

Pirelli HangarBicocca

English

eL Seed
**WAVES ONLY EXIST
BECAUSE
THE WIND BLOWS**



Waves Only Exist Because the Wind Blows, 2024

In his artistic practice, eL Seed explores the history of the places and communities that he encounters. He draws inspiration primarily from the energy of these areas, often marked by social and political conflicts, and the people who inhabit them. His paintings, sculptures, and architectural-scale works act as imprints on the contexts in which he intervenes, often inspired by the words of local writers, poets, and philosophers. He extracts phrases or verses from their works, translating them into his distinctive pictorial language made up of curved, flowing lines that form an abstract image with a powerful emotional impact.

Waves Only Exist Because the Wind Blows (2024) is a new mural covering the over 1,000-square-meter external surface of the Cubo. The origin of the work is a passage from the 1950 novel *The Moon and the Bonfires* by Cesare Pavese (1908–1950), which narrates a story of emigration and return to the Langhe countryside, in the Piedmont region of northern Italy, after the Second World War. The words chosen by the artist—«you need a place that's home, if only for the excitement of leaving»—are spoken by the main character, who, after having spent long years in the United States, emphasizes the difficulty of living without a sense of belonging to a place.

By approaching the history and literature of the country in which he works, eL Seed opens up shared questions and issues: those who leave think they are discovering a new existential path, those who return home believe they are finding themselves. Often both hopes are illusions, while the experience of transition is real. The artist explains: «Where is home? Is it a place or a feeling? As human beings, we all want to belong somewhere, to a place, to a group. The feeling of being at home is intertwined with the feeling of belonging. The psychological sense of attachment to home is so complex and profound that it goes beyond the physical aspects of a place. It involves a deep emotional connection and a sense of rootedness. As humans, we all long for a sense of belonging.»

The installation forms the shape of a wave, alluding to a sense of movement. The forms are reminiscent of a hand flowing while writing a text. *Waves Only Exist Because the Wind Blows* forms a dense weave that tells a shared story, made up of numerous roads and directions. By juxtaposing and combining complementary colors—blue and orange are at opposite ends of the color spectrum—the artist creates harmony from optical discord. The overall effect is of interweaving signs and infinite possibilities connections.

Special Project “Outside the Cube”

The site-specific work *Waves Only Exist Because the Wind Blows* by eL Seed is the second work (following *Efêmero* by OSGEMEOS inaugurated in 2016) commissioned and produced as part of Pirelli HangarBicocca’s project “Outside the Cube,” curated by Cedar Lewisohn and devoted to art forms associated with urban and public spaces.



Waves Only Exist Because the Wind Blows, 2024
Mural on the building of Cubo, Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan
1,100 square-meter
Courtesy eL Seed and Pirelli HangarBicocca.
Photo Lorenzo Palmieri

The Artist

In his works, eL Seed seeks spaces for dialogue by engaging with specific communities. The artist's name combines different traditions and cultural contexts, merging a reference to Pierre Corneille's (1606-1684) French play *El Cid* (1636), a memory of his school reading, with the Arabic term *al Sayed*, meaning "man," hinting at his Tunisian origins. Improvisation is an important part of the artist's creative process. In his preparatory drawings, made with markers, pens, and pencils, he merely sketches the geometric outline of his works, which take their final form only during their execution in large format.



Portrait eL Seed

eL Seed's first large-scale works in which he decided to make a public statement include the mural in the city of Gabes, in southern Tunisia. The artist chose the minaret of the city mosque, a 57-meter-high concrete tower. He colored the entire tower yellow, tracing calligraphic-like signs in lighter yellow and black, inspired by a universal verse from the Quran, which speaks about building bridges between communities. In 2013, he realized the *Lost Walls* project, also in Tunisia: a series of 24 murals painted in 4 weeks on abandoned buildings in various towns, small villages, and streets, which he left as signs spreading the stories of the people he met while traveling. He recounts, «I wanted to offer a different picture of Tunisia with *Lost Walls*. Following the Revolution, the country was associated solely with political issues. Although there has been a change of government, Tunisia's culture and history remain, and the attention should be focused on this wealth. I would like to

bring people back to Tunisia and let them discover the heritage they have abandoned or lost, just like the 'lost walls' of this work.»



Perception, 2016
Mural on 50 different buildings, Manshiyat Nasr neighborhood, Cairo, Egypt
Environmental dimensions

Each time he meets new communities, eL Seed thoroughly studies the environment and his personal rendering of the urban landscapes and the people who inhabit them, partly through his choice of local poetic voices that resonate in the collective consciousness. Reflection on marginalized environments negatively marked by prejudice led the artist to work in neighborhoods in various cities. One of his most famous and ambitious works, *Perception* (2016), was created in Manshiyat Nasr, a district on the outskirts of Cairo. This spatial intervention, covering the surfaces of 50 buildings and visible in its entirety only from the city's highest point, the Muqattam Mountain, is dedicated to the Coptic community of Zaraqeb. This religious minority, linked to the Christian Church of Egypt, has been excluded from the main social activities and has specialized during the last decade in collecting and recycling rubbish. Solid-colored areas and sinuous diagonal lines form a circular grid that encloses the famous words of Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, a 3rd-century Coptic bishop, on the theme of light and vision. The circular form, close to the idea of perfection, returns in later works such as the one on the façade of the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris.



Love is the miracle of civilisations, 2014
Mural on the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris
800 square-meter

Around 2017, eL Seed's two-dimensional drawings gradually evolved into three-dimensional, self-supporting sculptures, as in the case of *Mirage* (2021) and *Secrets of Time* (2022), installed in the Al Ula desert in Saudi Arabia and in Giza, Egypt, respectively. On May 21, 2021, one of these calligraphic sculptures was transported to Italy and placed in the Piazza del Duomo in Milan for just one day. «The essence of my art is ephemeral,» eL Seed says about this work, in which the word *hob*, “love” in Arabic, is interpreted as a transitory form in the shape of a blue teardrop.

eL Seed's work has been displayed in exhibitions and public settings around the world, including the Pyramids of Giza, Egypt (2022); the village of Giranchaur, Nepal (2021); the Women's Pavilion, Expo Dubai (2020); the Ain al-Helweh refugee camp, Lebanon (2019); the Dubai Opera (2018); the Biennale de Lyon, the DMZ Demilitarized Zone, between North Korea and South Korea (2017); the Manshiyat Nasr neighborhood, Cairo (2016); the Vidigal favela, Rio de Janeiro; the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (2014); and the Philippi neighborhood, Cape Town (2012). In 2021, eL Seed was among the World Economic Forum's selection of Young Global Leaders for his commitment to promoting positive change in the world. In 2019, he received the International Award for Public Art for his *Perception* project (2016) in Cairo and, in 2017, the UNESCO-Sharjah Prize for Arab Culture.

Our mission is to make art
open and accessible to everyone.

Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation dedicated to producing and promoting contemporary art. It was conceived and is supported by Pirelli. Established in 2004, Pirelli HangarBicocca has become a benchmark institution for the international art community, local public and region. It is a museum that is free of charge, accessible and open, and a place for experimentation, research and dissemination, where art is a point of reflection on the most topical themes of contemporary culture and society. It caters to a broad and diverse public with a programme of major solo exhibitions by both Italian and international artists, a multi-disciplinary program of accompanying events and in-depth discussions, theoretical and informational publications, and educational courses. A team of museum facilitators is on hand at all times to help the public connect with the art. Vicente Todolí has been the foundation's artistic director since 2012.

Situated in a former industrial building, once a locomotive manufacturing facility, Pirelli HangarBicocca occupies 15,000 square metres, making it one of the largest single-level exhibition spaces in Europe. This vast area comprises the Shed and Navate spaces, which are used for temporary exhibitions, and the permanent display of Anselm Kiefer's *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004–2015*. This monumental installation with seven reinforced concrete towers has become one of the most iconic works in Milan. The building also houses a number of services for the public: a spacious entrance with reception area, facilities for educational activities, space for conferences and meetings, bookshop and bistro with a charming outdoor area.

Institutional Technical Sponsors



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*Waves Only Exist Because the
Wind Blows, 2024* (detail)
Mural on the building of Cubo,
Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan
1,100 square-meter
Courtesy eL Seed
and Pirelli HangarBicocca.
Photo Francesco Margaroli