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Circulations et trajectoires artistiques entre le Nord de l'Afrique et la France (XIXe – XXe siècles)

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English translation by Simon Strachan

On the Threshold of the Tunis School

The Use of National References in the Perception and Promotion of the Fine Arts in Tunisia before the Second World War

Abstract

On the occasion of the inauguration of the first gallery founded by artists in Tunis, the painters Moses Levy, Pierre Boucherle, Antonio Corpora and Jules Lellouche published in 1936 a manifesto affirming their autonomy, beyond mercantile logics and national assignments. However, a national reading of their works prevailed in the press, at that time. This article proposes to put this founding event of the « École de Tunis » into context, by reinscribing it in a century-old history. This past is marked by the presence of French and Italian artists between 1840 and 1880, by the failure of a policy of asserting a French artistic model with an aborted project for a French museum around 1890, and by the affirmation of an artistic life characterised since the 1910s by its pluralism and even its eclecticism. This article thus intends to contribute, through the example of pictorial production, to the historicisation of discourses on the plurality or cultural identity of Tunisia, which are still today objects of debate.

Keywords: Tunisian painting; national models; École de Tunis; Galerie de l'art nouveau; Moses Levy

In the history of the fine arts in Tunisia, the opening exhibition of the Galerie de l'art nouveau in 1936 marks an important date.[2] For the first time, artists showed their work in a space that they themselves managed. Located at No. 5 Rue St-Charles,[3] right in the heart of the modern city, their gallery occupied premises that a few years earlier had housed La Boutique d'art, a gallery set up by the art dealer Charles Boccara. In this initiative that brought together two artists that had already acquired some financial security and capital of recognition, Moses Levy (1885-1961) and Pierre Boucherle (1894-1988), and two promising young artists, Jules Lellouche (1903-1963) and Antonio Corpora (1909-2004), each showing four paintings, *La Dépêche tunisienne*, the main local daily newspaper, saw a "timely replica of the studio exhibition spaces in which the Parisian critics

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[3] Today Rue Ali Bach-Hamba.

and the capital's eclectic and enlightened art lovers [took] pride"[4] (fig. 1). For the journalist, in the field of painting, as for all of the arts, the real point of reference is Paris, in spite of the proximity of Italy.[5]

On the occasion of this first exhibition, the four artists drew up a manifesto, explicitly based on those of the European avant-gardes.[6] It begins: "We are opening the doors of this Gallery to avant-garde Tunisian and foreign artists."[7] Here, the only reference to nationality concerns the country in which these artists live and work—Tunisia—with membership of the avant-garde movement transcending national borders. There is no mention of France, nor of Italy. Indeed, this exhibition is generally regarded as being the starting point of what fifteen years later would be called the École de Tunis, a term coined with reference to the École de Paris,[8] and about which Pierre Boucherle, who presented himself as its founder, stated in 1964 that it "never had the pretension, nor even the intention, to place itself as a school of art on the same level as, for example, the schools of French, Spanish, Italian or Flemish painting. Its aim was to bring together some of the best painters in Tunis, without distinction of movement, race or religion."[9] However, the narrative of the journalist from the *La Dépêche tunisienne* who reports on the 1936 exhibition is different. He refers to the nationalities of the exhibitors, and for three of them, finds in the national origins a key to understanding their works. Moses Levy, who was presented as the eldest of them who was already famous but constantly experimenting, escaped this categorisation, no doubt because his status of having the protection of the British government while being culturally Italian and French made him difficult to categorise. But Boucherle's art is described in terms of its character that is "French, and more specifically Latin, [which] feels the need for logical construction. He seeks to organise his sensations into a rigorous architectonic simplicity." Corpora "is Italian, and his painting aspires to order and Mediterranean clarity. His logicality, his need for the *definite* are in conflict with his southern nature, and out of this contrast between order and instinct is born his pictorial drama." Lellouche, who was Tunisian, is for his part associated with Africa: "He is perhaps the only painter who expresses himself as an authentic African. His art is fed by sensations rather than visions. Sensuality sometimes prevails over sensibility, instinct over creative logic, and it is then that his painting appears rather impressionist to us." This discrepancy between the affirmation by the artists of an avant-garde both rooted in Tunisia and open to the world that was free of national categorisation and a national reading of the works by the press invites us to think about the different uses of national references in the artistic production and the narratives that accompanied it in Tunisia over the course of the century preceding the affirmation, at the start of the 1950s, of an "École de Tunis" expected to develop an aesthetic repertoire capable of expressing the elements constituting "Tunisianness" (Nakhli 178).

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[4] "Exposition des 'quatre'. Préface au vernissage de la galerie de l'Art nouveau." *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 31 January 1936 (I would like to thank Karim Ben Yedder here for sending me a photograph of the article). It was probably Moses Levy who took the lease on the premises. The place attributed to him by the painter Edgard Naccache in the history of the Tunis School seems to confirm this ("Entretien avec Edgar [*sic*] Naccache ou la naissance de la peinture africaine." *Afrique*, No. 32, March 1964, pp. 52-55, quoted by Lagrange 183).

[5] On the importance of Paris's international influence between the wars, see *Paris-Paris, Créations en France, 1937-1957* and De Chassey. On its central role across Central Europe, which may be compared to the influence it exerted in the Mediterranean, see Delaperrière and Marès.

[6] The publication by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti of the "Manifesto of futurism" on the front page of *Le Figaro*, on 20 February 1909, may be regarded as the prototype for this (Lista).

[7] The manifesto was published in *La Dépêche tunisienne* of 31 January 1936, at the same time as an article announcing the exhibition (fig 1), both of which are reproduced in the appendix.

[8] According to Pierre Boucherle, it was coined in 1951 by the journalist Pierre Girou, then editor-in-chief of the daily *La Presse de Tunisie* ("L'École de Tunis se raconte." *L'Action*, 22 April 1970, quoted by Lagrange 185). In her in-depth analytical survey of the historiography of the *École de Tunis*, Marion Lagrange analyses the precise origins of the grouping (188-190).

[9] Boucherle, Pierre. "L'école de Tunis n'a pas la prétention de se situer sur le plan d'une école de l'art." *La Presse de Tunisie*, 25 April 1964, quoted by Lagrange 184.

Figure 1: "Une petite révolution artistique. Le Manifeste des 'Quatre'. Préface au vernissage de la galerie de L'Art nouveau" *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 25 January 1936, p. 3. Tunis, Tunis National Archives of Tunisia.

To do this, we will go back to the first indications of a taste for *cadres*,[10] those paintings that decorated the Bey and his ministers' palaces from the 1840s onwards, before the Regency was occupied by the French army in 1881. We will then assess the actions in the field of art of those promoting a francisation of the country, based on the Algerian model, and their limits, symbolised by the failure of a plan to set up a French museum. Lastly, we will discuss the affirmation of a shared Latin identity linking France and Italy, before and after the First World War, that took on a wider dimension under the aegis of the Mediterranean.

The spread of the fashion for paintings from Europe without a specific national flavour

Paintings constituted a new element of interior decoration that became more widespread in the palaces of Tunis from the 1840s onwards. While the artists producing them were in most cases from France or Italy, nothing indicates that a specific national identity was clearly associated with them. The diplomatic adviser of Bey Ahmad I, Giuseppe Raffo, who was Italian, doubtless contributed to the development of this new taste in Tunisia's Regency. He went regularly to Europe, to Turin, Milan, Florence, Paris and London, visiting the public collections there.[11] In the drawing rooms of his palace in Tunis, in Rue Zarkoun, near to the fonduk of the French on the edge of the medina, could be found full-length portraits that he had had painted in Paris—including his own portrait by Charles Gleyre, now held in the collections of the Tunisian Government, probably painted in early 1843[12] (fig. 2)—and "Raphael's madonnas that he liked most" that he had "had copied at the Uffizi"[13] (Winckler 162).

Some fifteen years later, the inscription added around 1859 at the bottom of a portrait of Bey Muhammad al-Sâdiq, "Simil. Calligaris. et compagnie," attests to this fluidity. We can see in it the indication that the work, started in Tunis by a French painter from Nîmes, Louis Simil (1822-April 1896?),[14] was completed by the Piedmontese Luigi Calligaris (1808-1870), the director of the Regency's new military school, with help from pupils at the institution.[15] Having spent his early life in Piedmont, which had been annexed by the French Empire, and travelled to Istanbul to work in the service of the Ottoman sultan, Luigi Calligaris was called to Tunis as early as 1833, with the task of instructing the beylical troops, in the context of the *tanzimât* reforms. He had helped to introduce to Tunis the practice of technical drawing, which was useful for military architecture, but also documentary and artistic drawing.[16]

While we find in the sources at that time the epithets "French" or "Italian" to describe works, it is with reference to decorative techniques or the choice of subject, rather than a clearly defined national identity. The largest room in the Bardo Palace was known in 1857 as the "salon français" on account of the "many paintings depicting the major battles of the Empire", which, according to the consul Léon Roches, decorated it.[17] A few years later, the journalist Léon Michel stated that the

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[10] This is the Italianism (from *quadri*) used by Giuseppe Raffo (1795-1862), the Bey's adviser on foreign affairs, in his journal (Winckler 73).

[11] There is evidence for this with respect to the Pinacoteca di Brera. Raffo mentions in his journal the works that particularly caught his attention, all of them Italian (Winckler 73).

[12] Charles Gleyre also produced the portrait of another of the Bey's ministers, Mahmûd bin 'Ayyâd, made known by an engraving.

[13] The author gives no indication as to the source he bases this on, probably the journal kept by Raffo. The importance of the practice of making copies in the dissemination of models in the area of painting probably deserves to be reassessed, even though it is poorly documented as it produced works whose market value is modest.

[14] Louis Simil also produced portraits of the ministers Khayr ad-dîn bâchâ (June 1852) and Mustafâ Khaznadâr.

[15] Given by the Tunis Regency to the government of the United States, the painting is currently held in the collections of the US State Department, in Washington (Moumni 66-67 and Figure 45).

[16] Calligaris went on to become director of the new Bardo military school between 1838 and 1853, and remained in Tunis until 1861. The Tunisian state collections hold a night-time battle scene signed by him and dated 1840 (Finzi 123).

[17] Correspondence of the French consul Léon Roches, 12 September 1857, Centre des archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve (CADLC), Tunisia, political correspondence, vol. 17, Roches, folio 227 verso, quoted by Oualdi 263.

ceilings of the Khéreddine Palace in La Manouba were, as in other palaces built at that time, "decorated with paintings *à l'italienne*" (214). In these recent buildings, "the old style of arabesques" had been abandoned in favour of "flat paintings produced by Italian artists". They reminded Léon Michel, "in their style and their bright colours of the kind that was favoured in France at the beginning of the nineteenth century" (218).

Among the artists the court commissioned paintings from, the majority of them were probably French. After the portrait of Bey Ahmad produced in 1846 by Charles Larivière during the sovereign's stay in Paris, a portrait whose replica, given by King Louis-Philippe to its model in Tunis, was on display at the Bardo Palace, it was from Auguste Moynier (1813-1865) that Bey Muhammad al-Sâdiq commissioned his portrait. Born in Genoa, with links to the military, Moynier had some characteristics in common with Calligaris. The difference was that he had trained at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris: a copy that he did of the portrait of Napoleon III by Winterhalter, sent to Tunis in 1856, no doubt convinced the Bey of his talent. If a certain kind of painting practised in Paris, of which the commission given by the beylical house in late 1866 to the young Alfred Couverchel, a pupil of Horace Vernet, was an example, seems to have been particularly appreciated in Tunis, we are tempted to say that this style had an international rather than national dimension, and responded to a taste that transcended European borders. The Italian painters probably remained the most numerous to be active in the Regency:[18] it is generally considered that Ahmad 'Usmân (1848-1920), who is regarded as the first "Tunisian painter", owed his training to them.[19]

The continuation of the close ties between Tunis's Ottoman elites and the empire's capital after the establishment of the French protectorate (Tunger-Zanetti) invites us to put forward the hypothesis that, until 1914, the practices in use in Istanbul continued to serve as a model in the Regency of Tunis. The fact that in Istanbul, as in Tunis, there were many Italian and French painters (Orhun Gültekin) might support this. On the one hand, it was the court painter Fausto Zonaro that Sultan Abdülhamîd II called on in 1907 to make a copy of the famous portrait in oil of Sultan Mehmed II, painted in 1480 by the Venetian Gentile Bellini.[20] But on the other hand, the prestige of Paris as a place to train in the fine arts was high in the empire's capital: following Osman Hamdi bey (Eldem), it was to Paris, in the studios of Jean-Paul Laurens and probably Georges Rochegrosse,[21] that Muhammad al-Hâdî (1872-1922) went to train. Al-Hâdî was one of the sons of the former minister of Bey Khayr ad-dîn bâchâ (the latter, having been removed from power in Tunis in 1877, had settled with his family in Istanbul, where he held the post of grand vizir between December 1878 and July 1879). Muhammad al-Hâdî found himself forced to leave Istanbul after the coup d'état by the Committee of Union and Progress in January 1913, and settled in the outskirts of Tunis, in Sidi Bou Said, where he died in 1922 (Zmerli).

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[18] We may mention Giuseppe Ancona from Trapani, who produced a depiction of the *mahalla* camp (1868), which was designed to collect taxes and to assert beylical sovereignty across the territory of the Regency. This painting formed part of the beylical collections.

[19] The Italian consul in Sousse appears to have encouraged Ahmad 'Usmân's father, an important general in the beylical entourage, to organise drawing lessons for his son. A biographical note regarding him indicates that he received an academic training in Rome ("Ahmed Osmane").

[20] Thalasso, Adolphe. *L'Art ottoman, les peintres de Turquie*. Paris, [1910], p. 9, quoted by Strauss, 142.

[21] Muhammad al-Hâdî probably frequented his studio before 1900, the year from which Rochegrosse spent all his winters in Algiers (Zmerli; *Georges-Antoine Rochegrosse*).

Figure 2: Charles Gleyre, *Portrait of Baron Raffo*, ca. 1842-1843, oil on canvas, 275 x 163 cm. Tunis, National Heritage Institute (INP), Ksar Said.

Bringing works by French artists to Tunis to set up a museum (1892-93)

However, the situation began to change following the occupation of Tunisia by the French army and the establishment of a protectorate. France's taking control of the country was accompanied by a movement calling for its colonisation and francisation, along the lines of Algeria, and the new authorities saw the promotion of French art in Tunisia as a means to achieve this goal. It was against this backdrop that in 1886 the plan emerged to set up a French museum in Tunis ("Un musée impossible"?). The man behind the project was a "progressive republican",[22] Georges de Dramard (1838-1900), a well-known figure in Paris, who, since 1868, had regularly shown his paintings at the Salon.[23] In 1885, he founded a Société française des amis des arts, which was close to the administration in charge of the fine arts. The project, which was never completed, resulted in around thirty artists who regularly took part in the exhibition of the Société des artistes français, which in 1881 succeeded the Salon parisien, giving one of their works to the French government, in order to build up the museum's collections, with a view to eventually securing private or public commissions in Tunis.[24] But were the thirty or so works sent in 1892-93 the expression of a specifically French art?[25] In large part, yes. With one exception, all of the artists that sent one of their works were French.[26] In most cases, the works' titles make reference to France, whether geographically, historically or in literary terms (this is the case for twenty-one out of the thirty-five), never to another country, except for a view of Venice. This is true for the landscapes, which make up almost half of the works sent and which for the most part are precisely located: in Brittany (two), in Normandy (two), on the Atlantic coast (two), on the Mediterranean coast (one), in central France (three), the area surrounding Paris (three) or Paris itself (one). But it is also true for the genre scenes, whether they refer to a literary work (*Donkey Skin*, one of the stories by Charles Perrault), the French Revolution (*Mass for the dead in the Morbihan in 1793*), the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 (*Refugees. Episode from the siege of Paris; Fighting in a street in Champigny*), or the present day (*Evening of 14 July; The Deck of the liner La Touraine*). Finally, it is true for the only portrait sent, that of Cardinal Lavigerie, a copy based on an engraving of the portrait made in 1888 by Léon Bonnat. Thus, these works dispatched to Tunis were intended to promote "French" artists and art, although this French character did not correspond to a clearly defined aesthetic, as with the works exhibited at the Salon des artistes français. Did this initiative embarked on by a Frenchman in a colonial perspective, albeit cut short, have a degree of effectiveness in promoting a specifically French art and the development of a taste for it? Were the works seen and did they capture people's imaginations? It is difficult to ascertain. We know that some of them, as they could not be shown to the public within the framework of a museum, were exhibited at the first Salon tunisien, in 1894.[27] Others were displayed more permanently in places frequented by a particular section of the public: it was to the archbishop's palace that the residence-general sent the *Mass for the dead in the Morbihan* in 1793 *(Vendémiaire Year II)* by Charles Coëssin de la Fosse (1829-1910).[28]

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[22] Politically close to Justin Massicault, who was appointed resident-general in Tunis in 1886, he was awarded the Légion d'honneur the same year, sponsored by Charles Prevet, a deputy for the Seine-et-Marne *département* who sat with the Gauche radicale, a parliamentary group comprising the radicals who chose to support Gambetta following the elections in 1881.

[23] Georges de Dramard had been a pupil of Édouard Brandon and Léon Bonnat in Paris. He had regularly shown paintings at the Salon since 1868.

[24] It is likely that their hopes were disappointed. However, they were rewarded for the work they sent by being decorated with the nichân al-iftikhâr (Centre des archives diplomatiques de Nantes – CADN, Tunisia, first transfer, 1351 bis). This Tunisian "insignia of glorification" was created by the Bey in 1837.

[25] The lists of the thirty-five works sent in three deliveries have been kept (CADN, Tunisia, first transfer, 1351bis).

[26] The only foreign artist was an American watercolourist from Philadelphia, Sigmund J. Cauffman.

[27] This is the case for Donkey Skin slipping her ring into the cake by Albert Maignan and Fighting in a street in Champigny by Léon du Paty.

[28] Also known by the title *The Mass of the Chuans*, this large-format work (180 cm x 260 cm), was exhibited in Paris at the Salon des artistes français in 1880 and was the subject of a photographic edition by Braun (fig. 3).

Figure 3: Charles Coëssin de la Fosse, *The Mass for the dead in the Morbihan (Vendémiaire Year II)*, collotype from the Braun artistic reproduction workshops, Paris.

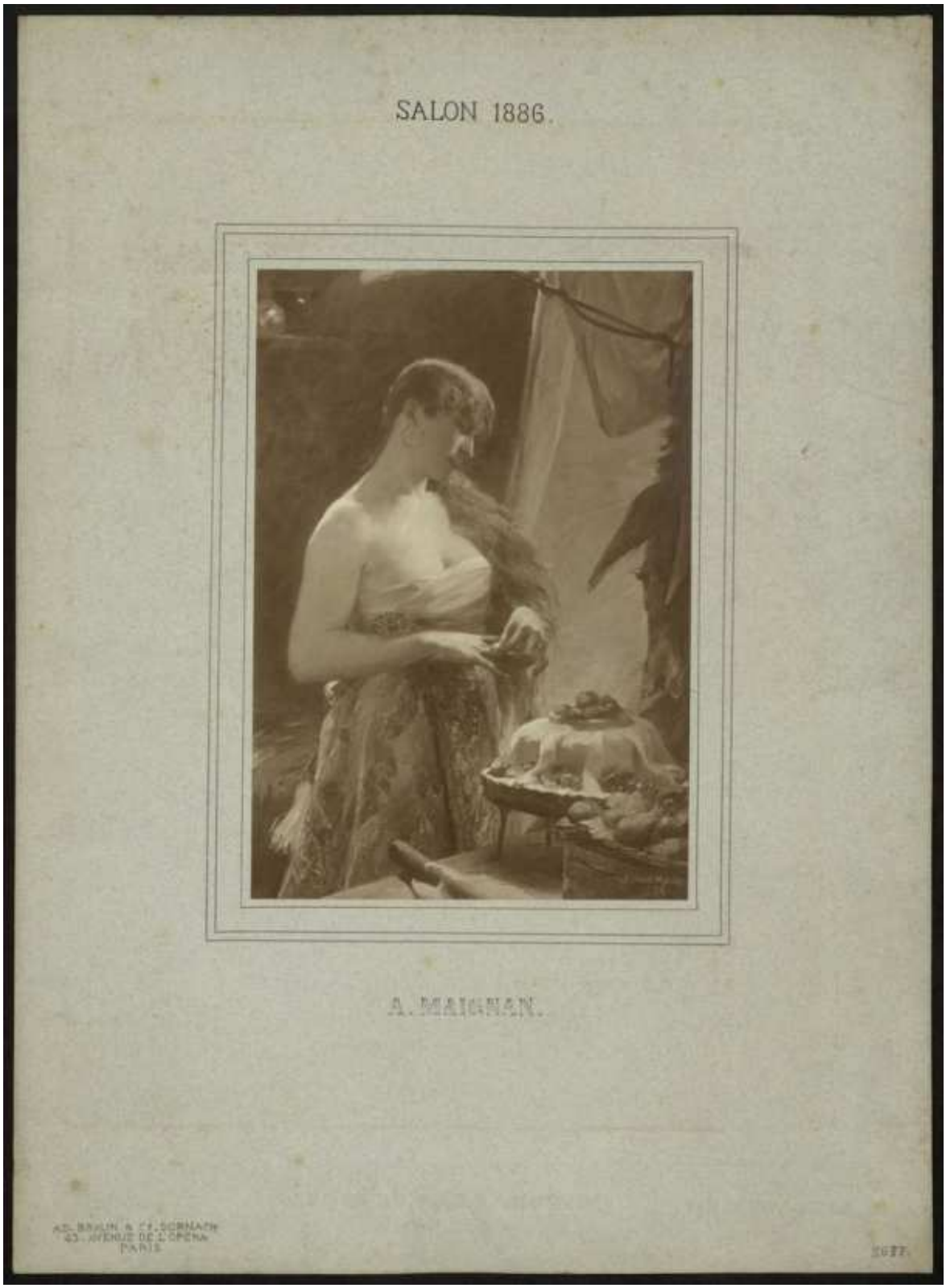

Figure 4: Albert Maignan, *Donkey Skin slipping her ring into the cake*, silver print by Adolphe Braun et Cie, 1886. Amiens, Musée de Picardie collection. Source: photo Musée de Picardie.

And it was the officers of the military circles in Tunis and Sfax who were assigned the denuded female figures of *Sleep* by Pierre Franc-Lamy (1855-1919)[29] and *Donkey Skin slipping her ring into the cake* by Albert Maignan (1845-1908)(fig. 4),[30] as well as a patriotic scene (*The Refugees. Episode from the siege of Paris*, by Alfred de Richemont (1857-1911)[31] and a landscape (*The Town of Argenton* [sur Creuse] by Mario Carl-Rosa (1853-1913). The pupils of the boys' school in Tunis could contemplate the *Regiment passing* by Jean Jacques Baptiste Brunet (1849-1917), those at the girls' school *Girl among flowers* by Louis-Maurice Pierrey (1854-1912).[32] But we have no record of how these paintings were perceived. It is not certain that all of the members of a diverse French community, with families that had entered into the service of the Ottoman Regency, without the colonial perspective that asserted itself subsequently (Planel), identified with them; and it is possible that they may have offended certain sensibilities among the population of the Regency. We may consider that The Republic standing by Philippe Félix Dupuis (1824-1888) had the widest audience, as the painting was dispatched to decorate the brand-new post and telegraphs office. But we have no elements that allow us to assess this.

Through the Salon and the Centre d'art: promoting an art open "to all periods, all schools and all countries"

After 1894, while there was still talk of setting up a museum of fine arts in Tunis, it was no longer in the form of a "French museum", but a museum "at once of fine arts, industrial arts and products of the Regency" ("Deuxième exposition artistique à Tunis" 291), i.e., a Tunisian museum. Similarly, it was under the name of "Salon tunisien" that in 1894 the art section of the Institut de Carthage established an annual fine arts exhibition, which took place on a regular basis from 1907 onwards. This annual exhibition was designed to show all of the Regency's artistic output, without restriction ("The Annual Art Salons"; "Salons et expositions d'art industriel à Tunis (1896 et 1898)"; "Un Salon pour Tunis"). The rules for the 1894 exhibition were taken from those for the Salon des artistes français, stating in Article 3 that works would be seen there "relating to all periods, all schools and all countries" ("Chronique de l'Institut de Carthage" 308). Thus, Italian artists could be found there, albeit in small numbers.[33] In its edition of 2 April 1897, for example, *La Dépêche tunisienne* welcomed the presence of the painter Gaetano Musso, from Palermo, hoping that "many Italian artists [would] now follow his example".[34] In the speech that he gave at the opening of the 1901 Salon tunisien, Eusèbe Vassel described Tunisia as a "hospitable land", with the Salon making it possible to bring together the different communities living there: the French, characterised by their taste for the ideal, "the generous combat for the exaltation and expansion of the Good, the Beautiful, the True […]; Italians […] who remember the Renaissance, when their forefathers heralded the greatest flourishing of Letters and the Arts; Tunisians too, eager to show that their countrymen are not more resistant to moral improvement than to material progress" ("Institut de Carthage.

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[29] *Sleep*, shown at the 1887 Salon parisien (No. 1369), obtained an honourable mention. The Salon's catalogue provides a reproduction of it (Dumas 271).

[30] This "small, meticulously executed painting" depicting "a beautiful young girl with a bare bosom draped in light gold and gauze fabrics" had been shown in Le Mans (Héry 513) and the exhibition of the Société des artistes français in Paris ("Le Folk-lore au Salon" 159). It was also reproduced by the publishers Adolphe Braun.

[31] The work was lithographed, as attested by a print in the series of "Scenes of daily life" in the collection of the Musée Carnavalet, with a slightly different title ("Scene in a cellar during the bombardment of Paris").

[32] CADN, Tunisia, first transfer, 1351[bis].

[33] We note, for example, that Michele Cortegiani (1857-1919), who was active in Tunis between 1902 and 1919, never exhibited in it.

[34] The general political context was that of a recognition by Italy of the French protectorate in Tunisia, following the defeat at the Battle of Adwan and the failure of Crispi's colonial policy. A Franco-Italian agreement on consular relations could therefore be promulgated by the Bey in 1897.

Ouverture du 6e Salon tunisien" 368).[35] This inclusive dimension was confirmed in 1913, when the organisation of the Salon was taken over by an activist from the French Section of the Workers' International (Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière – SFIO), Alexandre Fichet (1881-1967), a teacher of drawing at the Collège Alaoui, a middle school attended by Muslim pupils, and at the teacher training college.[36] Alexandre Fichet, who after the First World War was part of the editorial team of the newspaper *Tunis socialiste*, founded in 1921 by his brother-in-law André Duran-Angliviel, remained the organiser of the Salon tunisien between the wars, and then, on his return from being deported, from 1944 onwards. Thanks to his openness and the friendships that he built up with members of the Destourian Party (Abéasis), he contributed to the continuation of the annual exhibition through the upheavals of decolonisation by remaining its organiser until 1966.

In 1914, Fichet, who perhaps took as his model Paul Signac, the President of the Salon des indépendants since 1909, only referred to French artists when he said that he is convinced that they should present both the "output of experimenters, independents and 'fauves'" alongside those "who uphold the wholesome traditions of the masters", the role of reformers being to "safeguard the true tradition, protecting it from the very people who claim to perpetuate it" ("XVIe Salon tunisien" 283). Between the wars, it was Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres who was, together with Nicolas Poussin, one of the main figures of reference for the champions of a "French art" that was deemed to be threatened by cosmopolitanism and expressionism (Jarrassé 135), as well as Eugène Carrière, Claude Monet and Toulouse-Lautrec, for whom Fichet expressed admiration. But in 1923, he stated that he wished to "persuade our cosmopolitan population, divided by their origins, their tastes, their customs and their occupations, that Art is a welcoming homeland. The differences in race, emotion and expression constitute new sources of richness for this homeland and contribute to bringing it closer to universal and human truth, which is the only harmonious one"[37] ("Le Salon tunisien. Discours de M. Fichet" 97). In a post-war climate of a return to order and national affirmation, Fichet stated that the Salon tunisien was a melting pot devoid of national exclusiveness. By choosing the term "homeland" (*patrie* in French) traditionally used by the republican left, he was differentiating himself from the different forms of nationalism, and perhaps already from the promoters of a competing salon, organised from the autumn of 1922, which in 1924 took the name of Salon des artistes tunisiens. An amateur artist, Alfred Combarel, and a former magistrate from Constantine, André Delacroix (1878-1934), a member of the Société coloniale des artistes français, were opposed to Fichet's eclecticism and were soon joined, in 1930, by a former fellow student and friend of Fichet,[38] Gaston-Louis Le Monnier (1880-1947), who railed against "the decadent European movement",[39] But their salon did not survive the death of André Delacroix. And the Exposition artistique de l'Afrique française, held annually from 1928 with the aim of asserting imperial unity across the north of the continent—Tunis was the first city to host it (it did

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[35] The copy of the booklet of the 1901 Salon tunisien having disappeared from Tunisia's Bibliothèque nationale, we do not know exactly who the Tunisians in question were. We presume that they were neither painters and sculptors, but rather craftsmen. We note among the artists who received special recognition the names of the photographer Albert Samama Chikli (3rd prize) and the architect and ceramicist Élie Blondel (honourable mention). On these two artists, see Mansour and "Tradition et rénovation dans la céramique tunisienne" respectively.

[36] In 1908, Fichet helped set up a local section of the SFIO, following the tour of the possibilist socialist Georges Ducos de La Haille. The latter supported the reformist line represented by Paul Brousse, according to whom it was possible to put in place a socialist regime through the exercise of municipal power secured legally following victory in local elections.

[37] In April 1933, Fichet saw in "the great number of visitors to the Salon tunisien" proof that art is a universal preoccupation which "can be found in all latitudes, in all periods and in all races" ("L'activité de l'Institut de Carthage en 1933." II).

[38] Between 1894 and 1896 Alexandre Fichet and Gustave Louis Le Monnier had both attended a vocational school of applied arts run by the city of Paris, the École Bernard Palissy, and struck up a friendship (Le Monnier 30). This school aimed to train "artists skilled in certain crafts such as ceramics, glasswork, enamelling, wood, marble and ivory sculpture, metalwork, fabric design and decorative painting" (*L'œuvre sociale de la municipalité parisienne, 1871-1891*. Imprimerie municipale, 1892, pp. 16-17, quoted by Lebahar 128).

[39] "Les artistes tunisiens", *Le Petit Matin*, 2 May 1930. Having exhibited at the Salon tunisien, Le Monnier took part in the Salon des artistes tunisiens in 1930.

so again in 1932, 1936 and 1941)—did not set different selection criteria from those of the Salon tunisien. It fulfilled the same function in showing a varied range of works to the public,[40] while Alexandre Fichet continued to attempt to make known the recent trends in painting in Paris, including works by foreign artists working there.[41] The break between the two former students of the École Bernard Palissy was confirmed during the Second World War. While Fichet was deported to Sachsenhausen by the German authorities in 1942 (under house arrest in the Gers after a period of forced labour, he only returned to Tunis in the autumn of 1944), Gaston-Louis Le Monnier set up a trade union of professional artists (painters, sculptors and set designers) in Tunisia and organised two exhibitions in the spring and autumn of 1944. His memoirs suggest that he hardened in his conception of the French tradition in a way reminiscent of the evolution of the critic Camille Mauclair, who became a nationalist and anti-Semite having been close to the symbolists and anarchism and a Dreyfusard in his youth (Vaisse):

> Cities like Tunis are somewhat contaminated by that decadent art that is rife in Paris, that international art of naturalised foreigners that has swamped all of the French traditions of painting, and which from time to time hangs from the end of a pole the effigy of an innovator, like a paper lantern (Le Monnier 171).

The other important institution with respect to the fine arts in Tunis, the Centre d'art, was founded in 1922-23 (Lasram). Previously, only the drawing classes in primary and secondary schools and a few private workshops provided artistic training in the Regency. The Centre d'art therefore took over from the workshops of a pupil of Gérôme, Émile Pinchart (1842-1921), active between 1902 and 1913, Georges Le Mare (1866-1942), who went to be trained at the Académie Julian between 1900 and 1905, active between 1912 and 1916, and Joseph Buffard (1871-1937?), a former student at the École des Beaux-Arts in Lyon, where he had studied flower painting to cater to the needs of the silk industry (the decorative art class that he introduced in 1912 probably continued until the early 1920s). The Centre d'art, which only took the name of École des Beaux-Arts in 1930, likewise did not seek to impose a rigidly defined "French art" ("La fabrique des artistes 'tunisiens'" 157-180). The entrance competition was open to all young people between the ages of sixteen and thirty, with no restrictions in terms of gender or nationality. The teaching programme followed the model of the Paris École des Beaux-Arts, where its director, Armand Vergeaud (1876-1949), had been a student.[42] Vergeaud also regularly showed his work at the Salon tunisien, as many of the École's students would soon go on to do. He shared with Fichet the idea that the different types of artistic experimentation being conducted in France could be of interest in a country in which he considered there was no established tradition in the field of the fine arts. Among its students, the largest number were French, but there were also Tunisians and Italians, including Jules Lellouche, Antonio Corpora and Maurizio Valensi.[43] The Parisian heritage and open-mindedness common to Vergeaud and Fichet meant that they helped to bring to Tunis an open conception of the world of

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[40] The years in which Tunis hosted the Exposition de l'Afrique française, the art section of the Institut de Carthage took part in it and did not organise the Salon tunisien.

[41] Probably making use of his links with Parisian gallery owners, Fichet was able to show at the 1913 Salon tunisien works by Albert Gleizes and Marie Laurencin. We find among the exhibitors in the 1920s Parisian artists who had acquired a certain renown such as Jacqueline Marval (1866-1932), Maurice Denis (1870-1943), Kees Van Dongen (1877-1968) and Albert Marquet (1875-1947), or appeared promising, such as François Quelvée (1884-1967) and Lucien Mainssieux (1885-1958). This openness continued in the 1930s, with works sent not only by French artists such as Henry de Waroquier (1881-1970), Henri Le Fauconnier (1881-1946), Yves Alix (1890-1969), Jean Lurçat (1892-1966) and Marcel Gromaire (1892-1971), but also by foreign artists who had come to work in Paris such as Frans Masereel (1889-1972), Georges Sabbagh (1887-1951) and Mario Prassinos (1916-1985). On the foreign artists in the *École de Paris*, see *L'École de Paris, 1904-1929 : la part de l'autre*.

[42] The official director of the Centre d'art was initially Pierre Boyer (1865-1933), also inspector of antiquities and arts and director of the Musée Alaoui. Armand Vergeaud only took over officially as director of the institution after Pierre Boyer retired in 1930, which is when the Centre became the École des Beaux-Arts, whose "programme [was] designed in accordance with that of the Paris École des Beaux-Arts" (*L'Annuaire tunisien* 156).

[43] Jules Lellouche had probably attended classes at the Centre d'art from the time it was set up (he received a travel bursary in 1926); Antonio Corpora was a student there between 1927 and 1929; and Maurizio Valensi in 1932-1933.

art, without aesthetic or national exclusivism. In this respect, we may consider that they made possible the affirmation of a group of artists that would soon be known by the name of the École de Tunis, as a local variant of an École de Paris open to contributions from foreign artists.

Inclusive references: from a Latin to a Mediterranean identity

However, the situation of Tunis was very particular, due to the competition between France and Italy.[44] From 1911, a view was expressed that called for a Latin Renaissance in the field of the fine arts. It was put forward by Henri Leca-Beuque (1884-1948), a teacher of literature at the École normale de Tunis (where he also taught Alexandre Fichet) who was from Philippeville in Algeria.[45] It echoed that held by the man of letters Louis Bertrand (1866-1941), who was one of the originators of the Algerianist movement, with a somewhat different tone.[46] Indeed, Leca-Beuque differentiated himself from those who believed bitterly "that the disenchanted West [was] being choked to death by the all-powerful foreigners and Phoenicians". He saw in the Latin Renaissance that he was calling for the fruit of Tunisia's openness to foreign contributions, which would benefit Tunisia just as the Italian artists had benefited France in the sixteenth century. However, Leca-Beuque associated the development of "good taste" with French art. In his view, the preferences of "popular taste", if they "did not go towards manifestations of French genius, would all too easily be inclined to favour foreign trends" (Leca-Beuque 15), although we do not know exactly what he was referring to here—perhaps standardised works such as the chromolithographs produced in Germany, Italy and the Middle East that could be found on sale at that time in Tunis.[47]

The promotion of a "Latin" art in Tunisia took on a new form between the wars, when relations between France and fascist Italy oscillated between mistrust and rapprochement. The Franco-Italian alliance, symbolised by the signature of the Rome Accords in January 1935, was cut short by Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in October of that year and the victory of the Front populaire in France in the spring of 1936: in the autumn of that year the government led by Léon Blum recalled its ambassador from Rome.[48] But a narrative emphasising a common Latin identity transcending national borders persisted. As we have seen, Pierre Boucherle, who had taken part in the exhibition of colonial art in Rome in 1932, and whose exhibition in Algiers in the spring of 1934 had been admired by the young Albert Camus,[49] was characterised in 1936 by his Latin genius, while Corpora was associated with the Mediterranean.[50] This definition of Latin identity was doubtless less exclusive than that of Alberto Savinio, for whom Roman culture had died out following the infiltration of Arab-Gothic influences.[51] It opened up the idea of a common Mediterranean culture rather than being in opposition to it. The need for a broad inclusive category explains the success in Tunis of this concept which made it possible to encompass works associated with the Arab, Jewish and Berber worlds (Ruel 7-14; Fréris 43-51). The publication between 1927 and 1933 of a

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[44] It was estimated that in 1881 there were only 700 French people in Tunisia, compared with 10,000 Italians. The military occupation of the Regency by troops of the French army of Africa and the signature of the protectorate treaty in 1883 were only officially recognised by Italy in 1898 (De Montéty).

[45] Now Skikda. Henri Leca-Beuque was not only a painter (he exhibited watercolours at the Salon tunisien in 1912 and then regularly between 1920 and 1939) but also a musician and playwright. The reviews that he had published in the *Tunisie française* and the *Dépêche tunisienne* related to art, music, theatre and cinema (Arrouas).

[46] On Louis Bertrand and the genesis of Algerianism, see Martini et Durand.

[47] There is mention of these chromolithographs being sold in the shops at the bottom of the Rue de l'Église, by the entrance to the medina, in a review of the Exposition artistique de l'Afrique française (*Tunis socialiste*, 22 March 1932).

[48] For a general overview of the cultural exchanges between the two countries, see Fraixe and Poupault. On Italy's policy with regard to Tunisia, see Bessis.

[49] Camus's review of this solo exhibition at the Galerie du Minaret was published in *Alger étudiant : organe officiel de l'Association générale des étudiants d'Alger*, 19 April 1934. It was republished in Camus 558-560.

[50] "Exposition des 'quatre'. Préface au vernissage de la galerie de l'Art nouveau", *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 31 January 1936.

[51] Savinio, Alberto. "Per la 'nuova' civiltà italiana." *Colonna*, 5th year, No. 1, December 1933, quoted by Fraixe, 157.

Revue méditerranéenne des lettres, des arts, des sciences under the editorship of Albert Canal indicates that it was in early use there.[52]

There was no compartmentalisation of the art world into a French one and an Italian one in inter-war Tunisia. Pierre Boucherle and Henri Leca-Beuque were among the many French artists who exhibited at the Società Dante Alighieri, in the premises of the imposing building constructed in 1926 in Rue Thiers.[53] The Italian cultural association was very active in these years in the area of art, offering a class in drawing applied to arts and crafts and a rich programme of exhibitions that remained free of any indoctrination until 1938, even though, in May 1933, it was recommended that exhibitions should be collective ones and should exalt Italian identity[54] (Finzi and Gallico 237-242). In May 1932, an exhibition of twelve "modern painters" attested to this freedom: there were only four Italians among them, Antonio Corpora, Frida Uzan (1906-?), Maurizio Valensi (1909-2009) and Aldo Ronco. The former three had been taught by Vergeaud at the Tunis École des Beaux-Arts, and the latter three had opposed the fascist regime, by way of involvement in the Communist Party in the case of Aldo Ronco and soon Maurizio Valensi,[55] or a Livorno Jewish family tradition favourable to the Carbonari and Freemasonry in the case of Frida Uzan.[56] Among the five French exhibitors were Alexandre Fichet and Pierre Boucherle. Jules Lellouche also took part in the exhibition, which included a Swiss painter living in Tunis, Wilhelm Lebherz Louis (1907?-1950) and a Dutchman, Gerardus Hendricus Huysser (1892-?).[57]

On the eve of the Second World War, the local art world thus appears to have disregarded the national divisions that existed in Tunis, and a large number of artists appear not to have regarded themselves as representatives of a national school of art, whether French, Italian or Tunisian, even though we find in the local press a standard narrative that encouraged a national reading of the works of art produced. We can see in the way they distanced themselves from national identification, in the assertion by Moses Levy, Pierre Boucherle, Jules Lellouche et Antonio Corpora of freedom to express "their inner truth" which would define them as avant-garde, the sign of a process of becoming autonomous. By stating that true art is a "spiritual activity" that eludes commercial logic, the four painters who published their manifesto in 1936 were contributing to the creation of a local art world governed by its own specific standards. There is nothing hugely original about the definition that they give to true tradition, which "is only made up of a series of great revolutionaries", and that they contrast with everyday routine. However, it enabled them to differentiate themselves from the narratives which, formulated in France, Algeria and Italy, associated with France, Italy and the Latin or Mediterranean world more widely the attributes of measure, order and structure. These narratives were circulating in Tunis and were sometimes associated with expressions of sympathy with the fascist regime or the expression of a desire for an authoritarian political regime. Notwithstanding the recent work carried out, more remains to be done to increase our understanding of artistic activity in Tunis in the 1930s and 1940s. By placing it within the context of the preceding century, I have attempted to understand some of its specific

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[52] This journal's literary editor was Élie Léon Brami (1901-1983), alias Léon Madlyn, who ran the Galerie Sélection in Tunis between 1944 and 1958, and its art editor was Albert Sidbon-Beyda, an amateur painter whose works were in 1926 deemed to be too mediocre to be exhibited at the Salon tunisien, which prompted his resignation (see the minutes of the meeting of the art section of the Institut de Carthage, 24 April 1926, Archives nationales d'Outre-mer, 243 APOM, Abéasis collection).

[53] On the construction of this building, see De Montéty 420; Sessa 43 and Hueber and Piaton 114. Leca-Beuque's solo exhibition was reviewed in *La Dépêche tunisienne* (by André Delacroix, 3 March 1928) and *La Tunisie française* (by Pierre Girou, 15 March 1928). On the Società Dante Alighieri's activities in the field of art, see Finzi and Gallico.

[54] Remaining director of the Società until December 1937, the lawyer Ugo Moreno (1875-1966), a prominent figure from Livorno's Jewish community, maintained its liberal stance (Boccara 275).

[55] Having moved from anarchism to communism, Aldo Ronco was part of the Movimento immaginista in Rome around the magazine *La Rota dentata*, and of the Roman group of the Clarté movement set up by Henri Barbusse (Berghaus 204; "Bonaventura Grassi"). On Maurizio Valensi, who joined the Tunisian Communist Party around 1935, see Race and Valenzi.

[56] I base this on a written account by her son Henri-Michel Boccara, whom I would like to thank here.

[57] Tartaga, "Douze peintres modernes", *Tunis socialiste*, 4 May 1932.

features and the ultimate success of the modest manifesto published in 1936. Following the upheaval the country went through during the Second World War, with the prospect of the country soon gaining independence, the issue of a national reading of works of art and the affirmation of a local culture characterised by the plurality of origins were to take on fresh relevance.[58] They became part of a discussion about the definition of national culture that is still topical, as demonstrated by the discussions that have recently surrounded the publication by scholars of modern history of books on this subject (Aïssa; ʻÎsâ; al-Timûmî).

[58] This plurality has been highlighted in different types of discourse – political, tourism promotion as well as academic – using the metaphor of a mosaic (Alexandropoulos).

Appendix

We reproduce here the announcement of the opening of the Galerie de l'art nouveau published in the *La Dépêche tunisienne* of 25 January 1936 (fig. 1). It includes the manifesto drawn up by the four exhibitors, published in parallel in the Italian-language daily *L'Unione*.[59]

A review of the exhibition by the painter and journalist Armand Ravelet was published a few days later in the same paper. It gives us an idea of the four works shown by each of the exhibitors, which do not necessarily correspond to those reproduced in *La Dépêche tunisienne* on 25 January:

> "Mr Pierre Boucherle gives us a street [*sic* for a nude[60]], a still life, *The Moulin de la Goulette* and some flowers (1, 2, 3, 4); Mr A. Corpora, a composition, *The Children of the river*, [a] study and [a] landscape (5, 6, 7, 8); Mr Mosès Levy, *The News Stand*,[61] a still life, a landscape and *A Moroccan woman* (9, 10, 11, 12); Mr Lellouche, an *Arab woman*, a landscape and two flower paintings, with all of the works treated in the manner of the extreme avant-garde, except for those of Mr Pierre Boucherle, who seems at times, especially with the nude, to have been won back to traditionalism."[62]

Given that it has not been possible to identify with any certainty the works exhibited in 1936, and thus to provide reproductions of them, we have decided to give a rough idea of them by means of other pictures by these artists that are undated but that may have been painted around this time (fig. 5 to 8).

A small artistic revolution. Exhibition of the "four". Introduction to the opening of the Galerie de l'art nouveau

A plot has been hatched against the artistic commercialism and mundane conformism of society!

Tunis appears to have become hostile—was it ever its friend, oh conspirators?—to naked beauty, stripped of all academic rags and free in its aesthetic experiments.

Away with the dealers, the snobs and the academic painters who, through money, pseudo-dilettantism and prejudice, pervert the public's taste and make it impervious to art in its newest forms of expression!

This at least is what four of our most talented painters proclaim as they declare war on tendencies and failings that are detrimental to the cause of the spirit.

As a form of protest, Mosès Levy, Pierre Boucherle, Jules Lellouche and Antonio Corpora have created "La Galerie de l'art nouveau" at No. 5 Rue St-Charles—a timely replica of the studio exhibition spaces in which the Parisian critics and the capital's eclectic and enlightened art lovers take pride.

This evening from 6 p.m. the Four will exhibit works that are eminently representative of their style, at an unprecedented opening that will gather together the city's spiritual crème de la crème.

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[59] "L'Arta Nuova.", *L'Unione*, 25 January 1936. Part of this text has been published (Belluomini Pucci 44-51) and translated into French ("Défaire une histoire de la peinture tunisienne" 189-190).

[60] Translator's note: *rue* and *nu* sound similar in French.

[61] An oil painting on card with this title 75 cm high and 1 m wide, dated 1932, is reproduced as No. 155 in Belluomini Pucci 46. In 2002, it was held in the Pizzi Collection in Milan.

[62] Ravelet, Armand. "L'Exposition des quatre peintres de 'L'Art nouveau', rue Saint-Charles." *La Dépêche tunisienne*, 31 January 1936.

By way of invitation, the sympathetically revolutionary quartet has drawn up the following manifesto, which will appear at the start of its catalogue, a somewhat impertinent but warmly sincere text:

> To the Public:
>
> We open the doors of this Galerie to avant-garde Tunisian and foreign artists. By this we mean all those who, using colour and line, seek to express and communicate their inner truth. This Galerie is not a commercial enterprise, but a purely artistic event. Modern artists will be able to continually communicate with the public by means of solo and group exhibitions. The public can at last be guided towards a spiritual activity instead of being the victim of the manipulation of profit-seeking dealers.
>
> This Galerie will categorically refuse to exhibit so-called traditional painters, who are to tradition what cretinism is to intelligence. These people who continue to pander to the inertia of the humdrum public will be banished from our events, which will endeavour rather to stir up the waters that threaten to become stagnant.
>
> We call on progressive critics to assist us in this laborious task and we urge them (at least the intelligent ones) not to employ too often, and for people who do not deserve it, the names of the great masters.
>
> Avant-garde painters love the classics, and from their training they have retained one thing: tradition is only made up of a series of revolutionaries. Those today who persist in aping the works of the great masters only serve to render the truth ambiguous.
>
> Regarding tradition, it is good to quote what a young critic has written:
>
> When Sallust, in order to impart glory to his own work, writes "maxumus" instead of "maximus", I think of the primordial and grotesque animality that is for example in *Trader Horn*:[63] in the heart of Africa, near to the village, the council of notables is meeting. One of them speaks, but no one listens to him. So he gets up and returns with an austere mask over his face. He says the same things as before but they now all start to listen to him, holding their breath. Between the Sallustian "maxumus" and the savage's mask, there is no difference: they both have the same function – to give oneself airs in order to confer authority on oneself. This mask has too often been donned by all kinds of artists, even those who pass themselves off as modern, and they have called it "tradition". Something austere and academic in the form that ends up cracking the substance. We have always thought that tradition was nothing other than intelligence, but for others, on the contrary, tradition is the necessary betrayal that the artist commits towards his art: humiliating the creative ghost [by] reducing it to a pattern that is not his.
>
> The artists that are opening the Galerie are among the most representative of Tunisia. It is not for us to define their place in the art world. Moreover, each of them has his position in the ranks of dealers of European painting. They do not

[63] The manifesto is referring to the cinematic adaptation of the African adventures of the explorer Alfred Aloysius Horn, collected and published in 1927 in New York by Ethelreda Lewis with a preface by John Galsworthy. The film, made in East Africa by W. S. Van Dyke, came out in 1931.

belong to the same school and their movements are even contradictory. We find this fact very significant: their theories, their intelligence and their talent are the antithesis to one another. The important thing is that all four of them are in the war zone: that of living art.

Mosès Levy is a popular painter with the Tunisian public, and his artistic activity goes back some years. His name is well known in Paris and Italy, where a number of galleries own works by him. He represents the first third of this century. In his art, we encounter all of the exaltation and all of the renunciations that have been the torment of modern painting.

In search of truth. People generally think that "seeking" implies a tangible final result: "finding". This is a puerile idea that people have of art, as art is a continual process of seeking. Mosès Levy is a troubled and vibrant painter.

Pierre Boucherle. He is also known in Europe, and his works are exhibited at the most important Salons. A book about him has just been published by Les Éditions de la Zone[64] (Duhamel, Lugné-Poe and Salmon). Boucherle, who is French, and more specifically Latin, feels the need for logical construction. He seeks to organise his sensations into a rigorous architectonic simplicity.

Jules Lellouche. We can call him "the Lellouche case". He is perhaps the only painter who expresses himself as an authentic African. His art is fed by sensations rather than visions. Sensuality sometimes prevails over sensibility, instinct over creative logic, and it is then that his painting appears rather impressionist to us. Lellouche is now seeking to cut a broader path for himself.

Antonio Corpora, the youngest of the four, represents the artistic turning point[65] of the generation aged between twenty and thirty. Corpora also exhibits in Europe: he has had success in Paris, Florence, and very recently at the Rome Quadriennale. Corpora is Italian and his painting aspires to order and Mediterranean clarity. His logicality, his need for the *definite* are in conflict with his southern nature, and out of this contrast between order and instinct is born his pictorial drama.

He belongs to the generation that is trying to reduce art to its rigorous essence: the desire for naïve optimism, perhaps the impotent desire of man.

The Galerie de l'Art Nouveau

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[64] The book was written by three renowned figures: Lugné-Poe was the uncle of Pierre Boucherle's wife, Cécile Émonts; Boucherle probably met André Salmon when he was living in Paris, during the war, and Georges Duhamel in 1923 when Duhamel was staying in Tunis.

[65] We have corrected the misprint "tourment" (torment) that appears in the text published in *La Dépêche tunisienne*, replacing it with "tournant".

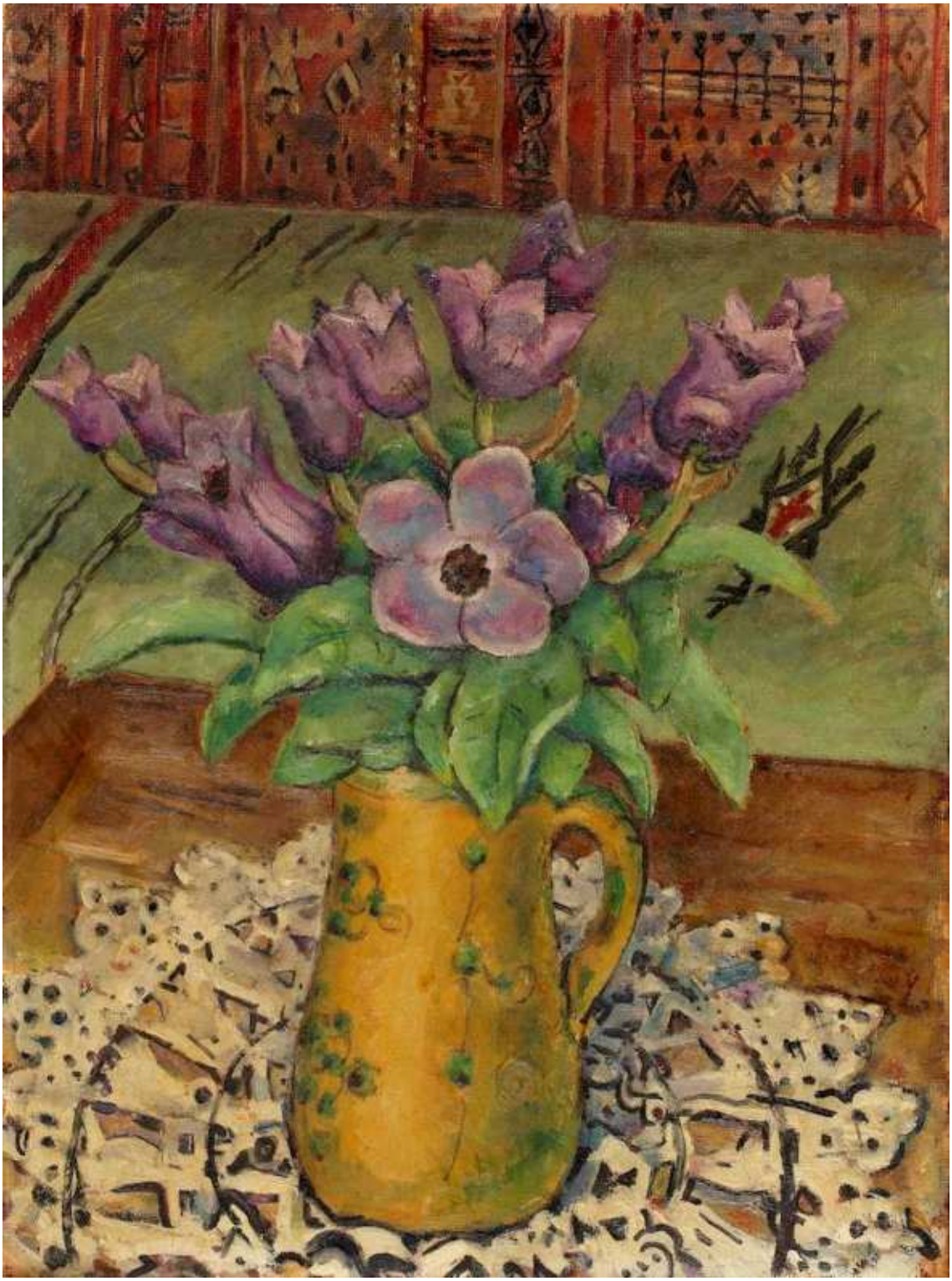

Figure 5: Moses Levy, *The Anemones*, oil on plywood, 50 x 37 cm. Elmarsa Moncef Msakni Gallery Collection. Tunis. (photo: Firas Ben Khalifa).

Figure 6: Pierre Boucherle, *The Mill of La Goulette*, oil on canvas, 72 x 60 cm. Elmarsa Moncef Msakni Gallery Collection. Tunis. (photo: Firas Ben Khalifa).

Figure 7: Jules Lellouche, *Sidi Bou Saïd, Dar Chabane*, oil on canvas, 54 x 65 cm. Elmarsa Moncef Msakni Gallery Collection. Tunis. (photo: Firas Ben Khalifa).

Figure 8: Antonio Corpora, *The Mosque of the Rue des Forgerons in Sfax*, oil on canvas, 46 x 55 cm. Elmarsa Moncef Msakni Gallery Collection. Tunis. (photo: Firas Ben Khalifa).

To this vigorous profession of faith should be added to the following motion that was adopted by Mrs Anna Denis-Dagieu and Messrs Henry [sic] Fauconnier, Gabriel Audisio, Pierre Bonnet-Dupeyron, Jules Borely (former director of fine arts in Morocco), Armand Guibert, Jean Amrouche and Camille Bégué:[66]

> A group of intellectuals are joining with the avant-garde artists of the Galerie de l'art nouveau and is calling on the intelligent public, the public authorities and progressive critics to work together in order to promote a Tunisian spiritual climate, which is still today confused with the lowest forms of profiteering and the most naïve dilettantism.

We wish the "four" and their supporters qualitative quantity in the collaboration they hope for.

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[66] The signatories were all writers with links to French North Africa. Living in Tunis's northern suburb of Khéreddine, Anna Denis-Dagieu published *Les Papiers du Merveilleux, revue de littérature, de philosophie, des sciences et d'art paraissant tous les deux mois* between 1931 and 1936. She also wrote *Montherlant et le merveilleux (1936).* Henri Fauconnier (1879-1973) had in 1925 settled in Radès, a southern suburb of Tunis. In 1930, he won the Prix Goncourt for his novel *Malaisie*. Jules Borely (1874-1947) had published a story set in Rabat, *Ahmed et Zohra* (1935). With links to Algeria, Gabriel Audisio (1900-1978), had just published in Paris with Gallimard *Jeunesse de la Méditerranée* (1935) and in 1936 was staying in Tunisia. Armand Guibert (1906-1990) and Jean Amrouche (1906-1962), who had both been teachers in Sousse, had founded in Tunis the Éditions du Mirage (1932), for which Camille Bégué (1906-1993), a literature teacher at the boys' lycée in Tunis, had written a monograph on the poet Patrice de la Tour du Pin (1935), as well as the "Cahiers de Barbarie" series (1934), in which in 1935 a collection of poems by Pierre Bonnet-Dupeyron, *Courrier de la solitude*, was published. On Guibert and Amrouche, see Dugas and Basset respectively.

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Biography

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