

ArtMarket-BlogMag

by *Riccarda Mandrini*

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Art Collecting. Un certain regard sur l'art: la Fondation Kamel Lazaar de Tunis.

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Faiçal Bagriche, "Souvenir", 2009, courtesy of FKL

In order to develop and promote visual arts in the Maghreb and the Arab world, Kamel Lazaar, finance professional, launched in 2006, a foundation bearing his name. The Foundation provides space for a dialogue on culture and art in the region, and offers it the opportunity to shine throughout the world. Considering the MENA's sensitive socio-political context, for ten years, the Kamel Lazaar Foundation has continuously carried out activities in different areas, to emphasize that culture is a mediator fostering our knowledge of different cultures, exchanging and building a bridge between different artistic, cultural, and social visions. Kamel Lazaar's interest for art was built on images of his childhood during which he rubbed shoulders with artisans in Mahdia. "I grew up watching local artisans in the Mahdia region producing wonderful fabrics and embroidery. Growing up in Mahdia (a city in north-eastern Tunisia), I noticed that we had an unusual amount of painters in the region. You could see them painting in the streets as if it were the most normal thing to do. And we had craftsmen. In every house, you could find men and women working on various art and craft practices" . Later as a student abroad, he came upon Western art museums, a different art history. This double influence left its mark on the man; Kamel Lazaar then continued to bring heritage preservation forward, as well as to promote modern and contemporary art.



Latifa Echakhch, "Tambour 49",
courtesy FKL

Kamel Lazaar professional status allows him to travel and support the artists by purchasing their works. Soon, his daughter Lina Lazaar would help guide his selection and thus, create a collection of over 1000 pieces representing not only different countries in the MENA region, but also the variety of techniques and themes. However, he soon realizes the limitations of cultural policies undertaken by countries in the region and in Tunisia. "As an Arab and as a Tunisian, I found myself very frustrated by the mediocrity within the system and by the lack of support for Arabic art, inside and outside the

region.”

So to answer to and overcome this frustration, Kamel Lazaar created the Kamel Lazaar Foundation. Very active in recent years, the Foundation primarily has a philanthropic mission in arts and culture. Its actions revolve around three axes. The founding axis focuses on visual arts, with a collection bringing together the biggest names in the art scene such as Mona Hatoum, Kader Attia, Ahmed Alsoudani, Faisal Baghriche, Zied Antar, Nidhal Chamekh, Néjib Belkhodja, Adel El Siwi, Maha Malluh and many more ... In addition, as part of the *KLF projects*, the Foundation offers selected artists the opportunity to create an original work which creation process is followed by the Foundation via its website. Finally, *Jaou* is an event mixing discussions and exhibits and during its five editions, it has promoted contemporary art and analysis of issues in that field.



Vidal Chamekh, “De quoi revent les martyrs, 2, dessin, n.11”,
Courtesy of FKL

The Foundation promotes the dissemination of culture through its website *Ibraaz* and its publications, as well as through the *North Africa Directory*, the first database bringing together all stakeholders in the North African art scene. At last, in order to continue supporting culture, Kamel Lazaar points the following out: “It is about enriching ideas through different influences within the Maghreb and the Middle East region, while keeping the current international situation in mind. They can be small actions in the wider scale of things, but it is precisely these little things that add up. It is within this context that I see the development of the Foundation: small actions that are building up.” Thus, the Foundation supports projects aimed at safeguarding and enhancing heritage, as it was recently done during the Baron d’Erlanger’s painting workshop restoration in Sidi Bou Said or during artistic and cultural events in Tunisia and beyond. In the long term, the Foundation wishes to create a contemporary art center in Tunis, and thus have a physical location that is a place for artists, curators, writers and thinkers but also for the general public, so that the arts become one of the pillars of development.

www.kamellazaarfoundation.org

Maghreb Directory

A special thanks goes to Elsa Despiney, curator at Kamel Lazaar Foundation



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