

THE PILL®

NADJIB BEN ALI

No Party

30.01 — 01.03.2025

THE PILL® is thrilled to host Nadjib Ben Ali's first solo exhibition at the gallery's new address in Paris, 4 Place de Valois between 30 January — 1 March 2025. Titled *NO PARTY*, the monographic exhibition brings together a group of recent works emblematic of the recurring themes explored by Nadjib Ben Ali, where the iridescent spectral visuality of video games, soccer matches, hip-hop videos and B-Movie slashers meet expressions of tragedy in their contemporary and art historical forms.

Nadjib Ben Ali uses his computer and smartphone screens to select, crop and Photoshop his images. Pushed to their luminous and chromatic extremes, images are meant to be withdrawn, to become impulses for painting. 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", defeated, turned into ghosts, as their spectral becoming is reflected on their faces, irradiated with fauvist colors, and on their necks, marked by the seal of fatality. The mask of the serial killer in *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), clips by Portorican 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".

An essay by Jean-Charles Vergne accompanies the exhibition, positioning Nadjib Ben Ali's work at the fringes of art history. It highlights influences ranging from classical masters and Fauvism to "bad painting," while also incorporating countercultural elements from the popular domains of so-called low culture. These references converge to evoke a sense of tragic contemporary pathos: "Nadjib Ben Ali stands here, at a particular moment when so-called "low" culture infiltrates "high" culture, against the flow, like a disreputable salmon swimming upstream where it wasn't expected. Irreconcilable subjects intermingle and infiltrate his paintings: the footballers' necks become analogous to those of the central figure in Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1818), the failing bodies of athletes, collapsed or prostrated by failure, echo Manet's *Dead Man* (1864) and their twilight faces sometimes evoke Léon Spilliaert's self-portraits. 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, joining motifs and bodies in a pulsating organicity that goes as far as to provoke repulsion. The paintings carry the tragedy of 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, without however abandoning a form of absurdity — another side of contemporary tragedy. In Nadjib Ben Ali's paintings, everything seems to be played out — in the tragic as well as theatrical sense of the word."

Nadjib Ben Ali graduated from the École Supérieure d'Art et Design de Saint-Étienne in 2019. His recent solo exhibitions were held at 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 *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.

THE PILL® was founded in 2016 by Suela J. Cennet in the historic peninsula of Istanbul, to operate as a global platform and mobile vessel for contemporary art, supporting artists through a dynamic of cosmopolitanism beyond the dialectics of center and periphery. Dedicated to the most ambitious emerging artists as well as those of international stature, the gallery's exhibitions and participation in major contemporary art fairs have been widely acclaimed by critics and trusted by the most prestigious collections. The Paris expansion marks a significant step in THE PILL®'s evolution, bringing its unique curatorial vision and focus on global contemporary art to one of the world's most influential cultural capitals. This new space, nestled in the historical heart of Paris, will span over 300 sqm and serve as a platform for innovative and thought-provoking exhibitions. The new space of THE PILL® in Paris was designed by the architect Rémy Bardin, and the specially engineered lighting by the French start-up Olumee, which has achieved a world premiere by combining its innovative technology with the know-how of Barrisol. This synergy between art, technology and design enables real-time, high-fidelity reproduction of outdoor light, offering visitors a unique indoor open-sky experience.