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# SUN RAYS AND TINY CUBES

AYMEN MBARKI

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## The tropism of archetypes

Notes on a paper's dreams of ink, on Aymen Mbarki's dream of paper.

The drawer, says Kubin, "is exceptionally sensitive to the attraction that the material can exert on him",<sup>1</sup> like the one exerted by "the irregular grain, gray or brownish tone of old paper".<sup>2</sup> Aymen Mbarki experienced this attraction when he found bundles of old documents in a store of discarded cardboard and paper. We don't yet know why, but it was decided that they would join his studio. In these sheets, something is happening. Something strange, but undoubtedly so familiar that it compels the artist to interact with it. On these sheets, whose format makes them seem like letter writing paper, a correspondence begins. A singular correspondence, however: this paper, with its body marked by the traces of time, seems to make a sibylline request of the artist. A request whose measure becomes discernible only through the trace of gestures that the illustrator brings to each attempt, to each response that, possibly, would satisfy the request, until the next letter.

What is this request? What is this call that urges the artist to return to his studio, his tools and his inks? That invites him to act, that whispers to his gesture and his drawing the paths to follow? Undoubtedly, we have to go backwards to try and grasp it: follow the lines drawn, review the sequence of gestures that led to them and attempt to induce the thoughts that inspired them. The request is at the source.

Let's get back to the encounter, to that first attraction. Old papers seduce people who work with pens and brushes. Looking for the reasons would be less enlightening than following its unreason. It's through the senses that we're first taken in. An ivory-colored paper still untouched by human intervention, but charged with that of the atmospheres it once inhabited. Reason would have it that the material has simply altered, that its nature has chemically changed. But unreason would not fail to see in this alteration the Latin *alter*. The paper has become something else. It is no longer an inert material. Its uneven coloring gives it sensitivities; its worn, wrinkled and brittle material tells the story of its passage through time. Its grain, from ivory to brown,

gives it flesh. By placing it in his hand and under his eye, the artist may have seen in this paper, not a passive medium, but, on the contrary, a living body in which lies a dynamism that will soon carry him along.

Because these pieces of paper are from another time, because they are still blank, they are full: full of the expectation of all that should have been drawn, traced or printed on them since the moment they were produced, full of all possibilities, full in power. The blank page, which has long awaited its ink without seeing its color, creates its own hues. It turns yellow, as the saying goes. In reality, for the senses that know how to feel it, it would be better to say that it turns pearlescent, ochre and brown as it gives itself over to air and light.

The halos that appear seem to be the dream-like apparitions of a canvas longing for a feather or a brush, for a trace that never comes. It dreams of what it might have carried within it, and the brown clouds that appear are the first signs of oneiric visions that the artist attempts to recapture through his colors. The artist's palette seeks its nuances in those of the paper: ochres, light and dark browns, as if to better participate in these apparitions, to better work on them and bring them to

the final affirmation of black, the ultimate expectation of the paper.

Thus, like Tiresias, the artist moves forward in the paper. Like Tiresias, blind and soothsayer, he cannot see. But he has visions. The divinatory art of the drawer consists in reading the future of the line in the traces that the sheets of paper deliver to him. He foretells a solar divinity in the burnished halos that crown the sheet. A radiance to which the lignin present in paper (whose Latin *lignum* means wood) cannot remain insensitive. It's what makes it ochre. In these halos and brown patches, he perceives the reminiscences of paper remembering its origins: wood. Perhaps it also appeared to him, in the quadrangular aspects of the sheets and masses that make up the reams of paper: the wooden cube. So here he is, scrutinizing these masses as one reads the spell cast by the dice; fibers, rings, knots and hollows are the signs that a heuristic drawing interprets.

In the oracular sanctuary of the studio, before the piece of paper he questions, Aymen Mbarki seems to be consulting the oracle. This body of paper, laden with solar dreams and a history, establishes a tropism of archetypes between him and the artist. It leads the

artist to think of the narratives that humans have passed down through the ages by means of tracings and their mediums, ink and paper; to think of the essence of these narratives crystallized in the archetypal figures of mythologies; to think, finally, of his own archetypal figure as an illustrator or, as he puts it, *zographos* (the Greek term for the painter of icons, which later gave the Arabic word *zukhruf*). Undoubtedly, this is what the artist is being requested to do: to take the gesture, the line and its visions beyond the present, to dream of the greater narrative that links this ink trail to all those who have gone before, to what remains after us. To consecrate the gesture that creates the trace, through which we have been, through which we will be.

**Mohamed-Ali Berhouma**

Tunis, April 2024

1 Alfred Kubin, *Le travail du dessinateur*, (Christophe David trad.), Paris, France, Éd. Allia, 1999, p. 36.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

# AYMEN MBARKI

b. 1983, Tunis, Tunisia

Lives and works in Tunis, Tunisia

Aymen Mbarki is a self-taught visual artist whose heightened awareness and sensibility to the poetics and politics of language and mythologies infuse his practice. His graphically minimal compositions and painterly outlines straddle across figurative, phonetic and asemic abstractions and capture the essence of spontaneous and intimate human gesture.

As early as the age of 5, when Mbarki came across small posters of a printed copy of the work 'Saturn Devouring his Son' by the Spanish painter and engraver Goya, a curious shift occurred whereby this encounter strongly and radically marked him and influenced his approach to art.

At 15, he was haunted by the idea of continuing his journey by himself by feeding his curiosity and adopting a personal approach to self-learning.

At the time, he spent most of his time in the library and in the museum of Bardo and Carthage. His first exhibition took place in 2019 at the National Library of Tunis, since then he has taken part in several group exhibitions.



**Aymen Mbarki**

*Procession 1, 2024*

Acrylic ink on old paper

Unframed : 21h x 81w cm

Framed : 33h x 88w cm

(AM-000044)



**Aymen Mbarki**

*Procession 2, 2024*

Acrylic ink on old paper

Unframed : 21h x 81w cm

Framed : 33h x 88w cm

(AM-000045)



**Aymen Mbarki**

*Procession 3*, 2024

Acrylic ink on old paper

Unframed : 21h x 81w cm

Framed : 33h x 88w cm

(AM-000035)





**Aymen Mbarki**

*The Sun Cannot Sear the Eyes, 2024*

Acrylic ink on paper

Unframed : 42h x 27w cm

Framed : 48h x 33w cm

(AM-000033)



**Aymen Mbarki**  
*Tirésias*, 2024  
Acrylic and ink on paper and a wooden cube  
108h x 105w cm  
(AM-000041)



**Aymen Mbarki**  
*The Night Visitor 1*, 2024  
Acrylic on old paper  
21h x 135h cm  
(AM-000049)



**Aymen Mbarki**  
*The Night Visitor 2*, 2024  
Acrylic on old paper  
27h x 63w cm  
(AM-000051)



**Aymen Mbarki**  
*The Night Visitor 3*, 2024  
Acrylic on old paper  
27h x 84w cm  
(AM-000050)



**Aymen Mbarki**  
*The Night Visitor 4, 2024*  
Acrylic on old paper  
21h x 51w cm  
(AM-000052)



**Aymen Mbarki**

*Lucid Dream*, 2024

Watercolor pencil on old paper

108w x 105w cm

(AM-000048)



**Aymen Mbarki**

*'Soleil invaincu' (Triptych), 2024*

Variable dimension, from left to right :

27h x 42w cm

54h x 42w cm

27h x 42w cm

(AM-000040)





**Aymen Mbarki**  
Untitled, 2024  
Acrylic on wood  
8.5h x 25.5w cm  
(AM-000046)



**Aymen Mbarki**  
*Epiphany*, 2024  
Acrylic in on Old paper  
54h x 42w cm  
(AM-000043)



**Aymen Mbarki**  
*Shades*, 2024  
Acrylic ink on paper  
138h x 132w cm  
(AM-000039)



**Aymen Mbarki**  
*Appearance*, 2024  
Old paper, acrylic ink on old paper  
63h x 71w cm  
(AM-000038)



**Aymen Mbarki**  
*The Ark*, 2024  
Acrylic on wood  
27h x 45w cm  
(AM-000042)



**Aymen Mbarki**

*Mirage*, 2024

Watercolor pencil and acrylic ink on old paper

63h x 108w cm

(AM-000034)



**Aymen Mbarki**  
*Struthio*, 2024  
Acrylic ink on old paper  
108h x 105w cm  
(AM-000037)



**Aymen Mbarki**  
*Zogrophos*, 2024  
Acrylic on wood  
8.5cm<sup>3</sup>  
(AM-000047)















