

## *Reviewing Landscape*

20 November, 2023 – 15 January, 2024

Elmarsa Gallery, Dubai



Zoubair Turki, *View from Sidi Bou Said*, Watercolor on paper, 60 x 72 cm

Elmarsa Gallery brings together an eclectic group of classical painters alongside modern and contemporary artists whose practice explores landscape. The story of landscape painting is one of slow development into distinct styles throughout time, with some of its iterations culminating out of antiquity into the formation of classic and historic landscape painting. Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century and into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, classic landscapes were sought out to illustrate and encapsulate the ingenuity of picturesque and sublime beauty, with locations in Italy and the Netherlands as ideal surroundings for study. With time, France and England established new centres of study for romantic landscape painting, nevertheless having yet to be considered and legitimized as quality genre by the Academy. As the swaying of tides in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century came ashore due to the advocacy of landscape painting, the historic landscape gained notoriety and respectability amongst the art Academies of Europe.

Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, North Africa emerged as a prime destination for artists and scholars, spawning new ways of portraying geography through paths previously carved out by orientalist predecessors. It was this fascination which would go on to inspire painters versed in impressionist and expressionist practices to expand

on their milieu of carefully observing nature. The promotion of Art Tourism, with the establishment of associations such as the Tunisian Salon (est.1894) joined by Cecile Bougourd and Yahia Turki, the Society of French Orientalist Painters (est.1893), and the Society of Algerian Artists and Orientalists (est. 1897) joined by Alexis Delahogue, amongst others, created discourse within the community of landscape painters. One of the favourable outcomes of the exchange creating new possibilities for scholarship and education within the arts. The composition of landscape painting also evolved, contrasting the frame using urbanism.



Cécile Bougourd, *Cimetière à Zarzaourc*, Oil on canvas, Circa early 20th Century, 38 x 60 cm

The integration of modernism and expressionism took precedence, fostering regional talent influenced by both traditional painting and classic European practices. As the early 20<sup>th</sup> century approached, so did landscape painting. With an established history of the Salon, the formation of artist groups such as the Groupe des Dix founded in Tunisia by artists including Moses Levy, incited clear narratives surrounding the necessity for establishing more intimate depictions of North African landscape. The Aouchem group, that saw the involvement of artist Baya Mahieddine and Ecole de Tunis, formed by artists such as Pierre Boucherle and Yahia Turki in 1947, focused their interests in reviving traditional motifs to be incorporated into a new form of social realism.

From then, contemporary artists working natively with their geography have chosen more nuanced approaches to the realm of landscape, such as Atef Maatallah, an artist whose practice is focused towards depicting the precariousness of historical narratives and the existence of human life.



Atef Maatallah, *Aux Quatre vents ou El-Mzédoudi*, 2018, Pencil drawing on paper, 150 x 200 cm

Throughout the duration of the exhibition, the following artists will be displayed:

- Alexis Delahogue (France, 1867 – 1936)
- Ammar Farhat (Tunisia, 1911-1987)
- Antoine 'Mayo' Malliarakis (Egypt, 1905-1990)
- Atef Maatallah (Tunisia, b. 1981)
- Baya Mahieddine (Algeria, 1931 – 1998)
- Cecile Bougourd (France, 1857 – 1941)
- Hedi Turki (Tunisia, 1922 – 2019)
- Jellal Ben Abdallah (Tunisia, 1921 – 2017)
- Moses Levy (Italy, 1885 – 1968)
- Pierre Boucherle (France/Tunisia, 1894 - 1988)
- Yahia Turki (Turkey/ Tunisia, 1901/03 - 1969)
- Zoubeir Turki (Turkey/ Tunisia, 1924 - 2009)



Ammar Farhat, *Untitled*, 1962, Oil on canvas, 46 x 55 cm



Alexis Delahogue, *Biskra-Sidi Sarsour*, circa early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Oil on canvas, 38 x 55 cm

## About the artists

### Alexis Auguste Delahogue (France, 1867 – 1936)

Influenced by the post-impressionist movement, Alexis Delahogue travelled with his twin brother Eugène from Algiers to Constantine and on to El Kantara and Biskra. He exhibited at the *Salon d'Hiver* in Algiers, and they were both members of the *Société des Peintres Orientalistes* and the *Société des Artistes Algériens et Orientalistes* from 1889. Alexis Delahogue exhibited regularly at the *Salon des Artistes Français*, of which he was a member. He is well-known for being the painter of the desert caravans, the oasis and landscapes under the Saharan vibrant light. Particularly, he painted Tunisia including the oasis of Gabès, and many views of the cities of Tunis and Kairouan. The country of Tunisia awarded the two brothers with one of the most prestigious decorations called the *Nichan al Iftikhar*.

### Ammar Farhat (Tunisia, 1911-1987)

Born in Béja, Tunisia and orphaned at the age of five, Farhat was a self-taught painter who began his art career at age fifteen, making charcoal portraits in cafés. Discovered at the 1937 Tunisian Salon by French painters Jacques Revault and Alexandre Fichet, Farhat quickly became one of Tunisia's most important modern artists. His first solo exhibition was held in 1940, and he later joined other young artists of his generation in forming the *École de Tunis* in 1948 and the "Group of Ten", which was an influential association of Tunisian Artists with intentions aimed at the promotion and development of modern art in the country. The Group of Ten organized exhibitions, workshops and cultural events, bringing modern art to a broader audience, hence contributing to the growth of Tunisia's art scene. Farhat's talent was quickly recognized, awarding him the Prize of the *Young Tunisian Painting* at the 1949 Tunisian Salon, offering him the chance to travel to Paris. Mahmoud Messadi is quoted to have stated that 'Not having been shaped by academic learning, he was free of constraint and could be what a painter can dream of...'. Farhat's figurative paintings depict vivid scenes from the lives of Tunisia's rural working class. Detaching his scenes from a homogenous orientalist perspective, Farhat works towards painting a Tunisian society laden with its diverse heritage, rich in its traditions and heavily entrenched in its own history. From tattooed old women, wedding ceremonies, musicians, and dancers; A melancholy of the past exists, yet an undeniable hope in the future remains. In 1984, he won the National Art Prize in Tunis and a cultural center in his hometown of Béja was named after him. Ammar Farhat passed away in Tunis in 1987.

**Atef Maatallah (Tunisia, b. 1981)**

Born in 1981 in Al Fahs, Tunisia, Atef Maatallah lives and works in Tunis. Maatallah graduated from the Institut Supérieur des Beaux-Arts of Tunis, and pursued his training at the Cite des arts de Paris. His work revisits the codes of narrative figuration depicting ordinary people and objects he encounters in daily life, evoking precariousness of existence. Maatallah's paintings and drawings give a cultural commentary through part of an intimate story or one suggestive aspect of everyday life inside Tunisia's society relating to historical narratives. He had solo exhibitions at Elmarsa Gallery in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017 and 2019 in Tunis and Dubai. His works have been presented in exhibitions including L'Institut des Cultures de l'Islam de la Ville de Paris in 2016, Me.Na Pavilion in Singapore in 2014 curated by Catherine David from the Centre Pompidou, and have been widely shown at art fairs in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Miami, Marrakech, London, Paris, New York. He was twice the recipient of the Prize of Paris Contemporary Drawing in 2015 and 2016. His works have been acquired by various private and public collections in North Africa, Europe and the Middle East, including Barjeel Art Foundation, Kamel Lazaar Foundation and the Ministry of Culture in Tunisia.

**Antoine 'Mayo' Malliarakis (Egypt, 1905-1990)**

Born in 1905 in Port Said, Egypt, to a Greek father, who was engineer for the Suez Canal and a French mother, Antoine Malliarakis, is better known as Mayo. In 1910, he started his education in Ismailia, North East Egypt, and pursued it in a Jesuit school in Alexandria. Since very young, Mayo showed an interest in art, especially aquarelle, and drawing; which led him in travelling to France in 1923. There, he studied architecture, and painting at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, before going to Berlin in 1928, where he joined the French writer René Crevel (1900-1935), and started working in the studio of the German expressionist Rudolf Levy (1875-1944). It is important to note that the oeuvre of Mayo is hard to precisely define. With his refusal to be part of the Surrealist movement, whether in Cairo, or in Paris, the artist consequently imposed a personal style. In 1933, Mayo returned to Egypt, but would eventually go back to France, where he settled in villa Seurat in Paris in 1935. He then decided to relocate in Rome in 1966, subsequently moving back to Paris. Instead of following pure artistic, and theoretical principles, he preferred to combine inspirations, and aesthetics from realism, surrealism, and poetry. From the late 1960s to the 1980s, Mayo stayed in Rome, and produced works, that tackle the theme of metamorphosis, in connection with the Latin poem *Metamorphoses*, written by Ovide (43 B.C.- 18 A.D.) The artistic specificity, or affiliation of Antoine Malliarakis, was always separated between the places, where he lived, and the different movements, that he discovered. This particularity is the very image of the art from a cosmopolitan world, in which Egyptian, Greek, and French people met. Antoine Malliarakis passed away in Seine Port, France, in 1990.

### **Baya Mahieddine (Algeria, 1931 – 1998)**

Baya was an artist born in Burdj El Kiffan, Algeria in 1931, to a family of mixed Kabyle and Arab heritage. Known for her bold gouache paintings that live in folkloric and whimsical realms, she is considered one of Algeria's most prolific modern artists. Referring to her own style as "Bayatism", Baya is drawn to painting depictions of mothers, children, fauna and flora alongside musical instruments. Her life is considered enigmatic, discovered in 1942 by French art collector, Margeurite Caminat Benhoura while tending to her property alongside her grandmother. Margeurite later became guardian to Baya, fostering her abilities in the arts. In her youth, the artwork of Matisse, Miro and Braque hung on the walls of the Benhoura home, becoming reference for her own studies. She was later introduced to gallerist Aimé Maeght and writer André Breton, who included her in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Surrealist Exhibition in Paris in 1947, Debuting her first solo exhibition at Galerie Maeght, Paris. In 1948 she started a residency at the Madoura Studio in Vallauris, meeting and collaborating with Pablo Picasso. Since, her work has been exhibited extensively in various museums and galleries. In 1982, Baya exhibited at the Museum Cantini in Marseilles inaugurated by French President François Mitterrand. In 1987, she was honored by Algerian president Chadli. Baya passed away in 1998, and a retrospective was held at the Musée des beaux-arts, Algiers. Baya has reclaimed international recognition with the first North American exhibition by the Grey Art Gallery at New York University in 2018, and a major retrospective held at the Sharjah Art Museum in 2021 as part of the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the 'Lasting Impressions' series.

### **Cecile Bougourd (France, 1857 – 1941)**

Cecile Bougourd was born in 1857 in Pont-Audemer, a French commune located in Normandy. She was the daughter and student of Auguste Bougourd (1830-1917) a famed landscape painter. She appeared in the Paris Salon catalog for the first time in 1888, the first of many accomplishments, going on to become one of few female painters exhibiting in provincial Salons. In 1892, the Bougourd family relocated to Nantes. Throughout the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Cecile spent time in Tunisia, with her subject of interest shifting from flora to urban landscape. Alongside her father, Cecile travelled to Tunis and quickly thereafter joined the Society of French Orientalist Painters in 1904. Becoming more enveloped in a community of French painters in Tunisia, Cecile and Auguste joined L'Institut de Carthage in 1906, aiding in the relaunch of the Tunisian Salon. Regularly exhibiting at the Tunisian Salon until 1914, Cecile made a name for herself, emphasizing the metropolitan aspects of the cities she painted. Moving back to France in 1914, subsequent years came with the death of her father, in 1917. In France, Cecile taught painting, traveling between her siblings and painting along the way. Her focus in painting expanded, with still lifes of flora resurfacing as part of her practice. The motifs of Tunisia stay present throughout her paintings, an ever-present imprint left on her perspective of landscape. Her work is owned by private collectors globally and can be found in Canel Museum of Pont-Audemers permanent collection.



#### **About Georges Albert CYR (France, 1880-1964)**

Georges Albert Cyr was born in Montgeron, near Paris, in 1880. Cyr started painting in Paris, advised by Juan Gris. He moved to Rouen, circa 1910, to start an artistic career and met with the artist Jean-Baptiste-Armand Guillaumin, friend of Gauguin, Pissaro and Monet. His first solo exhibition was held at the Galerie Moderne in Rouen in 1922. By 1924, Cyr was exhibiting at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris and had solo exhibitions in Le Havre, Rouen and Paris. In Rouen, Cyr worked and exhibited with many French artists of the avant-garde in the 20's and 30's, and was also friend with the Parisians: Armand Guillaumin who was his master, and also Marquet, Matisse, Picasso, among many others. He befriended with the painters of the estuary Henri Saint Delis, Othon Friesz, and Raoul Dufy. Yet, Cyr's stripped-down paintings have found little resonance among the public in Normandie. In 1934, he left Rouen for Beirut where he remained until his death, participating actively in the artistic life of the country. Cyr made close friends within the avant-garde Lebanese intellectual circles, including the poet and playwright Georges Schehade and A. Tabet. His studio became the favorite meeting place for artists such as Chafic Abboud, Elie Kanaan, Omar Onsi, Farid Aouad, Cesar Gemayel, Michel Basbous. In 1962, the Beirut contemporary art centre paid a tribute to his work and career, before his death two years later in 1964. In 1965, Brigitte Shehadeh organized a retrospective exhibition of the artist's work in Beirut. Cyr was awarded the Lebanese National Order of the Cedar. An entire room has been dedicated to the works of Georges Cyr at the Havre Museum in France. An exhibition of his work was organised by the Galerie Bertran in Paris in 2004.

#### **About Hedi Turki (Tunisia, 1922 - 2019)**

An emblematic figure of Tunisian painting, Hedi Turki was born in Tunis to a family of Turkish origin. At first, he learnt, self-taught, the fundamentals of painting, before completing an art course in Paris at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in 1951. From 1956 to 1957, he obtained a two-year scholarship to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome. In 1959, he travelled to the United States, where he discovered American abstract art and enrolled in a class at Columbia University. From 1963 until his retirement in 1985, he taught at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Tunis. In 1964, Turki was one of the founding members of the Ecole de Tunis. His work has profoundly evolved over time from his early figurative work to abstraction. A further significant influence was the work of Abstract Expressionist artists, mainly of prominent American painters Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. His work was key in introducing abstract painting in Tunisia. Meanwhile, Turki's work is deeply rooted in his attachment to Tunisia and to spirituality. He lived and worked in Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia, where he died in 2019. Turki's work has been regularly exhibited in Tunisia, France, England and across Europe.

### **Jelal Ben Abdallah (Tunisia, 1921 – 2017)**

Born in the picturesque Mediterranean town of Sidi Bou Saïd, Ben Abdallah studied in Tunis and is known as a ceramist, mosaicist, fresco painter, and sculptor. First exhibiting his paintings at the age of 16, his early illustrations also appeared in the first Tunisian feminist periodical *Leïla* in the 1930s. He participated in the Salon Tunisien in 1942 and 1945, and established an atelier in Montparnasse in Paris in 1952. Associated with the École de Tunis, he adapts miniature painting to create finely detailed representations of quotidian life, idyllic women, surrealist imagery, horses, marine creatures, and ethereal seascapes. From 1950 he also received state commissions to make decorative ceramic tile panels for civic buildings. Amid his illustrious art practice, Ben Abdallah had also been a resident stage designer at the Tunis Theater. Exhibiting in Tunis and abroad since 1939, his contribution to Tunisian art was celebrated by a solo exhibition in 2010 at the Galerie Atrium in Carthage entitled 'Femmes, je vous aime!'

### **Moses Levy (Italy, 1885 – 1968)**

Moses Levy was born in Tunis of a British father and an Italian mother. His son is the Tunisian-based painter Nello Levy. Moses trained in Italy - in Lucca, Florence and the studio of Giovanni Fattori - and was subsequently active in Viareggio. He spent most of his life in Tunisia, but continued to travel frequently between the northern and southern Mediterranean coasts. After studying at the Lycée Carnot in Tunis, at the Academy of Lucca in Florence and then at the School of Fine Arts in Florence, he was admitted with "The picking of olives" in 1907, to the VII Biennale in Venice. Back in Tunisia in 1908, he mixes Tunisian and Tuscan inspirations and exhibits at the Tunis Chamber of Commerce and Arts, in Rome in 1913 and 1914, then he exhibits with painters from the Avant-garde such as De Chirico in Viareggio in 1918 and 1919. In 1925, he lives in Tunis and continues to exhibit his work in Rome, Viareggio and Tunis. In 1936, he exhibited with the Group of Four in Tunis and appears as one of the leaders of the Group of Ten founded in Tunis in 1948. Close friend of Yahia Turki, Ammar Farhat, Aly Ben Salem, Jellal Ben Abdallah, Hatim El Mekki and Abdelaziz Gorgi, Moses Levy will be one of the founding members, with Pierre Boucherle, of the School of Tunis in 1949, and one of the driving forces of the Tunisian art scene. As soon as he is back to Italy, a retrospective is dedicated to him in 1953, in Florence. Settled permanently in Viareggio, he continues to enrich Tunisia and Italy with his powerful colour palette until his death in 1968, at Viareggio, where a beautiful retrospective was organized in tribute to his work and life in 2002.

### **Pierre Boucherle (France\Tunisia, 1894 - 1988)**

A native of Tunisia, Pierre Boucherle was a well-known figure at the forefront of the art scene in Tunisia during the French Protectorate. Starting at a young age with satiric illustrations in Tunisian newspapers, Boucherle achieved a strong and important body of work throughout his long career. He developed his unique style specializing in nude, landscape and still life paintings. Reminiscent of the Cubist aesthetic, his paintings are distinguished by the simplicity, accuracy and the rigorous bold outlines of his drawing. Mobilized during the First World War, he then went to Paris. During the inter-war period, he met the painters Modigliani and then André Derain, Moïse Kisling, and the poet Guillaume Apollinaire. In 1923, he received his first scholarship to go to Spain to study art. He was a student at the École des Beaux-Arts in Tunis. Boucherle lived between Tunis and Paris, where he participated regularly in major exhibitions such as the Salon d'Automne, Salon des Tuileries, Salon des Indépendants. After World War II, he returned to Tunisia and in 1936 founded the Group of Four with artists Corpora, Moses Levy, Jules Lellouche, which quickly became the Ecole de Tunis in 1949, representing the avant-garde in the arts in Tunisia.

### **Yahia Turki (Turkey\Tunisia, 1901/03 - 1969)**

Yahia Turki was a Tunisian painter and pioneering modernist. In addition to Qur'anic education, Turki attended school at the Collège Sadiki, the Lycée Carnot and the Lycée Alaoui. He received a scholarship from the French Protectorate for classes at the Centre d'art de Tunis, facilitated by Alexandre Fichet and Pierre Boyer. In the 1920s Turki worked in the colonial bureaucracy and as a cartoonist, and was the first Tunisian artist to exhibit in the Salon Tunisien in 1923. He lived and painted in Paris from 1926 to 1928 and from 1931 to 1935, frequenting the studios of artists such as Matisse and Derain. Turki's primary medium was oil on canvas. A member of the Groupe des Dix in 1947 and founding member of the École de Tunis in 1948, he influenced younger artists in his quest to reconcile Tunisian national identity within an inherited system of artistic practices. The thematic content of his work reflected this struggle. Turki portrayed Tunisia through scenes of quotidian life, architectural spaces, landscapes, still lifes, and portraits. He painted murals in the École d'Agriculture de Moghrane in the 1950s. Turki assumed the presidency of the École de Tunis from Pierre Boucherle after Tunisian independence in 1956.

### **Zoubeir Turki (Turkey\Tunisia, 1924 - 2009)**

Born 19 November 1924, in Tunis, Zoubeir Turki was a Tunisian painter and sculptor. He was the younger brother of Hedi Turki (1922–2019). He was also a student at the school of fine arts in Tunis, then spent a period in Stockholm from 1953 to 1958, where he attended the Academy of Fine Arts. He portrays the figures in his compositions with a great deal of wit and affectionate humour, making them lively, vivacious, and malicious. His drawing is linear, very pure, and reminiscent of Matisse's, but is nevertheless full of detail, meaning, and the psychology of its figures. He especially excels in mimicking the Tunisian middle classes. He also executed some mural decorations and low reliefs in Tunisia. He went back to Tunisia in 1958, two years after the country's independence where he resumed contact with the Ecole de Tunis, which he was a founding member of and served as senior official in the Ministry of Culture. He became the President of several associations and unions, including the National Union of plastic and graphic arts, the Cultural Commission of the city of Tunis, and the Union of Plastic Artists Arab Maghreb. He founded and directed the Center for Living Arts and the Belvedere; furthermore, on the political front, he was elected to the National Assembly in 1979 and a municipal councillor for the city of Tunis. The depiction of Tunisia's collective memory made his painting style unique, which brought him international recognition and undoubtedly the most popular artist in the art history of Tunisia. Turki was also a sculptor; his bronze sculpture of Ibn Khaldun was erected on the most famous place of Tunis Avenue Habib Bourguiba, where the School of Tunis was founded in 1949. Turki died in Tunis at the age of 84.

### About the gallery

Founded in 1994, Elmarsa Gallery is located in Tunis and Dubai, with an expanding European presence in Paris. Specializing in both modern and contemporary art, the gallery represents and supports the career of some of the most influential and recognized artists of the 20th and the 21st century from North Africa and the Middle-East, with a wide-ranging exhibition programme at its two gallery spaces. Active in both the primary and secondary markets, Elmarsa also represents its artists at major international art fairs focusing on African and Middle-East art in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Paris, London, Marrakech, Miami and New York.

### Exhibition Information

Opening Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 7pm

Location: Unit 23, Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz 1, Dubai, UAE

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