

Halim Karabibene

***Subjective Landscapes***

January 20 | March 1, 2018

23 Alserkal Avenue, Dubai



Halim Karabibene, *Siesta in Gammarth, Berlin-Bizerte* 2014, Oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm

Elmarsa Dubai is very pleased to present ***Subjective Landscapes***, a solo exhibition of engravings and paintings by Tunisian artist **Halim Karabibene**, from January 20th to March 1st 2018 at their gallery space in **Alserkal Avenue, Dubai**.

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.



Halim Karabibene, Carthage story, 2015, Aquatint 30 x 40 cm on paper 51 x 64 cm

Pictorial versions of the Surrealist automatic process, the dream-like imagery of Karabibene's engravings make visible the troubled unconscious of the contemporary Tunisian society. The recurring image of wheels throughout his work bring to mind the expression "the wheels have come off" for when something has gone irretrievably wrong. This tragic turn is made visible by the disruptive eruption of the repressed Carthaginian and Berber elements buried in the nation's collective memory onto the surface.

Relics of the ancient pillars that still stand in the ruins of Carthage outside Tunis are layered with appearances by Tanit, the Phoenician goddess adopted in Berber culture, and the war elephants that permitted Hannibal's victorious crossing of the Alps and intermingled with idyllic scenes of Mediterranean resort towns like Gammarth. His engravings seem to prescribe that contemporary Tunisian society delve into its own cultural history to repair the present and build a future.





Halim Karabibene, *Tunisian Winter*, Paris 2013, Carborundum engraving on paper, 100 x 100 cm

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.

**About the artist:**

Born in 1962 in Bizerte (Tunisia), Halim Karabibene came to recognition in the 1990s due to his unusually sarcastic yet masterfully executed collages and oneiric paintings. Throughout his career, Karabibene has formally explored an alternative universe, one that is hybrid and playfully "staged" with a whole range of mythical neo pop characters.

Since 2007, Karabibene has been pursuing a multidisciplinary performance in which he has been encouraging public authorities to inaugurate Tunisia's first National Museum of Modern and contemporary Art (MNAMC). With a pressure cooker as symbol and form of the future Museum, Karabibene uses social networks, events and exhibitions to effectively launch this pseudo fictional museum until it sees the light. Between 1982 and 1993, Karabibene has studied architecture and attended the *École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. From 1999 to 2001, he lived at the *Cité Internationale des Arts* of Paris.

Represented by Elmarsa Gallery, Karabibene's work has been widely exhibited in private institutions and museums around the world, including at the ifa gallery in Berlin and Stuttgart, the Barjeel Foundation in Sharjah, the Museo Vittoriano in Rome, the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, the Musée d'Art Moderne in Algiers, the Museo Ponedvedra in Spain, etc. Karabibene lives and works between Tunis, Bizerte and Berlin.

**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.

**Exhibition Facts:**

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

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

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