



*“RÉCIT”*

*STORY*

Solo Show

**SADOK GMACH**

*« I feel that we are all inspired by our life stories and our experiences. I draw much of my inspiration from encounters and from emotions I have lived through. But also, from our tangible and intangible cultural heritage, our myths, and our history »*

*said Sadok Gmach.*



## Painting a Story

Once upon a time....

Sadok Gmach, my father, was born to a couple from Takrouna who left their native village at the beginning of the twentieth century to settle and make their home in the suburb of Bab Souika.

The couple settled in Bab Souika, a neighborhood that already hosted a community of rural migrants who had moved to the capital in the hope of a better life for themselves and their children. Such was the case for Abderrahmen, who sought to provide an education for his children, both sons and daughters.

After primary school, he continued his studies at the École Normale, where he was a student of the great master Yahya Turki. Upon obtaining his teaching diploma, he embarked on his first major journey through several European countries. His horizons expanded as he discovered European culture, architecture, and art. His travels continued thereafter, and throughout his visits, he never stopped encountering the works of modern and contemporary artists who left their mark on him and undeniably influenced his artistic practice.

He used to tell me that the one who had influenced him most in his early days was Modigliani. He was captivated by the depth that this artist could give to his characters. He particularly appreciated their expression and often recalled his admiration for the simplification and refinement of their faces and bodies.

From the 1960s onwards, Sadok Gmach began to exhibit his work and sought to distinguish himself from the prevailing practices on the Tunisian art scene. It was in 1964, by founding the Groupe des Six, that he left his mark on the history of Tunisian painting. By coming together, Sadok Gmach, Nejib Belkhouja, Lotfi Larnaout, Fabio Caracci, Jean-Claude Heinen, and Fabio Rocchegiani embodied, in their own way, an artistic revival by opposing the discourse proposed by the artists of the École de Tunis. By breaking away from the narrative and folkloric dimensions claimed by the latter, the artists of the Groupe des Six emphasized the plasticity of the work and sought to place artistic practice within a resolutely contemporary perspective. Other artists, such as Nja Mahdaoui, Abdelmajid Bekri, Naceur Bencheikh, Ridha Bettaieb, Manoubi Boussandel, Mohamed Mtimet, and others, joined this movement.

## **S'ancrer dans la modernité**

Modernity in art represents a radical break from classical tradition, characterized by a quest for independence, the experimentation with new forms, and a reflection on the contemporary world. It moves away from the faithful representation of reality to prioritize subjectivity and innovation.

Following in the footsteps of modern artists, Sadok Gmach questioned the figure over the course of six decades. He possessed the will to see the world with a renewed gaze, detaching himself from the folkloric dimension to capture the essence of light, shapes, and colors.

In his early exhibitions, he demonstrated a simplification of forms and a refinement of space—a refinement that led him toward a nearly abstract universe by the late 1960s.

It was during his stay in Paris in 1969 and 1970 that a project of distinct maturity began to take shape, marked by flat surfaces and the brilliance of color.

In the early 1970s, while living in Berlin and swept up by the Pop Art wave, he strengthened his interest in flat surfaces and gave his figures a realistic expression. He addressed topical themes and sought to anchor his work in a social and committed dimension.

During the second half of the 1970s, upon his return to Tunis, he began a pictorial experiment interpreting Islamic miniatures. This approach combined the flatness of space and figures with text. Poems, song refrains, and proverbs sat alongside painted scenes to create renewed interpretations.

Since the 1980s, Sadok Gmach has been revisiting the figure, questioning it through a lens at the crossroads of Nouvelle Figuration and narrative figuration.

His work, fundamentally modern, renews itself over time, intersecting with international movements while remaining deeply anchored in a form of Tunisianness.

## Painting Time, Painting his Time

Mohamed Aziza said in 1971: "If the journalist takes up his pencil and the filmmaker aims his camera..., Gmach, for his part, sharpens his brushes. To the voracious curiosity of the painter as a witness, nothing is indifferent."

A witness to the evolution of post-colonial Tunisian society, Sadok Gmach—the artist, the intellectual, the man of culture—observes, meditates, and keeps his distance to better grasp the stakes of this societal and cultural mutation. The characters in his paintings are most often passive, silent, and contemplative; in his works, where time seems suspended, much is said.

Imbued with French and European pictorial culture, he never ceased seeking to create a typically Tunisian expression. His iconography tells the story of his life and that of his people. It poetically retraces the daily scenes he experienced throughout his life, lingering on what felt most authentic and most truthful to express.

From the beginnings of his work until his passing, Sadok Gmach was interested in empty spaces, silent moments, and "in-between" spaces—thresholds between what was and what is to come.

Painting the daily lives of his contemporaries was a deliberate purpose for him. In doing so, he became the author of these scenes—most often mundane—inhabited by lonely characters and deserted landscapes. It is worth noting how much Sadok Gmach drew inspiration from the work of Giorgio de Chirico; from the atmosphere of his works when they describe an unreal and metaphysical universe. He was also inspired by him when claiming a narrative dimension. More often than not, his paintings display settings waiting for an event. Time there is long, contemplative, and stretched. Through these seemingly frozen scenes, the artist invites us to think about what will happen the next moment: an action, or perhaps nothing at all.

During the final decades of his life, the artist reserved long hours for looking at the sea. Every day and in every season, he would sit in the morning and at the end of the day, facing the Gulf of Tunis. Having made his home in La Goulette, he turned these moments of contemplation into an inspiring practice. Contemplating the expanse of the sea with its changing colors, the tormented winter sky, and the calm summer sky gave him the opportunity to appreciate the grandeur of nature. He lived the banality of the daily life of the people of La Goulette on their way to the market, through long hours of discussion over a capucin coffee, or simply silent, contemplating the sky just as he did.

He used to say that he cherished those hours listening to Umm Kulthum, meditating on the lyrics of her songs while looking at the sea and the sky. Just as the characters in his paintings tend to detach themselves from the world—absorbed rather than truly melancholy—the artist likely saw in them the reflection of his own solitude, or quite simply, the human condition. Life passing by, with time... the need to seize, to capture the fleeting moment. Through painting, the artist seems to ask his own questions. What do we expect from life? What do we grasp of the universe? In the expression of this waiting, the artist seeks to find meaning.

**Nomen GMACH**  
Visual Artist  
University Professor

**1963-1970**



La Grand-mère, 1963  
Oil on panel  
116H x 73W cm  
Tunis



Maternité, 1963  
Oil on panel  
87H x 65W cm  
Tunis



Barbot, 1964  
Oil on canvas  
87H x 65W cm  
Tunis



La mère et l'enfant, 1964  
Acrylic on canvas  
130H x 97W cm  
Tunis



Composition 6, 1969  
Acrylic on panel  
83H x 60W cm  
Paris







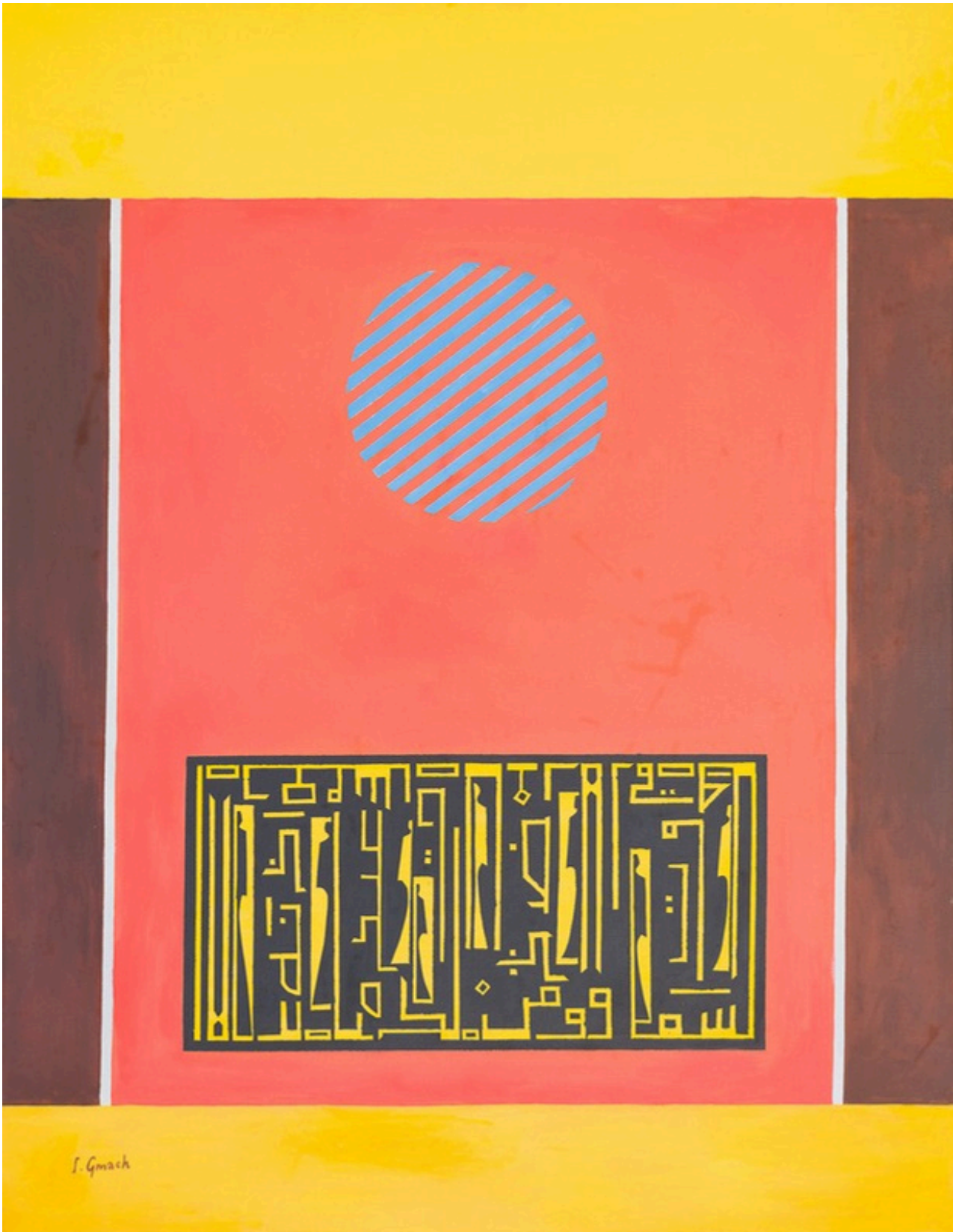
Genèse 3, 1970  
Acrylic on canvas  
90H x 57W cm  
Paris



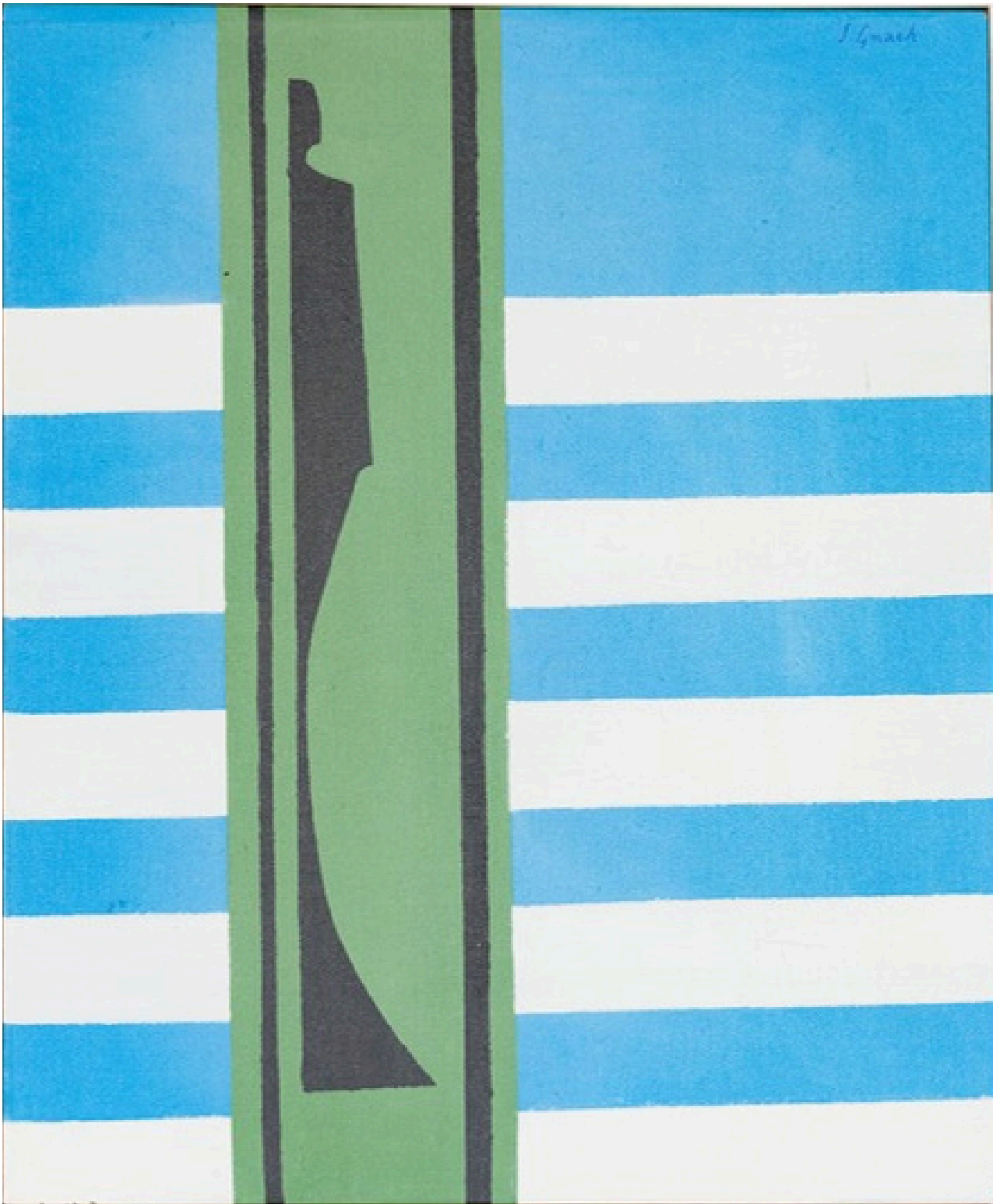
Genèse , 1970  
Acrylic on canvas  
90H x 71W cm  
Paris



Genèse , 1970  
Acrylic on canvas  
60H x 88Wcm  
Paris



Genèse 18, 1970  
Acrylic on canvas  
114H x 88W cm  
Paris



Genèse, 1970  
Acrylic on canvas  
59H x 49W cm  
Paris



Genèse 2, 1970  
Acrylic on canvas  
91H x 60W cm  
Paris

**1970-1975**



Le cigare est encore allumé, 1970

Acrylic on canvas

66H x 82W cm

Berlin



Un désir à graver, 1970

Acrylic on canvas

92H x 60W cm

Berlin



Picasso et ses demoiselles, 1970  
Acrylic on canvas  
88H x 65W cm  
Berlin



Horizon, 1970  
Acrylic on canvas  
113H x 80W cm  
Berlin



Vendeur de jasmin, 1974

Oil on canvas

81H x 65W cm

Tunis



Beb Souika, 1974  
Acrylic on canvas  
73H x 54W cm  
Tunis

**1975-1980**



Paternité, 1976  
Acrylic on canvas  
89H x 65W cm  
Tunis



Roba vecchia, 1976  
Acrylic on canvas  
89H x 65W cm  
Tunis



Le mystique, 1975

Oil on panel

92H x 65W cm

Tunis



Inquiétude, 1976

Oil on canvas

81H x 65W cm

Tunis



Nature morte, 1977  
Acrylic on panel  
54H x 65W cm  
Tunis



Nature morte, 1977  
Acrylic on canvas  
60H x 73W cm  
Tunis



L'histoire du transporteur avec ses filles, 1977

Acrylic on panel

72H x 90W cm

Tunis



Frères, 1979  
Acyclic on canvas  
100H x 81W cm  
Tunis



Errance, 1979  
Acyclic on canvas  
100H x 81W cm  
Tunis

**1980-1990**



Le marié, 1984  
Acyclic on canvas  
65H x 54W cm  
Tunis



Sans titre, 1984  
Acyclic on canvas  
65H x 54W cm  
Tunis



Le marié, 1988  
Acyclic on canvas  
95H x 95W cm  
Tunis



Méditation, 1989  
Acyclic on canvas  
81H x54W cm  
Tunis



Méditation, 1989  
Acyclic on canvas  
81H x 60W cm  
Tunis



Méditation, 1989  
Acyclic on canvas  
81H x 65W cm  
Tunis



L'étranger, 1989  
Acyclic on canvas  
100H x 73W cm  
Tunis

2000



Personnages, 2009  
Acyclic on canvas  
100H x 100W cm  
Tunis



Personnages, 2009  
Acyclic on canvas  
100H x 100W cm  
Tunis



Personnages, 2009  
Acyclic on canvas  
150H x 100W cm  
Tunis



Personnages, 2009  
Acyclic on canvas  
100H x 150W cm  
Tunis



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
60H x 60W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
60H x 60W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
47H x 39W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
47H x 39W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
47H x 39W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
47H x 39W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
99H x 150W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
150H x 99W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
55H x 37W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
55H x 37W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
55H x 37W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
55H x 38W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
55H x 38W cm  
Kheireddine



Composition, 2012  
Acyclic on canvas  
55H x 38W cm  
Kheireddine



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Born on August 2, 1940, and passed away on August 9, 2024, in Tunis, Sadok Gmach was a major figure in the visual arts in Tunisia. From as early as 1956, he took part in numerous group exhibitions, both in Tunisia and internationally.

Throughout his career, he held several solo exhibitions in cities such as Tunis, Paris, Geneva, Berlin, Frankfurt, and Munich. He also played an active role in structuring the Tunisian art scene by contributing to the creation of several groups, including the Groupe des Six (1964), the 11 jeunes peintres (1964), and Groupe 70 (1968).

His career was marked by a strong international presence: participation in the International Small Format Exhibition in Milan (1966), the Paris Biennale (1967 and 1969), as well as the São Paulo Biennial. He stayed at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris (1969–1970), then in West Berlin (1970–1971), periods during which he exhibited regularly.

He took part in several major artistic events, notably the first Arab National Festival of Visual Arts in Damascus (1972) and the first exhibition of Maghreb artists, organized in Algiers (1974) and later in Tunis (1975).

Alongside his artistic practice, Sadok Gmach was actively involved in cultural and institutional life. He was a founding member of the National Union of Plastic and Graphic Arts (1968) and held various positions within Arab and Maghreb artistic organizations. In particular, he served as Deputy Secretary General of the Maghreb Union of Plastic Arts (1975) and became a member of the executive committee of the General Union of Arab Plastic Artists starting in 1987.

Between 1974 and 1976, he was seconded to the office of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, before teaching art education (1976–1980). He then joined the Municipality of Tunis, where he directed the Yahia Gallery from 1980 to 2000 and served as Head of the Cultural Department from 1983 to 1993.

During this period, he initiated numerous artistic events: the creation of the Annual Grand Prize for Visual Arts of the City of Tunis (1981–2000), the organization of the Great Arab Maghreb Biennial (1981 and 1982), the launch of the Young Painters' Salon (1981–2000), as well as the Photography Salon (1982–1986). He also organized several exhibitions paying tribute to major figures of Tunisian art, including Ammar Farhat, Nouredine Khayachi, and Ali Ben Salem.

His commitment also extended internationally, particularly through collaborations in France, as well as participation in organizing exhibitions of international artists, including that of Claude Viallat in 1997.

An author of articles and a lecturer, he contributed actively to the discourse on visual arts in Tunisia and the Arab world. He also served as an expert at ALESCO in 1980.

## **Distinctions**

Sadok Gmach was awarded decorations by President Habib Bourguiba:

- Order of the Republic of Tunisia (1975)
- Order of Cultural Merit (1983)



**Gallery Founder:**

Essia Hamdi

Phone: +216 28 375 863

Mail: [Essia@leviolonbleugallery.com](mailto:Essia@leviolonbleugallery.com)

**Sales and Appointment:**

Dali Hamdi

Phone: +44 7443 207300

Mail: [Dali@leviolonbleugallery.com](mailto:Dali@leviolonbleugallery.com)

**Instagram:**

[leviolonbleu.gallery](https://www.instagram.com/leviolonbleu.gallery)

**Facebook:**

[Le Violon Bleu Gallery](https://www.facebook.com/LeViolonBleuGallery)

**Gallery Director:**

Mohamed Arbi Ammar

Phone: +216 97 660 089

Mail: [contact@leviolonbleugallery.com](mailto:contact@leviolonbleugallery.com)

**Press and Communication:**

Mariem Letaief

Phone: +216 98 192 058

Mail: [Mariem@leviolonbleugallery.com](mailto:Mariem@leviolonbleugallery.com)

**Address:**

16, Rue de la gare, Sidi Bou Said  
Tunis, Tunisia

**Website:**

[www.leviolonbleugallery.com](http://www.leviolonbleugallery.com)

[www.the lobster edition.com](http://www.the lobster edition.com)