

Press release

Thameur Mejri

11 February -

10 July 2022

*Until my veins collapse*

*(States of emergency)*

macLYON



Thameur Mejri, *The Walking Target*, 2020

180 x 150 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Selma Feriani Gallery, Tunis/London

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**Thameur Mejri (born in 1982 in Tunis) blurs the boundaries between public and private in an effort to confront individual and collective values, particularly in contemporary Tunisian society.**

**For this purpose, he takes the human body as a tool to measure both possibilities and prohibitions, making it a central element of his artistic practice.**

**Through his drawings—vast compositions on stretched or floating canvases—as well as murals, Thameur Mejri's works question the notions of humanism and the construction of human beings on a social scale, by representing several paradoxes that emerge from political and cultural practices.**

**His precise and prolific iconography constitutes a device critical of our relationship with the objects and symbols that surround us in daily life and which impose, whether consciously or not, certain forms of alienation.**

**Curators : Salma Tuqan (Director of the Delfina Foundation, London) and Matthieu Lelièvre (Artistic advisor in macLYON)**

Since the so-called “Jasmine Revolution” (2010–2011), Tunisia has been constantly questioning the directions of its model of society, as well as the links that exist between political, civil and institutional forces. As someone who sees the disarray of many young people tempted to leave the country, Thameur Mejri (born in Tunis in 1982) shares with a whole generation of fellow countrymen and women a sense of perpetual crisis. He interprets this as being due to chaotic management of the community. He feels that the root causes are to be found in the incomplete democratic system that has existed since decolonisation, the tensions between secular society and religious values in both public and private circles, a political life in which the majority of people do not participate, and a host of other phenomena that run through Tunisian society. More generally, the artist observes a crisis of democratic representation, the consequence of a gap between politics and the lives of ordinary citizens. His painting reflects these issues, both structural and informal, political and social.

Thameur Mejri is inspired by popular global culture and uses techniques of repetition, juxtaposition and superimposition between a variety of more or less identifiable objects and brightly coloured surfaces. Everyday elements, pictograms and (sometimes) words, seem to float in these compositions, which are based on an apparent disorder that deliberately blurs our reading of the work. These heterogeneous associations sometimes display a kind of absurdity, even humour, but they often come across as threatening, seeming to harbour a latent violence. Draughtsman, painter and video artist, Thameur Mejri combines techniques and sources of inspiration to construct a critical apparatus through a singular iconography. He evokes the dangers that threaten individuals in a society where democracy is unstable. His vision is informed by the writings of philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben. Through their analyses of biopower and states of emergency, the artist examines the specific power mechanisms that are exercised over the individual bodies of citizens. It is precisely through the representation of the body, particularly the naked body, that he expresses the immediacy of these dangers. The (usually) male bodies that are represented deconstruct, fragment, and even decompose in contact with various objects with which they either merge or clash. Hybrid beings in a state of permanent mutation emerge on the canvas, in a provocative attempt to liberate themselves from the dogmas and oppressions that weigh down on them

The exhibition *Jusqu'à ce que s'effondrent mes veines (États d'urgence) [Until my veins burst (States of Emergency)]* is the first opportunity for a French public to see the work of Thameur Mejri.

By populating his paintings and drawings with objects, he sets in motion a critical process that focuses on the alienating nature of these elements and symbols of everyday life. His thinking along these lines has been further enriched by a recent encounter with the ideas of philosopher Bernard Stiegler, who, in the wake of research by the archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan, maintains that human beings are born incomplete: Unlike the wolf cub, they lack a coat and therefore cover themselves with clothes and shoes. Unable to hunt with their bare hands, humans equip themselves with a bow to shoot and a knife to butcher.

These objects, which Stiegler refers to as “exosomatic organs”, are a palliative for the limits of the human body and they affect and condition the evolution of the endosomatic organs (i.e., those of the body itself), as can be observed, for example, in the case of the brain, which has undergone numerous changes as a result of the evolution of technological devices. The extent to which these extensions of the human body are part of our daily lives determines many of our actions and, according to Thameur Mejri, exposes us to all kinds of interdependencies, inequalities and forms of control. Indeed, these objects which the artist paints, and which are essential to an individual's existence, are also the fruits of a kind of economy controlled by a privileged group, a dominant social class which owns the means of production. Through a variety of artistic practices, Thameur Mejri offers a rereading of the history of these objects and the ambivalence of their role in contemporary society..

Salma Tuqan and Matthieu Lelièvre, curators



Thameur Mejri, *Deactivate*, 2020  
180 × 150 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Selma Feriani Gallery, Tunis/London

Thameur Mejri was born in 1982 in Tunis, Tunisia. He lives and works in Nabeul, Tunisia.

He graduated from the Institut supérieur des Beaux-Arts in Tunis (Tunisia), where he now teaches. Recent solo exhibitions include *Folds in the Soul* at Montague Contemporary in New York (USA, 2021), *États d'exception* at the Kamel Lazaar Foundation in Tunis (Tunisia, 2021) and *Walking Targets* at the Selma Feriani Gallery in Tunis (Tunisia, 2020).

He is a video artist and also makes experimental films with his older brother Kays. Their first film, *The Plague*, won an award at the New York Independent International Film and Video Festival in 2007. The other short films, entitled *The Gift*, *Silicon*, and *Prelude*, have also been screened at film festivals and art events in Los Angeles, New York, Damascus, Sicily and Tunis.

Thameur Mejri was in his early twenties when the “war on terror” began and was deeply affected by the 2003 invasion of Iraq and graphic media coverage of it such as the images of detainees being tortured in Abu Ghraib prison. This was the prism through which his work developed. Then in late 2010 the Arab Spring came to his hometown and became a major influence on his vision of the world.

His artistic practice is characterized by a subversive approach to painting and drawing: “I try to deconstruct the mechanisms of power and control that have been established by the political, economic, cultural and religious system in contemporary Tunisia.” For Thameur Mejri, it is a matter of “confronting the chaos that exists in our contemporary societies.”

Thus, when the artist refers to chaos in his paintings, he is echoing the expression of tensions that he may feel himself: “This doesn’t provide a clear vision of the future, and it’s not easy to reflect on the origin and the heart of our problems, nor to understand where we are going and what we really want. I don’t provide any answers; on the contrary, I want people to ask questions, to feel uncomfortable, to feel lost and to feel moved.”



Thameur Mejri  
Photo Firas Ben Khelifa

## Degrees

2005

Master of Fine Arts, Institute of Fine Arts in Tunis, Tunisia,  
completed in 2008 by a degree of Advanced Studies

2001

Bachelor's degree in business and economics

## Solos shows (selection)

2021

*Folds in the Soul*, Montague Contemporary, New York, NY, USA

*States of Exception*, B7L9 Art Station, Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Tunis, Tunisia

2020

*Walking Targets*, Selma Feriani Gallery, Tunis, Tunisia

2019

*Eroded Grounds*, Gallery 1957, Accra, Ghana

2017

*Heretic Spaces*, El Marsa Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates  
*Before You Split the Ground*, Jack Bell Gallery, London, United Kingdom

2012

*Disaster Pieces*, El Marsa Gallery, Tunis, Tunisia

2011

*Narcissism VS Cannibalism*, Abu Dhabi Art Fair, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

2010

*Mâle (Dieu) épouvantail*, Artyshow Gallery, Tunis, Tunisia

## Group shows (selection)

2022 [upcoming]

*And I Must Scream*, Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA

2021

*Works on Paper et Catch a Fire*, Montague Contemporary, New York, NY, USA

2019

13<sup>th</sup> Cairo Biennale, Cairo, Egypt

*Incarnations: African Art As Philosophy* (Sindika Dokolo Art Collection), BOZAR, Brussels, Belgium

*What Is a Box*, El Marsa Gallery, Tunis, Tunisia

2018

*Cultural Narratives*, Selections Art Magazine, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Tunisian Pavillon, 13<sup>th</sup> Dakak Biennale of Contemporary African Art, Dakar, Senegal

*Mitli Mitlak (Like You, Like Me)*, N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art, Detroit, MI, USA

2016

*Yesterday Is Tomorrow's Memory*, El Marsa Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

*Effervescence*, Institut des Cultures d'Islam, Paris, France

2015

*You Love Me, You Love Me Not*, Galeria Municipal Almeida Garrett, Porto, Portugal

*Coup de crayon*, Ghaya Art Gallery, Sidi Bou Saïd, Tunisia

2012

*Intervalles*, El Marsa Gallery, Tunis, Tunisia

2011

*Une histoire sur l'art*, El Marsa Gallery, Tunis, Tunisia

2010

*Collection*, Kanvas Art Gallery, Tunis, Tunisia

2009

Point Rouge Gallery, Montréal, Canada

Annual Exhibition of the Visual Artists Association, Tunis, Tunisia

2008

6<sup>th</sup> Edition *Printemps des Arts Plastiques de La Marsa*, Palais Abdellyah, Tunis, Tunisia (regularly exhibited since)

2007

The Infusion Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA

2005

Ali Guermessi Gallery, Tunis, Tunisia

## Selected Film Screenings

2009

*Silicon* et *The Gift*, Art Now Film Festival, Damascus, Syria  
*Silicon*, New York International Independent Film and Video Festival (NYIIFVF), New York, NY, USA

2007

*The Gift*, New York International Independent Film and Video Festival (NYIIFVF), session in New York, NY, USA, awarded in Los Angeles, CA, USA

2006

Festival International de Hammamet, Hammamet, Tunisia  
Festival International du Film Amateur de Kelibia (FIFAK), Kélibia, Tunisia

## Collections

Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Fondation Sindika Dokolo, Luanda, Angola

Dalloul Art Foundation, Beirut, Lebanon

Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL), Marrakech, Morocco

Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Tunis, Tunisia

Private collections in Paris, London, Doha, Abu Dhabi, New York, Johannesburg

The guiding principle of the exhibition is to present visitors with a representative group of the artist's work.

Thameur Mejri teaches painting at the Institut supérieur des Beaux-Arts in Tunis. In recent years he has gone beyond the canvas to explore drawing and architecture as creative media, to make it possible for drawing – and the sign – to take over the whole space.

The first room of the exhibition will contain a display of videos by Thameur Mejri. These have led some writers to comment on the relationship between his work and heavy metal music.

A second room will present old and recent series of drawings in dialogue with his paintings. It will continue with an immersive installation of works produced in Nabeul and Lyon during a residency; they are accompanied by a soundtrack.

These different environments will immerse visitors in the social and political complexity that Thameur Mejri transposes into his work, while at the same time exploring the ability of the works to deliver a political message. Through the traditional presentation of paintings hung on the wall, on the one hand, and video and sound installation, on the other, what the artist is also exploring is the expressive potential of drawing and painting, multiplied across different formats and modes of presentation.



Thameur Mejri, *États d'exception*, B7L9 Art Station, Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Tunis, Tunisia, 2021  
Courtesy Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Geneva/Tunis  
Photo Julie Przt

Thameur Mejri is interested in the perplexities of human existence and the paradoxes between violence, innocence, guilt and shame. Work involving the human figure is one of the essential components of his compositions:

“The body is central to my creative process”<sup>\*</sup> says Thameur Mejri.

“I try to deal with subjects that are likely to be considered taboo in an Arab, Muslim country: like sexuality, for example, but without resorting to pornography, nudity, religious obscurantism, and so on. I attach more importance to the meaning the work imparts than to technique and the way it is done. [...] Aesthetically, this translates into a visual deconstruction of the body and the decomposition of its image. Deconstruction of the body to bring about the destruction of dogma. I try to make the real body disappear in favour of a hybrid being in a constant state of change.”<sup>2</sup>.

Thameur Mejri attaches particular importance to the symbolic functioning of objects and to the titles of his works: “I believe that the title is part of the mechanism that the work is, it is not a commentary on the work.”

From these coloured forms, anodyne, everyday, sometimes disturbing, objects emerge, which are tautly arranged in dense, complex compositions. They seem like a collection of puzzles constituting a universe that has to be decoded in order to appropriate its meanings. Through them the artist offers a critique of our relationship with the objects, the signs and the symbols that surround us in our day-to-day lives.

Certain iconographic constants (microphones, flies, balloons, skulls, hammers, sheep's heads, Mickey Mouse, screens, gas masks, and helicopters) are elements in a language to be deciphered.

For Thameur Mejri, painting goes beyond colours and shapes. Within his pictorial space, basic acts of deconstruction are carried out intentionally as if he were doing battle, with energy, determination and violence. Deconstructed, shredded and partially veiled, recognisable forms emerge and can be identified under a mass of shapes.

<sup>\*</sup> Olivier Rachet, “Thameur Mejri, la peinture au poing”, *Diptyk*mag, 2021.  
<sup>2</sup> - Yves Brunner, “Thameur Mejri, un artiste pluriel “révolutionnaire” avant la révolution”, *Lepetitjournal.com*, 2012.



Thameur Mejri, *States of Emergency 2*, 2020  
200 x 180 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Selma Feriani Gallery, Tunis/London



Exhibition's view: *États d'exception*, B7L9 Art Station, Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Tunis, Tunisia, 2021  
Courtesy Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Geneva/Tunis  
Photo Firas Ben Khelifa

The artist uses iconographies, adopts superimpositions, associates, dissociates and accumulates many different forms. The dominating colours are not intended as artifices or for purely optical effects: they reinforce the artist's messages and transmit them; they add to the narrative.

"Colour is not about colouring" Thameur Mejri insists. "It has to have meaning, it has to be symbolic. For me, colour is the soundtrack of a scene in a film."\*

Thameur Mejri exploits the symbolism of the colours blue and red, traditionally associated with heaven and hell. The colour red, which can also be equated with human blood, is a reminder of the blood that flowed during the citizens' confrontation with the dictatorial power.

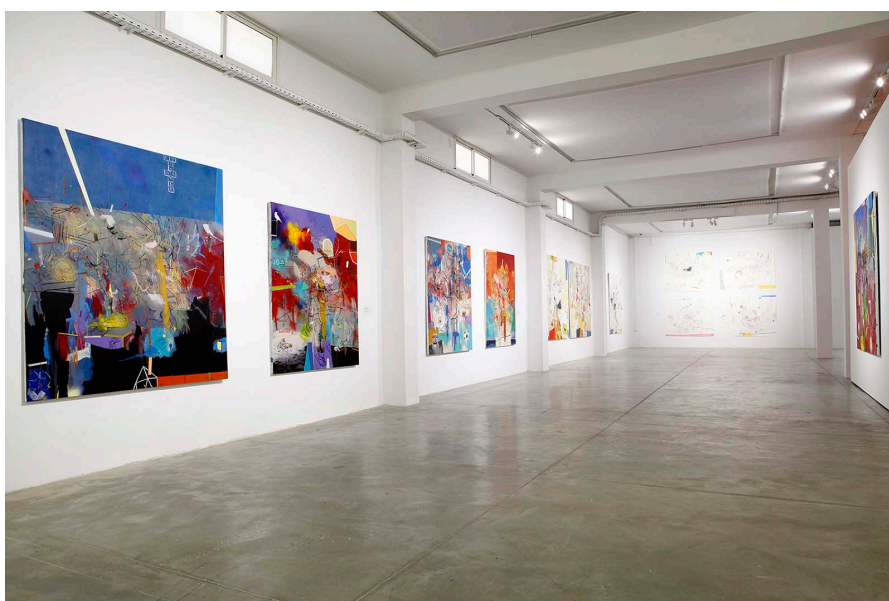
\* Quotations (translated by Jeremy Harrison) are taken from the article by Olivier Rachet Thameur Mejri la peinture au poing published by Selma Feriani Gallery, 2021



Thameur Mejri, *The Walking Target 2*, 2020  
180 x 140 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Selma Feriani Gallery, Tunis/London



Exhibition's view: *Walking Targets*, Selma Feriani Gallery, Tunis, Tunisia, 2020  
Courtesy Selma Feriani Gallery, Tunis/London



Exhibition's view: *États d'exception*, B7L9 Art Station, Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Tunis, Tunisia, 2021  
Courtesy Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Geneva/Tunis  
Photo Firas Ben Khelifa

## Mary Sibande, *The Red Ventriloquist*

11 February - 10 July 2022

For her exhibition at the macLYON, South African artist Mary Sibande (born in 1982 in Barberton) takes the format of sculpture and installation to a new level in her work. Relying on different characters and colour codes, for the past number of years the artist has developed an art of sculpture and installation that bears witness to the life of the women in her family, and through them, to the living conditions of South African black women, and their place in the complex history of a country built on racial segregation.

According to the artist, the abolition of apartheid may have given civil rights to the black majority, but the political decisions taken thereafter prevented any real social and economic change within the country. The white minority retained its grip on the economy, leaving most of the black population living in precarity. This phenomenon has not evolved over the years, and the frustration and sense of injustice has fostered a violence that Mary Sibande associates with this structural inequality.

The violence rooted in the lives of these vulnerable populations has inspired the artist to reflect on different ways of channelling anger, resulting in an exhibition in the form of a vast sculptural and sound installation that occupies an entire floor of the Museum.



Mary Sibande, *The Locus*, 2019  
Series *I Came Apart at the Seams*  
Inkjet on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag, Daisec Mount  
200 × 136 cm  
Courtesy de l'artiste et SMAC Gallery, Le Cap/Johannesburg

## *Little odyssée*, The collection presented to children

11 February - 10 July 2022

The macLYON is experimenting the co-conception of an exhibition of work from its collection especially for younger audiences, in collaboration with a group of Masters-level students of Heritage and Museum Studies at the Université Lyon 3. The students, accompanied by a team of experts, have spent time discovering the rich and unique collection of the macLYON, in order to devise an exhibition resolutely focused on the needs of young audiences, in all their plurality. The organization of this exhibition takes into account a child's shorter concentration span and the impact of sensory experiences as they make their way from one room to the next, creating an exhibition that optimizes the young visitor's comfort, understanding, well-being and encounter with the artworks.

*Little odyssée* is designed as a sensory and experimental journey in three parts, inspired by a child's developmental cycles: an ode to discovery and experimentation. It questions the body's interaction with its surroundings, illustrating the different degrees of involvement between the child and their world. Moving from inside to outside, and from physical perception to a more intellectual approach, younger audiences can experience art in all its dimensions.

This initiative is part of the macLYON's cultural development projects with schools and third-level establishments, built around an innovative hands-on approach.



Ange Leccia, *Arrangement*, 1991  
Collection macLYON  
Installation's view in UCLY, 2019  
© Adagp, Paris, 2022  
Photo Blaise Adilon

# Crossover: David Posth-Kohler × Bruce Nauman

11 February - 10 July 2022

In 2019, in the framework of the Biennale de Lyon, the CIC – Lyonnaise de Banque commissioned a monumental work from sculptor David Posth-Kohler for its atrium.

After the Biennale, Sténos was given to the museum collection by the artist. With Sténos, David Posth-Kohler brings giants to life. These possess the ability to construct and deconstruct themselves into a multitude of alter-egos.

Crossover is an exhibition that strives to create a dialogue between a work from the collection and an emerging artist. After Jimmy Richer and Hélène Hulak, David Posth-Kohler is the third artist invited to invest the Museum entrance. For the occasion, the works of David Posth-Kohler will echo Bruce Nauman's videos from our collection. Bruce Nauman, in the 1960s, questioned the body and everyday gestures, staging himself during filmed performances.



David Posth-Kohler, *Sténos*, 2019  
Exhibition's view in CIC during the Biennale de Lyon 2019  
Collection macLYON  
Photo Blandine Soulage

Established in 1984 in a wing of the Palais Saint-Pierre, in 1995 the Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon moved to the site of the Cité internationale, a vast architectural ensemble spread over one kilometre on the edges of the Parc de la Tête d'Or, in Lyon's 6th arrondissement and gathering hotels, restaurants, offices, housing but also a casino or a cinema.

The work of architect Renzo Piano, responsible for the entire site, the museum conserves the facade of the atrium of the former Palais de la Foire, overlooking the park. The Palais was designed by Charles Meysson in the 1920s.

The 6,000m<sup>2</sup> museum is spread over several floors and presents modular spaces that are perfectly adapted to the needs of the different artistic projects welcomed by the museum, as well as new forms of contemporary expression. The macLYON focuses on current national and international art, in all its forms, offering exhibitions and a wide programme of transdisciplinary events.

Its collection includes over 1,400 works. A selection of these is shown in rotation at the macLYON as well as in several partner structures. Works of its collection are regularly loaned for exhibitions in France and all over the world. It consists mainly of monumental works and ensembles of works, dating from the 1940s to the current day, created by artists from all over the world, the majority for exhibitions at the museum or for the Biennales d'art contemporain de Lyon, for which the museum oversees the artistic direction.

Brought together in an arts pole with the MBA since 2018, the two collections form a remarkable ensemble, both in France and in Europe..



View of the Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon.  
Photo Blaise Adilon

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● By bus  
Stop Musée d'art contemporain  
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Bus C4, Jean Macé/Cité internationale  
Bus C5, Cordeliers/Rillieux-Vancia  
● Ridesharing  
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● By car  
Along quai Charles de Gaulle, carpark  
P0 and P2, reduced rate for our visitors