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| Elmarsa Gallery is pleased to present **«*النتيكا*** The rustling of the stone » Atef Maatallah’s first solo exhibition in Dubai, from 18 Novembre 2019. The exhibition presents some fifteen drawings and mosaics mapping the inner land of the artist’s childhood in "antika", the ruins of the Tunisian archaeological site Thuburbo Majus transformed into a playground to flee the daily dreary burden from his native town of El Fahs. **«*النتيكا***  The rustling of the stone » extends the artist's interest in history related to our relationship to time and dichotomies between individual memory and collective memory, human reality and historical reality.  A movement presides over the paths drawn by the artist: contemplation, introspection around the first home. This home, this place from which this series of drawings radiates, is the one to which a cold body takes refuge; it is first and foremost the family home, the home of a native land. A self-archeology digs into the cold ashes of an inner life in search of the still burning embers of a soul. And these are the memories of the childhood boredom that went fetching its games from the "antika", from the archaeological site of Thuburbo Majus; also memories of a dull daily life weighing on the city of El Fahs that we fled to the ruins, thus freeing ourselves from the place, also freeing ourselves from time.  Undoubtedly, it is because in this elsewhere of another time, everyday life vanishes into the vastness of the centuries and the city walls collapse for a horizon of plains; they are also the memories of popular beliefs that old stones blow into the ears of the living. Before the name of Thuburbo Majus was dug up, there was Henchir el-Kasbah and for the silent stones that were already on the ground, legends had been carved to their measure: this place where the foot and head of a monumental Jupiter and gigantic carved stones lay could only be a land of giants; but these colossuses are no longer there and there is only an empty site ready to be filled with vast fables. Victor Guerin noted as early as 1860 that the inhabitants of the region named one of the cisterns at the site "Damous er-Rouah", the "underground of souls": there would be "thrown the bodies of several murdered men, [...] the souls of these unfortunate people are constantly flying around the opening of the cistern, to demand revenge"**⁵**.  The deserted "antika" was inhabited by rural and contemporary legends inspired by an ancient urban area. It becomes the place of the imaginations that a child composed, by decomposing, by play, the shards of a fragment of mosaic or by rolling his marble balls in the dust of centuries, that a dreamy shepherd guessed from among the woolly tufts of his flock, that a drunkenness, finally, wandered when the stones replayed the bacchanals they sheltered.  Native of El Fahs, Atef Maatallah is a graduate of the Higher Institute of Fine Arts of Tunis (2005) where he studied sculpture. Since the end of 2017, he had occupied the basements adjoining Elmarsa gallery, which can be accessed from Abdelhafidh El Mekki Street. Over the months, the artist's daily life has become a ritual: for days, he leaves the ground of the street’s trivialities to sink into an underground and will only come back up tired of the labor. From the surface from which we write, this chthonian path, which has become a chorus, preludes what the artist is undertaking from below the world. Let us remember the root bonds between man (homo) and the earth (humus¹), let us remember the primitive strain they would share, of this first man made of materia prima, clay. Then, of these remembrances, we would almost see the artist, by sinking underground, inhuming himself (in-humus) and, as a result, inhuming his self (in-homo), through an entry into oneself. There, in himself where he faces his inner self, he works. But then, on what?    View of the artist studio. *Le Mzéoudi* (The bagpipe player), drawing on paper. June 2018.  When the words were silent, the studio was filled with the rustle of the stones. Not only the figurative stones, the ruined stones, but their resonance in the practice of drawing: the graphite pencil leads. They are also stones whose erosion tells a story. The rubbing of the pencil lead on the paper seemed to be the scansions of a long poem, punctuated by stops: the choice of another lead, sometimes fatter, loaded with graphite, sometimes drier, loaded with clay. And each pencil, each lead refill and each level of erosion of the tip points made a singular noise. On the surface of the paper, graphite stones and their wear and tear echoed faithfully the ancient stones and their defeats on the surface of history. Even more than seeing the drawings being made, entering the artist's graphic monuments also involved listening to the eroding graphite ores.  At first sight, the first graphic fields, which we witnessed being created during our visits, state the interference of two different times: on the one hand, the time of History - already established by its capital initial -, borrowing its slowness and powers from the resistance of the stone, from the persistence of ruin; a time that then intended to be timeless, erecting its temples and carving its monuments towards an eternity by which its men would attain immortality. On the other hand, it is also the time of history - announced, this one, by its anecdotic lowercase -, being part of the transitional and fleeting course of a daily life, of the banal flight of a plastic bag, of the ballet of drying clothes. The time of a *mezoued* (Tunisian bagpipe) melody that spreads its complaints to the four winds, of the vulgarity of a garbage lying on the ground. Despite their apparent distance, these two times coexist together and in the same time: that of the work; two times whose strange encounter establishes the poetic power of these visions.  Mohamed-Ali Berhouma  Excerpts from the exhibition catalogue essay: *“Archaeographing the interior lands - Some incursions into Atef Maatallah’s drawings”* by Mohamed-Ali Berhouma (April 2018-May 2019)  ***5*** *Victor Guérin, Voyage archéologique dans la Régence de Tunis, Paris, H. Plon (coll. « [Bibliothèque Joseph-Simon Galliéni (1849-1916) »), 1862, T. 2, p. 371.* |

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| **About Atef Maatallah**  Born in 1981, El Fahs, Tunisia, Atef Maatallah lives and works in Tunis. Maatallah graduated from the Institut Supérieur des Beaux-Arts of Tunis, his works have been exhibited in numerous cultural venues including L'Institut des Cultures de l'Islam de la Ville de Paris in 2016, Me.Na Pavilion at Singapore Art Fair 2014 curated by Catherine David from the Centre Pompidou. He was awarded twice the Prize of Paris Contemporary Drawing in 2015 and 2016. His works are part of various private and public collections including Barjeel Art Foundation and the Ministry of Culture in Tunisia.  **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 participates in several international art fairs in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Paris, London, Marrakech, Miami and New York.  **Exhibition Information**  Gallery Opening Hours  Monday – Friday, Saturday: 10am – 7pm  Location  23, Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz 1, Dubai, UAE  Gallery Contact  T: +971-4-3415806│[info@galerielmarsa.com](mailto:info@galerielmarsa.com) | | | | | | |
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