

SULGER-BUEL GALLERY

PRESS RELEASE

VIRTUAL SHOW
WAVES: Art from North Africa
Curated by Najlaa El-Ageli
1 – 30 June 2020



*Ilyes Messaoudi, Night 126 'Oh Yeah, Third World My Eye!', 2020
Mixed Media on canvas, 30 x 25 cm*

Sulger –Buel Gallery cordially invites you to the launch of its exhibition WAVES. It will be available to view online only from 1 June to 30 June 2020. Curated by Najlaa El-Ageli, of Noon Arts Projects, this vibrant show brings the work of five contemporary artists linked to North Africa and its diaspora, as they explore both regional and global themes.

Participating artists: Amado Alfadni, COMBO, Ilyes Messaoudi, Hany Rashed and Soad Abdul-Rasoul.

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Joined by their North African heritage, WAVES features an eclectic mix of art practitioners as they explore and respond to an environment wherein extremism, materialism, consumerism, manipulation and post-colonialism take on a particular form and impact on the local culture, as well as the making of waves out of these underlying social, political and economic currents.

Blending together fact and fiction, with past and present concerns, the creative works comment on and playfully distort and inherently complex reality; thus making new extensions and offering an authentic experience in which the artists reside. Whilst each has different skills and talent, what is pertinent to the North African identity within the universal context is hereby revealed with a great cross section of origins coming from Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia and Morocco.

Najlaa El-Ageli: "I am excited and honoured to be curating this exhibition at Sulger-Buel, focusing on the current waves crashing onto the North African arts scene. In terms of the appreciation of visual art, this part of the African continent is sometimes forgotten or sidelined, but as a place it has always been a magnet for every kind of civilisation and that has left deep imprints onto its collective cultural, social and political psyche.

"This exhibition seeks to highlight the diversity of thought and technique that is employed by the artists, from Amado Alfadni's commentary on the repercussions of post-colonialism on the region, to Soad Abdul-Rasouls's queries into the female place within society, to Combo's diasporic discourse on the North African identity in Europe.

"We also have Ilyes Messaoudi's magic wand that revives the olden tales of Scheherazade within the modern Tunisian setting, to lastly Hany Rashed's satirical windows conveying popular Egyptian street and domestic life. All in all I want to share the beautiful North African vibes and the energy that is presently undergoing major tidal change and transformation."

About the Artists:



*Amado Alfadni, The Lucky No. 2701, 2017
Photo transfer – Monoprint, 30 x 42 cm*

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Amado Alfadni

Born in 1974, Amado Alfadni is a Sudanese-Egyptian artist whose childhood was composed of two different environments: the Cairene street and the Sudanese home. The relationship and the tension between these two elements strongly influence his view of both cultures; and, have made him question 'Identity' with its related rhetoric, as well as the variables of nation and ethnicity in his artwork.

By working with forgotten historical events and referring to the current state of things, he challenges the power dynamics between the individual and authority on both the social and political levels. He gives a voice to the ethnic minorities, with a focus on research and documentation of ignored happenings. Utilising oral history, his work lays a foundation for a post-colonial historical rewriting; and, it also discloses the possibility of a counter-discourse, a counter-knowledge, which make connections that are otherwise hidden.

In his series of 'Ace of Spades', Amado highlights the exploitation of human beings who have been historically forgotten and overlooked, bringing out the fight for freedom against domination, contrasting between the unlucky and authority. He uses images that shift the power dynamics in favor of the unlucky, who were born under specific circumstances that made them powerless in the face of ruling political and social powers.



COMBO, *Co-Exist-2019* (Diptych), 2019
Mixed Media on canvas, 200 x 320 cm

COMBO

Combo, aka Combo Culture Kidnapper, is a street artist who was born in 1989 in Amiens, France to a Lebanese-Christian father and a Moroccan-Muslim mother. This dual religious background would come to greatly influence his artistic trajectory and personal message.

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After graduating from Villa Arson in Nice, he worked as an artistic director for advertising agencies in Paris. But by 2012 he decided to dedicate his time to an earlier passion for street art, wherein he developed a signature style. This would come to import and recycle popular cultural icons mixed with urban myths, comics, cartoons, video games, paintings and photography. Relevant to his work also is the call for peace between people of different faiths that took on the greatest significance with the 'CoeXist' slogan that he sprayed across Parisian streets after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in 2015.

Combo's work is an expression of a humanistic ethos and a call for inter-religious understanding as well as taking risks to convey strong messages combined with his travels around the world. For example, he infiltrated the forbidden area of Chernobyl to post advertising denouncing nuclear energy in relation with the anniversary of the accident at the Fukushima Plant. He also posted Google pages in Hong Kong that had been banned by the Communist party, including for the arrest of artist Ai Weiwei. Whilst in Beirut, Lebanon he posted 'Less Hamas, More Hummus'; and, at the start of 2017, he parodied posters of the candidates for the French presidential election by posting electoral billboards.

The majority of his work is made of wheat pasted prints that he un-pastes and then pastes back on canvas. His most famous graffiti has been the 'CoeXist' project in which he campaigns for tolerance by a visual text incorporating the signs of the three Abrahamic faiths: a Muslim crescent for the letter C, a star of David for the X and a Christian cross for the T. He was, in fact, attacked and beaten up in 2015 whilst painting a wall at Porte Dorée near Paris as part of this project.

Always current and topical, Combo is a master at manipulating cultural symbols with historical and contemporary figures as well as adding textual quotes to encourage the viewer to think about the big issues of freedom, civil liberties, capitalism, consumerism, religion and extremist politics. His ultimate goal however is to advocate for peace, harmony and diversity whilst challenging false stereotypes. For Combo: *"My pieces work in a disruptive way... they surprise. They are where they shouldn't be."*

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*Ilyes Messaoudi, Night 106 'Sex Education', 2020
Mixed Media on canvas, 50 x 70 cm*

Ilyes Messaoudi

Ilyes Messaoudi was born in 1990 in Tunis, Tunisia. He started his artistic journey at the School of Science & Technology in Tunis, where he learned to master several techniques and use different materials. It allowed him to combine painting, collage and embroidery in a style of his own. Currently living between Tunisia and France, his art remains deeply rooted in his North African heritage.

Messaoudi's artistic discourse tends to develop a contrast working through time, between tradition and modernity, where he plays with notions of societal fusions and identity struggles that are awakened by a cultural revolution. His energetic collages often use varying tones with a dash of childish and naive spontaneity, simultaneously critiquing and praising the taboos within Tunisian and North African culture.

In Messaoudi's most recent collection titled '1001 Nights of Scheherazade', he presents a series of bright and vivid paintings that juxtapose popular Tunisian sayings with traditional and contemporary Tunisian cultural icons to depict the tale of Scheherazade, the legendary storyteller in the collection of the Middle Eastern folklore 'One Thousand and One Nights'. With these collages that have added sequins and threads, the artist himself becomes a griot of current times, as he wickedly digs into the old tales to reflect upon, conjure and explore the new and current one thousand and one taboos, the one thousand and one doubts, and the one thousand and one emotions.

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About his work, Messaoudi has said: *"I'm researching anarchism in Tunisia between 1930-1950 and anarchism there today. I use the same mantras, singing the old hymns of political and social discourse, as they are still true today... It is often poetic and sarcastic, but it shows history repeats itself."*



*Hany Rashed, Untitled, 2015
Acrylic on plastic sheet, 34 x 45cm*

Hany Rashed

Hany Rashed was born in 1975 in Cairo, Egypt. A self-taught artist, he worked closely with renowned artist Mohamed Abla, who became his creative mentor. Considered to be one of Egypt's most prominent and prolific contemporary visual artists, Rashed tackles and utilises pop culture in a way that breaks down barriers.

By experimenting with a range of techniques, such as collage, monotype, painting and sculpture, he continuously reinvents himself and his work. His predilection for the use of media images in his earlier work has pushed his audience to recognise the banality and damage caused by excessive exposure to Western media, highlighting a depersonalisation of the individual.

At the beginning of the January 2011 Revolution in Egypt, Rashed played a role in documenting recent Egyptian history through satirical artistic productions. About his Bulldozer series, he said: *"The paintings of Bulldozer combine the use of manipulated plastic sheets together with the distortion of images from various sources. The bulldozer, which appears in some of the paintings, epitomises the deconstruction and repositioning affecting the people and the society, either in a cynical satire or playful reimagining. Bulldozer reflects on the human and social behavior and relationships."*

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*Soad Abdul-Rasoul, My Last Meal, 2019,
Acrylic on canvas, 105 x 190 cm*

Soad Abdul-Rasoul

Soad Abdul-Rasoul was born in 1974 in Cairo, Egypt. Abdul-Rasoul's art explores the African figurative art form. She draws upon folklore and the interaction between people, animals and plants, whilst embracing the interior portraiture traditions of Europe, resulting in a re- imagination of the human form.

When asked why there are tree branches and creeping vines, not to mention the faces and legs of animals in her portraits, she said: "As my work evolved I started adding botanical elements to biological ones, trying to combat the idea that human beings are more important than animals and plants."

Employing drawing, painting, graphic design and collage, the artist offers great detail and an interweaving of human and geographical mapping to trace back roots within the living world. With her metamorphosed figures, she doesn't seek to visualise physical beauty, but reflects on the connection between people and the elements of existence like earth, metals and plants.

With tree-like figures, branching veins and arteries, as well as monstrous insect-like characters, these merge in her mixed media canvases and collage bust, reminding viewers of the bond between the interior of the human body and the exterior. By using the fragments of maps and the scientific illustrations of the human body, Abdul-Rasoul reconceptualises the way we perceive space and notions of the human body, offering something that exalts the feminine, the emotional and the animalistic.

She has stated: "Women are my 'icons' that I am dealing with in my paintings – not to visualise their physical beauty, but more their secrets, hidden, their special ingredients and silent desires. My works are the result of my reflections on the secret worlds and the relationships/connections of women to the elements of existence like

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earth, metals, plants etc. I fill the white canvas space in front of me with how I wish my personality to be, and not like the world wishes it to be."

About the Curator

Najlaa El-Ageli is a British-Libyan architect who in 2012 founded Noon Arts, a small private foundation, to explore the newly burgeoning Libyan arts scene and creative movement that followed the 2011 Revolution. Its aim was to spot and nurture the work of talented local artists and bring it to the international stage.

After curating a number of successful exhibitions featuring contemporary Libyan art in the UK, Libya and Malta, another big project came in 2015 when Noon Arts was commissioned to curate the Imago Mundi Libya catalogue for the Benetton Foundation based in Italy. This led to the publication of a substantial art book that travelled the world. Soon after this, El-Ageli began to liaise with other artists from the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region that led to more shows exploring newer themes and turning to work as a freelance curator from a London base.

She has gone on to curate exceptionally well-received exhibitions, including: 'Textural Threads' (done in collaboration with Arts Canteen in London), 'Jewelled Tales of Libya' (held at The Arab British Centre in London), "Pop Art from North Africa" (held at the P21 Gallery in London and Casa Arabe in Madrid), and the latest show titled "Retracing A Disappearing Landscape" (this showed at the P21 Gallery in London, Casa Arabe in Madrid and Cordoba.

About Sulger-Buel Gallery

Sulger-Buel Gallery is an art gallery specializing in the contemporary art of Africa and its Diaspora. Founded in 2014 by Christian Sulger-Buel, the gallery provides a focus for those wanting to explore one of the fastest developing, ground-breaking and important areas in contemporary practices — Modern & Contemporary African Art. We do this while addressing a variety of artistic mediums including drawing, painting, sculpture and photography. Led by a diverse and international team of specialists, Sulger-Buel presents a dynamic exhibition program, produces innovative publications and offers consultancy services; visitors, curators and collectors alike can experience its cutting-edge shows at the London space a stone's throw away from the Tate Modern as well as at international art fairs across the globe.

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