

Exploring surfaces to another world

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BEIRUT: “The Visit,” the latest exhibition at Galerie Tanit by Chafa Ghaddar, blends contemporary art practices and fresco techniques in a series of 23 abstract paintings.

Separated into sections, it presents her “Cheminement” works, which are flesh-toned with a red slash suggesting wounds; her “Tissu” section, involving lace patterns; and a few standalone pieces in blood red and pastel blue. All the works were created this year.

“The show is called ‘The Visit’ as a direct exploration and I wanted to represent a state of in-between or liminality because I’m interested in liminality as a notion,” Ghaddar told The Daily Star, “the experience of the viewer and the space where you’re at the threshold of skin, space or the edge of something that will happen or has already happened.”

Born in 1986 and currently living in Dubai, the Lebanese artist has developed her career in mural and surface painting over the years.

These ideas explored in this series have been recurrent in her previous works, especially the pieces dealing with skin as a malleable surface.

“If liminality is what I want to experience and explore, that it should be the subject,” she said.

“In order to build it, I went into the works on paper and into the notion of skin, which is something dynamic, porous, has movement, can be stretched and manifest time in so many different ways.

“This is why many of my works have human qualities, like the idea of wounds,” she said, referencing “Cheminement #6,” which features a parchment-hued square with a red gash cutting through it, against a leaf-like pattern. “It’s not represented as something relating to pain, but because it [wounds] suggests different temporalities and ... that something has happened, [it] has ambiguity and is a portal through skin, as a disruption to a surface.”

The lace pieces in the “Tissu” section are influenced by her childhood and her feelings of home, which led to her interest in mural practices. Many are painted in warm burgundy or coral colors, with lace either printed on the surface or stuck to the paint.

“[Lace] has the quality of coming from an interior because this ornament has a decorative pattern and it relates to a space,” she said. “It could be a room, a house or a hotel something with a domestic quality which is why I kept it very consistent, exhausted or overlaid differently, but still related to skin in a blurred way these ideas of home and material almost imprinting on your skin.”

The only figurative piece is a fresco-style work titled “Corps,” depicting an upside-down nude female body, faintly painted.

“Fresco suggests, in its phenomena as a technique, different temporality,” she said. “It’s a work of construction and you have to work while the surface is fresh and you get an excellent stability of pigment because of the natural chemical reaction.

“At the same time is it represented nowadays as a ruined surface with the fall of the skin in old frescos, so I like how as a contemporary human being we always look at them with a duality,” she added.

“It’s a mural practice but also painting and is meant to live in cities ... you have to let go of control.

“If you have charcoal on your hand and it smudges, then don’t be surprised if the next day it’s stable on the surface.”

Ghaddar’s next project will be painted onto the walls of Dubai’s Safa Library. She hopes to complete it in the coming year.

The library “used to be a typical architecture from the ’70s and they turned it into something extremely contemporary and sharp, almost like a white cube,” she said. Her mural will “suggest a negotiation between the surfaces of the old and the new and will be in blue, to representing a portal and temporarily.”

“The Visit” is up at Galerie Tanit, Mar Mikhael until Jan. 12, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.