

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

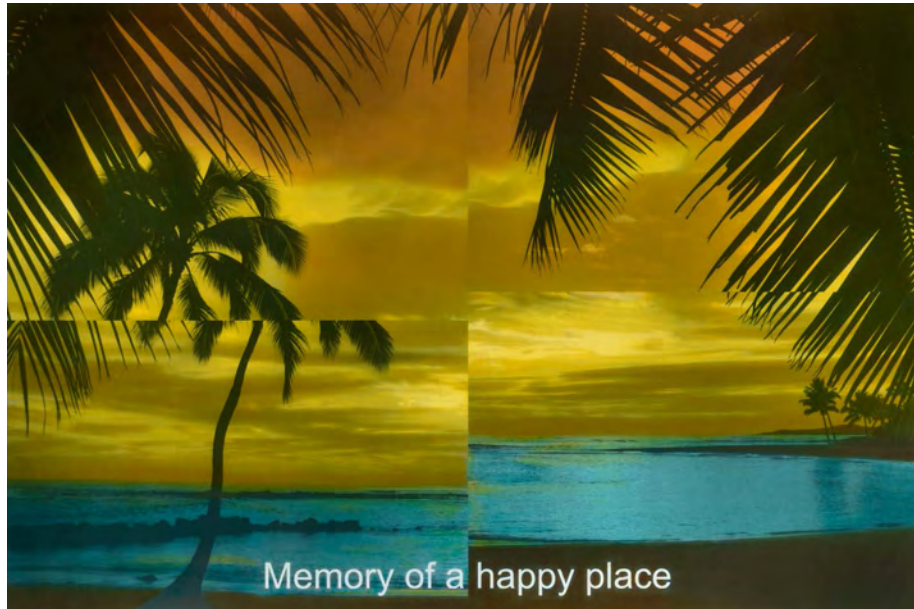
PARIS - BRUXELLES

YOUSSEF NABIL

Memory of a Happy Place

March 19 - May 7, 2022

3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri, 75004 - Paris



Memory of a Happy Place, 2021
Hand coloured gelatin silver print (75 x 115 cm 29 17/32 x 45 9/32 in.)
Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Nathalie Obadia is pleased to present Youssef Nabil's fourth personal exhibition at the gallery. Highly personal, *Memory of a Happy Place* is the first presentation of a series of twenty photographs, as well as a new film titled *The Beautiful Voyage*.

Born in Egypt in 1972, Youssef Nabil composes an oeuvre greatly influenced by his ambivalent relationship with his birth country, which he left at the age of thirty. This exodus infuses his work with a romanticized perception of the country filtered through the ambiance of the golden age of Egyptian cinema from the 40-50s. Mired in nostalgia, his photographs' ethereal aesthetics take from the hand coloring technique inspired by the technicolor films. Breathing new life into the ancestral *savoir faire*, the artist thus hand paints each of his black and white photographs, as editions become variations, each a unique version of the artist's labor.

Youssef Nabil has been practicing the art of self-portraiture since his departure from Egypt in 2003. Taken throughout the globe, his self-portraits become metaphors for the artist's feeling of exile. Nabil almost systematically represents himself, his back turned to the audience, facing an uncertain future, and inspired by the codes of great romantic painting. The character he embodies, his face shielded from view, becomes an allegory onto which one can project a melancholic imaginary.

Largely made up of self-portraits and landscapes, the exhibition explores the themes of exile, fate and memory through the lens of the poem *Ithaca*, written by Constantine P. Cavafy, a great source of inspiration for the artist. Much akin to the Greek poet, Youssef Nabil captures the portrait of a life built in exile through a voyage with no end in sight, away from a homeland whose greatest gift becomes the incentive to leave.

Thus, the photographs of the exhibition map the artist's psycho geographic topography, charting an emotional geography dotted with the places near and dear to his life. This pilgrimage into the artist's psyche also translates the stuff of dreams linked to the experiences memory alters to provide a romanticized storyline. The split composition of some of the photographs echoes this reflection on the deceit of memory. In *No one knows but the Sky* or in *Memory of a Happy Place* the doubling of the horizon line mirrors the poetic bias of memory, the architect of fantasied recollections.

Nabil also makes use of a technique of transparence, permeating for the first time through his photographic work, as is the case for *Your Life was just a Dream* and *What the Future holds*, or the self-portraits in which his silhouette appears on the landscape through a cinematic fade. Linking the works to a medium dear to the artist, this technique also symbolizes the impermanent nature of our earthly voyage. The body, detached from the background floats through the space in an eerie fashion. Contemplating on the transitory nature of our passage through the Earth, the artist imbues his work with the motif of transience. These self-portraits therefore represent the duality between life and death, home and exile, as Nabil considers himself a visitor through these landscapes which become vehicles for life experiences.

The relationship to cinema is further introduced on certain photographs via the insertion of texts, acting subtitles. These words contribute to the exploration of the poetic dimension present in the exhibition. The lyrical titles are effectively considered by the artist as true extensions to the works.

Many of these self-portraits are set onto a maritime backdrop, the sea symbolizing for the artist his close link to the Mediterranean, and the mindset which characterizes its emotional territory. The sea becomes an invitation to the voyage, representing the gate of a poetic departure, the prelude of an initiatory journey. Both mirages of fantasied territories and allegories for the ephemeral nature of existence, these works immerse us in the artist's mythology, in all its cathartic dimension.

The exhibition will also be the first presentation of Nabil's new film *The Beautiful Voyage*, 2021. Making a first-time appearance of the artist in front of his camera on film, alongside his muse, the actress Charlotte Rampling, Youssef Nabil creates a profoundly intimate film, punctuated with his Mother's voice reciting his favorite poem *Ithaca* by Constantine P. Cavafy. This autobiographical movie becomes an allegory of the mother/son relationship in the Arab world, as the artist speaks of his culture through the bias of his own experience.

The Beautiful Voyage, is the artist's fourth film after *You Never Left*, 2010, *I Saved My Belly Dancer*, 2015 and *Arabian Happy Ending*, 2016, it bears a fundamental importance in the artist's practice, sparking a new chapter of his oeuvre. Both actor and director, Nabil lets us in on his writings, as Charlotte Rampling reads the artist's thoughts on the ephemeral nature of our existence, and his interrogations, observations and reflections on life, death and departure. This prose becomes the backdrop to a sequence in which for the first time, the artist faces the audience, sat on the seafront, the waves swaying at his feet, all happening in a dream.

Set in another realm, these photographs, thus present a version of the world entwined between dream and reality. Through this odyssey into his intimacy, Youssef Nabil makes us the spectator of his life story.



The Beautiful Voyage, 2021
Film still, 8 minutes
with Charlotte Rampling and Youssef Nabil
Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia,
Paris/Brussels

Born in 1972 in Cairo (Egypt), Youssef Nabil lives and works in Paris (France).

Youssef Nabil has had numerous exhibitions in renowned international institutions and biennials: in the USA, at the Pérez Art Museum (PAMM) in Miami, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), the Studio Museum in Harlem and Aperture Foundation in New York, the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art and Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in Savannah, and the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh; in Canada, at the Aga Khan Museum of Art in Toronto; in France, at the Centre Pompidou, Maison Rouge, Arab World Institute, and Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris, the Frac Normandie in Sotteville-lès-Rouen, the Friche Belle de Mai in Marseille, the Rencontres de la Photographie in Arles, and the Institut du monde arabe in Tourcoing; in Belgium, at the Fondation Boghossian and Maison Particulière in Brussels; in the UK, at the British Museum and Victoria & Albert Museum in London, and the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Newcastle; in Germany, at the Museum für Modern Kunst (MMK) in Frankfurt, the Kunstmuseum in Bonn, and the Gemäldegalerie Staatliche Museen in Berlin; in Spain, at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) in Barcelona, the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo in Seville, and the Instituto d'Art Modern in Valencia; in Italy, at the Villa Medici in Rome, the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence, The Palazzo Grassi in Venice and the 53rd Venice Biennale, Unconditional Love; in Qatar, at the Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha; in Brazil, at the Galeria Leme in São Paulo; in Mexico, at the Centro de la Imagen in Mexico City; and in Mali, at the 5èmes Rencontres de la Photographie africaine in Bamako, during which he was awarded the Seydou Keita Prize. In 2020/2021, Youssef Nabil had his first retrospective exhibition at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice, titled *Once Upon A Dream*.

Paris Saint-Honoré

Wang Keping

Metamorphoses

January 15 - March 12, 2022

Valérie Belin

Modern Royals

March 24 - May 28, 2022

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri

Patrick Faigenbaum

Photographies, 1974 - 2020

January 18 - March 5, 2022

Youssef Nabil

Memory of a Happy Place

March 19 - May 7, 2022

Brussels

Agnès Varda

Calder, Richier, Schlegel, Székely par Agnès Varda

January 14 - March 5, 2022

Joris Van de Moortel

Foolhardy Boarding A Lost State of Mind

March 17 - May 7, 2022

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