



Adel El Siwi
Yellow Tropics

**15 November, 2024 - 6
January, 2025**
Tabari Artspace, DIFC

Tabari Artspace is delighted to announce *Yellow Tropics*, the solo exhibition of Egyptian painter, Adel El Siwi. El Siwi is a chronicler and storyteller of his generation. Born in the 1950s, a period of both upheaval and change in postwar and post-revolutionary Egypt, his painting practice spans over fifty years, and it is one which the artist describes as having been one continuous stream of activity and thought.

Yellow Tropics, his first exhibition in over a decade, is a staging of both recently executed paintings and pieces from an archive of earlier works. The paintings shown here collectively present philosophical provocations and musings.

The exhibition's title might at first seem misleading about his origin as an Egyptian whereby the word 'tropic' does not conjure images of the great sand dunes of the Egyptian desert or the muted oranges of a Cairene scene at dusk. Rather, the title serves as an allusion to the anthropological history of Upper Egypt and the origin of man, and to Egypt's literal reaches towards its southernly neighbours and the greater African continent historically speaking. The title hints at his desire to reclaim an element of his identity, not solely as an Egyptian, but as an African and as one of the Continent. It is not simply Egypt's Islamic and Mediterranean history and culture that inform his country's identity, but according to El Siwi, a longer and earlier one at that.



Collectively the artworks on show, although only a small selection from the many different phases of his creative output over the years, present a variety of subjects. El Siwi's world seems familiar yet intangible, at one's fingertips yet out of reach like a performance of dramatists on stage. His paintings have the air of observation of the viewer and communication with them, yet just like the genre of magical realism, somewhat elusive. The selection of artworks presented have been produced as early as the 1980s with figures and subjects in the works that are by no means meant to be fanciful allusions or insinuations, but rather, in the manner of magical realism, invocations of a somewhat distant parallel universe.

A conjuring of a shared Continental history of Africa, and a desired alignment by the artist artistically and emotionally with a greater story of identity and history, has resulted in an oeuvre unlike many artists of his generation. Whereas literal representations of people and events (such as those by the Egyptian modernists who sought to celebrate a newly-defined notion of identity in the wake of the Egyptian revolution against the monarchy and British influence) populate much of the canon of modern Egyptian art, El Siwi distinguishes himself with both a consideration of what it means to be Egyptian in the current world through the combined expression of figurative painting and abstraction.





The artist's fascination with the science of colour is front and center in this presentation whereby bright turmeric-hued yellow and its stimulating energy dominates the canvases of his latest works. This exhibition is a marked shift to chromatic intensity. The paintings emit a vibrancy of liveliness, of something super charged. Whereas in the past his muted hues of subdued colours emitted a cool calm, his yellow paintings- akin to those of Vincent Van Gogh's sunflowers- project an alacrity of life and a desire to stand out in the world with their marked departure from the reds, blues and greens of earlier phases of his practice. In his choice of colour, yellow is both a statement of life and a reference to the colour fields of a different landscape that informs him as deeply as those of his native Egypt. In his choice of yellow, it is as if to say Africa is the primordial source of life and human energy.

Despite El Siwi's philosophical considerations in this exhibition of life, history and current time, he is not to be misconstrued as a pessimist, but rather arguably, an optimist. The persistence of his artistic practice as a daily habit both of creation and thought reflects a man of his time, with all its complications and hope.

Artist Notes



-ENDS-

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Adel El Siwi
B. Egypt, 1952

Painter Adel El Siwi is known for his monumental figures and elongated faces, as well as his ongoing artistic exploration of the relationship between animals and human beings. Having trained in medicine it is evident that El Siwi has mastered the human anatomy, indeed the human figure is a central theme within his work, a subject he has explored inside and out negotiating both form and philosophy.

Adel El Siwi studied medicine at Cairo University between 1970 and 1976, however simultaneously indulged in independent study at the Faculty of Fine Arts between 1974-5. In 1980, he relocated to Milan, Italy, where he lived and worked for a decade before moving back to Cairo where he currently lives and works.

Siwi has participated in the Cairo Biennale (1996, 2008), the Sharjah Biennial (1997), and the Venice Biennale (2009). His work has been included in a number of group exhibitions, including: Rencontres Africaines, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (1994); Modernities and Memories, Venice Biennale, (1997); Transafrican Art, Orlando Museum, Miami, (2000); Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East, (organized by the British Museum), Dubai (2008); Oum Kalsoum: La quatrième pyramide, IMA, Paris (2008); ItaliaArabia, Chelsea Art Museum, New York (2008). Siwi was invited by “Le Laboratoire: Sculpture Urbaine” to project his work onto historical buildings in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (1996), Grenoble, France (2000), Alger, Algeria, (2003).

In addition to his career as a visual artist, Siwi has translated numerous art historical texts into Arabic by artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Paul Klee.

ABOUT TABARI ARTSPACE

In 2003, at a time when the UAE art scene was still nascent, Tabari Artspace art gallery was founded by Maliha Tabari in Dubai. With a twofold aim of preserving histories of craft emerging from the MENA region, while elevating young artists in the Gulf on a global stage, Tabari Artspace's forward-looking vision situates itself in the contemporary art world's dynamic moment. Tabari, who was trained as an artist herself, has re-envisioned the art gallery since 2017 to bridge the storied past with an ever-changing present, with a program that juxtaposes the breadth of Arab heritage with the promise emerging artists hold for the future.

Today the gallery is constantly embracing new discourses and amplifying the voices of women and youth. Tabari Artspace is committed to documenting and showcasing art practices in MENA, positioning them on a par with those on the international art scene. Its roster of artists have been exhibited in institutions and biennials including but not limited to: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Institut du Monde Arabe, Sharjah Art Museum, Venice Biennale, Sharjah Biennial, São Paulo Biennial, and are part of collections such as the Barjeel Art Foundation, British Museum, Dalloul Art Foundation, The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Lyon Biennale, The Khalid Shoman Collection, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art and Yale University Art Gallery.

The foundations for this international outlook began with the realization that artists from the Arab region were noticeably absent in the West. Tabari's approach was to represent artists who were creating unique visual vocabularies in their medium and particular contexts. In Egypt, this included the late Adam Henein in sculpture and Omar El-Nagdi in abstract expressionism. In Lebanon, she worked with Hussein Madi before he became hailed for his talent of melding Cubism with Islamic abstraction. Tabari has also launched the careers of artists such as Saudi Arabian artist Ahmed Mater, Iranian artist Farhad Moshiri, Syrian artist Louay Kayyali, and Egyptian artists Mohamed Abla and Adel Siwi, before they became influential. By bridging mid-career artists with emerging talent, Tabari Artspace has succeeded in building an international collector base interested in the region's evolving artistic production across generations.

Moving fluidly between a platform for exhibition-making and artist mentorship, Tabari Artspace has taken an in-depth focus on GCC-specific, female-centered narratives, increasingly working with Kuwaiti, Emirati and Saudi artists such as Alymamah Rashed, Maitha Abdalla, Al Maha Jarallah and Lulwah Al Homoud. Tabari Artspace's communal spirit extends to its all-women team, which nurtures and elevates artists who are overlooked at home, placing them in a broader historical context.

Now in its second decade of operation, the artists shown at Tabari Artspace offer a living visual archive of social change, contested borders and aesthetic movements in the region at large. Grounded in the cosmopolitan city of Dubai with a branch in Cromwell Place in London since 2015, the art gallery lends visibility to its artists through international shows and residencies, as well as creative collaborations with other spaces. In line with its research-driven approach of enabling artists to grow, Tabari Artspace also functions as an incubator. It has recently partnered with the revamped boutique hotel La Serena in Forte Dei Marmi, launching an artist residency that serves as part-creative sanctuary, part-maker's studio. Located near neighboring marble and stone foundries, this art space offers sites of material exploration that resonate with the art gallery's emphasis on contemporary craft.

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