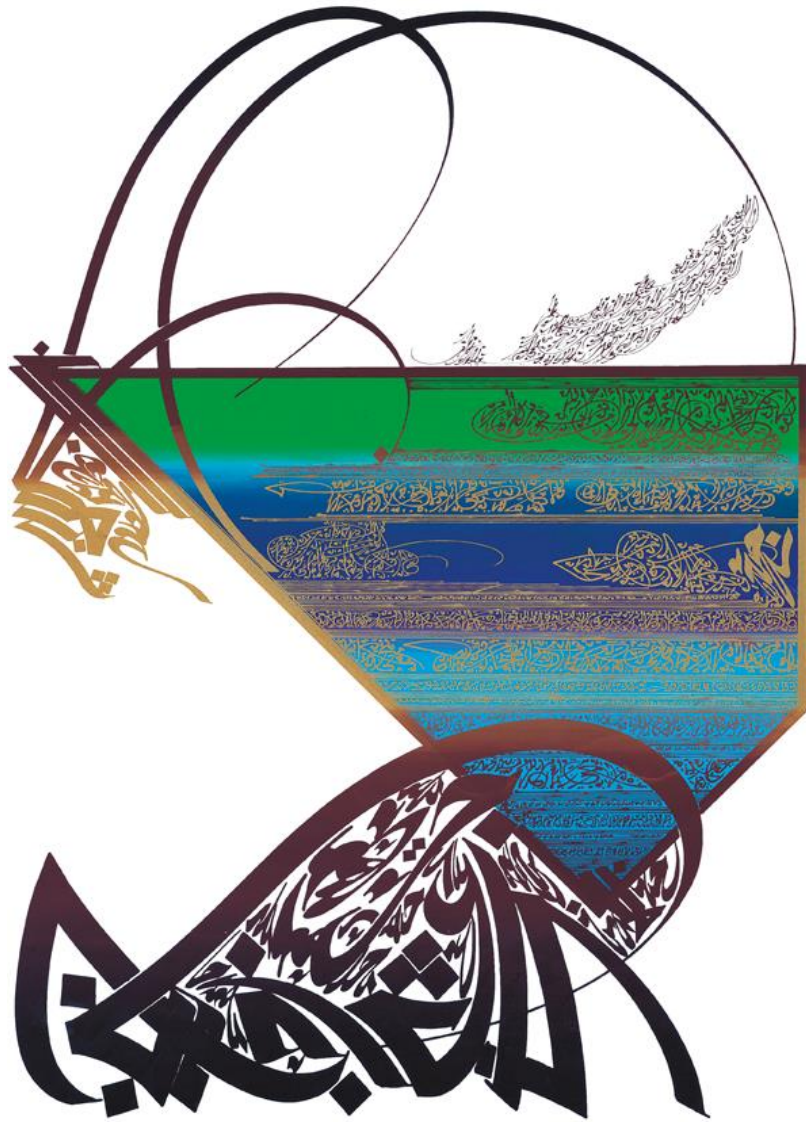


Calligrams 9, 1986-87, Indian ink on parchment paper, 100 x 140 cm

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Silkscreen 1 from the *Hidjaz 1* portfolio, 1997, Original silkscreen print on Arches vellum paper, 56 x 38 cm

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Midoun 3, 2002-07, Mixed media on linen canvas, 150 x 150 cm

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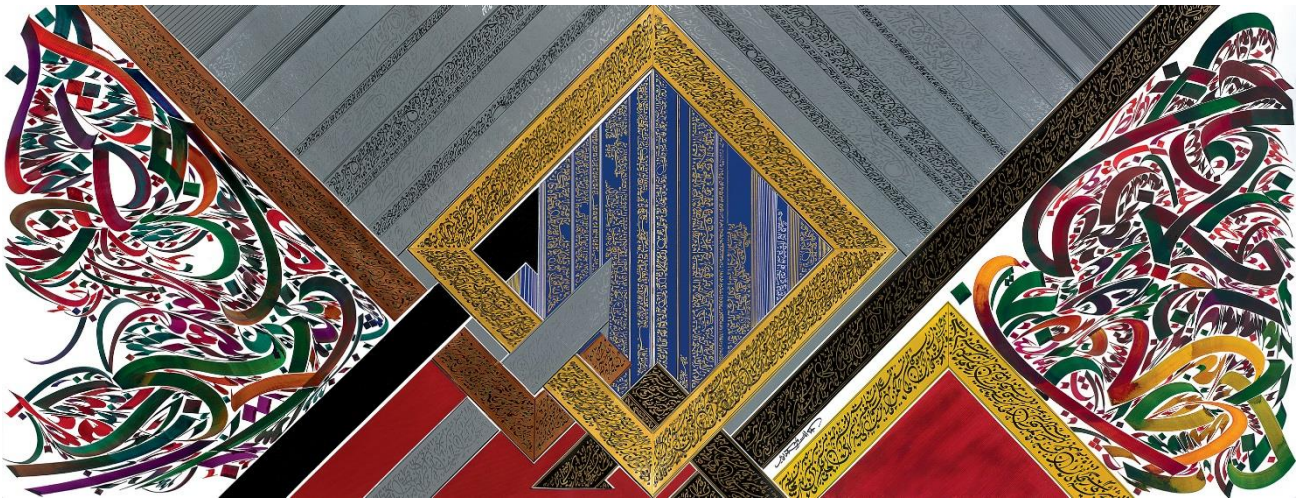


Calligrams on Parchment – Square 1, 2011 Indian ink, gold and acrylic on parchment, 85 x 85 cm

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

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Asrar 6, 2015, Mixed media on canvas, Diam. 90 cm

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TEXT ABOUT EXPO

Trained at the École d'Architecture Paris La Villette, Karabibene builds a surreal or phantasmagorical imaginary world through his multidisciplinary practice. Multiple and seemingly incongruent scenes play out in different layers of his densely-packed compositions, drawing simultaneously from diverse visual languages ranging from Tunisian modernist Gouider Triki and the Roman mosaics exhibited at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis to the works of Hieronymus Bosch, René Magritte, Salvador Dali and Francis Bacon. In Karabibene's paintings and engravings, these disparate parts come together in his oeuvre to offer politically charged and sharply humorous commentary on post-revolutionary Tunisia.

Karabibene's composition seems to radically shift in *Tunisian Winter* (2013). Sitting on a cloud at the center, a pressure cooker – the artist's symbol for the combustible state of post-revolutionary Tunisia which made recognizable in his ongoing multidisciplinary performance work MNAMC calling for a still unrealized Tunisian national museum for modern and contemporary art. Here, the mounting political pressure in the nation have turned into a maelstrom that is pulling everything into its chaotic vortex: the multi-layered organization of his other compositions has lost its order and the fine lines that defined the contours of those figures has become shadowy and hazy.

Shifting to Karabibene's paintings, the introduction of colour seems to bring out the essential playfulness of his compositions. Human and fantastical characters appear to dance and move freely in the canvas's multiple plains, unaware of the eruptions of strange forms from its collective memory and the foreboding shadows and plumes of smoke that lurk in the corners of *Siesta in Gammarth* (2014). Nevertheless, the tragic element coexists with the comedic in this imagined world, as represented by the repeated stairs motifs suggesting a chutes and ladders-like game of chance, where danger lies around every corner.

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About the artist:



Born in 1937, Tunis. He lives and works in Tunisia. In 1967, he graduated from the *Academy of Arts of Santa Andrea* in Rome and the *Ecole du Louvre* (Department of Oriental Antiquities) in 1968. He pursued his academic training in Paris, at the *Cite Internationale des Arts*, on a scholarship from the Tunisian Government. He's one of Tunisia's leading artists and a notable Arab contemporary artist. Nja Mahdaoui is a visual artist who considers himself **'an explorer of signs'** and has been described 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 abstracts compositions. Famous for his meticulous work in ink on parchment, Mahdaoui stresses the visual impact of his compositions, devoided of actual textual meaning, which he refers to as **'calligrams'** or **'graphemes'**.

Thus, the concept beyond the works reveals how the ideas are conveyed creatively through the artist choice of materials and medium: Canvas, vellum, papyrus, arches paper, silkscreen print, book, poster, design, sculpture, aluminium, brass, melamine, drum, textile, embroidery, tapestry, ceramic, wood, jewelry, stained steel glass, architecture, planes...

Nja has been Jury member and Honor guest at many international events and biennales (Sharjah International Arabic Calligraphy Biennial, UAE, 2006, The International Arts Biennial of Tehran, Iran, 2006, Abu Dhabi Art Festival in 1989...) and he was member of the International Jury of the Arts Prize of UNESCO from 1993 to 1995. He has received a number of distinctions and international awards, such as the 'Great prize for Arts and Letters' from the Tunisian Ministry of culture in 2006 and the UNESCO great prize for Artcrafts in the Arab world in 2005.

He 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 (2010), Gulf Air aircrafts (50th Anniversary, 2000) and created many logos, designs and posters for theater plays, books, companies, and organizations such as Amnesty International in 1991.

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In addition, he took part in Art Projects, introducing his work in performing art within the framework of theatre and dance. Performances of "Total Art" and "Body-Writing: interactive communication between Arab and European artists, and artists from North America and Asia on the theme "Language and register in exchanges in visual arts" in Tunisia, France, Italy, Denmark, Japan, Cuba, Canada, Germany and Jordan...

In 2012, he has performed a charity live creation for Noor Dubai Foundation, in collaboration with 4 young Emiratis artists, hosted and organized by Christie's, under the patronage of H.E. The Minister of Culture for the UAE, Abdulrahman Al Owais. | Link >

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJxP3mG-5yM>. And recently, a performance with the Italian artist Agostino Ferrari, "Meeting signs" at the Living Art National Center in Tunisia | Link >

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxOtS_TRXws

He takes part regularly in seminars and colloquia at universities in Tunisia and abroad and gives lectures. At the American University of Sharjah in 2007, in the AUD American University of Dubai in 2011 - 'Crossing the Line: Drawing in the Middle East - intersections of transdisciplinary practice and understanding', and lately at CSUN California State University Northridge and at UCLA University of California, Los Angeles in 2011.

Nja participated in numerous exhibitions worldwide including 'Word into Art' at the British Museum, 'The Brush dances & the Ink Signs' at the Hermitage Museum, 'Perspectives: Arab & Iranian modern masters' at the Saatchi Gallery, the 'Arab Book Art' at the 'French National Library' in Paris, only to mention a few.

His works have been widely shown around the world in GCC, Asia, America, Africa and Europe. They are presented in international art fairs in Abu Dhabi Art, Art Dubai, Art Paris, Marrakech Art fair, Kunst, Zoom Art Fair, Art Asia Miami, Art Stage Singapour, India Art Summit, Scope Basel, Contemporary Istanbul. They 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.

About Elmarsa:

Elmarsa was founded in 1994 in Tunis and expanded to Dubai in 2015. Specialized in both modern and contemporary North African art, it represents recognized 20th century artists as well as mid-career artists. Elmarsa regularly participates in several international art fairs in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Paris, London, Marrakech, Miami and New York.

2, place du Saf Saf
2070 La Marsa, Tunisia
T: +216 71740572

23, Alserkal Avenue
Al Quoz 1, Dubai, UAE
T: +971 43415806