

NOT SO PRIVATE



**LINA
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Artist

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As part of the Chemin des affinités, a collaborative programme of travelling residencies set up by Arts en résidence – Réseau national and the foundation La Petite Escalère, the artist Lina Bani Odeh participated in a travelling residency, placing at the heart of her work the ways in which public and private spaces influence our behaviors, our emotions, our sense of self and our relationships with others. Hosted successively between April and December 2025 by La Galerie, centre d'art contemporain de Noisy-le-Sec, the Centre d'arts Fernand Léger in Port-de-Bouc and La Box at Bourges, her year-long journey took place under the watchful eye of and in exchange with the author Selim-a Attalah Chettaoui.

Not So Private by Lina Bani Odeh as seen by Selim-a Atallah Chettaoui

Lina's paintings are both bold and caring. That's what made me love them at first sight. Instead of focusing on faces, often left featureless, they linger on tile patterns, a head scarf lying around or a hand casually resting on an ornate handrest, therefore offering an immediate glimpse of someone's intimacy. "It's like telling someone: this is your soul" she explained about the series *Souls Spaces*, which she had worked on a few years before her residency for *Chemin des affinités*¹.

Lina normally lives and works in Bethlehem in occupied Palestine, and her artistic approach focuses on people, their spaces, and the comfort they might seek in mundane details when confronted with uncomfortable situations. For *Chemin des affinités*, she wanted to try to capture how people feel in the public spaces they pass through every day that might exclude them for a variety of reasons. When doing her research for this project, she identified tension points to focus on for each location: in Noisy-le-Sec² the cultural

diversity of a city at the periphery of Paris; in Port-de-Bouc³ the transformation of the city center where buildings inhabited by people in precarious situations were set to be demolished; in Bourges⁴ the city's recent election as the European Capital of Culture. But with every discussion we had, the project progressively shifted, just like Lina during this nomadic residency that perpetually displaced her.



Visit to the Port-de-Bouc shipyard

¹ *Chemin des affinités* is a collaborative program of itinerant residencies established by Arts en résidence – Réseau national with the support of the foundation La Petite Escalère. In 2025, it was organized with La Box at ENSA Bourges, the Centre d'arts Fernand Léger in Port-de-Bouc and La Galerie, centre d'art contemporain de Noisy-le-Sec.

² Where she was welcomed by La Galerie, centre d'art contemporain from April 15 to May 31, 2025.

³ Where she was welcomed by the Centre d'arts Fernand Léger from September 15 to October 15, 2025.

⁴ Where she was welcomed by La Box at Bourges national higher education art school (ENSA) from October 15 to December 15, 2025.

When we first met in person – we had been introduced online during the selection interview, which I had to take on the parking of a small peripheral town whose public space didn't offer any comfortable place to settle –, Lina said that what would best describe her stay in France was feeling overwhelmed. Even though she had already been there a while, having been in residency at Triangle-Astérides in Marseille before Chemin des affinités had started, she still couldn't get used to the art stores and how much choice they offered. It felt like too much and was too different from where she had grown up.

In the occupied West Bank, to get to such a store, you must either go through a checkpoint or drive for hours. Once you get there, the choices are often a lot more limited.

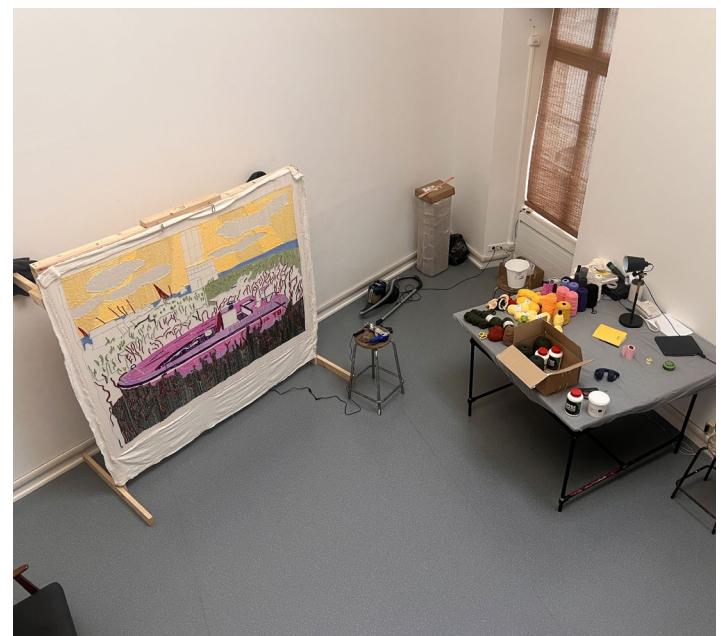
A tufting gun⁵ is seen as a potential tool of warfare. So, she could only start

experimenting with that technique during Chemin des affinités.

Lina's process is straightforward. She takes long strolls and finds locations and details with the potential to become the subjects of the final pieces. I really loved joining her during some of those wanderings, which seemed to create familiar paths in unknown locations. Usually, she makes sketches during that exploratory period and transforms them into paintings later, but tufting became the only medium for everything stemming from this residency. This technique is time consuming and requires specific and costly materials. The repetitive action of pressing the button on the machine ended up creating a tiny dent in one of her fingers and each time she applies the glue, its strong smell kicks her out of her studio for a full day



Work in progress at La Galerie, Noisy-le-Sec



Work in progress at La Box, Bourges

⁵ A tufting gun is the tool used for tufting: a textile manufacturing technique that requires inserting wool or acrylic threads in a stretched canvas. Tufting is mostly used to create rugs, but it can also be used to make cushions, textile pictures or even clothes.



Not So Private #2, 96 × 75 cm (37¹³/₁₆ × 29⁹/₁₆in.), 2025, Lina Bani Odeh

to ventilate the fumes. Until it has fully dried, you must also be careful not to make everything unravel while shaving the strings. When we spoke about it at the beginning of the residency, it was also frustrating for Lina to get used to the separated color patches the threads created, so very different from the pigments she loves to mingle when painting. After a while however, she acquired a taste for these constraints and her use of threading made for eerie, colorful landscapes, playful like comic books or small carpets where children might play with trains – but the pervasiveness of the construction works for the

tramway is probably clouding my perception of this piece created in Noisy-le-Sec. The title *Not So Private* came from the intention to focus on the tiny details, known only to us or to our loved ones, that we hang on to in public in order to feel safer. While doing research, Lina had expected the inhabitants of each town to need them in the face of the obvious changes described earlier. But it turned out what they really cared about and what bothered them was more trivial, like some sort of rumor going around about their day-to-day lives – and that's where the beauty



Visit to the municipal archives of Port-de-Bouc

lies, says Lina, when the research confronts actual people. The encounters were sometimes made in unexpected places: in Port-de-Bouc for example, she wanted to go on a fishing boat but did not manage to get the administrative authorizations, so she mostly saw people at the supermarket. It made me think of Annie Ernaux's *Regarde les lumières mon amour*, where the author represents those stores as the only social hubs where encounters remain unavoidable despite sociocultural differences.

In Noisy-le-Sec, it was striking to hear Marc⁶ from La Galerie describe a city that lacked nature and was too urban and industrialized, and to hear Lina reply she found everything very green, blooming with flowers in the spring. It is therefore natural that throughout the residencies and the travels, Lina's focus centered on that perpetual gap between her gaze on each town and that of its inhabitants. Always newly arrived because of how *Chemin des affinités* is structured,

she experienced each time, on the one hand, what the people talked about, felt and saw most; on the other, what she actually saw and felt during her strolls. Often, she felt like a tourist, always like a stranger in places where she knew she wouldn't stay, and whose language she didn't speak – so she decided to embrace that inherent difference in perception and to structure the pieces created for *Not So Private* as diptychs.

In Noisy-le-Sec, the trees felt green, the town greener than Bethlehem, Lina's real home, greener than Marseille where she had just come from. And yet in Noisy, everyone was obsessed with the construction for the tramway which had torn apart the main street, made all journeys longer, full of noise and discomfort, "but it was only that one street" insisted Lina. In Port-de-Bouc, there was some talk about the buildings to be destroyed because they were unsanitary, or because of drug dealing,



Street with trees, in Noisy-le-Sec

⁶ Marc Bembekoff is the director of La Galerie, centre d'art contemporain de Noisy-le-Sec.



View of the Halle au Blé in Bourges

but what people mostly spoke about was how many tourists there were. She saw elderly people and found solace in the tiny harbor's boats, the leaves' rain-soaked tender green and the view from her room in the Centre d'arts Fernand Léger. In Bourges, the Christmas decorations made her feel like she was in a holiday song – more precisely *It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas*⁷ – and the subject of the European Capital of Culture didn't seem to come up at all. When I was there in November,

I was struck by how few people there were in the streets and Lina by how many stores there were per inhabitant. But she found a contagious joy in the ducks swimming in flocks in the ponds of the city, and we marveled at them under the rain when she took me on one of her walks.

These towns didn't look alike, and the nature of the residency meant Lina moved as soon as a place started feeling familiar enough to look something like home. *Not So Private* ended up encapsulating what was of comfort to Lina in those spaces and how different her view was from that of the people who inhabit each location every day. But this might still change because Lina's gaze seems to transform with each new piece she creates.

Selim-a Atallah Chettaoui
December 2025

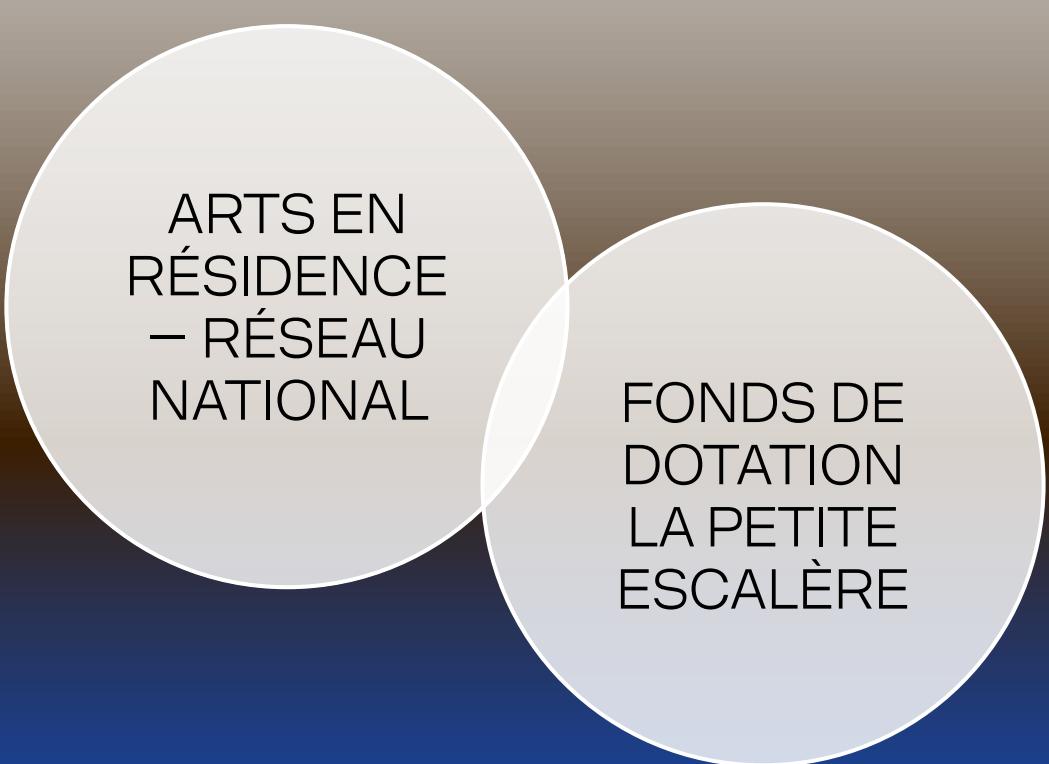
⁷ American song written by Meredith Willson in 1951 and recently covered by Michael Bublé.



Not So Private #1, 136 × 105 cm (53 9/16 × 41 5/16 in.), 2025, Lina Bani Odeh



Not So Private #3, 188 × 145 cm (74 1/16 × 57 1/16 in.), 2025, Lina Bani Odeh



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