

# TUNIS OPENINGS

press release

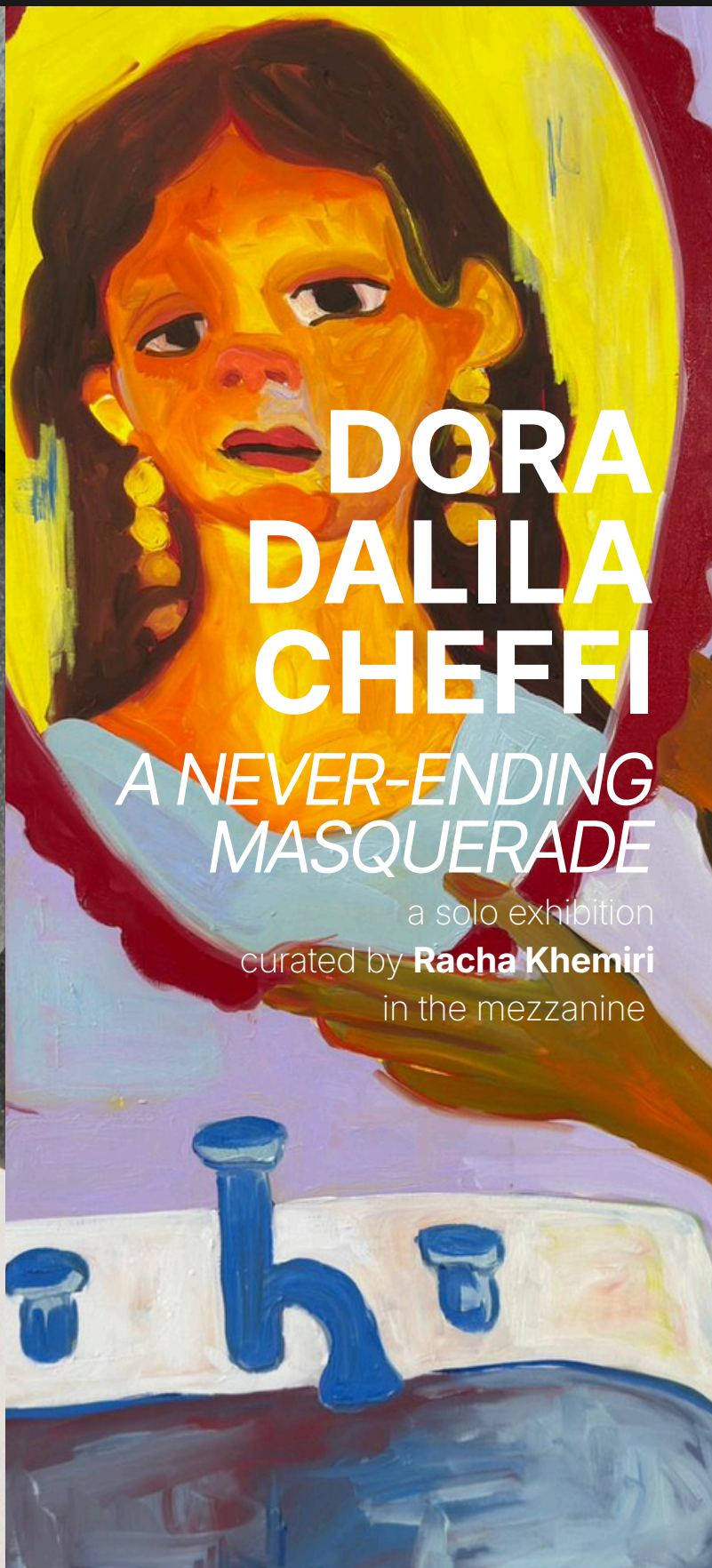
selmaferiani



## JESSICA BOUBETRA

*STEEL GENETICS*

a solo exhibition in the main space



## DORA DALILA CHEFFI

*A NEVER-ENDING MASQUERADE*

a solo exhibition  
curated by **Racha Khemiri**  
in the mezzanine

# TUNIS OPENINGS

## press release

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Selma Feriani Gallery presents three parallel exhibitions at its Tunis space, opening on 30 April 2026. Across the gallery's main space and mezzanine, the programme brings together distinct yet resonant artistic positions through a solo exhibition by Artist Jessica Boubetra, *Steel Genetics*, in the main space; a solo exhibition by Dora Dalila Cheffi, *A Never-Ending Masquerade*, curated by Racha Khemiri, in the mezzanine.

### Main Space

Jessica Boubetra's *Steel Genetics* opens as a speculative landscape where biology, technology, and fiction converge into material form. Conceived as a fictional collection of trees—an artificial, inverted arboretum—the exhibition stages a constructed ecology in which classification loses its authority and the act of naming begins to resemble a failed spell.

Totemic structures, suspended forms, and dispersed sculptural entities occupy the space, proposing hybrid botanical specimens that oscillate between the organic and the alien. Drawing from the visual language of science fiction, Boubetra develops a body of work in which fabrication becomes a form of propagation, and where life-like systems emerge through the synthesis of technological processes and organic principles. Each sculpture operates as a specimen within an imagined taxonomy, where geological, vegetal, and technological registers blur, opening a space to consider how such worlds become thinkable—and under what conditions.

### Mezzanine

Curated by Racha Khemiri, Dora Dalila Cheffi's *A Never-Ending Masquerade* brings together painting, video, and installation to explore the instability of representation and the construction of identity.

Within her compositions, bodies sway, stretch, and dissolve, caught in a space where the image begins to detach from its source. There is a sense of distance—like forms suspended beneath a translucent surface—where visibility is both offered and withheld. Cheffi's work proposes a radical reimagining of how women have been represented, moving away from spectacle toward a quieter, more ambiguous theatricality.

Here, masquerade is no longer about concealment or transformation, but about excess—about being too much to resolve into a fixed or legible identity. Through vivid colour and fluid form, the works navigate a space between intimacy and performance, where the gaze itself becomes unstable.

## About the artist

### JESSICA BOUBETRA

**Born.** 1989

**Lives and works** in Paris, France

Jessica Boubetra's practice stands at the intersection of craft and digital field, notably through her use of 3D-printed ceramic. Her work resonates with themes often found in science fiction narratives, where technology enhances the natural world, and questions of materiality, memory, and the body are redefined through technological advancements.

Her works can be seen as fictive artifacts from a world where natural growth is no longer purely organic, but mediated by technology, questioning what is "natural" in a post-digital age. Her sculptures explore the consequences of blending organic life with digital processes. They echo speculative futures where nature itself had been reconstructed through a digital lens. Through her hybrid practice, she questions the role of the artist in a world where machines and AI can replicate, and even surpass, human abilities.

Jessica Boubetra's work has been shown in several international institutions, including MO.CO La Panacée, Montpellier, France; Villa Noailles, Hyères, France; Fondation Thalie, Brussels, Belgium; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France; Cadaval Palace, Evora, Portugal, and MRAC de Sérignan, France.

Boubetra's work can be found in many prestigious collections such as Fondation Thalie, Brussels, Belgium; Collection Villa Santo Sospir, Jean Cocteau, France; Fond municipal d'art contemporain de la ville de Pantin, France.

## About the exhibition

# STEEL GENETICS

*Steel Genetics* offers a speculative landscape where biology, technology, and fiction converge into material form. Classification loses its authority, and the act of naming starts to resemble a failed spell. Neither landscape nor collection in any traditional sense, it stages a fictional ecology of forms: trees that are not trees, relics without a past, specimens without a stable taxonomy. But what kind of nature is being generated here? And what does it mean to fabricate "life-like" systems when the boundary between fabrication and emergence is no longer stable? What would it mean to grow something that is not yet possible, and to treat fabrication as a form of propagation?



## About the exhibition

Conceived as a fictional collection of trees, an artificial, inverted arboretum, it draws from the visual language of science fiction cinema, assembling sculptural entities that exist beyond natural and conventional taxonomies. Totems, suspended forms, and dispersed entities occupy the space. They propose a collection of hybrid botanical entities that embody mutations between techniques, materials, and forms, oscillating between the organic and the alien. In this sense, the works take the form of futuristic relics, or artefacts that seem to be excavated from a time that has yet to occur. Among these entities, a sculptural piece evoking the form of a tree emerges as a central figure. Its structure, at once branching and constructed, borrows the exhibition's title, Steel Genetics, while incorporating hand-painted ceramic elements that reference the traditional practices of Sejnane ceramics, articulating a passage from technical process to artisanal, human gesture.

At the core of Jessica Boubetra's practice lies science fiction as both method and framework. Her works are generated through parametric 3D modelling, using software based on mathematical parameters rather than visual modelling, where algorithms produce organic forms through computational logic. These digital structures are then materialised via 3D ceramic printing, before undergoing a sequence of manual operations led by the artist. Central to this process is a deconstruction and reassembly of printed elements, which are treated as fragments and reworked through an artisanal, hands-on methodology. Each component is modelled, smoothed, and finished by hand, particularly in the ceramic elements, before being recomposed through sculptural collage. The ceramic components are bisque-fired and glazed, with all colours individually developed by the artist.

The sculptures emerge from a fusion of technological processes and organic principles; forms that would be impossible to generate without this synthesis. Metal becomes structural code, ceramics suggest membranes, and matter itself behaves as if programmed. Through this interplay, the works reach vegetal and organic configurations via a kind of "mathematical organicity" as Boubetra explains, where growth and fecundity are simulated through algorithms and digital logic.

Rather than strictly imitating nature, these forms operate within a slippage between generated form and a digitized nature, creating an oneiric field where artificial life is established according to its own rules. Each sculpture functions as a specimen within an imagined classification system, where geological, vegetal, and technological registers blur, asking how such a world becomes thinkable at all, through what kinds of fictions, and under what conditions.

In the suspended sculptures *Body Snatchers*, indeterminate organic forms unfold in suspension. Their surface, in dark tonalities traversed by subtle variations, appears almost liquid and internally altered, as if marked by an ongoing process of transformation. Beneath them, ovoid appendages repeat with a quasi-cellular insistence, while hanging elements in translucent mouth-blown glass, made by the artist, suggest secretions, extensions, or outgrowths. Referring to the various film adaptations of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (notably those of 1978 and 1993), the works evoke an imaginary in which the body becomes the site of a gradual and imperceptible substitution.

## About the exhibition

In these narratives, alteration does not occur through visible rupture, but through a process of duplication, whereby external organisms replicate individuals identically while emptying them of their interiority. What, then, occupies these forms? By maintaining this uncertainty, *Body Snatchers* opens a reflection on the porosity of identities and the mechanisms through which forms may be reproduced, infiltrated, or reconfigured, without ever fully revealing the moment at which the shift occurs.

Presented as an archaeobotanical relic from an imperceptible future, the vertical sculpture *Gamma Seeds* articulates a formal vocabulary that evokes both cycles of biological growth and the distributed logic of industrial networks. Its elements, precisely arranged, seem to orbit a central axis, as if around an invisible core or an artificially cultivated organism, or perhaps an energy-harvesting device. At its base, a rough, mineral mass recalls something excavated, unearthed, almost prehistoric; above it, extensions rise and branch out, suggesting a form of emergence that is at once organic and constructed. Its title already sets this ambiguity in motion. *Gamma*: a wave, a frequency, a radiation whose effects cannot be fully contained. *Seeds*: origin, latency, the minimal unit of transformation. Between contamination and promise, the work positions itself as a post-natural organism, evolving within a space where mutation is no longer an accident, but a condition.

Rather than offering answers, the work inhabits a fractured, enigmatic temporality, where remnants of the past and fragments of the future overlap without hierarchy.

*Les Orders Hybrides* revisits the architectural column, referencing both its structural and decorative roles. Drawing on the codes of classical orders, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, the series borrows their familiar grammar only to bend it, introducing plant-like and biomorphic forms that shift the column toward a more uncertain aesthetic. What once stood for stability, proportion, and grandeur begins to mutate, its authority displaced by materials and processes associated with the present. The column persists and becomes something closer to a totem: an object that signals, gathers, and projects meaning rather than simply holding weight. Its vegetal motifs recall the sculpted flora of ancient temples, where ornament mediated between architecture, myth, and the natural world. That mediation is redirected here toward a speculative register.

What, then, is being ornamented, and for whom? The work unsettles the function of decorative roles, positioning it somewhere between inherited pattern and technological fabrication. In doing so, it suggests not a return to classical language, but its reprogramming, and possibly a drift from historical order toward composite forms that are at once organic, technical, and faintly dreamlike.

The wall-mounted work *Exo Se* is structured around a central white form composed of smooth, segmented volumes, evoking a spinal or mineral structure. Pale pink cylindrical connectors punctuate the composition, linking this core to red, mouth-blown glass, which extend laterally like branching out growths and recall vascular or coral-like systems. The work articulates anatomical, organic and artificial registers, pointing to a conception of the body as an assemblage of functions rather than a unified entity. By mobilising forms that oscillate between the biological and the technical, the work approaches a medical vocabulary, where analogies emerge with devices of implantation, connection, or grafting. It thus brings into play a continuity between the mineral and the organic, as if inert matter could adopt the logics of the living, or conversely, as if the body could be understood as a modular and extensible construction.

## About the exhibition

The exhibition oscillates between the archaeology of a forgotten future and the projection of synthetic genetic worlds. It invites viewers to navigate uncertain forms and to imagine the possible futures of materiality, of the organic, and of the formal language in a post-Anthropocene context. Steel Genetics proposes a way of looking at the living through the prism of technology, where life is no longer biological but encoded, and genetics are no longer bound to the organic. An ambivalent field of observation is established, situated between programmed mutation and uncontrolled drift, where the arboretum becomes at once archive, incubator, and a living fiction.

*Racha Khemiri & Jessica Boubetra  
Tunis, April 2026*

## About the artist

### DORA DALILA CHEFFI

**Born** 1990. Helsinki, Finland

**Lives and works** between Helsinki, Finland and Tunis, Tunisia

Dora Dalila Cheffi's work encompasses painting, video and installation.

Initially trained in art education, in which she obtained a BA from Aalto University School of Art, Design, and Architecture, where she also studied sculpture and painting, her practice developed to encompass a practice that centres on a highly personal approach to painting and video. Much of Cheffi's work centres around observations and immediate experience, which are translated into works characterised by vivid colours and forms.

Her artwork has been part of group shows with Nuoret 2023, MACAAL – Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden, Villa Medici, Talan L'Expo, Subliminal Projects, Selma Feriani Gallery, Institut finlandais, and shown online with Other Space by Andersen's Contemporary and Taymour Grahne Projects.

Her most recent body of work, titled Paper Thorn and A Prickly Leaf, consisted of a video piece and a series of paintings. The works were partly produced during her residency at the Serlachius Residency in Finland and were first exhibited at Forum Box and Porvoo Art Hall in Finland in 2025. In 2026, she will exhibit at Selma Feriani Gallery in Tunis and at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris. She will also take part in an exhibition curated by the contemporary art museum Kiasma for Oulu, European Capital of Culture 2026.

## About the curator

### RACHA KHEMIRI

**Born** 1990. Helsinki, Finland

**Lives and works** between Helsinki, Finland and Tunis, Tunisia

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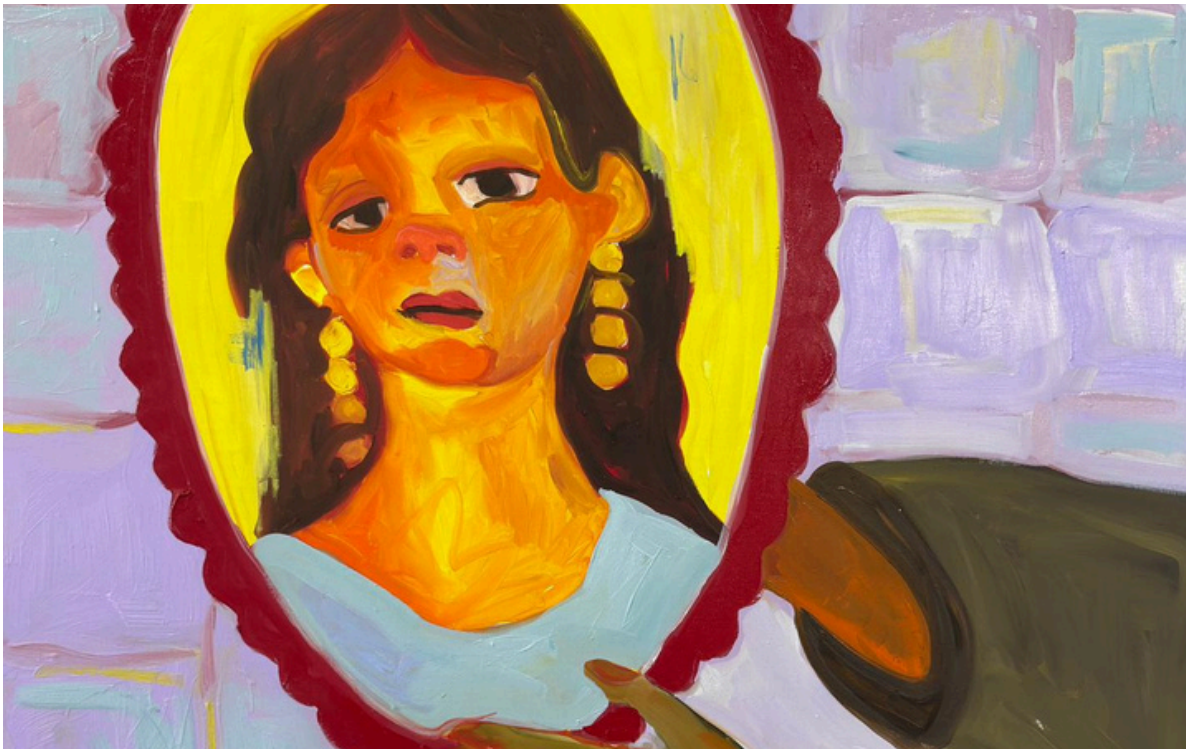
## About the exhibition

# *A NEVER-ENDING MASQUERADE,*

"Masquerading is both character play and self-display".<sup>1</sup>

Quietly existing in her bathroom, a woman stares out at us. She may be looking at herself, guarding something, just as she may be surveying us. The distinction does not hold for long. She is both observer and observed, residing in an interval where the image begins to detach from its source. The bodies that inhabit Dora Dalila Cheffi's *A Never-Ending Masquerade* sway and spin within this same condition. Some are solitary, others appear in pairs, and sometimes in small constellations. Seated at a table, meeting our gaze at close distance, or mounted on an ornamental horse, they face us, unapologetically. They are sealed within the world the artist has made for them, in the space she carves out for them, which encloses them as much as it frees them. Cheffi is, in this sense, almost a playwright. The paintings play on the dual sense of the term: they are at once the product of her boundless pictorial imagination and the site of a theatre stage in which acts and scripts will be rehearsed.

There is something of jelly in this world. Not as motif alone, but as a translucent sealing. You can still see what is inside, but it is held at a slight remove, protected by a thin, glistening coating. There is a second skin forming that does not hide, but prevents full, unmediated access.



## About the exhibition

A continual trying-on follows: gestures, figures, temporalities, moods, and sensibilities. In *The Empress*, this sanguine self-portrait, the artist seems to rehearse the posture of a historical figure, something resembling authority, something borrowed from imperial iconography, yet the gesture does not resolve. The figure maintains equilibrium and slips at once. Suddenly, she is multiple. Suddenly, more than one person greets us. Laurel, red, insignia: the signs are legible, but the position is not secured. It leans more towards being accustomed to a role already written and imposed while having to perform it accordingly.

Can we make peace with the impossibility of fully classifying what we see? Everything tends to be sorted by colour, by emotion, by light, by temperament. "All of this history has taken place here", says Cheffi. The histories that have been recorded do not remain external to the figures they describe. It is also moulded in their faces and features.

It is almost never entirely clear whether these scenes are unfolding, remembered, or misremembered. They seem to happen already doubled, as part document, part invention, and slightly out of place in their own present tense. Draw the curtains of your curiosity and ask yourself: What happens when images refuse to stay in their time? When they detach from their sources, loosen their meanings, and begin to circulate on their own terms?

Dora Dalila Cheffi's paintings operate in this same condition. They do not settle into the one tense so much as tiptoe around it, flitting between what is and what was, between the familiar and the slightly offbeat, between observation and re-staging. Each work seems like a vignette or an episode, bouncing and orbiting between remembering and inventing. Perhaps there is a sinuous mystery to solve, perhaps not. This is precisely the case for *Ceremonial Dressing of a Lady*, in the dialogue and distinction between her sources and herself. Fiction interrupts reality, or is it the other way around? The slippage between both, the magnetic pull between them, is what stirs Cheffi's work. And yet even stability of "source" begins to wobble. Whether first as an image circulating elsewhere, or later as something re-encountered together, in conversation, in proximity, it is no longer fully retraceable. The work behaves as though it has already been seen before it is seen, as if it arrives with a faint archival element attached to it. Not quotation, not reference, but a kind of afterimage that could be a hint to a distant archaeology or to immediate presence.

Seeing the mosaic *Triumph of Neptune and the Four Seasons* was a big revelation for Dora Dalila Cheffi. In *The Four Seasons* (without Neptune), masquerade ceases to be a metaphor and becomes something almost aggressively literal; these bodies do not hint at performance, they are already inside it. The gowns are too adorned, voluminous, the masks too complete, almost speculative, the whole setting tipping into a sort of over-determined theatre where you cannot tell anymore what is character and what is pure condition. It is not disguise in the sense of concealment; it is disguise as a total saturation. The mask here is not hiding a face. It is what happens when a face refuses to stay singular. A way of being multiple without announcing it, of staying just unstable enough that nothing gets to become official.

## About the exhibition

In Cheffi's work, Neptune is more like a borrowed prop that forgot it was supposed to be powerful. Authority seems already a little theatrical, like it is been borrowed from a museum vitrine and worn out for the evening. And the borrowing is the point: figures try on histories the way you try on jackets that almost fit, except no one is interested in tailoring them properly. The result is not irony exactly, but more like a loosened seriousness, where images that know too much to believe in themselves cleanly, but not enough to stop performing.

Painting becomes a window where two discordant notes are brought into contact and struck together, so that their friction provides a condition in which the historical and the contemporary, the offbeat and the familiar, coexist in an unstable present.

Staged through an intentional placement, her figures defy all expressive expectations, that is to say, what might otherwise appear as something entirely open, without friction or resistance. The expressions can be sterile at times. Almost stoic, evanescent, and deadpan. The closure of knowing the persona is withheld. Masquerading here extends beyond the equivalent of putting a tangible mask on, or of wearing a disguise or concealment. It is not the addition of a mask but something in the faces that display their volume and nature, those that are hybridised, alchemised, housed within (other) faces.

There seems to be an aesthetic discord through a kind of quiet misbehaviour, where the paintings even detach from their own sources and assert their terms, without begging for determination. A still life drifts, a figure rehearses something like authority, a gesture feels both ancient and oddly recent, carrying the weight of a reference through a clever, humorous touch. Here resides the unknowability of her subjects. Neptune disappears without drama, authority is worn like a costume that may or may not fits, women occupy space without announcement, against backgrounds that hang like thick curtains, and the everyday exists with an almost indifferent centrality.

Cheffi's work proposes instead a kind of radical reimagining as an ode to the ways women have been represented throughout history. The masquerade here does not read as spectacle in the classical sense either. Because the theatricality is strangely flat, almost deadpan. So, masquerade here becomes less about pretending to be something else and more about being too much of something to resolve into a suitable identity.

*A Never-Ending Masquerade* solicits us with its lustre and darkness. Bodies bend away from exacting geometry, from anatomical certainty, privileging feeling over stasis. Even space seems slightly misaligned, awkward, compressed, as if objects were gently squeezed into place. Mood wavers like a fog. The layering of colour nourishes it. Backgrounds cascade into dense, sometimes unintelligible combinations: maximalist, excessive, indulgently chromatic, until something like balance is struck. Figures feel as though they are covered by a thin skin of time, and yet the presence of their impression is persistent.

*Racha Khemiri  
Tunis, April 2026*

**Notes to Editors**

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**About the gallery**

*A contemporary art gallery and leading international platform based between Tunis and London that supports the growing art infrastructure in Tunisia and North Africa, offering artists a global platform within a nurturing environment and with exceptional local and international curation.*

Founded by Selma Feriani in 2009 in London and then in Sidi Bou Saïd, Tunis, in 2013 under Selma Feriani Gallery, the gallery is today a leading international art gallery with locations in Tunis, Tunisia and London, United Kingdom, representing twenty-two artists. For the last 15 years, its ongoing mission has been to seek out both emerging and established contemporary artists from the MENA region and beyond, supporting their long-term career development and facilitating their recognition financially, critically and historically. To date, the gallery has presented a progressive, politically and socially conscious programme, organising critically acclaimed exhibitions, installing public interventions internationally, presenting ambitious solo shows and participating in major art fairs around the world. Providing a platform for ongoing discourse between Europe and Africa, Selma Feriani's aim is to create balanced opportunities for exploration, research and exchange between the two continents, for artists, professionals and the public, while nurturing a cross-cultural link between Western and Global South contemporary art practices. The gallery is behind the practice development of artists such as Maha Malluh, Nidhal Chamekh, Malek Gnaoui, M'barek Bouhchichi, Massinissa Selmani, Elena Damiani and Nicene Kossentini.

By supporting the growing art infrastructure in Tunisia and North Africa, the gallery offers artists a global platform within a nurturing environment and with exceptional local and international curation. A cultural hub that places Tunisia on the contemporary art map while revitalising its cultural legacies.

In January 2024, the gallery relocated to the La Goulette Industrial Zone, launching a new purpose-built, museum-standard space in the rapidly growing Tunis Lake district, becoming Selma Feriani's primary address. The first commercial space of its kind in North Africa, it is designed by architect Chacha Atallah and spans 2000sqm. Boasting 800sqm of museum-quality exhibition space across three rooms, a library and bookshop and an annual outdoor sculpture commission in its adjoining garden, the gallery hosts rich public and education programmes placing particular emphasis on local communities. The introduction of the new institutional-standard exhibition space champions the further growth of a meaningful cultural network for emerging and established artists from Tunisia and beyond.

Beyond its exhibition programme, Selma Feriani produces a range of cultural content, including talks, workshops, Basement Sessions (projections and performances), and collaborations with Archivart on its masterclass program.

Established in 2021, L'Atelier by Selma Feriani is a residency and research space in Bhar Lazrag, Tunis, supporting local and international artists through four annual residencies and cultural programming that encourages experimentation and cross-cultural exchange.

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