

THE VISIT

by Chafa Ghaddar



The Residue of Elsewhere

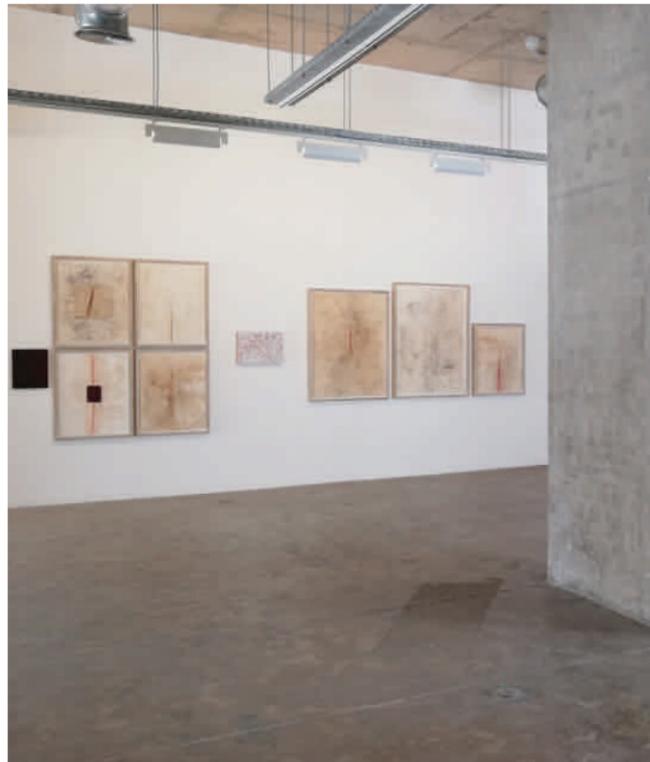
The threshold is a membrane. Having just crossed one, you have accomplished, unknowingly, a complex, invisible gesture. From *limen*, the Latin for threshold, we hold liminal—an obscure suspension between two states. This is the realm of the imperceptible in-between. A moment ago, you were neither fully inside nor entirely outside. Here yet not yet here. Eased into a familiar gallery sanctum, yet still writhing in a strident Beirut beyond. You were perfectly liminal, between two postures: pre- and post-, former and latter, near and here.

This is exactly where the artist wants you.

The liminal is Chafa Ghaddar's heartland. Her entire practice pulses with the desire to fix what flees. To pin down what bubbles up. To catch what escapes. Time is at once her accomplice and her nemesis. In her signature fresco works, degradation and decay stealthily devour the labor of construction and creation, the masterfully wrought layers succumbing to the ravenous acceleration of time. The works are at once finished and destroyed, the physical articulation of an elusive "in between."



The Visit is the culmination of Ghaddar's deep reflections on the very notion of liminality and how it manifests itself in space and on surfaces—paper, canvas, fabric, fresco. The artist hones in on the idea of 'the visit' to revel in the complexity lurking below its seeming simplicity. Much like the threshold, a visit is treacherous. At once invitation (you were asked here) and invasion (you penetrate a space), no visit is innocent. Indeed, the visit occupies a curious position in the realm of liminality: it can be programmed, yet remains unpredictable; it embraces an interior, yet retreats to its own exterior; it is bound in time, yet defies temporality.



Four bodies of work explore the nether regions of the visit, their orchestration and sequencing ushering us through a unique exploration that is bodily, visceral, even quietly violent. Yet Ghaddar eschews the literal. Increasingly, she is laying claim to an artistic language that is striking in its singularity. Although her thinking and gestures spring from a place of poetic fluidity, to call this language poetic would be to discount its raw strength, its potent immediacy. The Visit is a generous, multi-voiced testament to Ghaddar's undulating exploration of the liminal—an exploration that capsulizes an elusive elsewhere, the unreachable destination of our own visit.

Biography

Chafa Ghaddar (1986) was born in Lebanon and currently lives in Dubai, U.A.E. She graduated in Fine Arts from ALBA, Beirut and later attended an intensive course in fresco and traditional painting techniques in Florence, Italy. While developing a career in wall painting and surface finishing, she explores the use of fresco in contemporary practices as well as other processes, and works equally with murals, painting, drawing, photography and mixed media. She was awarded the Boghossian Art Prize for painting in 2014.

She executes murals in the professional and the contemporary art field and has participated in several collective exhibitions and projects such as "Exposure 2012" at Beirut Art Center, "On Fleeting Grounds" and "Nostalgic Imagery" at Galerie Janine Rubeiz, "Journeys through our Heritage" at Beirut Exhibition Center, "Works on Paper" and "Feminites Plurielles" at Galerie Tanit, and "Strata" in collaboration with a hypothetical office at Dubai Design Days, 2017.

She is currently developing a mural at the Safa public library in Dubai, as part of the A.I.R. Program 2017 and in collaboration with Art Dubai, Tashkeel and Dubai Cultural Authority.



GALERIE TANIT - BEYROUTH
Naila Kettaneh Kunigk



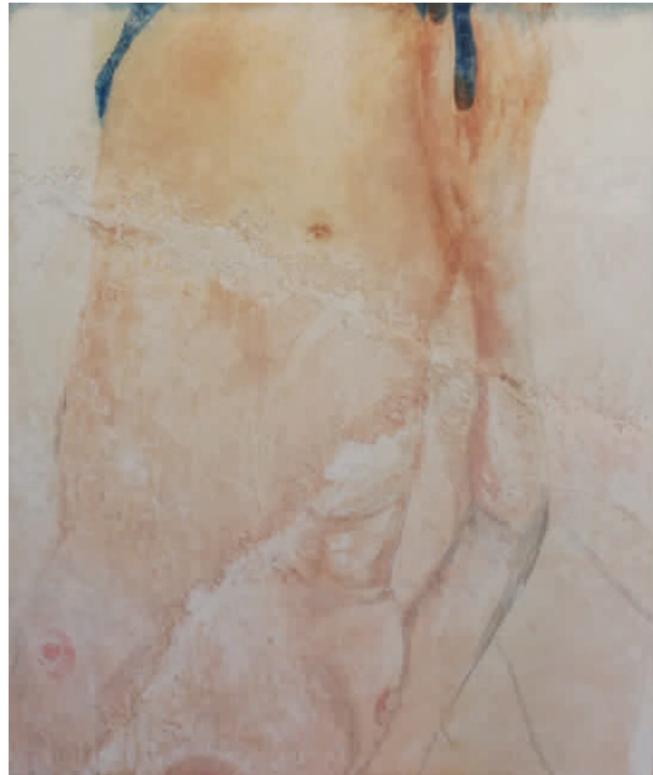
Every visit leaves a residue.

How can a blood red canvas be a landscape of drama and subtlety? Like "Cheminement," "Tissu" holds the residue of a pattern on its surface—a pattern that is overused to the point of exhaustion, emptied of function, blurred, reduced to near-vanishing. So far does it retreat away from the surface that the pattern seems intrinsic, as if it has emerged from within the threads, rather than being applied to them. It is hard to think of Red (2018), the flowing red swathe in the "Tissu" series, as a surface. It, too, is bodily. Glue, paint, fabric, canvas all collude in the birth of a drape of blood and skin, at once massive and fluid, malleable and yet imposing. Its unctuous folds could easily envelop us.



"Tissu" is Ghaddar at her most painterly, reveling in the process, almost lost in the gesture, inheriting the lineage of the so-called "action painters," yet with a stance more removed and purposeful. Deposits on these surfaces include the imprint of the lace, the strength of the impression determined by the pressure of the body as the artist leaned into the application, how easily the material shed resistance to absorb the oncoming ooze.

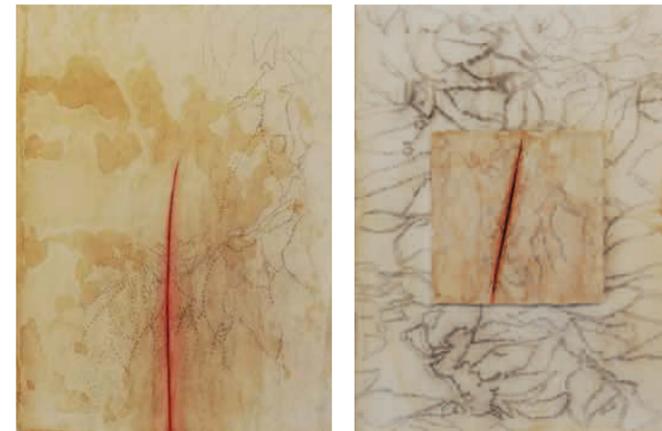
Time itself is residue in the giornate of the large-scale fresco work, Corps (2018), where the body, made evident by figuration, is still strangely abstracted by the very process that created it. Accidents of pigment, differences of shading, a rough, rasping, rocky surface—the central slanted line of the fresco seems to slice the figure asunder, a less bloody echo of the corporeal trauma of "Cheminement." In classical fresco technique, the giornata represents the work held in a day. But just as no day can be as before, the work bears the irregularity inflicted by time.



Ghaddar's fresco problematizes the fresco's already complex relationship with time still further. The fresco seems to be at once in the The Visit and yet out of it. Here we have a literal body, flattened yet twisting and escaping, shifting out of frame. It comes from another aesthetic universe, a more figurative one. But its cracked and chaotic facade is bound to time in ways that the surfaces of "Tissu" and "Cheminement" simply are not. This is the fiction of a body presented as a real one; yet the wounds, abstracted, seem to frame a kind of visceral reality, a document of what could have happened.



The visit ushers in an elsewhere.



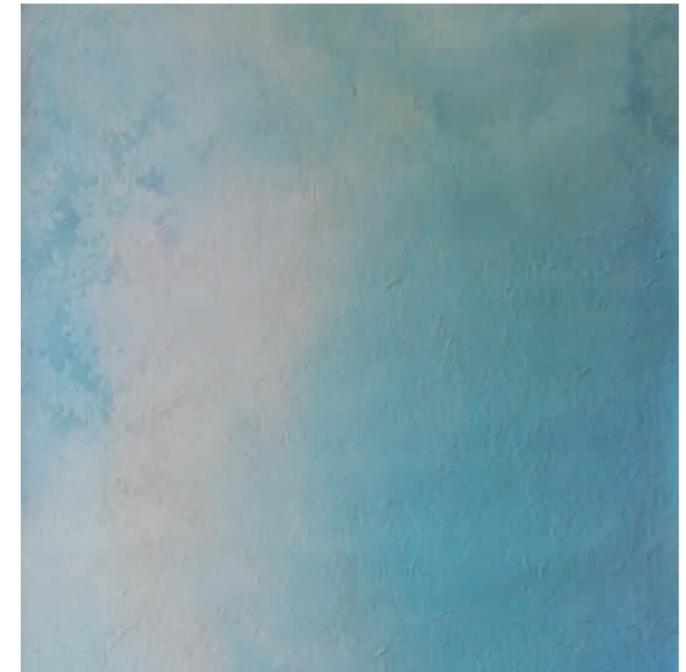
If the threshold is a membrane, the gash is a portal. These cavities in "Cheminement" are like passages to some beyond, a slit through which another dimension rustles. Just as you penetrated into the decontextualized, suspended space of the gallery, so, too, are you beckoned to be ejected from it. The visit makes us into intruders, whether we are invited or not.



Nowhere is the uneasy lure of the elsewhere more evident than in "Pool." The domineering metallic cobalt blue plank surprises by its harsh geometry. Banished from its language are the fleshy sheets, the blood-soft drape. From the space of the body and its latent trauma, we are poised on an unknowable dreamscape that practically projects us beyond this physical moment.



Elsewhere, cottony cloud-like blue fields seem to breathe, behaving almost like a reflective surface, a nod to the aqueous receptacle of the series' title.



More than simply evoking an elsewhere, Ghaddar actually attempts to hold it, to capture it. The oblique beams of sunlight regularly invading the gallery—crystallizing everything the artist has unpacked in her fathoming of the visit—never leave a trace. By creating the site specific work 2018(12:45), floor-bound plaster/acrylic strips that mount onto the wall, Ghaddar tries to coincide the outside (elusive nature) with an inside (a patch of gallery) that is itself shape-shifting as it transforms with each show. The here-and-now, the artist seems to imply, is itself an illusion.

The threshold summons. But is any visit really ever concluded? Doesn't every visit bear in it the kernel of a return, or the promise of a reenactment? While the residue left by the visitor is obvious, what is less so is the inverse path. Instead of imagining the impact of the visit, think, rather, how the visitor is altered.