

Horizons

Asma M'Naouar

"Horizons" expands on Asma M'Naouar's career-long investigation into abstraction through movement, materiality and emotion. The exhibition is a reflection on the act of painting and on the primacy of light through a selection of new and recent works that explore the complexities of both our world and the inner self. Over her more than thirty year career, Asma M'Naouar's practice has been characterized by the representation of a non-visible world as well as the intense gestural and deep emotional physicality of painting. Her pictorial expression has been shaped by the works and legacies of both Abstract Expressionism and the oil technique of the Italian Renaissance painters. Tunisian born, Asma M'Naouar studied at the Institut des Beaux-arts of Tunis in the late 1980s, before she pursued her academic training in Italy at the Rome Art Academy, and then specialized in Art Conservation at the Palazzo Spinelli in Florence. During her Roman and

Florentine stays between 1993 and 2002, she not only learned old master techniques of oil painting but also studied the works of the Italian Renaissance. Asma M'Naouar's practice departs from the tradition of easel painting and oil techniques, extending her work into abstraction and gestural painting. In her work, M'Naouar aims to experiment the creative process itself within the act of pure painting, while expanding upon anthropological perspectives on the memory and trace. Primarily concerned with light, color and space, M'Naouar's work represents an attempt to transcend both the material and the surface, showing similarities to the Abstract Expressionists', particularly Jackson Pollock's action painting process. Also, her densely textured compositions including scratched marks like graffiti evoke the informalism of Antoni Tàpies' work, the Catalan figure of Art Informel, and the evocative power of his matter paintings.



“

I studied Fine arts at the Academy of Fine Art in Tunisia and then I had the opportunity to go to the Academy of Rome to continue my studies in Italy. I was in Rome for ten years and worked there, and all of my experience as an artist was there. But at one point, I decided to return to Tunisia because, in the eighties, I was a Tunisian artist in Rome. A woman Tunisian artist in Rome.

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Interview with Asma M'Naouar
Maria Finders, Golbal Art Forum,
Dubai 2007



Mare Nostrum 1 | 2019 | Oil on canvas | 120 x 140 cm

اسما منور

فناء الكثرة في الوحدة

عمر الغدامسي

أعمال اسما منور، هي نصوص مكتوبة، ليس بالمعني الدارج لمفهوم الكتابة بوصفه وعاء للكلام و إفصاحا ثانويا متأخرا له، بل هي انبثاق من الصمت و سابقة للغة و متجاوزة لها، انها اقرب الي ما يسميه جاك دريدا بالكتابة الأصلية التي تقف ضد النطق و تمثل عدمية الصوت مقابل تجليات الروح و الكينونة. هناك ناموس عام يحكم الكائنات و الأشياء علي حد سواء، لذلك فانه يمكننا مطابقة مفهوم الاثر، كما عينه جاك دريدا في تفكيكه لمفهوم الكتابة، علي علاقة الأثر بالزمن في لوحات اسما منور، و عموما نحن لم نذهب بعيدا، ذلك ان الرسم عند اسما منور، و كما اشرنا هي كتابة أصلية. يشير الاثر لدي دريدا الي حركتين هما امحاء الشيء و بقاءه في الباقي من علاماته أي رحيله و الحفاظ عليه في ذات الوقت . و عل هذا المفهوم يبدوا قريبا من وصف الجرجاني لمعني الامحاء بقوله انه فناء الكثرة في الوحدة. تنشأ اللوحة لدي اسما منور، عبر طبقات لونية متعاقبة، تمحي منها أجزاء و ترحل منها أخرى تحت طبقة لونية شفافة. و هي بذلك تحاكي تأثير الزمن و فعله، بما يجعل كل لوحة من اعمالها اشبه بقطعة جيولوجية، كل طبقة داخلها هي اثر لحركة الزمن في تعاقبه، من طمس و محو و فساد و تهنيش. كل لوحة هي اثر مرتحل و مقيم، متصدع و منفجر، ساكن و مسكون. رغم هذا التنوع في حضور الأثر بصريا في أعمال اسما منور، إلا انه في العمق هو حضور مخال و يخفي دلالات تتجاوز البصر ليثير البصيرة نحو الشعور ونحو تلك الأسئلة الجوهرية عن الوجود و الحياة وعن الكينونة و الزوال، ذلك ان مفهوم الأثر مرادف جوهريا للغياب، إذ أن الأثر هو كل ما تبقى من زمن مفصول، فهو الفعل الذي بقي مبتورا عن كل سياق أنتجه أو واعز أحدثه.

تحفظ اللغة الالمانية السامية القديمة، بمعني جليل يربط بين الأثر و الإحساس أو الشعور، حيث ان كلمة الأثر Spor هي من نفس جذر كلمة Spüren أي الشعور. يبدوا الأمر مفهوما، ذلك انه ليست هناك قيمة في ذاتها لما يبدوا أثرا، بل المعني يكمن فيما يحدثه لدينا من أحاسيس تدعو الي التأمل و السؤال. و هذا عين ما تحدثه فينا أعمال اسما منور، عبر ذلك الزخم من تلك المساحات الشفافة أو الاخري المسطحة العارية كذاكرة بيضاء او عبر تلك المساحات الضاجة بحركات متعاقبة و متقطعة، متداخلة و منضهرة، بارزة و حادة او معتمة أو مطمورة تبرز كخدوش أو وميض خافت.

يعد الزمن مفهوما غير قابل للإدراك، ذلك لأنه عبور سريع، و وفق القديس أوغسطين، فان الزمن عبارة عن حركة دائمة يتقدم جزء منها أولا، ليلحقه بعد ذلك جزء آخر، دون أن يتمكن هذان الجزءان من التواجد معا. في المقابل تمتلك الذاكرة تلك الخيمياء التي تسمح لنا بأن نجتمع في عالمنا الداخلي الزمن الذي تعذر علينا تمثله في العالم الخارجي. و هو ما تفعله اسما منور التي تستدرجنا إلي هذا المعني المركزي، من خلال أطوار و تمثلات متعددة لشكل الأثر بوصفه حركة.

يُعرف عادة الزمن كمقياس للحركة، غير انه يمكن للحركة ان تتوقف، في حين ان الزمن منفلت و لا يتوقف، و مع ذلك فان الذي يحدد الزمن هو الحركة التي ينتجها أي جسم مادي أو أي كائن روحي، وهذا ما تفعله اسما منور أيضا، حيث تأخذ الحركة في أعمالها هيئة الأثر و قد مر عبر أطوار متعاقبة من الانمحاء و الظهور، الاحتجاب و التجلي، سواء عبر خطوط خاطفة أو ممتدة او عبر مساحات شفافة أو أخري مسطحة، موظفة في ذلك تقنيات متعددة من الخدش و التعرية و التقشير و التشفيف، و ذلك باستعمال الألوان الزيتية، و التي مقارنة بغيرها من ألوان الاكريليك و الاكواريل، تبدوا أكثر توافقا و انسجاما مع امتداد الزمن، و من ثمة مع عملية الإنشاء الفني لدي هذه الفنانة، فالألوان الزيتية تأخذ وقتا أطول كي تجف. كما أنها توفر تنوع الملمس، علي جسد اللوحة، من اللين و السطحي الي الخشن و الناتئ. الألوان الزيتية، و كما خبرتها اسما منور، تبدوا أيضا طيبة، لإحداث ذلك التداخل اللوني أو تلك الطبقات الشفافة المتعاقبة، كتعاقب الأزمنة علي الأجسام المادية و في الذاكرة.

الحركة في أعمال اسما منور، هي الأثر، بوصفه قرينا لمفهوم الزمن و دلالاته المادية البصرية، و كل اثر هو ذاكرة، سواء علي هيئة خط او خريشة أو احفورة أو رجات و ارتدادات تكشف ما طفح علي سطح اللوحة من بقايا اثر سابق بقي مطمورا تحت سطح لوني بارز او يطل كشبح من وراء سطح لوني اخر شفاف. ان الذاكرة هنا، في اعمال الفنانة، تحضر من خلال كل درجات الاستعادة و التذكر، فهي الحضور الساطع او الباهت او الخاطف كوهضة، كما انها المحو و النسيان. بكل هذا فان كل لوحة من أعمال هذه الفنانة هو زمن عابر يترك اثره عبر حركات و هيئات متعددة من الحضور و الاحتجاب.



Horizons 1 | 2020 | Oil on canvas | 140 x 120 cm

Asma M'Naouar
*The annihilation
of abundance in unity*

Time is an indiscernible concept, as it is a rapid passage, and according to Saint Augustine, time is a permanent movement, one part of which advances first, followed by another part, without the two parts being able to exist together. On the other hand, memory possesses that alchemy that allows us to collect in our inner world the time that we could not represent in the external world. And it is what Asma M'Naouar does, who draws us into this central meaning, through various phases and representations of the shape of the trace as a movement.

Time is usually known as a measure of motion, but movement can stop, while time is running out and does not stop. Nevertheless, what determines the time is the movement produced by any physical body or any spiritual being, and this is what Asma M'Naouar does as well, as the movement in her artworks takes the form of trace that has passed through successive phases of emanation and appearance, concealment and manifestation, whether through lightning or extended lines or across transparent areas or others flat, employing multiple techniques of scratching, erosion, peeling, and dehydration, by using oil colors, which compared to other acrylic and watercolors, appear more compatible and in line with the extension of time, and thus with the artist's creation process, as oil colors take longer to dry. They also provide a variety of texture, on the body of the painting, from soft and superficial to rough and salient. Oil colors, and as experienced by Asma M'Naouar, also appear malleable, to cause that chromatic overlap or those successive transparent layers, like the succession of times on physical objects and in memory.

The movement in Asma M'Naouar's works is the trace, as a companion of the concept of time and its physical and visual connotations. And every trace is a memory,

whether in the form of a line, a scribble, a fossil, or a vibration and a reverberation that reveals what was left over on the surface of the painting from the remnants of a previous trace that remained buried under a prominent color surface, or, appearing like a ghost from behind another transparent color surface. The memory here, in the artist's work, is present through all degrees of recovery and recollection; it is the presence, bright or faded or swift as a flash, as well as the erasure and forgetfulness. With all this, every painting of this artist's work is a passing time that leaves its mark through multiple movements and bodies of presence and concealment.

The works of Asma M'Naouar are written texts, not in the usual sense of the concept of writing as a vessel for speech and a late secondary revelation of it, it is rather an emanation from silence, an antecedent to language and a transcendence to it, it is closer to what Jacques Derrida calls «arche-writing», that stands against pronunciation and represents the nothingness of the sound versus the manifestations of the soul and being.

There is a general law that governs beings and things alike, so we can match the concept of the trace - as Jacques Derrida defined it in his deconstruction of the concept of writing-, to the relationship of trace and time in the paintings of Asma M'Naouar, and in general we did not go far, because Asma M'Naouar's drawing is, as we said, an arche-writing. For Derrida, the trace indicates two movements: the erasure of the thing and its remaining in the remainder of its signs, which means its departure and its preservation at the same time. Perhaps this concept seems close to Al-Jurjani's description of the meaning of erasure, saying that it is the annihilation of abundance in unity.

In Asma M'Naouar's work, the painting is created through successive color layers, parts of which are erased and others go away under a transparent color layer. In this way, she simulates the influence of time and its action, in a way that makes each of her works resemble a geological piece, each layer within it is a trace of the movement of time in its succession, from obliteration, erasure, corruption and fragility. Despite this diversity in the presence of the trace visually in the works of Asma M'Naouar, it is, in depth, an elusive presence that hides connotations that go beyond the gaze to raise insight into feeling and towards those fundamental questions about existence and life and about being and disappearance, so that the concept of trace is essentially synonymous with absence. As the trace is all that is left of a separated time, it is the act that remained amputated from every context that it produced or deared to produce.

The ancient German Semitic language preserves a noble meaning that connects the effect with the feeling, as the word trace «Spor» is from the same root of the word «Spüren», meaning the feeling. The matter seems understandable, as there is no value

in itself of what appears to be a trace. Rather, the meaning lies in what it generates in us of feelings that invite contemplation and questioning. And this is exactly what the works of Asma M'Naouar creates in us, through that momentum from those transparent or other flat, bare spaces like a white memory, or through those spaces that are noisy with successive and intermittent movements, intertwining and molten, prominent and sharp, dark, or buried, which emerge as scratches or a faint flash.

Essay by Amor Ghedamsi,
February 2021
Translated from Arabic by Narjes Torchani

Horizons 2 | 2020 | Diptych | Oil on canvas | 70 x 70 cm each





Architecture 14 | 2019 | Oil on canvas | 110 x 120 cm

“ What does Abstraction mean? Everything is natural, the surfaces intertwine and intersect in the light for an inner/outer representation that nature always ends up taking over. **”**



Architecture 9 | 2014 | Oil on canvas | 130 x 100 cm

“ At fifty-six years old, I realize that in my painting, the many different layers of colours that I relentlessly superimpose on the canvas, the invitation to the gaze to penetrate the work by scratching the surface and intense gestural movements that engage physically and emotionally are only a natural glide towards brighter horizons. ”



Abstraction 5 | 2019 | Oil on canvas | 120 x 110 cm

Asma M'Naouar

About the artist

Tunisian born, Asma M'Naouar graduated in Aesthetics and Arts Science from the Institut des Beaux-arts of Tunis in 1988, before she pursued her academic training in Italy at the Rome Art Academy in 1993. Awarded a number of artist residency grants, she stayed in Switzerland, France and Lebanon. Then, she settled in Italy in 2002 where she completed her Master in Conservation at Palazzo Spinelli in Florence. She was awarded various prizes including the 1st Prize of the critic "Giordano Bruno" in Solerno, Italy, in 1993 and the First Golden Prize at the Biennale of Kuwait in 1996. In 1999, she was awarded the 1st Prize for Visual Art by the Ministry of Culture in Tunisia. Since 1996, Asma has been regularly exhibiting at Elmarsa gallery where she had her latest solo exhibition in June 2014. She took part in numerous group shows. Her work has been exhibited in galleries, museums and biennials in North Africa, Europe and the Middle East such as Sharjah Biennale (1995), Palazzo Suevo Bari, Italy (1998), the National Museum of Art in Kaunas/Lithuania (2003), Municipal museum of Pultsk in Poland (2004), the Arab World Institute in Paris (2008), Dar El Founoun in Tunis, Algiers, Rabat (2008), and the Palais Namaskar in Marrakech as part of the exhibition "Symbiose de deux mondes - L'Europe et le Maghreb" organised by The Written Art Foundation in Franckfurt. She also participated in the itinerant exhibition "Un Autre Regard" in Tunis in 2000 and in 2004 in Switzerland. She took part in international art forums as a guest speaker such as at the Global Art Forum at Art Dubai and at the Palais Namaskar in Marrakech within the framework of the exhibition. In 2015, she took part in the travelling exhibition « All the World's a Mosque » in Carthage, Tunisia, curated by Lina Lazaar. Her works can be found in many public and private collections including The Foundation Pietro Caporella in Rome, the Center Rachid Karamé in Tripoli, Lebanon and the Ministry of Culture in Tunisia as well as private collections in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.



“ I have been painting for more than thirty-five years with rather academic diligence, showing clearly that the act of painting has become my act of survival. ”

Asma M'Naouar
2021

Education and training

2016		“Yesterday is tomorrow’s memory: a group show of work from North Africa”, Elmarsa Gallery, Dubai, UAE	
2003	Master in Conservation - Institute for Art and Restoration, Palazzo Spinelli, Florence, Italy	2013	“Symbiose de deux mondes- L’Europe et le Maghreb”, Palais Namaskar in Marrakech, initiated by The Written Art Foundation in Franckfurt.
2001	Intergovernmental Agency of the Francophonie in Tripoli, Lebanon	2010	Arab Art Festival, next to the Exposition Universelle of Shanghai, China
1997	Residency with the Workshop of Tunisia - International City of Arts Paris	2009	“Sur les traces de la peinture contemporaine” (Tunisian Contemporary Painting), Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia
1996	Residency with the Workshop of Tunisia - International City of Arts Paris	2009	Group exhibition, BIAT- Banque Internationale Arabe de Tunisie, Tunis, Tunisia
1995	Residency with the Bildzwang Workshop, Pro-Helvetia at Lucerne, Switzerland	2008	“The Emirates through the Arab Contemporary Artists’ Insights”, organized by the Ministry of Culture of the United Arab Emirates, DIFC, Dubai, UAE
1994	Residency with the Bildzwang Workshop, Pro-Helvetia at Lucerne, Switzerland	2008	“Artistes arabes entre l’Italie et le Maghreb” (“Arab artists between Italy and the Maghreb”), Dar El founoun, Tunis, Alger, Rabat
1993	Graduate of the Academy of the fine arts of Rome - Emphasis in Painting	2008	Exhibitions of women in the occasion of the 13 of August, Saragossa, Spain
1988	Control in Aesthetics and Arts sciences - I.T.A.A.U.T. University of Tunis	2008	“Art connexions”, Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia

Solo shows (selection)

2021	“Horizons”, Elmarsa Gallery, Dubai	2008	Printemps des Arts, Palais Abdelliya, La Marsa, Tunisia
2014	“City”, Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia	2008	“Femmes créatives de Tunisie”, Palais de l’UNESCO, Paris, France
2010	“Untitled, 2010”, Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia	2007	“Mémoire de Demain” Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia
2009	Galerie Gilbert Dufois, Senlis, France	2006	Arab Art Festival, Beijing, China
2008	Exhibition at the Raiffeisenbank, Vienna, Austria	2006	“Tunisian women and art” UNES CO and IMA- Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France
2006	“Natura”, Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia	2005	“Regard sur la Tunisie” Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia
2004	“Mare Nostrum”, Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia	2004	Municipal museum “Four Corners of the World”, Pultsk, Poland
2004	“Mare Nostrum”, Dante Alghieri, Rome, Italy	2004	Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia
2002	“Mare Nostrum II”, Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia	2003	MK Ciurlionis - National Museum of Art, Kaunas, Lithuania
1998	Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia	2003	“5 + 5 Artists of Two Banks of the Mediterranean” Acropolium museum of Carthage, Tunisia
1997	Galerie de la Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France	2003	Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia
1996	Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia	2002	Hordaland International Art Gallery, Bergen, Norway
1993	“Mare Nostrum”, Gallery I.M.M.ART. Fondation Caporella, Roma, Italy	2002	Exhibitions “French-speaking Artists” 9th summit of the “francophonie”, Palais de l’UNESCO, Beirut, Lebanon

Group shows (selection)

2021	“A Tunisian story...”, Elmarsa Gallery, Dubai, UAE	2002	Exhibitions “French-speaking Artists” 9th summit of the “francophonie”, Palais de l’UNESCO, Beirut, Lebanon
2019	“What is a box?” Jacques Derrida, curated by Mohamed Ali-Berhouma, Elmarsa Gallery, Tunis, Tunisia		
2017	“Modern art from North Africa”, Elmarsa Gallery, Dubai, UAE		

- 2002 Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia
 2001 "Europ' Art" Geneva, Switzerland
 2001 Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia
 2000 "Variations 2000" Gallery El Teatro, Tunis, Tunisia
 2000 Exposition Universelle of Hanover, Tunisian Pavilion, Germany
 2000 Exhibition of Swiss artists having lived in Tunisia and Tunisian artists having lived in Switzerland
 2000 "Un autre regard" (A different insight), Palais Kheireddine, Tunis, Tunisia
 2000 Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia
 1999 "Beirut cultural capital" Palais de l'UNESCO, Beirut, Lebanon
 1999 Elmarsa Gallery, Tunisia
 1998 Exposition Universelle of Lisbon, Portugal
 1998 "Dix années de jeune peinture tunisienne", Palazzo Suevo Bari, Italy
 1997 "Another glance" Museum of Modern Art of Bienn/ Gallery ITTEN, Bienn, Switzerland
 1997 "Ten years of young Tunisian painting" Charles de Gaulle Library, Tunis, Tunisia
 1996 "Chassé croisé" Tunisian and European Painters of the 20th century, Palais Kheireddine, Tunis, Tunisia
 1995 "Kunswinter" Contemporary art museum of Luzern, Switzerland.
 1995 Biennale of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.
 1994 "Crossing cultures" Gallery MAE, Marseilles, France/ Museum of Carthage, Tunisia
 1994 "Folgoratti sulla via di Damasco" Covent of Saint Onofrio, Rome
 1994 "The light, the project, the form" with Molinari and Vinciguerra, Fondation Caporella, Italy
 1993 "Mare Nostrum" Galerie I.M.M.ART, Rome, Italy

Prizes and awards

- 2009 1st Prize for the best representation of the city of Kairouan, Cultural capital of the Islamic world, delivered by the ASESCO (UNESCO).
 1999 1st Prize of Creation, Ministry of Culture, Tunisia
 1996 "Golden Sailing" - 1st Prize - Biennale of Kuwait
 1993 1st Prize of the critic "Giordano Bruno" - Campagna - Salerno - Italy

Public collections

- Private collections in the UAE
 Ministry of Culture in United Arab Emirates
 Ministry of Culture in Lebanon
 Ministry of Culture in Tunisia
 The Foundation Pietro Caporella in Roma, Italy

Publications

- 2004 « Arts de Tunisie », Simpack Edition Française Tunis, Khaled Ben Romdhane
 2002 « La quête de la Tunisianité » (the quest of tunisianity), Ed. Finzi, Mustapha Chelbi, Tunisia
 1997 « L'Aventure de l'Art Moderne en Tunisie », Edition Simpack, Ali Louati, Tunisia

Filmography

- 2007 « Huit femmes tunisiennes peintres » (Eight Tunisian women painters), documentary film by Hmida Ben Ammar, produced by Baheddine Attia, presented at the festival « Doc à Tunis ».

Catalogues

- 2008 « Les Emirats vus par les artistes arabes contemporains », Dubai, UAE
 2008 « Artistes Arabes entre l'Italie et le Maghreb », Martina Corgnati/ Toni Maraini, Tunisia.
 2007 « Global Art Forum », WAI – World Arab Institute, Paris.
 2004 « Impressions croisées », exhibition at Palais Khereddine, Tunisia
 2000 « Exposition de l'Art Contemporain », Palais de l'UNESCO, Beirut, Lebanon
 1997 « Un autre regard », Swiss painters in Tunisia and Tunisians in Switzerland, Bienn, Switzerland
 1997 « Dix années de jeune peinture tunisienne », Tunis
 1994 « Folgorati sulla via di Damasco », Roma
 1993 « La luce, il progetto, e la forma », with Molinari et Vinciguerra, Roma



Mare Nostrum 5 | 2019 | Oil on canvas | 120 x 120 cm

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