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Driven by a de-hierarchization of cultural categories, Nadjib Ben Ali's painting explores the intersection between human emotion, dramatic archetypes and their 21st-century visual expressions. Tapping into both popular, counter-cultural references and the dramatic choreography of historical painting, his compositions draw inspiration from soccer, rap videos, horror films, and B-movie slashers.

Ben Ali selects and manipulates his images digitally using computer and smartphone screens as tools. Pushed to their chromatic and luminous extremes, these digital creations serve as starting points for his paintings. He reimagines and distorts epic and affective moments from soccer games, adding a visceral, dramatic intensity. Imbued with a universal sense of drama, his works echo themes from the arenas of ancient games to epic narratives harking back to Greek and Shakespearean tragedies. Soccer players are transformed into spectral figures, their faces fragmented into vibrant, acidic hues that evoke a haunting, sepulchral quality—where sports imagery collides with the macabre world of horror films.

Figures are isolated, their facial features obscured by thick, solid colors, creating a sense of confinement and tension. Faces, dazed or taut with nervous energy, and bodies, slumped in exhaustion or contemplation, recall a vast iconographic tradition. These works span narratives from classical tragedies to the everyday struggles of existence, laced with a touch of absurdity—the hallmark of contemporary tragedy. His choice of counterbalanced titles underscores this complexity. In Ben Ali's paintings, whether referencing rap videos, monstrous horror film imagery, or fallen sports heroes, tragedy resides in subtle interstices, between the hyper-saturated colors and the raw emotional weight of the scenes. His art is a theatrical, almost apocalyptic playing out of human drama, where every element contributes to a vivid, tragic sensibility.

Nadjib Ben Ali (b. 1994) graduated with honors from the École Supérieure d'Art et Design de Saint-Etienne in 2019. His recent solo exhibitions were held at THE PILL, Paris (2025, France), The Cabin, Los Angeles (2023, U.S.) and Le POCTB, Orléans (2022, France). His work has been shown as part of institutional group shows such as *Les Enfants terribles*, Centre culturel Jean Cocteau, Les Lilas, (2025, France), *Voir en peinture,* MASC, Les Sables d'Olonne, Musée Estrine, Saint-Rémy de Provence and Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dole (2023, France); *Glad to take height and see the slow motion world*, Jeune Création, Romainville (2021, France); *Novembre à Vitry,* Galerie municipale Jean Collet, Vitry sur Seine (2019, France); *Le jour suivant*, Cité du Design, Saint-Étienne (2019, France).

Nadjib Ben Ali
B. 1994, lives and works in Paris.

Education
2019 École Supérieure d'Art et Design de Saint-Etienne — Honors

Solo Exhibitions
2025 *No Party*, THE PILL, Paris, FR
2023 *LES PIEDS... MAIS SURTOUT LA TÊTE*, The Cabin LA, USA
2022 *DRAMADRAMA*, Le POCTB, Orléans, FR

Group Exhibitions
2025 *Les Enfants terribles*, Centre culturel Jean Cocteau, Les Lilas, FR
2023 *Voir en peinture, la jeune figuration en France*, MASC, Les Sables d'Olonne, FR
Voir en peinture, la jeune figuration en France, Musée Estrine, Saint Rémy de Provence, FR
Voir en peinture, la jeune figuration en France, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dole, FR
2022 *Enivrez-vous*, Praz-Delavallade, Paris, FR
Dessins d'après / Peintures d'après, Saint-Étienne, FR
2021 *Goals*, La loma projects, Los Angeles, USA
Glad to take height and see the slow motion world, Jeune Création, Romainville, FR
Amicalement vôtre, Galerie Richard, Paris, FR
2019 *Novembre à Vitry*, Galerie municipale Jean Collet, Vitry sur Seine, FR
Le jour suivant, Cité du Design, Saint-Étienne, FR
2018 *Objet de tendresse*, Galerie Michel Journiac, Paris, FR

Residencies
2023 La Brea Studio Residency, The Cabin LA, USA

Special projects
2026 *Et on dansera....*, PSG x Art Basel Paris

THE PILL®

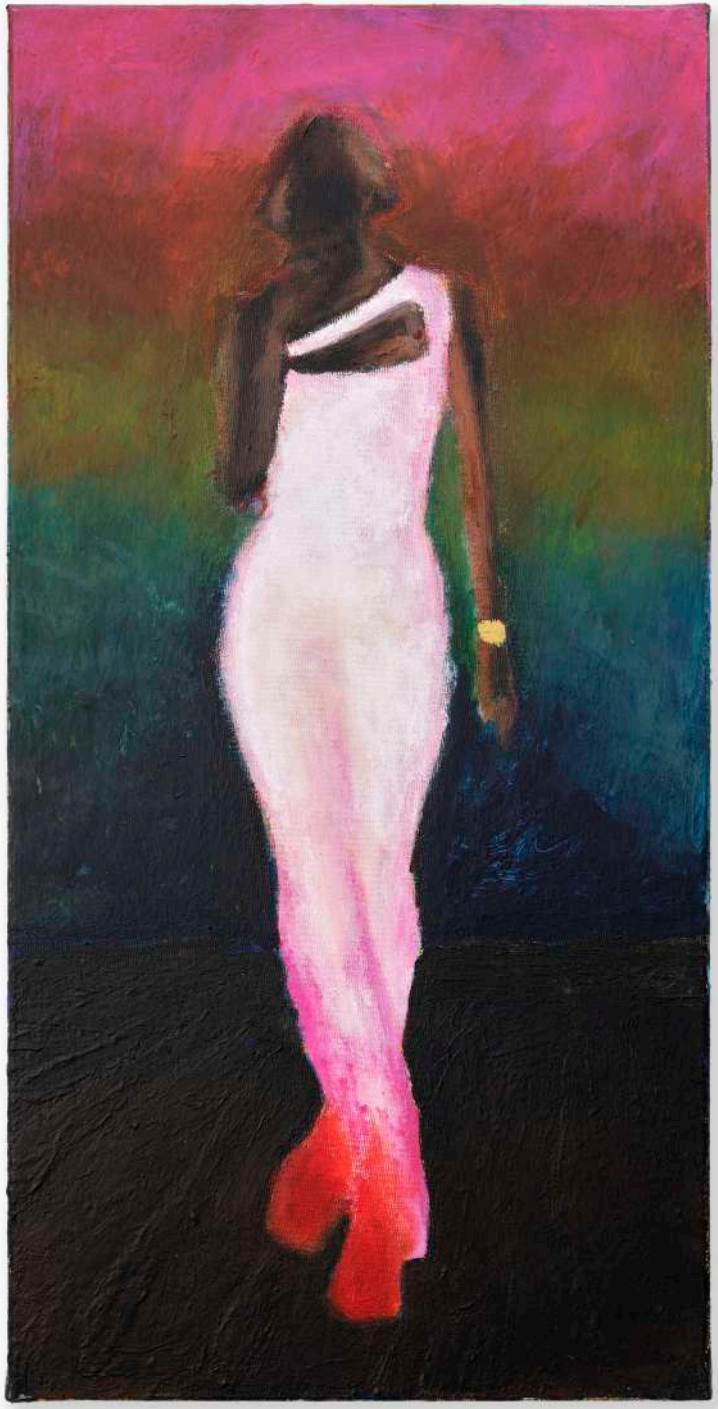
Selected works and exhibitions



Nadjib Ben Ali
KETCHUPMAYO, 2026
55 x 38 cm



Nadjib Ben Ali
MOSQUITO THINKER, 2026



Nadjib Ben Ali
CONCERT, 2026



Nadjib Ben Ali
ANGLE MORT, 2026
55 x 38 cm



Nadjib Ben Ali
WALKER TEXAS RANGER (Niaka Mashup), 2026
55 x 38 cm



Nadjib Ben Ali
CHOUINEVILLE VIDEOGAME, 2026
55 x 38 cm



Nadjib Ben Ali
NO PARTY, 2024
33 x 46 cm



Nadjib Ben Ali
TOURBILLON - LA GUITARE, 2024
38 x 55 cm



Nadjib Ben Ali, *MAIS-QU'EST CE QU'UN REDFLAG (PHANTOM)*, 2024







Exhibition view, *No Party,* The Pill, Paris, 2025





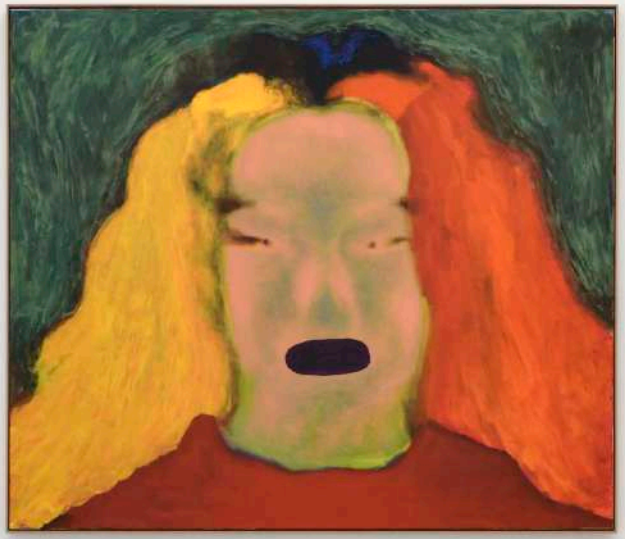
Exhibition view, *No Party,* The Pill, Paris, 2025



Exhibition view, *No Party,* The Pill, Paris, 2025



Exhibition view, *No Party,* The Pill, Paris, 2025



Exhibition view, *No Party,* The Pill, Paris, 2025



Les Enfants Terribles, Centre Culturel Jean Cocteau, Les Lilas, 2025



Les Pieds... Mais Surtout La Tete, The Cabin LA, Los Angeles, 2023



Les Pieds... Mais Surtout La Tête, The Cabin LA, Los Angeles, 2023





Les Pieds... Mais Surtout La Tete, The Cabin LA, Los Angeles, 2023



Les Pieds... Mais Surtout La Tete, The Cabin LA, Los Angeles, 2023



DRAMADRAMA, Le POCTB, Orleans, 2022



DRAMADRAMA, Le POCTB, Orleans, 2022



DRAMADRAMA, Le POCTB, Orleans, 2022

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Special projects



Nadjib Ben Ali, *ET ON DANSERA*, 2026



PSG x Art Basel Paris

On the occasion of Art Basel Paris 2026, Nadjib Ben Ali was invited by Paris Saint-Germain to take part in a special artistic collaboration exploring the dialogue between contemporary art, football and popular culture.

For this project, the artist conceived *ET ON DANSERA*, a vibrant composition that captures the energy of movement, celebration and togetherness. Through his expressive use of colour, dynamic figures and distinctive painterly language, Ben Ali explores the emotional and social dimensions of football, approaching the sport as a space of collective identity, shared experience and human connection.

The artwork was translated into a limited-edition Paris Saint-Germain T-shirt and sweatshirt, extending the artist's visual language beyond the traditional exhibition space and into the everyday lives of football supporters. The collaboration also unfolded through a wider visual campaign across Paris, including the city's Métro network and the Parc des Princes, bringing contemporary art into direct dialogue with a broad and diverse public.

Situated at the intersection of painting, fashion and sport, this collaboration reflects Ben Ali's ongoing interest in the representation of bodies, collective experiences and the cultural codes that shape contemporary society. By bringing his artistic practice into the world of Paris Saint-Germain, the project opens new possibilities for artistic expression and accessibility, celebrating the capacity of art and football to bring people together across social and cultural boundaries.


Art | Basel
Paris


QATAR
AIRWAYS


Art | Basel
Paris
La foire internationale d'art moderne et contemporain
Grand Palais
Du 23 au 25 octobre 2026
Achetez vos billets
Nadjib Ben Ali: *Et on danse...*, 2026. Photograph by Objets Pointus. Courtesy of the artist and THE PILL.
Commissioned by the Paris Saint-Germain for Art Basel Paris.


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La foire internationale d'art
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Grand Palais
Du 23 au 25 octobre 2026


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Selected press and texts

BeauxArts



Des maillots de foot et des affiches peintes par Nadjib Ben Ali : le PSG met l'art à l'honneur en s'associant avec Art Basel Paris

On aurait pu croire ces deux univers inconciliables. Pourtant, et pour la troisième année consécutive, le club de football du **Paris Saint-Germain** (PSG) s'allie avec la foire d'art contemporain **Art Basel Paris** pour faire entrer l'art au **Parc des Princes** et initier les fans de ballon rond à la jeune peinture figurative.

Au cœur de ce partenariat ? Le jeune peintre français **Nadjib Ben Ali** (né en 1994), dont on a pu voir une première exposition monographique entre les murs de l'excellente galerie The Pill l'année dernière, et qui dévoile pour l'occasion une œuvre intitulée ***Et on dansera***, déclinée à la fois **sur les maillots d'entraînement** des joueurs et **sur des affiches**, visibles du Grand Palais au Parc des Princes en passant par le métro parisien.

Célébration du collectif

Grand amateur de football, le jeune homme n'en est pas à son coup d'essai lorsqu'il peint cette **ronde de joueurs** qui se tiennent par la main, vêtus de maillots striés de bleu, de blanc et de rouge. Diplômé de l'École supérieure d'art et design de Saint-Étienne en 2019, et déjà exposé en solo à Los Angeles (The Cabin) et Orléans (entre les murs de la galerie Le pays où le ciel est toujours bleu), le Parisien de naissance **pioche ses motifs dans la culture populaire**, des matchs de football aux clips de hip-hop en passant par les jeux vidéo et les films d'horreur.

Un partenariat qui mêle art et foot

Le partenariat entre le PSG et Art Basel a été **initié en 2024** avec le plasticien **Georges Rousse**, qui a signé une installation éphémère monumentale au Parc des Princes. En 2025, un maillot d'échauffement était déjà imaginé par le créateur **Emeric Tchatchoua**, auquel succède donc Nadjib Ben Ali.

Cette semaine, toujours dans le cadre de cette collaboration, des **jeunes du Centre de formation** et de la PSG Academy, ainsi que des bénéficiaires du programme « One Team » de PSG for Communities, auront l'occasion de **visiter la foire** en compagnie de guides

Art Basel



Nadjib Ben Ali : peindre les émotions du football

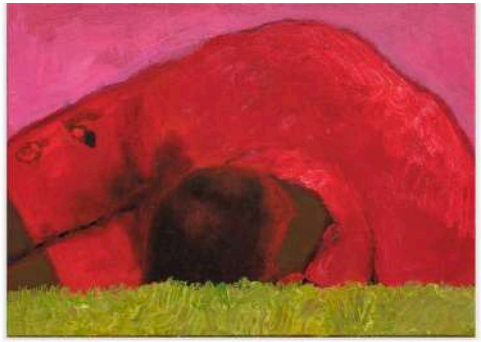
Le jeune artiste français représente l'intensité du jeu avec des couleurs saturées et une patte singulière

By Ingrid Luquet-Gad | 06 Jan 2025 | 5 min read

Le football et la télévision sont de ces choses qui fédèrent universellement. Nadjib Ben Ali, né en 1994 à Paris, diplômé de l'École supérieure d'art et design de Saint-Étienne en 2019, peint l'un et l'autre, et se place ainsi à l'exacte intersection entre les émotions humaines de toujours et leur reproduction médiatique au 21e siècle.

L'artiste réalise des captures d'écran de matchs de football professionnel, alimentant ainsi une bibliothèque de plans. Il utilise ensuite une technique singulière pour en retranscrire l'aspect moiré : des crayons de peinture, créés en entourant des bâtons de pistolet à colle de tissu synthétique, sont plongés dans des pigments acryliques. En résulte sa patte caractéristique, semblable à des coups de feutre fluo rose, jaune, violet ou vert.
Au fil de grands formats qui engloutissent le·la regardeur·euse, Nadjib Ben Ali traduit la chorégraphie épique des joueurs ou isole un détail poignant, comme une nuque tendue ou un visage enfoui dans les mains. L'artiste accorde la même attention à la signalétique qui, parfois, absorbe la figure, à l'instar des maillots floqués ou des chaussures siglées.

Sa peinture déhiérarchisée rappelle aussi bien les icônes rock de Nina Childress, les portraits évanescents de Marlene Dumas et les abstractions géométriques de Sarah Morris. Chez Nadjib Ben Ali, tout est exacerbé car tout doit pouvoir être retransmis. De la gestuelle dramatique à la colorimétrie acide, une folle course à la visibilité s'enclenche. Cependant, celle-ci n'étouffe jamais tout à fait une humanité à fleur de peau : l'artiste nous en fournit les indices iridescents.



Nadjib Ben Ali, NO PARTY, 2024. Avec l'aimable autorisation de l'artiste et de The PIL.



Nadjib Ben Ali, HAZMATIK (les flammes), 2024. Avec l'aimable autorisation de l'artiste et de The PIL.

Crédits : Nadjib Ben Ali est représenté par The Pill (Istanbul, Paris).

Ingrid Luquet-Gad est une critique d'art et une doctorante basée à Paris. Elle enseigne la philosophie de l'art à l'université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.

Publié le 6 janvier 2025.

The
Steidz

Chez The Pill, les temps morts de Nadjib Ben Ali

Le jeune artiste parisien Nadjib Ben Ali investit la galerie The Pill avec « No Party », sa première exposition en France. Cadrages serrés, teintes saturées, l'univers du football s'invite et devient prétexte à une exploration contemporaine du portrait.



Vue de l'exposition « No Party » de Nadjib Ben Ali, The Pill, Paris, 2025. Photo : Rebecca Fanuele. Courtesy de l'artiste et de The Pill.

Comment transforme-t-on une image en peinture ? La question peut paraître étrange, pourtant elle se pose de manière toujours plus insistante à mesure que, chez les peintres, le motif pris sur le vif, ou ce que l'on veut bien encore appeler le « modèle vivant », cède complètement la place aux captures d'écran et aux photographies numériques, c'est-à-dire au « déjà-représenté ». Ainsi opère Nadjib Ben Ali (né en 1994), qui n'échappe pas au tropisme de son temps. Lui aime le football, mais plus encore il aime les images de sa diffusion à la télévision, sur l'écran de son smartphone. Non seulement il les capture, mais il les collectionne pour se constituer un corpus de formes. D'autres artistes travaillent comme lui, ils sont même nombreux aujourd'hui à compiler les *screenshots*, comme des croquis, dans un dossier sur leur ordinateur. Chez Ben Ali, beaucoup de visages et de détails corporels sont parfois recadrés, retouchés, saturés, pour obtenir ce qu'il désire. L'espace intermédiaire en devient immense, qui sépare le modèle de l'œuvre finale. Au point que l'on peut se demander s'il est encore permis de parler de portraits. Car au fond, le sujet de cette peinture n'est pas le sujet humain, mais son double cathodique.

En cela, Nadjib Ben Ali s'inscrit dans la lignée des peintres qui, après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, ont pleinement assimilé les codes de l'imagerie publicitaire et médiatique. Avec Martin Kippenberger, Luc Tuymans, Alex Katz et d'autres, il partage un goût pour la culture populaire, et surtout un sens minimal de la fiction. Seulement, là où ses pairs cultivent le détachement émotionnel, Ben Ali laisse précisément poindre du sentiment. Cela se perçoit dans les textures, les contrastes, dans la touche expressive, incandescente, vibrante, dans la sensualité qui laisse l'envie de toucher. C'est que depuis les années 1950-1960, l'imagerie médiatique a colonisé notre quotidien jusque dans ses moindres recoins. Difficile de s'en détacher, de l'appréhender de manière purement abstraite et critique. Le territoire virtuel d'où elle surgit se confond désormais totalement avec nos vies et avec le réel. Tout devient perméable, l'écran déborde, et le trouble, l'émoi que suscite cette forme invasive de l'image entre dès lors nécessairement dans le sujet de la peinture. C'est du Alex Katz, du Luc Tuymans, avec plus d'âpreté, d'inquiétude et de chair.

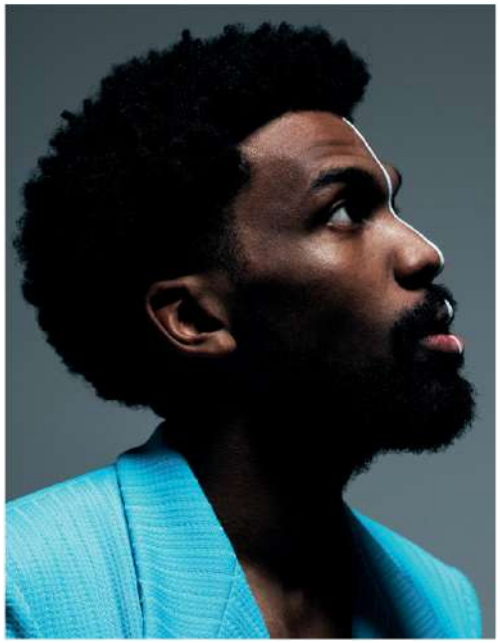


Nadjib Ben Ali, *NO PARTY*, 2024, 2024, acrylique sur toile, 33 × 46 cm. Courtesy de l'artiste et de The Pill.

Mais revenons à ce que nous voyons. Des joueurs au sol, des profils, des visages tendus, l'étiquette d'un maillot, le repos d'un temps mort, regard perdu. Toute la dramaturgie du football, combinée à un sens aigu de la (re)composition. Dans certains corps pliés en forme de paysage, certains aplats découpés au couteau, il y aurait presque du Nicolas de Staël. Il y a surtout, partout, du cinéma, une profonde compréhension des cadrages et de la manière dont ils servent l'émotion et retiennent le suspense. Le détail prend tant de place qu'il nous semble davantage épier que regarder, comme un voyeur épris de nuques ou de chaussettes de sport. Nadjib Ben Ali s'inspire également des clips musicaux et de leurs effets plus saturés, plus rythmés. L'exposition accueille d'ailleurs, en plus de la série sur le football, quelques toiles inspirées de l'univers du rap. Là encore ces figures tutélaires et ambiguës, à la fois héroïques, fragiles et inquiétantes ; là encore ces teintes saturées, acides, puissantes. « Nadjib Ben Ali applique aux images et à la couleur le principe de l'*autotune* », explique sa galeriste Suela J. Cennet. Et c'est vrai qu'il y a de cela dans ses excès de jaune, dans ses bleus qui phosphorent, dans ses vert-contre-rouge. Distorsions synthétiques, lumières à fleur de peau, tout est faux, si faux, et pourtant cela touche. Il y a là tant de passion, d'énergie et d'envie. Envie de voir, envie de formes, envie de remplir la toile blanche. C'est avec cet élan que Nadjib Ben Ali parvient à faire d'une image une peinture.. •

Numéro







Nadjib Ben Ali is wearing an ensemble by GUCCI.

ART & DESIGN **7 dec 2022**

French artist Nadjib Ben Ali finds the raw material for his flamboyant paintings in football, rap videos and Hitchcock movies

Once again, *Numéro art* teams up with Gucci to showcase the young and promising talents of the French artistic scene. With a hunger for forms and colors, young French artist Nadjib Ben Ali finds the raw material for his flamboyant paintings in football, rap videos and Hitchcock movies.

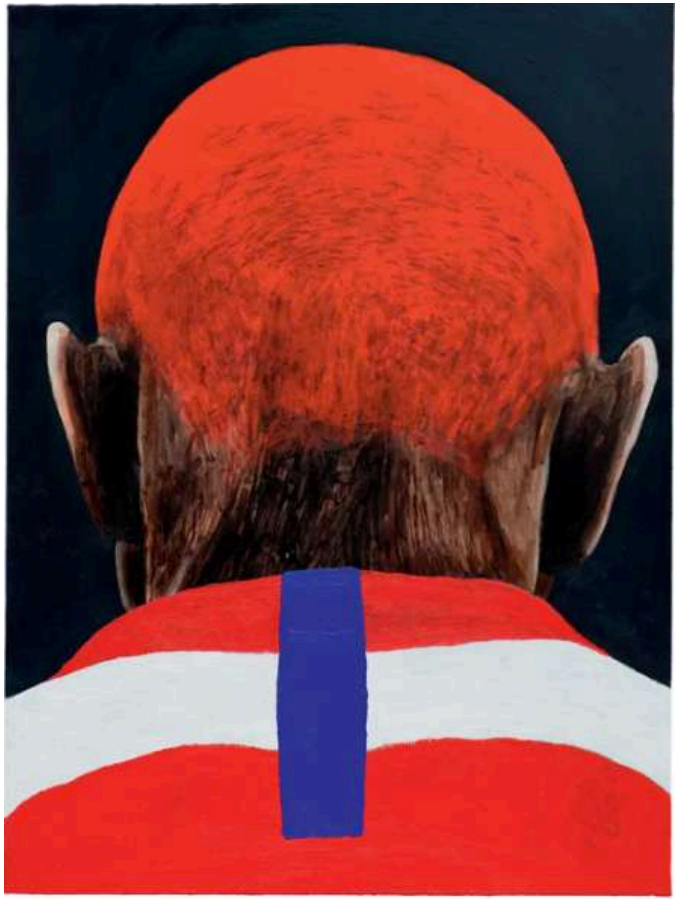
Portraits by **Eva Wang**.

Styling by Ferdi Sibbel **Thibaut Wychowanok**.

A “real image cannibal”

Nadjib Ben Ali is a football fan. But you can’t really say he watches matches; rather, he dissects them, like a critic scrutinizing an Alfred Hitchcock movie shot by shot. When he sees a frame he likes he takes a screenshot of it, which he then stores in a database to rival the Cinémathèque française. *“I’m a real image cannibal, hungry for shapes, colours and compositions.”* Some remind him of the master of suspense, others of Michelangelo. Hands touching, a close up of the back of the neck, a wide shot of a crowd. Legs intertwined. Faces marked by failure or victory. Ben Ali then compiles and reproduces these scenes as drawings – the physical manifestation of a virtual fantasy. If necessary, he reframes them, the spontaneous line of the marker pen giving them (new) life. Then comes the moment when they are transposed into paintings.

“My goal has always been to reproduce a marker-pen line in my painting.” To this end he invents his own tools: paint pencils made from glue sticks into which he inserts synthetic fabric (a soccer jersey, for instance). *“For me drawing is like learning a choreography, memorizing a gesture that I’ll reproduce later on canvas.”* Plunging his DIY pencils into acrylic paint, he mixes the pigments to recreate the brilliance of the screen on which the image first appeared. If necessary, he adds a little glycerol, *“for a brighter black in the eye.”* When he paints, Ben Ali looks as much to his drawing (for the materiality of the line and the gesture) as to the original image (for the composition). *“But painting always wins,”* he concedes. *“I can change a colour, even if it is not identical to the screenshot or drawing because the balance of the painting calls for it.”* Which he sometimes does to the point of abstraction.



Nadjib Ben Ali, “Welcome to Chouineville” (2022). Acrylic on canvas, 89 x 116 cm.

A strong taste for dramaturgy

Ben Ali is not the first artist to take an interest in the dramaturgy of soccer. In 2006, Philippe Parreno and Douglas Gordon made *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*, for which they filmed the soccer star with several cameras from different angles for the entire duration of a match. Every move was captured, alongside nervousness, indecision, indifference, solidarity and isolation. After 90 minutes, these fragments come together to form a whole, a vertiginous over-presence of a man, a dramatic hero. This same feeling of drama and dizzying wholeness is found in Ben Ali’s paintings. *“I’m not interested in a particular soccer player but in professional soccer, the big sponsor ads, the spectators in the stadiums. I want to be in their place, I want it all to belong to me. I like the dramaturgy. Soccer players aren’t actors; they’re focused on the game and aren’t in control of their affects. Their weakness is exposed. I like this idea, them lying down, overwhelmed, wounded.”*



Nadjib Ben Ali, “Vitevitevite” (2022). Acrylic on canvas, 140 x 210 cm.

An eclectic approach to painting

The artist has developed an obsession with necks, like the Dardenne brothers who filmed their actors from behind as way of showing a character in a weakened state. Viewers become voyeurs, stalkers with total power over their prey. In Ben Ali’s work, the nape of the neck becomes a source of eroticism, the viewer glimpsing a patch of skin peeking out between the hairline and the jersey. This fetish for body parts, and the clothing that dissimulates them, feeds an underlying homo- eroticism. Beyond Hitchcock, the movie reference here is Brian de Palma, another master of composition and patent fetishist (*Pulsions*, *Body Double*). One of Ben Ali’s recent canvases once again focuses on a face, but it is wearing the white mask of John Carpenter’s *Halloween* serial killer. The fluorescent red light that illuminates it against a black background radiates violence and absence; it is impossible to interpret the expression. Upon closer inspection, one sees the character is shedding tears of blood.

“My new* Mixtape *series is based on images that aren’t necessarily from soccer. *The mask was worn by a young boy in PNL’s Simba video. Then I saw it again in another rapper’s video. I had my image: a bleeding world. Now I’m working on finding that light so specific to computer screens, more so than in my soccer series. For this I use fluorescent, almost phosphorescent colors. The whole thing is more Pop, very 70s.”* It recalls the paintings of Nina Childress, the mode by turns figurative and abstract, exploring styles with a certain extravagance. Both respond to the question of how to turn an image into painting using multiple approaches: hyper-realist, almost to the point of caricature, combining classicism, kitsch, Pop art, bad painting and Abstract Expressionism. These stylistic deviations are in themselves a powerful commentary on the hierarchies within art and society – like finding Michelangelo at a soccer match.



In love with the images produced by the screen, Nadjib Ben Ali presses pause and selects the choice pieces that summon painting, admitting silhouettes and football settings for their primitive qualities, shapes and colors. The painter adopts the posture of Craig Feldspar, character of the TV series Malcolm in the Middle. Caressing the ambition to become the best viewer in the world, he compiles the 2018 World Cup in 64 drawings, one per match.

Here, the shots have the materiality of large felt-tip pen strokes. Sponges and tape, Nadjib Ben Ali tinkers with his own brushes to rediscover the gestures of these drawings, television landscapes. 4k Ultra HD TV, for 110 inches of pure pleasure. Mega zoomed proposition. Calves squeezed into their bright socks, the fabrics of the shorts brush against each other in the colorful melee. Surpassing their author, these larger-than-life formats grab us where the dramaturgy of sport is confused with soap opera.

Totally distorted by emotions, color is about to dominate the game. The atmosphere of Love, Glory and Beauty: a decisive penalty shootout, a surprise wedding in Vegas, an exit from the field, an illegitimate child, a player rolling on the grass, the awakening of this character after four seasons in a coma… Dramadrama. Football is neither more nor less than a tense soap opera of emotions, an ideal pretext for painting.

If Nadjib Ben Ali has accustomed us to the use of flashy colors, this use of red as mood lighting bathing the entire canvas marks an evolution in his practice. Color is psychological resonance. In cinema, the change in chromatic atmosphere marks a moment of narrative shift. Somewhere between immeasurable joy and deep pain, the fluorescent carmine face in the POCTB window announces the sequel, the outcome of the match is not yet determined…

Mathilda Portoghese

NO PARTY
Jean-Charles Vergne

Nadjib Ben Ali belongs to a generation of painters whose cultural sources are drawn from the margins of the history of painting. While the masters of past centuries provide a soil, Fauvism and bad painting infuse the surfaces, and his large-scale compositions evoke historical painting, his work is also nourished by a counter-culture (notably embodied by the American painter Ed Paschke) and references drawn from the most popular registers of a supposedly low culture. The mask of the serial killer in Halloween (John Carpenter, 1978), videos by Puerto Rican rapper Bad Bunny, French duo PNL, Spanish pop star Rosalía, the iridescent lights of screenshots of soccer matches, are all manifestations of an uninhibited practice, driven by a de-hierarchization of cultural categories and a movement of capillarity by which so-called "minor" culture rises to the level of culture described as "dominant".

Nadjib Ben Ali watches soccer matches, plays video games, feeds on rap and hip-hop videos, and is a fan of gore films and B-movie slashers. He uses his computer and smartphone screens to select, crop and Photoshop his images. All this takes place on computer or smartphone screens, which he uses to select, crop and reprocess his images. Pushed to their luminous and chromatic extremes, images are meant to be withdrawn, to become impulses for painting, not for the purpose of reproduction - a vain fascination with technological imagery - but to invert and ruin them, just as Hubert Robert ruined the picture of Le Louvre by extrapolating its decrepitude in a dystopian painting (La Grande Galerie du Louvre en ruines, 1796). After meticulously selecting and manipulating his images, Nadjib Ben Ali overflows them, pulverizes them and gives them a sensitive, powerful, strident dimension, based on a universal dramaturgy that belongs as much to the games of the antique stadium as to the great Greek or Shakespearean tragedies. The soccer players are "played off", turned into ghosts, and their very heads sometimes have more to do with Caravaggio's Decollation of St. John the Baptist (1608) than with any attempt at glorification or heroism. The ghostly future of the soccer players can be read on their fatally marked necks (*Welcome to Chouineville*, 2022), haloed by a tragedy, itself supported by the solitude emanating from their faces, which are radiant with color, even when they're in the midst of a group. Their faces, decomposed by iridescent, acidic colors, evoke the most sepulchral of representations, where the soccer image collides with that of a horror film (*Ô Dodo*, 2024 or *WHITE KINTO'unzz*, 2022).

From the very beginning, his works have formed an organic corpus under the generic name *REDMIXTAPE*, emphasizing both a compilation principle and an intonation carried by the evocative power of the color red. Originating in hip-hop and R&B culture, mixtapes appeared in the 1970s with DJs such as Grandmaster Flash or Afrika Bambaataa and the Soulsonic Force, in the form of audio cassette recordings of mixes using techniques such as beatmatching and scratching. Following a similar process, Nadjib Ben Ali's paintings are developed at the crossroads of disparate cultural registers and fields. They provoke friction - scratching, one might say - between the history of painting, soccer imagery, video games, rap and hip-hop, and implode style through injections of self-mockery. As for red, whose claimed influences are Alfred Hitchcock's Marnie (1964) and rapper Cacahouete's video, 357. Python #3 (2021), sets the tone for this mixtape. The fact that red can be dominant in works such as *No Party* (2024) or totally absent from the paintings doesn't change a thing: everything is

held together by the idea of red and its highly symbolic, tragic, twilight or violent function.

Nadjib Ben Ali stands here, at a particular moment when so-called "low" culture infiltrates so-called "high" culture, against the flow, like a disreputable salmon swimming upstream where it wasn't expected. Irreconcilable subjects intermingle and infiltrate his paintings: the Miskinamenté series uses the mask of the Halloween killer or of Jason in Friday the 13th (Sean Cunningham, 1980), while referring to its use in the video clip for 357. Python #3 or in the video for PNL's Simba; the footballers' necks become analogous to those of the central figure in Géricault's Raft of the Medusa (*No Party*, 2024), the failing bodies of athletes, collapsed or prostrated by failure, echo Manet's Dead Man (*Tourbillon*, 2024 or *VITEVITEVITE*, 2021), their twilight faces evoke Léon Spilliaert's self-portraits (*CCTVision*, 2024). The surface of the painting overplays the idea of surface, it is a "penalty area", in the most literal and punitive sense of the word: isolating figures, sequestering facial orifices by filling them in with thick solid colors (*CATARACTATTACK*, 2024 or *Hybrid Birthday (Bluecut Mix)*, 2024). Occasionally, Nadjib Ben Ali uses mixtures of impure agglomerates of beige/orange/yellowish/bluish colors, coarsely brushed on and called "butter" or "margarine", a kind of repellent binder, an unholy pictorial cartilage that joins motifs and bodies in a pulsating organicity that goes as far as to provoke repulsion.

The *OSBORN EFFECT (Autotune)* series plunges the faces of footballers into a bath of tawny colors corroded by an acid green evoking the transformation and madness of Norman Osborn into the Green Goblin in Spiderman. Nadjib Ben Ali applies an Osborn effect to these faces in the same way one would apply Photoshop to an image, or autotune to a voice, to mask false notes and give it an artificial harmony. The series carries the tragedy of these famous sportsmen's faces towards their inevitable disappearance, a new celebrity driving out the previous one in a fatal mechanism of replacement and polishing. The dazed faces, in recollection or nervously tense, the bodies lying or slumped with exhaustion carry a vast iconographic history that stretches from the great founding narratives to the most current and human scenes of compunction, interiority and existence, without however abandoning a form of absurdity - another side of contemporary tragedy - through the choice of counter-weighted titles. Such is the case with *AARGHHH (Margarine edit)*, or Chouineville, a contraction of the verb "chouiner" (whine, moan) and "ville" (city) to describe the complacent lamentation of soccer players collapsed and grimacing on the ground to simulate an opponent's foul.

Whether in figures borrowed from rap clips, monstrous faces from horror films or fallen heroic sports figures, the tragic is hidden surreptitiously in the interstices, between the boosted colors, recalling Zinedine Zidane's confidences in the film dedicated to him by Philippe Parreno and Douglas Gordon (Zidane, a portrait of the 21st century, 2006): "Sometimes when you arrive in the stadium, you feel that everything has already been decided". In Nadjib Ben Ali's paintings, everything seems played out – in the tragic as well as theatrical sense of the term – and in his pictures we see "that part of theater, illusion and chance that cannot be taken away from life without mutilating it.[1]»

1 Jean-Marie Domenach, Le Retour du tragique, Paris, Seuil, 1967, p.285.

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