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## EL SEED'S GRAFFITI ROAD TRIP THROUGH TUNISIA





**Lost or forgotten were the walls that now proudly carry the messages of French/Tunisian *calligraffiti* artist, eL Seed, from his road trip around Tunisia last summer, beautifully and poetically documented in his first book 'Lost Walls'. Sparked by the reaction to his largest project to date, the minaret of the Jara mosque in his home town of Gabes, eL Seed decided to set out on a month long personal journey across his mother country painting 'Lost Walls' along the way. The resulting book provides a unique and rare insight into the world of *calligraffiti* and the Tunisian people.**

eL Seed hopes that '[Lost Walls](http://www.amazon.com/Lost-Walls-Graffiti-through-Tunisia/dp/3937946489/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1398153392&sr=8-1&keywords=lost+walls)([http://www.amazon.com/Lost-Walls-Graffiti-through-Tunisia/dp/3937946489/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1398153392&sr=8-1&keywords=lost+walls](http://www.amazon.com/Lost-Walls-Graffiti-through-Tunisia/dp/3937946489/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1398153392&sr=8-1&keywords=lost+walls))' will show another side of Tunisia to the world, at a time when certain negativities stemming from the revolution have drawn attention away from the deeper history, beauty and culture of his country. His walls, spreading messages of hope, love and unity have already touched the lives of many of the people he met on this highly emotional artistic journey.

"What I would like from 'Lost Walls' is to give another image of Tunisia. After the revolution people now only link the country to politics. There has been governmental change of course, but the culture is still there, the history is still there and the focus should be on all of this beauty instead. I want to bring people back to Tunisia to discover the heritage that is left and lost there, just like the 'Lost Walls,'" says eL Seed.



On the four week *calligraffiti* road trip, eL Seed painted 24 walls in total, spanning the entire country, “Sometimes two walls in a day,” he says. “I would drive to a place stop there and meet the locals. There is an Arabic saying that goes:

*You enter a city only with its men*

and in Tunisia there is always a way to meet the people. And the people are the country.”

eL Seed is proud to have the added support of Jeffrey Deitch, art collector, philanthropist and owner of Deitch Projects New York and well known champion of the art of *calligraffiti*, who kindly wrote the foreword to ‘Lost Walls’. Deitch joined eL Seed in Dubai for the pre-launch of the book in March 2014, and an art talk discussing the future of *calligraffiti* as an art form.

**Why did you choose to represent this specific quote from the Quran that you painted on the minaret of the Jara Mosque, in your home town of Gabes?**

*O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know and honor each other. (Quran – S49,v13)*

The verse was addressed not only to the Muslim community but was a universal message, to all of mankind as an invitation for people who have different opinions,



religions and backgrounds to meet and understand each other despite their differences.



### **Were the towns you visited in Tunisia planned beforehand?**

I knew where I wanted to go but I'd never been to a lot of the places before. Nothing was planned beforehand, except for the house of my grandfather. Some places we knew people already or knew someone who knew someone, so we always had one contact at least when we arrived. Most of the time we went to small towns, where literally nothing happens and the people were completely confused as to why we were there, as they see nothing in their homes anymore. I would tell them yes there is something here but you just don't see it. One guy said, "sometimes you need somebody else to tell you how beautiful you are" and I like this phrase.

### **What was the most inspirational place you visited on your this four week journey?**

I don't think there is one place in particular, as each had its own story. I don't want to distinguish between each city or town or the people that live there. The goal was to give a global image of Tunisia and show the depth and richness of Tunisia's culture, people and traditions. And I believe I achieved this.



### **Who wrote the text in the book?**

I wrote the text, and each text relates to the walls, the place itself and the people that I met there. Some walls don't have any stories, they are just lost. There was a wall on the road just abandoned in the middle of nowhere and I stopped and painted on it, for no reason at all, just for the sheer beauty of it. It was unexpected. Not all walls need to have a meaning or a purpose for me to paint them.

### **Do you feel like you reconnected with your country through Lost Walls?**

Yes absolutely. I knew Tunisia, but through Lost Walls I discovered a lot of things I didn't know. The goal at the beginning was to have other people discover Tunisia but it actually was me discovering it too. That was the cool part. People should spend more time discovering their own countries. The beauty of it and the things you can discover will amaze you.





### **What do you want people to get from this project?**

I want people outside of Tunisia that have never been, to go and visit discover it's beauty, and maybe this alone could even have an economic impact on the country. I also want the Tunisian people to be proud of what they have. The book is ultimately a message of hope. I paint on a wall and the people relate to it, and that is part of the joy of what I do.

### **How did the relationship with Jeffrey Deitch come about?**

He presented a *calligraffiti* show in the early 80's in New York and I was part of the show revisiting this exhibition, 30 years later. The show was called *Caligraffiti from 1984 - 2013* showcasing the new generation of artists and how the art of *calligraffiti* has been developed over the years. We didn't meet at the show but I later met him at the Conde Nast Traveler Awards where he came to show his support for my work and I then asked him to write the preface for my first book, because he's such an influential figure in the world of *calligraffiti*.







*French/Tunisian artist [eL Seed](http://elseed-art.com/) is one of the founding forefathers of modern 'calligraffiti', a blend of the historic art of Arabic calligraphy and the modern art of graffiti, mixing street culture from Paris and Arabic history to poetic effect. Born to Tunisian parents in the suburbs of Paris, eL Seed spent his formative years juggling different cultures, languages, and identities.*

*Today eL Seed's pieces have developed out of two worlds colliding, with these two cultures clashing and blending into one another, to form a new identity, a unique mark and a distinctive style.*

*Text © 'Lost Walls' press release, 22 April 2014*

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