

TEMLON



BILAL HAMDAD

FASHION MOODBOARD, December 18, 2025

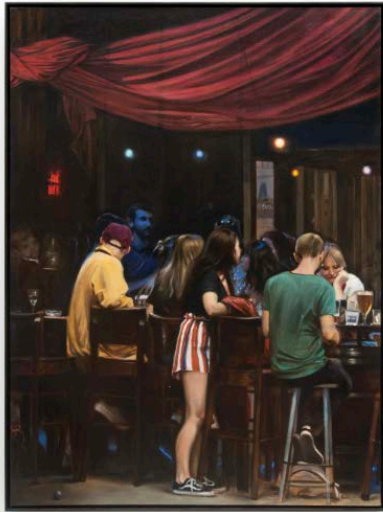
BILAL HAMDAD, A PAINTER OF THE 21ST CENTURY!

Le 18.12.2025, par Virginie Apiou

A young painter and keen observer, Bilal Hamdad, a Franco-Algerian artist, is the guest of the Petit Palais until February 8. His large-scale canvases and small portraits blend with remarkable harmony among works by great masters such as the restless Gustave Courbet. This comes as no surprise when one knows that Bilal Hamdad draws on the work of his peers as one would from a rich and effective reservoir, with an interesting humility—one that understands how classical art can enrich modern forms. We visited the PANAME exhibition with him...

MOODBOARD: How many of your paintings are exhibited at the Petit Palais?

BILAL HAMDAD: Twenty-one. It's the result of a selection made together, from around forty of my works, with the Templon gallery and the exhibition curators.



Miroir des astres



Visages. Détail

M: In this exhibition, there's a dialogue with works by old masters, including those of Gustave Courbet.

BH: We tried as much as possible to create links between the paintings, and we worked in relation to the available spaces.

M: Are your works recent?

BH: The most recent one was made a week before the opening. The oldest dates from 2019, just after I graduated. I finished at the École des Beaux-Arts de Paris in 2018. Some of the canvases are from 2021.



Bilal Hamdad

At the time, I was working for a luxury house, doing customizations on Moynat bags.

M: How old are you, and what is your background?

BH: I'm 38. I first studied fine arts in Algeria. Then there were residencies in Bourges, Madrid, and later Paris. All in all, I trained for ten years.

M: Why did you title this series of paintings *Paname*?

BH: *Paname* was initially the title of a painting I made for the exhibition. While I was painting it, I thought that this title could apply to all of my current work, so I suggested it. It's more familiar than Paris. *Paname* speaks to everyone—it cuts across all social classes.

“Paname is more familiar than Paris, it speaks to everyone, it’s all social classes.”

M: Why did you title this series of paintings *Paname*?

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M: What is your working method?

BH: It varies. Sometimes I scout locations and have someone pose there. I then photograph my model, and from that material I create a painting.



Expo Paname, Petit Palais



Expo Paname, Petit Palais

M: For the large-scale works featuring groups of people, do you work like a collage—layering several photographs that you then reinterpret on the canvas?

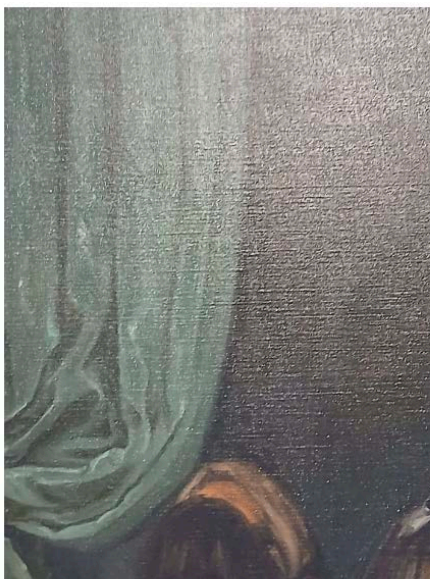
BH: Yes. When I was in residence in Madrid, I took a lot of photos outdoors, and from that material I try to find the best composition. I’m looking for balance within the space. I always create a link between inside and outside. Some figures are inside, others are not. In a café or outside the café. In the subway, or coming out of the subway. I paint a boundary. It’s up to the viewer to enter my world—or not. And often, if you look closely, there’s an additional depth in the background.

M: You work in oil painting—what does that bring you?

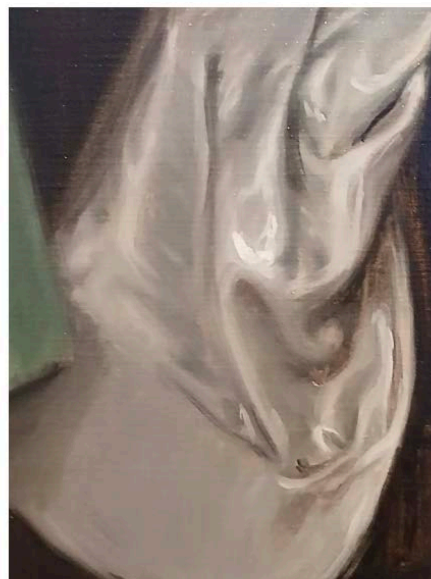
BH: More freedom than acrylic, because oil gives you time to rework things, to return to your subject. Time matters in my work.

M: Is the way oil reacts to light warmer than acrylic?

BH: It’s more alive. And I also greatly prefer watercolor to acrylic. I started out with watercolor. Some of the paintings shown here have sections that are treated a bit like watercolor in terms of luminosity. I like that approach of revisiting a detail, lightening it. For certain backgrounds, I sometimes use very little material—there isn’t much impasto, not much thickness of paint.



Riseau velours vert - Détail



Doublure manteau - Détail

M: What's very beautiful in your work is that you've "absorbed" the great masters without imitating them, you have a style of your own, recognizable. Both contemporary and ancient at the same time. What are your influences?

BH: Above all Spanish painting, Goya, *Las Meninas* by Velázquez, especially in terms of reflection and background. There's also all the Venetian painting, like Titian. In some canvases, I've made nods to classical painting. There are elements I try to integrate that recall the paintings we're taught.

M: Why those painters in particular?

BH: Because it's the South, it was incredibly beautiful. It's a legacy. I'm from the South. And also because they are figurative painters.

And artists like Velázquez find pictorial solutions.

M: What is a pictorial solution?

BH: It's knowing how to place a reflection that completely changes the interpretation of your painting. These painters play with space, with colors, with inside and outside, and that helps me understand how I should highlight certain details.

M: Is it a question of composition, where depth plays a major role?

BH: The depth of the gaze, but also the depth of what lies outside the frame. You can naturally imagine what's happening around the canvas.

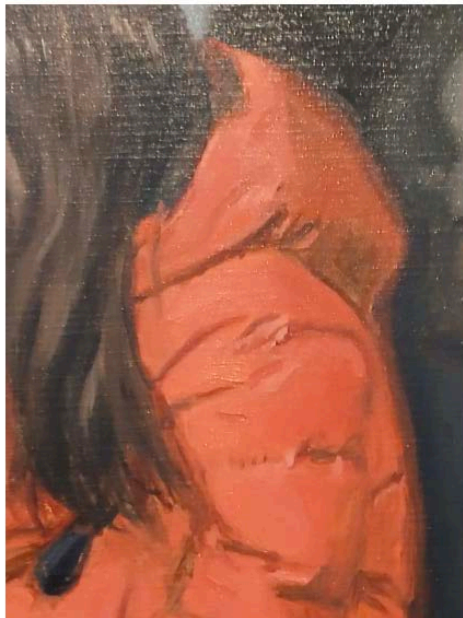
M: There are iconoclastic details, such as a green velvet curtain that wouldn't normally exist in a café frontage. Where did that striking idea come from?

BH: I saw that curtain in a hotel. I like the texture. And while working on the composition of the canvas, I thought it could be very interesting to draw it. It brings a theatrical quality. And at the same time, if you look at Italian painting, there are often curtains. All of that, once again, I call pictorial solutions. And it also creates mystery.

M: And it highlights complementary colors, like the green against the red of a character's padded jacket?

BH: Yes, that's true—it was complementary. It also gives rhythm to the whole.

“The wardrobe of my paintings is what I've seen.”



Doudoune rouge - Détail

M: How do you choose the textures—the clothes, including shoes, that characterize your works?

BH: Clothing reflects our time; it's what we see every day. Caravaggio, in his time, dressed his figures in what he saw around him. The wardrobe of my paintings is what I've seen.



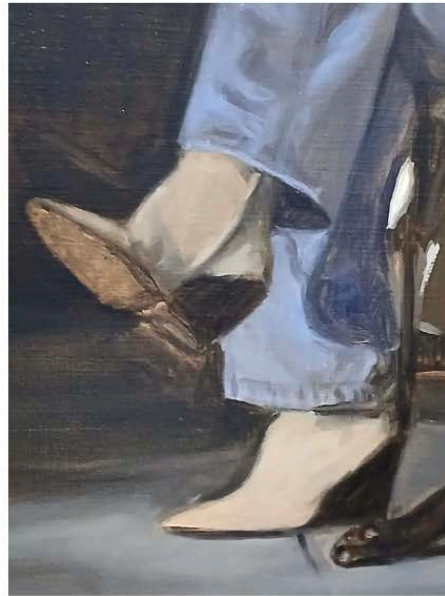
Jean baskets - Détail

M: Textures, like a coat lining, a tracksuit, denim—along with attitudes bring a certain sensuality. Do you feel them that way?

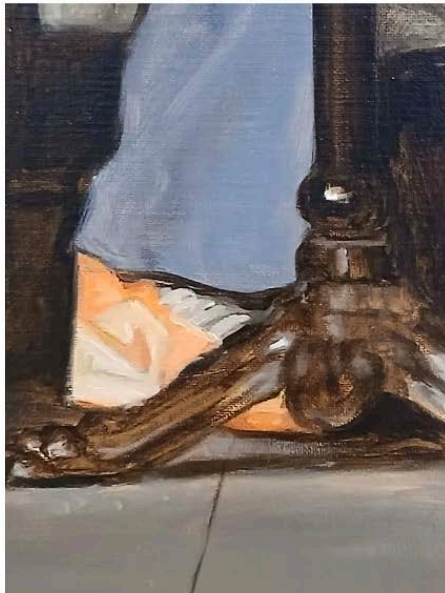
BH: Fabric is important in painting because it's always a different movement, sometimes even a unique one. Light can also change thanks to the materials of a garment; it brings flexibility. A velvet curtain, with its swirls, responds to faces that are flat in their own way. And all of that brings sensations that complement each other.



Sandales - Détail



Bottes - Détail



Basket fluo - Détail

M: Shoes are very present in your work. They have personality and give personality to those who wear them. They also say a lot socially. Do you have a preference for a particular garment element, coats, or an accessory?

BH: Yes, often it's shoes. They're great, especially for working with light. I can use the almost fluorescent color of a pair of Nikes to draw the viewer's eye. It directs the gaze toward the bottom of the canvas—and down there, there's always a dog!

“The dog is often the only character who looks at the viewer.”



Le chien, regard spectateur - Détail

M: The dog is an old tradition in painting—the animal tucked into a corner, a benevolent symbol that links humans together.

BH: Yes, it's a tradition, a culture, and a silent witness to the human world. It's also often the only figure that looks directly at the viewer.

M: You've also painted a work that appears blurred. Why?

BH: It gives a single gesture to the canvas. And the slight blur contrasts with my other paintings, whose outlines are more defined. Here, I tried to create the same movement among the figures. Someone is laughing, others are absorbed in their own conversation.

M: It feels like a snapshot, caught in the moment?

BH: Yes.

M: The subway appears very often in your work. What do you like about that place?

BH: I started working with that motif when I was at the Beaux-Arts—I made a painting of it back then. It's a place of social crossing, and each station has its own visual identity. I started with the idea of painting several stations.

M: You also work in very large formats—why?

BH: I made four large-scale works for this exhibition. In one of them, I inverted the composition. The interior, in the background, is light. The exterior is in the foreground and dark. It's a game. And the composition is built like a pyramid, it was important to guide the viewer's eye.

M: In another painting, we see a curtain again.

BH: Yes, there's a link between my paintings—through the curtain or other elements. It might be a little girl running in the corner of one painting, whose movement reappears in another.

M: How long does it usually take you, from the idea to the composition and the completion of a piece?

BH: I paint three or four canvases at the same time. It takes between one and three months, sometimes more.

M: Why work on several at once?

BH: It allows me to gain distance.

M: You let them rest. It's like a text.

BH: Often, especially when I get stuck, I leave the work aside. It happens that I make very good progress up to 60 or 70 percent. The remaining 30 percent comes afterward. That's the hardest part.

M: Some paintings are set in winter, others in summer, does temporality, the seasons, interest you?

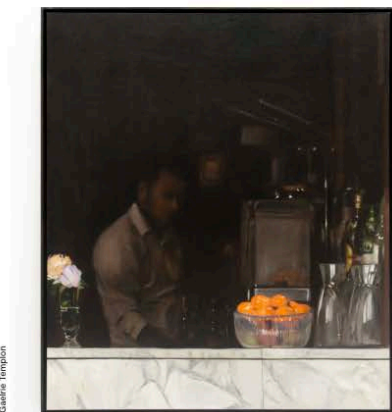
BH: In general, I take a lot of photos in the summer.

M: Why?

BH: I'm less lazy, I go out more. When it's cold, I feel less like photographing.

M: And the attitudes of the figures in your paintings are more relaxed in summer.

BH: Yes, that's true.



M: Are there things that are particularly important to represent in the human body?

BH: For me, the most important thing is the face. I always start with the face, I finish it first, then I do the rest: the body, then the space. The face is the most difficult part, so I begin with it because when I start a canvas, I have the energy needed to do it, and I keep going back to it until it works—because sometimes it doesn't.



M: In some works, the figures are almost invisible. Why?

BH: I was in Spain when I painted, for example, that man behind his bar. There was already the marble countertop, the oranges, but at first there was no one there. It was a still life. And then suddenly I thought of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* by Manet. So I added that male presence, and finally the flowers, for strength and for reflection.

“I use the reflection in bar windows to make characters appear, such as an Uber delivery driver, a bartender...”

M: Reflections, that's the famous little stroke of white paint that creates a sense of shine.

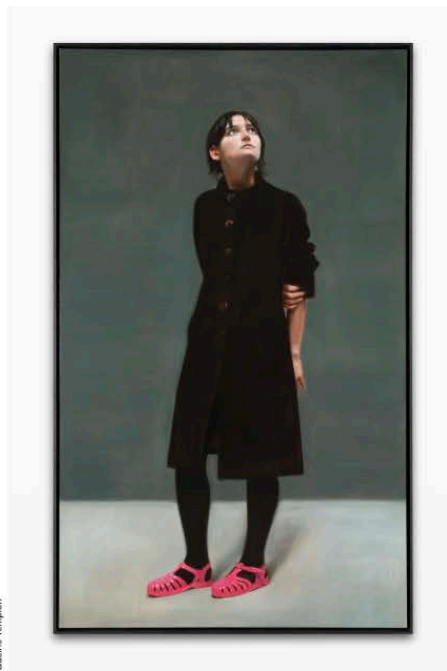
BH: Yes, and you can see very clearly that there's almost nothing there, just the simple fact of adding very fine white lines here and there.

M: And making the figure almost disappear into chiaroscuro, into shadow, what were you looking for?

BH: Always that relationship between interior and exterior. And that darkness comes from the legacy of Spanish still life, with a Zurbarán-like framing. Altogether, it composes a world.

M: The word "reflection" comes up often in discussions of your work.

BH: Yes, it's also what builds the composition. I use reflections in bar windows to make figures appear, a delivery rider, a bartender... And it allows for several readings of the painting.



Galérie Templo
Olivia

M: You also work with full-length portraits. And we find contemporary shoes in colors that don't exist in classical painting. Why those choices?

BH: The young woman who served as my model was a studio colleague when I was in residence in Spain. I saw her once wearing that dress and those shoes, whose color I then changed. I had her pose like in an old painting, but with shoes that recall our time, because that shade simply didn't exist in the past.

M: And the plain background?

BH: For the background, I hesitated. At first, I wanted to paint an entire architectural setting, but it didn't work. Then I wanted to use many colors, that didn't work either. And I created that background one week before the exhibition. For me, it was about highlighting the portrait, having such a strong, sustained background helps do that.

M: In the painting of the young child with a scooter, one thinks of Manet's *The Fifer*.

BH: I also made that work in Madrid. I am indeed referencing Manet, who painted children and who himself was inspired by Velázquez. Manet spoke about his century by depicting children with their play accessories, and for me, in my time, it's a child with a scooter.

M: You describe a mixed world, a blending of populations. Is there a political dimension to your work?

BH: Yes. I find this multicultural society to be a richness. I paint my everyday life. And later on, I also think I'll paint in Algeria, I grew up there. I'd like to create that link with France as well.



Galérie Templo
Rive droite

M: How would you define "the street"?

BH: The street... you see everything. And in Paris, that's the advantage of the city. There are several Paris. You walk through the 18th arrondissement, then the 17th, it's not the same at all, and I represent what I see. In a large-format painting, I don't depict Paris as a whole, but a neighborhood with its metro exit. To compose it, I went to Amsterdam to observe *The Night Watch* by Rembrandt. That helped me think about the space behind, the architecture, and afterward I try to achieve balance.

M: There's a great deal of subtlety in the gestures and human attitudes in your paintings. A girl has rounded shoulders. A boy twists his hands. Do you hunt for these body positions when you see them in photos? Do they specifically attract you?

BH: I love people's bodily attitudes. A waitress with a rounded back who's waiting, her arm forming an arc, mirrors a flower seller whom I added to the canvas to create balance but also social richness. That's important. These figures head in two different directions. I also think a lot about the position of hands, about crossed legs that are sometimes doubly intertwined. If you look closely at the details, you can even make out, in the background, the feet of a person whose body you don't see at all.

“She is solitude with that quiet smile.”



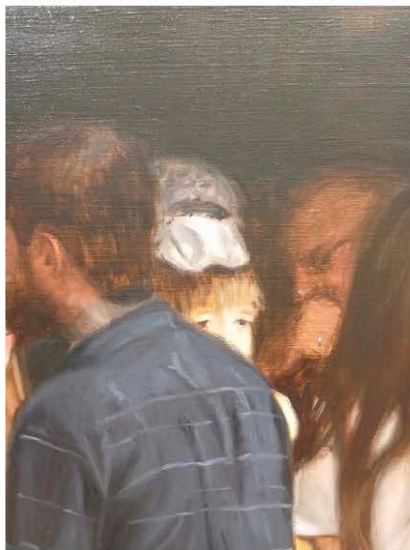
Femme en turban - Detail

M: Your work has a vital energy that doesn't try to be pretty, in line with Courbet's nervousness.

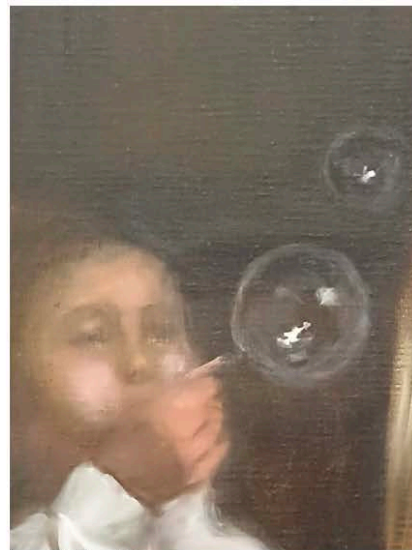
BH: As a young painter, I try to forge a loving connection with art history, particularly Courbet, because he wanted to represent the people of his time in large formats. I even make direct references to his work, such as the relationship between guard dogs and a city dog in one of my paintings.

M: And then there's also the gaze of a woman in a turban who seems to belong both to the modern era and to the classical 19th century.

BH: Yes. I added her at the end, when I was finishing my painting, because I noticed that none of the many characters were looking at the viewer. So, only this woman does. She is solitude with that quiet smile.



Hommage à La Buveuse d'absinthe, E Degas



Hommage Les Bulles de savon, E Manet

M: Earlier you mentioned direct references to certain great classics of painting. Which ones are they?

BH: I slipped the upper part of the face from Degas's La Buveuse d'absinthe into the crowd, and also, on another of my pieces, Manet's Garçon faisant des bulles de savon.

M: You also painted cats there, again positioned at the bottom and on one side.

BH: These two cats are from Madrid. But it's also a tribute to the many cats I saw in Algeria. In France, there are no cats hanging around outside. So I put them together next to humans, and they're enemies! I thought it was funny to create this feline enmity in the heart of the bustling city.

M: Your motifs evoke a country rich in diversity.

BH: Yes, that's right, what interests me is the mix. You can spot a musician playing on subway line 2, he's very well known. I called him to ask him to pose. Again, this was inspired by Rembrandt's painting, with his musician on the side.

M: What are the origins of your two recumbent paintings?

BH: When I was a student, I painted a sleeping man. Here, it refers to Manet's Dead Man, but also to a painting I had studied, Ophelia by John Everett Millais. This is the first time I've staged scenes; my work up until then had been more spontaneous. For the first recumbent motif, I had the models pose in the park at Versailles. For the next one, I had a pool built and everyone lay down in the water.

M: Why did you draw a small tango orange boat in front?

BH: I think it immediately brings to mind the color of the clothing. And it also gives the painting another interpretation.

M: Which one?

BH: When I started this painting, I was listening to podcasts about immigration, about people crossing the Mediterranean in fragile boats, and that's why there's black in it too. But you can also interpret this painting in a universal way.

M: You don't sign your work?

BH: Yes, I do! I sign the back of my paintings! ●



Galerie Tempion, Romain Darnaud

Café des anges