



EXHIBITION – JUNE 1st, 2019 to AUGUST 31st, 2019

SLIMEN EL KAMEL

(Tunisia, 1983)

Slimen El Kamel was born in Mazouna in the region of Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia. Nurtured in the popular narrative, his childhood was moulded by the imagination of the rural environment where the tradition of folk tales and poetry flourished. His studies at the *Higher Institute of Fine Arts* in Tunis allowed him to crystallise this literary and intellectual heritage into a singular artistic practice. A practice whose genesis opens through writing and draws its resources from its texts, sometimes poetic or literary, sometimes memorial or improvised. The daily writing exercise, while it delimits, extends the horizons of its physical universe.

Not far from free figuration, the artist questions the relationship between the real and the imaginary through the dramatization of the constellated image. Images of memory, of a reality taken from everyday media, intersect in a pictorial field where, on the surface of a picture, the rustling of a dialogue begins without end, not for the narrative of a fact, but for a festival of narratives.

His more recent work considers the links between the human body and everyday consumable objects. El Kamel considers the ways in which virtual and lived reality hinge upon visual and auditory channels of communication.

El Kamel holds a Masters in painting from the *Tunis Institute of Fine Arts*. He has participated in exhibitions and art fairs in Africa and Europe. El Kamel was an art resident at the *Living Arts Center* in Rades for a year and paid multiple artistic and research visits to Paris, Algeria, and Bahrain. He was a finalist of the inaugural *Sovereign MENA Art Prize* in partnership with *Start*. This prize awards 30 of the most exciting mid-career artists across the MENA region with an exhibition in *Alserkal Avenue*, Dubai. The exhibition took place in October 2016. The artist is also active as an art critic.



Deux Moments (Two Moments) (2019), Assemblage & Mixed Media on canvas, 130 x 192 cm

SLIMEN EL KAMEL – PULSE

The art of Slimen El Kamel is painted with Life. Real life. Made-up life. He is the master puppeteer of myths reaching beyond traditional borders, the director of a cinema vérité on canvas. And as soon as unveiled, his cast of joyful and pathetic characters are set free. Some escape. Some remain inside the canvas. In a nutshell, that is what I can tell you about the work of Tunisian artist and art critic Slimen El Kamel, whom I met in London in 2016. Four years on, we have developed a friendship built on sharing our passion for art, for stories, and for this Life that he so uniquely insufflates into his work.

For our seventh exhibition, I am proud to present seven works made over the last four years. Over such a relatively short period of time, El Kamel's palette has evolved tremendously. His men and women now often roam freely outside the canvas. Their expressions too have changed, for they now seem more at peace and playful than they were in his paintings of 2016, which conveyed a soft angst, translated by barb wire, torn photographic portraits and erotic pictures feasted on by armies of flies and ants. Since his 2016 *Adam the Solitary* and his *Sisterhood* lost in a maze of TVs, Slimen has allowed more color in. His bestiary has expanded to other animals that ornate his rural and urban portraits of Tunisian youths. *Call to Nature* (2018) is an example of this new magical realism made of vast pointilliste-like color fields, in which people propose, meditate, greet each other, and call each other

from far away. All these small gestures of daily life serving as memories of who we are, and how we are – like a behavioral DNA which the artist likes to observe, dissect, record, distort, rearrange and reinterpret.

But there are always several possible readings in Slimen's paintings. Happiness is often tainted with darker omens, human drama, blood stains and insects associated with decay. In *Cities Nearby* (2019), flowers, the moon, stars and the sun form the theatre of scenes of friendship, while on the opposite side of that stare into the lens (the artist's eye represented inside the frame), there is an ensemble of characters who appear stranded, almost abandoned. In Tunisia, as in other countries around the world, many still leave the countryside to find work in the city. Families are separated, stories are split. And it is only when you start reading one of the possible stories in one of his paintings, that Slimen rearranges its elements and characters into yet another. In *Two Moments* (2019), we find the same man with his broom, the same lost boy and that same girl from the beach, that oil lamp, the footprints and the cat – all of these narrative elements sharing an altogether different emotion than in the former painting.

This process translates the artist's intention to poetically connect the dots, to allow for correspondence between his works, in an effort to create a very personal yet universal world of stories. This is where the communion of art happens, in this no-man's-land between the projected unconscious of the artist and our own, where his emotion merges with ours. When I see *Tale of the Two Cities* (2019), I am instantly projected into some of the first building stones of my human experience of what life in North African cities could be. Slimen's vivid choice of oranges, yellows and reds remind me of Albert Camus' description of the long Summer in *La Peste* (*The Plague*, 1947), which marked me as a teenager. Slimen's city is designed out of negative orange surface on an otherwise dotted background in which his usual actors of nostalgia stand out, bringing me back to my own youth, to flashes of memories that I cannot connect to any particular moment anymore. A first kiss, an embrace, or leaving a friend, are all possible outcomes of this visual confrontation as far as I am concerned.

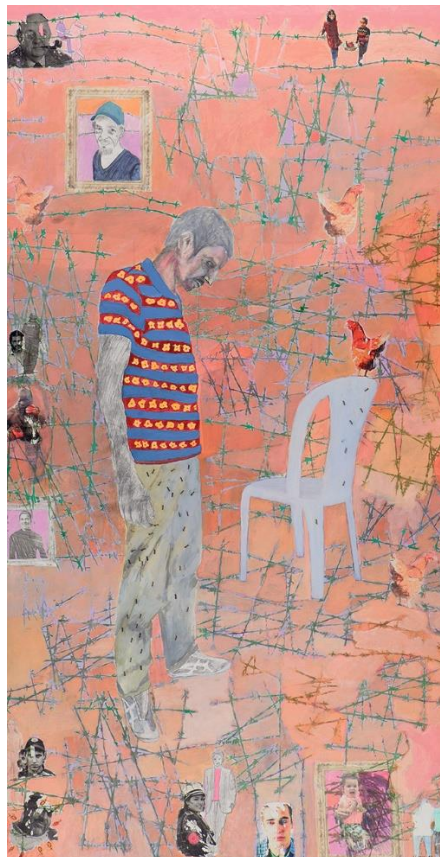
It seems that the time for waiting is over. Slimen El Kamel has moved out of this limbo all so present in his 2016 *We are waiting*, where a man stands next to a white plastic chair, waiting for the ants to consume his body, his freedom imprisoned in a giant grid of barb wire. Today, the artist's characters inside the canvas communicate with the outside world, they are actors in a new society, actively writing a new (hi)story. Slimen El Kamel is taking the pulse of a new Tunisia, reading it with his home-made artistic instruments, and transcribing it for us all to feel.

Klaus Pas

June 2019



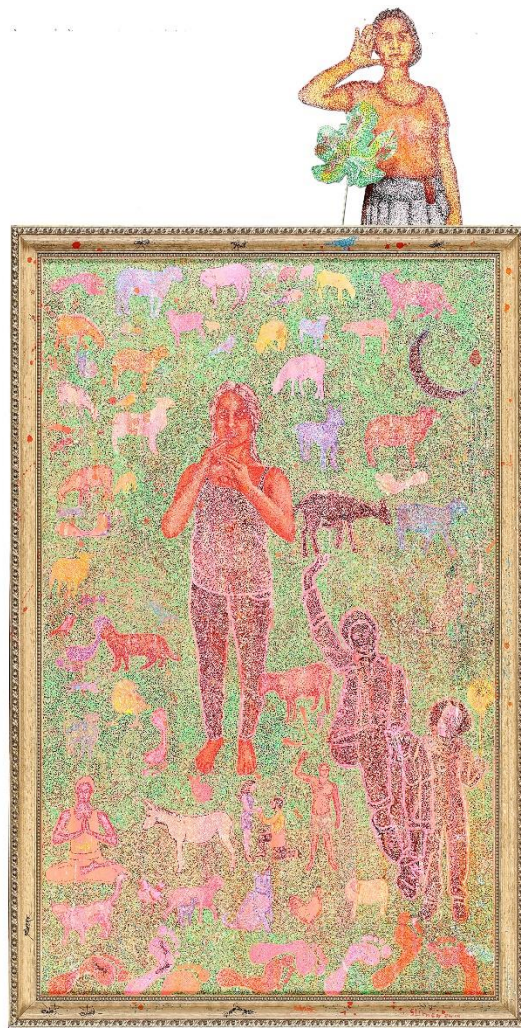
Adam the Solitary - 2016 - 180 x 190 cm - Acrylic on Canvas



We are waiting - 2016 - 195 x 102 cm - Acrylic on Canvas



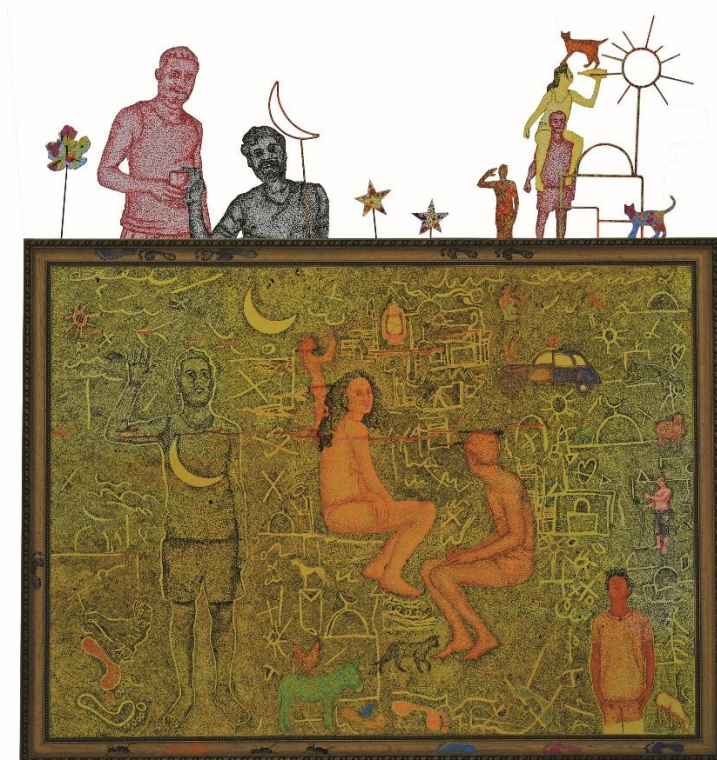
Sisterhood - 2016 - 160 x 195 cm - Acrylic & Serigraphy on Canvas



Appel à la Nature - 2018 - 200 x 100 cm - Assemblage & Acrylic on Canvas



Deux Moments - 2019 - 130 x 192 cm - Assemblage & Acrylic on Canvas



Cities Nearby - 2019 - 162 x 172 cm - Assemblage & Acrylic on Canvas



Tale of the Two Cities - 2019 - 130 x 180 cm - Assemblage & Acrylic on Canvas

TO THE EXHIBITION

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Selected Exhibitions & Collections

Solo exhibitions (selection)

2019 Kloser Contemporary Art, Online

2018 Sulger-Buel Gallery, London, UK

2011 Galerie ArtyShow La Marsa, Tunisia

2009 Galerie ArtyShow La Marsa, Tunisia

Group exhibitions (short selection)

2019 Galerie La Marsa, Tunis, Tunisia

2019 1-54 Art Fair, New York, USA

2019 Museum of Modern Art, Kuwait City, Kuwait

2019 1-54 Art Fair, Marrakech, Morocco

2018 1-54 Art Fair, London, UK

2018 Dakar Biennial, Dakar, Senegal

2017 AKA Art Fair, Paris, France

2017 1-54 Art Fair, London, UK

2017 Art Paris, France

2017 1-54 Art Fair, Marrakech, Morocco

2017 Galerie Elbirou, Sousse, Tunisia

2017 Turbine Art Fair, South Africa

2016 Dubai Art Fair, Dubai, UAE

2016 Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town, South Africa

2016 1-54 Art Fair, London, UK

2016 Marsa Gallery, Dubai, UAE

2015 Bibliothèque Nationale, Tunis, Tunisia

2015 Dubai Art Fair, Dubai, UAE

2012 Acropolium of Carthage, Tunis, Tunisia

Awards & Residencies

2018 Fondation Blachère, Senegal

2016 Awarded at the Cachan Biennial, France

2016 Nominated for the MENA Art Prize, Dubai, UAE

2009 Centre des Arts Visuels, Rades, Tunisia

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