

NOVO

Nidhal Chamekh

Curatorial Essay by
Pier Paolo Pancotto

Nidhal Chamekh (1985), graduated from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Tunis, arrived in Paris in 2008 to complete his academic studies with a master's and doctorate at La Sorbonne. He is currently a pensionnaire of the Académie de France in Rome - Villa Medici. Whether in Tunis, in Paris - the two cities where he alternately stays - or in Rome, Chamekh seeks his reflection on the concepts of cultural and social identity, of nationalism and post-colonialism and the meanings that they express, yesterday and today. For this purpose he draws on an articulated as well as vast iconographic and iconological repertoire where references to current events blend with historical evocations often related to his own context of origin, Tunisia, which he raises to a universal prototype to investigate myths, utopias and contradictions in the ancient and modern world. This repertoire alternates images of the past, taken from documents of the period in question, with other contemporary ones, generated both by collective news and by individual daily life. Their whole, decontextualized from its sphere of belonging, is thus emptied of its original meaning, as if to echo an attitude now widespread in the era of communication and globalized economy, assuming another one, open to various interpretations. Indeed, divided between the anthropological need for mythical narratives (past and present history, especially that of his birthplace) and the disruptive forces of contemporary aesthetic codes, Chamekh develops a hypertextual language, capable of questioning the relationship between traditional artistic means and those deriving from digital systems. The result is a lexicon where images and texts - from the archive or recent, published in traditional form or disseminated on the net - alternate seamlessly, giving rise to a visual patchwork to be read in a circular manner, that is, without the indication of a precise starting or stopping point. This fluidity reflects the exploration on the theme of identity and the boundary between what is true and its simulation that the artist, with equal freedom, has been carrying out for some time. Thus, through drawing, installation, collage, sculpture and video, he gives life to an unprecedented visual catalog by means of which it is possible, if not assimilate, at least to decipher reality in all its possible semantic nuances and linguistics, including the randomness and ambiguity that govern it. In this way he manages to deal with contemporaneity without giving in to the news and to cast a glance on the world around him, making himself a witness through his own specific skills, namely creativity.

The works chosen for his personal debut in Florence are proof of this. It is a series of large and small sized drawing tests. The former, belonging to the *Exil* cycle (2019), are proposed on a three-dimensional structure specially designed for the gallery spaces in line with the installation character that recurs in many of the artist's projects. They are large papers on which Chamekh intervenes with graphite and ink giving body to a graphic schedule where each representation, while maintaining its own autonomy, becomes part of a compositional network that articulates, exponentially expanding, its semantic and perceptive value.

The smaller works belong to the *Le Battement des ailes* cycle (2019) and, besides the measures, they share with the preceding material, technique and dating as well as the narrative structure. They too are centered on drawing, an expressive form that plays a central role in the artist's creative path. Also in this case, on the white surface of the sheet a sequence of images are recomposed, juxtaposed, superimposed, aligned, sometimes with a regular gait like that of a cinematographic montage, which, in their own way, account for the comparison that the artist cultivates with the great social issues of one's own time and of the past, underlining their perennial relevance.