



Youssef Nabil, *Self-portrait with Roots*, Los Angeles, 2008 Hand-painted gelatin silver print, 115 x 75 cm  
Pinault Collection © Photo: Youssef Nabil

## YOUSSEF NABIL TO DREAM AGAIN

19 May – 13 Sept. 26  
Level 0, Rooms 8 a, b, c

Exhibition organized on the occasion of the Mediterranean Season 2026 and in the context of the Bicentennial of Photography 2026 – 2027.

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saison **terra** née  
2026

With the collaboration of

**GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA**  
PARIS - BRUXELLES

Since the 1990s, the Franco-Egyptian photographer and videographer Youssef Nabil (born 1972) has been producing a body of work with a strong visual identity, to which the Musée d'Orsay has made a decisive contribution. His first visit to France and discovery of the Museum's collections in 1992 is still a source of inspiration that has imbued his work for more than thirty years, as evidenced by the self-portrait *The Dream* (2021), a direct descendant of Puvis de Chavannes' *Le Rêve*. With this exhibition, Youssef Nabil is the first contemporary artist in the Orientalist galleries, offering an opportunity to put his works in perspective with those that have influenced him within this same space, which, along with symbolism, constitute the heart of their aesthetic rapprochement.

The black and white silver prints, enhanced by Youssef Nabil's use of an old hand-coloring technique, evoke the glorious, fantasized Egypt of his childhood – the artist's birth country – and conjure up velvety-toned visual ambiences. His body of work, which borrows from the registers of dream and nostalgia, seeks to escape from questions of identity alone in order to embody an idealized, fantasized Mediterranean world without borders. In the artist's eyes, Egypt is the setting for an accepted, sensual orientalism, with images that make fresh use of its codes: warm, bright colors bathing in a tranquil atmosphere composed of desires and dreams, depicting a free Orient, without prohibition or censure. In addition to this orientalism, the aesthetics of his uncluttered settings, summo-



Odilon Redon

*Caliban's Sleep (Sommeil de Caliban)*, between 1895 and 1900  
Oil on wood  
H. 48,2 × W. 38,5 cm  
Collection Musée d'Orsay  
Bequest of Mrs. Arl Redon in execution of the wishes of her husband, son of Odilon Redon, 1982  
© Photo: RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) / Christian Jean

ning up blues and whites and uniting them to produce effects of transparency, reflect the artist's symbolist influences. The themes of exile, rebirth and dream are omnipresent in his work. The back postures in his faceless self-portraits are tinged with melancholy and have an air of mystery about them.

The exhibition title *To Dream Again* (De rêver encore) highlights the central role of dreams in Youssef Nabil's work, as well as in the Orientalist and Symbolist movements that inspire it.

The selected quotation, drawn from Act III, Scene 2 of *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, concludes the monologue of the character Caliban. This passage, which has become emblematic of Anglo-American literature, is attributed to this mixed-race and enslaved figure, often interpreted as a symbol of Indigenous populations in the Mediterranean colonized by Northern Europeans. Its lyricism is striking in contrast with the coarse language Caliban typically uses throughout the play.

The scene is illustrated by Odilon Redon, whose iconic work *Sleep of Caliban* is featured in the exhibition.

**“Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises, Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not. Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices, That, if I then had waked after long sleep, Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming, The clouds methought would open, and show riches Ready to drop upon me; that, when I waked, I cried to dream again.”**

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Act III, Scene 2 of *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare

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The display follows the chronological route of a journey taken by an artist of our time, comprising five major stages interspersed with transhistorical echoes. A rich collection of 19<sup>th</sup>-century photographs of expeditions in Egypt opens the exhibition by making a distinction between artistic production in the Orient and orientalism. On this historical basis, the exhibition showcases works bearing on the artist's youth, followed by his initial encounter with the Musée d'Orsay during his first visit to France in 1992, the third stage in the itinerary, involving a number of his tutelary figures, including Pierre Puvis de Chavanne and Odilon Redon. The penultimate room is devoted to the intersecting identities depicted by Nabil, on either side of the Mediterranean, borrowing symbols from East and West alike in syncretic creations. Two of the artist's videos are screened in the last room, reflecting his passion for the cinematic medium.

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#### CURATORSHIP

**Sylvain Amic**, President of the Public Establishment of the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée de l'Orangerie, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (24 April 24 – 31 August 25)  
**Nicolas Gausserand**, Advisor to the President, head of international and contemporary matters

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#### MEDIA PARTNERS

**Les Inrockuptibles** **fisheye**

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#### ACCESS & OPENING HOURS

Musée d'Orsay  
Esplanade Valéry Giscard d'Estaing  
75007 Paris

9:30 AM – 6:00 PM (Thursday until 9:45 PM)  
Closed on Mondays

[All press releases and press kits on the digital press space:](#)

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