

Jazira

el meya



Le cheval blanc (Portrait de l'emir Abdelkader), Acrylique sur toile, 175 x 198 cm, 2021.
Donation Claude et France Lemand / Musée de l'IMA
Crédit Photo: Leila Saadna

**villa
arson**

June 18–August 27 2023
Opening: June 17 2023

Galerie carrée

nice

El Meya was born in 1988 in Constantine. She lives and works in Algiers. For her first solo exhibition in France, she is presenting a series of paintings created in Algeria and during her residency at the Villa Arson in Nice in the spring of 2023.

The title of the exhibition *Jazira* refers to the word “island” in Arabic, which according to historians gave its name to the city because of a group of islands off the coast of Algiers (*El-Djezaïr*), and by extension to all of Algeria. Throughout history the territory of Algiers expanded onto the sea, and gradually the islands became connected to the city. The land appropriated the sea in the same way that it appropriated the cultures and civilizations that came into contact with it. Over the course of centuries, Algeria was nourished by Phoenician, Roman, Berber, Arab, Ottoman, Jewish, Spanish, French tales... The religious and social syncretism deriving from these cross-fertilizations make up the background of Algerian society.

El Meya inherited this diversity. She borrows traditional scenes from the collective imagination and the history of the country, which she transposes into her paintings. The subject matter, the objects, the backgrounds she juxtaposes on her canvases follow a precise codification, as do rituals (scenes of sacrifice and trance, rites of passage...). She stages men and women executing specific gestures that are sometimes simple to understand, and sometimes in need of deciphering. Like in a puppet show, bodies appear strangely divided up. Each face, each limb, seems to have been assigned a specific function. The grotesque stands alongside the tragic, delicacy alongside cruelty.

The creative context of El Meya's work is informed by tastes inherited from trends running through art history up until today: modern art, but also Islamic art and Persian influences.

The works exhibited show a particular interest in orientalist representations depicting how the colonial gaze fantasizes local populations. El Meya extracts singular images of people, places and images which supposedly represent typical Algerian men and women. Through my paintings I try to talk about present day Algeria from my subjective viewpoint as an Algerian painter, who neither wants to reestablish the old orientalist vision nor wants to deconstruct knowledge inherited from the past, but strives rather to create new images, those of a new perspective reinstating the complexity and diversity of histories, places, and facts.

Fayçal Baghriche

In partnership with *aria* [artist residency in algiers] (Algiers), and with the support of the French Institute in Algeria and the cultural agency Paperbagg (Algeria).

The exhibition follows up on the artist's residency at the Villa Arson.

French – English translation Claire Bernstein

Curating

Fayçal Baghriche

Editing

Julie Hiet

Program

June 17 2023

- 5pm
Opening

Every day (except on Tuesdays)

- 3pm
Students on a mediation course at Villa Arson will create guided tours of the exhibitions, sometimes with performances, evoking their personal interests in relation to the artistic issues of the program.
Free admission.
No reservation needed.

Press contacts

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Practical information

Exhibitions opened every day (except on Tuesdays) from 2 to 6 pm; and from 2 to 7 pm starting July 1st.

Villa Arson is a public institution of the ministry of Culture and a legal member of Université Côte d'Azur. It is supported by the City of Nice, the Alpes-Maritimes Department, the Region Sud Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. Villa Arson is a network member of École(s) du Sud, BOTOX(S), Plein Sud, d.c.a, ANdEA and ELIA Art Schools.



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