



Beya Othmani is a curator and researcher based between Tunis and Berlin. She was previously part of SAVVY Contemporary, a Berlin-based art space, where she co-produced the event series *Listening Session: Untraining the Ear*, and the *Untraining the Ear festival*. She worked as a curatorial assistant on various exhibitions, among them *The Dog Gone Death* at Dak'Art 13 Biennale (2018), and *Shadow Circus* for the Forum Expanded of the Berlinale (2019). She has recently joined Archive Kabinett, where she is part of the editorial and research team. She pursued her master studies at the Berlin-Weissensee School of Fine Arts (KHB) in the department of Spatial Strategy. Her master's thesis looks into radical independence strategies for art spaces. She holds a B.A from McGill University, Montreal, from the department of Middle East Studies where she pursued her final research around women's role and participation in the armed struggle of the Algerian war of liberation within the Army of National Liberation.

Project Title: *The Politics of Exhibition-Making in Modern Tunisia from 1957 to 1991: A History of Curating Fine Arts.*

Abstract

The research attempts to trace the development of curatorial practices in Tunisia focusing primarily on state-sponsored fine arts exhibition practices. Looking at those practices as a historical phenomenon, it proposes to identify particular politics of exhibition-making at different stages of the country's historical development. Starting with the first twelve years of independence, the research interrogates how fine art functioned and was structured within Bourghiba's agenda of creating a Tunisian national narrative. Looking at the year 1968, it will assess the impact of the student's revolt and the unionization of artists on exhibition-making. It will also look at how this practice adjusted, if it did, in the 1970s and 1980s to both the trending pan-Arab aspirations of the youth and the liberal economic policies of Hedi Nourra. This research does not attempt to demonstrate a direct line of causality between general political paradigms of the state and the politics of exhibition-making but is rather trying to question those parallels and eventually challenge them. Looking at the historical unfoldings between 1957 and 1991, one wonders how the restructuring of the state cultural institutions impacted exhibition practices. Was there at any moment a curatorial direction of the state? Who were the curators of that time? Were there any peripheral exhibitions that managed to escape this curatorial direction (if any)? Why were cultural continuities with the French protectorate, such as the School of Fine Arts or the Institut de Carthage, tolerated? What role did the School of Tunis play in the consolidation of Tunisian authoritarian institutions? The research seeks to fill in some major gaps in the historiography of fine arts exhibition-making in Tunisia between 1957 and 1991. By doing so, one could take those exhibitions and their politics as entry points into mapping a broader structural landscape of public and private agents, and networks constituting the cultural fabric in Tunisia under Bourguiba.