



*Le Violon Bleu*

Contemporary Art Galleries

## Meriem Bouderbala: Universe

17 May – 10 July 2008

“Universe” is a series of paintings by the Tunisian contemporary artist Meriem Bouderbala, presented for the first time by Le Violon Bleu London.

Le Violon Bleu would like to thank the Tunisian Embassy for their support in the organisation of the exhibition.

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# Preface

Le Violon Bleu was established in Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia in 2004 and rapidly built a significant presence as a leader in the field of contemporary North African and Middle Eastern Art. The gallery was also the first to bring renowned international artists to Tunisia. In 2007 Le Violon Bleu extended its reach to London and opened a gallery on Maddox Street, Mayfair.

Le Violon Bleu London has brought the contemporary artistic influences of its Tunisian base and the surrounding Arab countries to the London market, and re-contextualised them amongst a number of other international artists. The gallery is proud to represent a distinctive choice of established and emerging international artists which include Arman, Sacha Sosno, Farid Belkahia, Julio Pomar, Lucille Marcotte, Abderrazek Sahli and Valeria Nascimento.

The gallery's artistic selection prioritises finding contemporary art that delivers an innovative message, and attempts something unique through process or practice. For example Arman; the author of accumulation, colère and coupé, is the inspiration behind the gallery name and logo.

Furthermore the gallery exhibits a variety of artistic methods including sculptural and painted compositions which make use of ceramics, bronze and mixed media. Le Violon Bleu is thus a creative environment, provoking new dialogues between artists and for international contemporary art in general.

Le Violon Bleu is particularly interested in promoting and encouraging its artists to evolve and develop their work for exhibition within the gallery space. Meriem Bouderbala has produced the following series of work; 'Universe', specifically for Le Violon Bleu, offering the gallery and the artist the opportunity to design and curate the exhibition reciprocally.

## Introduction: “une fenêtre sur le chaos”

Meriem Bouderbala's artwork permits a visceral aesthetic indulgence. The sumptuous colours and carefully planned symmetry afford Meriem's work a captivating poetry and spirituality. However, beauty is not the only message that her artwork projects; Meriem's artistic influences are theoretically and practically extensive.

Philosophically Meriem's artwork points towards the joyous and celebratory potential of mankind and his ability to fulfil spiritual enlightenment through art and culture. But her work also contains the dormant possibility of social critique and the necessity for perpetual reflection. On a technical level Meriem's art is inspired by the structural and organic world. An enthusiasm for processes in architecture and techniques such as origami have led her to produce carefully articulated assemblages and painting techniques. Her artistic materials are frequently explorative including the use of textiles such as voiles and cottons and her painted surfaces include the use of tissues and silks.

Meriem's work frequently tackles complex issues of femininity, culture and religion, exploring both her own concerns and also expanding the conceptual field of contemporary art. Previous works have explored the artistic production of the naked form as it affects different viewing cultures, and the use of the female head scarf in the Arab world. Meriem is particularly interested in the potential of “minority art” and the importance of creativity and uniqueness in contemporary art production. She strives to produce artworks that challenge current contemporary trends and explore new aesthetic possibilities in design and presentation; these prerogatives are seminal to Le Violon Bleu's presentation of “Universe”.

"Universe" is a series of fifteen artworks which have been commissioned and curated for Le Violon Bleu London. Each canvas explores notions of infinity, cosmology, space and the attendant ideas of a religious or spiritual presence. Each piece in the series is presented as a form of map, and many pieces are made up of silk paper upon which early maps were printed. The map is both physical and theoretical as it appears at once as an ariel view of Earth, whilst also indicating the viewing field of a religious entity, judging humankind from above. Meriem's use of mixed media gives the surface a three dimensional terrain.

The colours in each canvas are partly inspired by Meriem's homeland Tunisia, in which the artworks are produced. Her distinctive blues are a feature of the homes in the nearby area of Sidi Bou Said, where each house has painted blue doors and windows. Similarly, white represents the whitewashing of the exterior walls of homes throughout Tunisia. Meriem's colours are thus personal and indicate an attachment to land and home. The rich purple colour visible in each canvas represents the infinity of the sky, and the wider cosmos. The colour is intended to be luxuriant; inspiring happiness and relaxation.

Within each painting symmetry and pattern is omnipresent. Glancing quickly it is possible to see symbols and figures within the media. This is a seminal part of the series for Meriem, who is inspired by Arabic art, which restricts the overt use of faces and bodies. Meriem considers this cultural tradition to contain immense beauty, and a number of the works within the series can be seen to contain abstract images of man and woman. Also central to each work are the strips of mirror, these lend each piece the ephemeral quality of "universe", they cause a constant transition and blurring which keep each painting in perpetual movement. The viewer is confronted by the constantly changing identity of each canvas. Light and environmental conditions cast each painting in a variety of ways, for Meriem this is precisely the essence of universe.

"Universe" attempts an illusive task through the power of aesthetic enlightenment, and offers an audience the brief possibility of reflecting on humanity and reaching outwards into the spiritual world of the unknown. Meriem considers her work to be a physicalisation of the ephemeral, "une fenêtre sur le chaos" : "a window through chaos".

## La lumière comme un chant dans la nuit minérale

Chaque toile est une fenêtre sur le chaos.

J'ai voulu des arrangements, des assemblages de blocs d'espace, des ruptures et des surgissements tracés au miroir dans la toile, des géométries de plans ordonnés en structures spatiales.

Se deviner naissant dans le chaos originaire toujours déjà là, à peine plus qu'une vibration de l'air, une illusion d'être se déroband aussitôt que saisie. Un visible qui appelle les invisibles et leurs chants.

Meriem Bouderbala

## The light, like a song in the essence of the night

Each canvas is a window unto the chaos.

I wanted the arrangements and assemblages on the canvas to be specifically arranged according to space; this explains the ruptures and sudden appearances of mirror on the canvas. The spaces follow a geometrical structure.

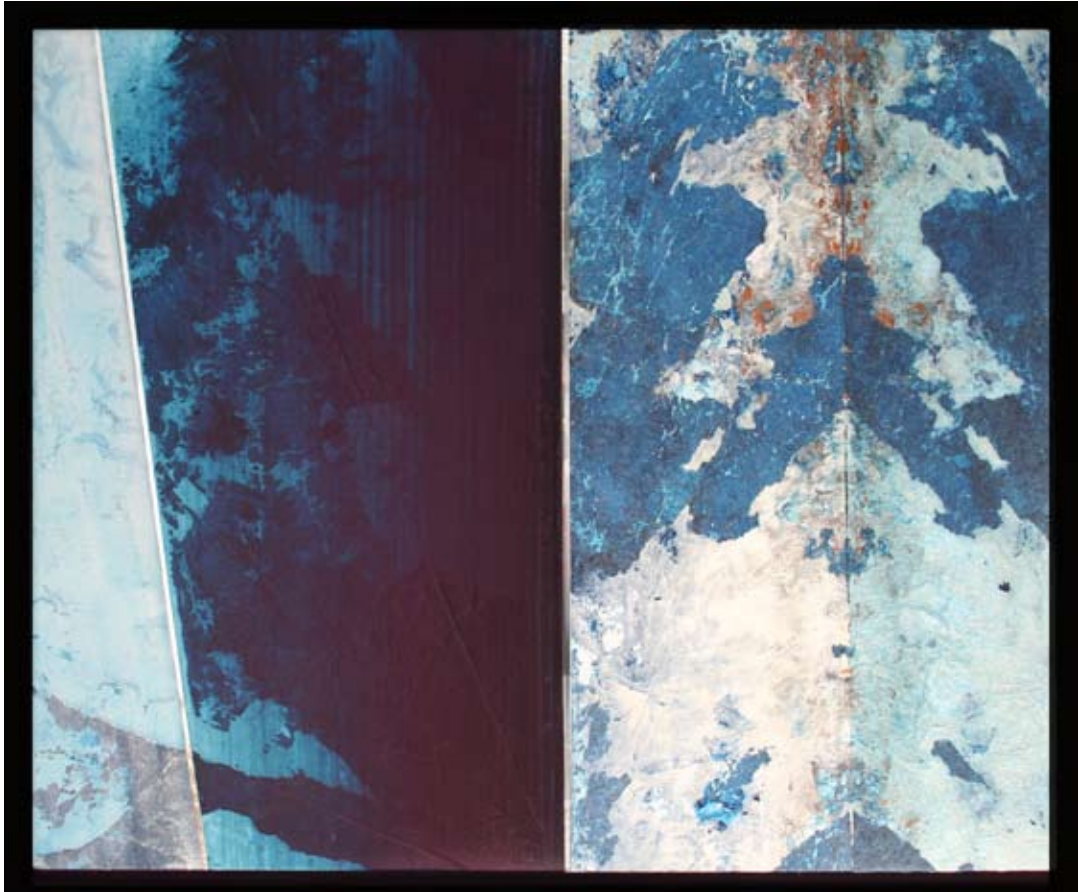
I feel that the work of art is always already brought into existence by the inherent chaos, although it is hardly more than a quiver, or a vibration in the air, an illusion that slips away the moment we try to catch it. It is a visible entity which attracts the invisible and its songs.

Meriem Bouderbala





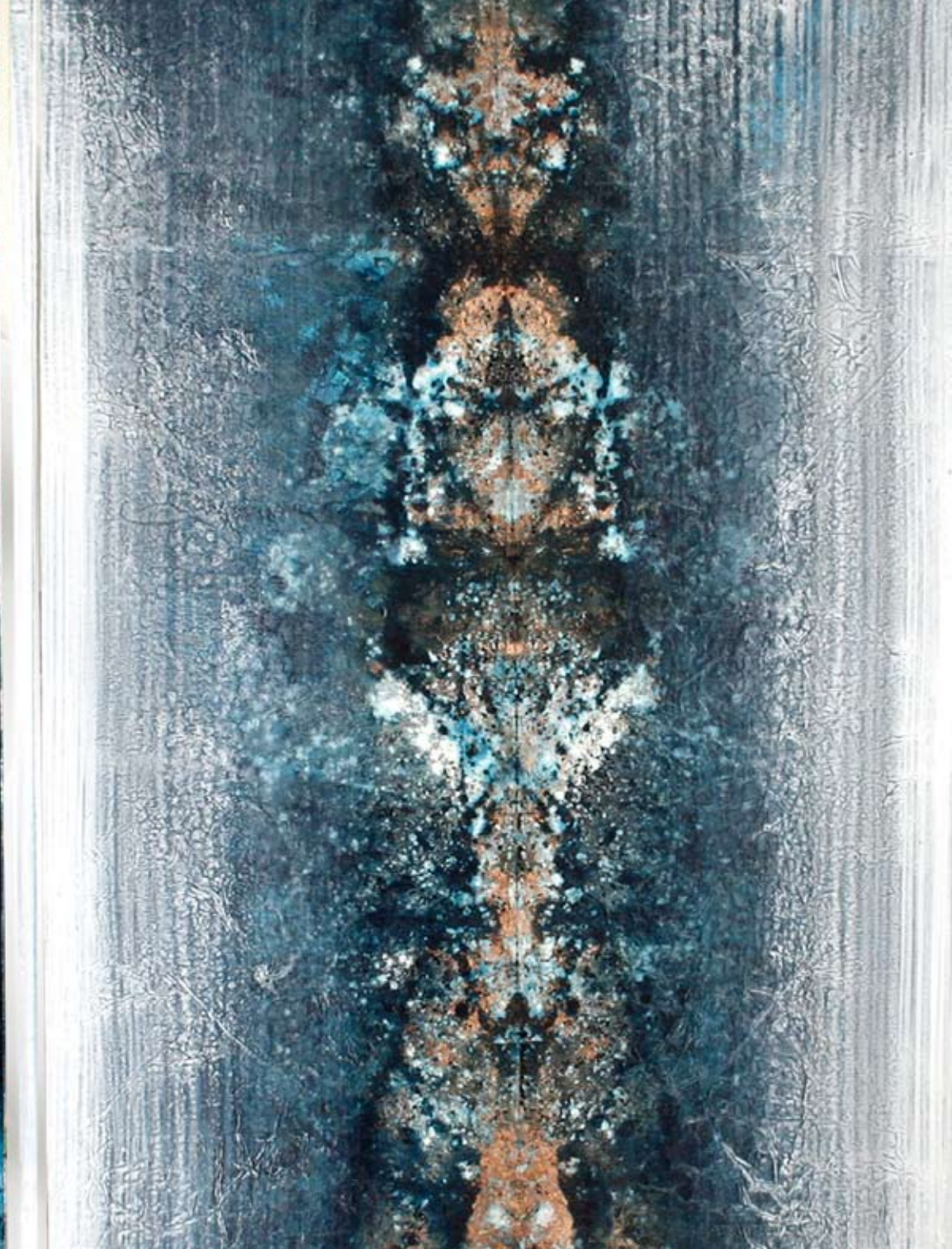




Untitled  
Mixed Media on Canvas  
92 h. x 116 w. cm  
(2008)





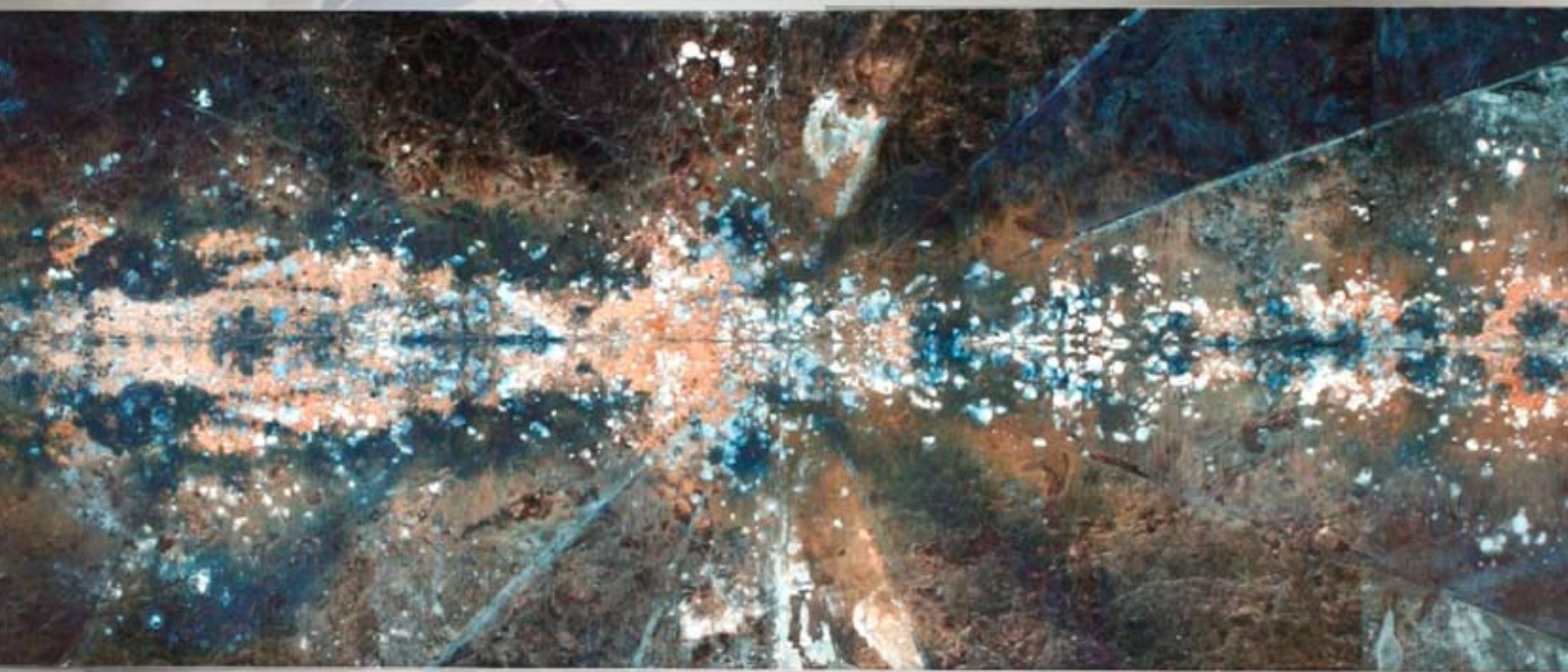


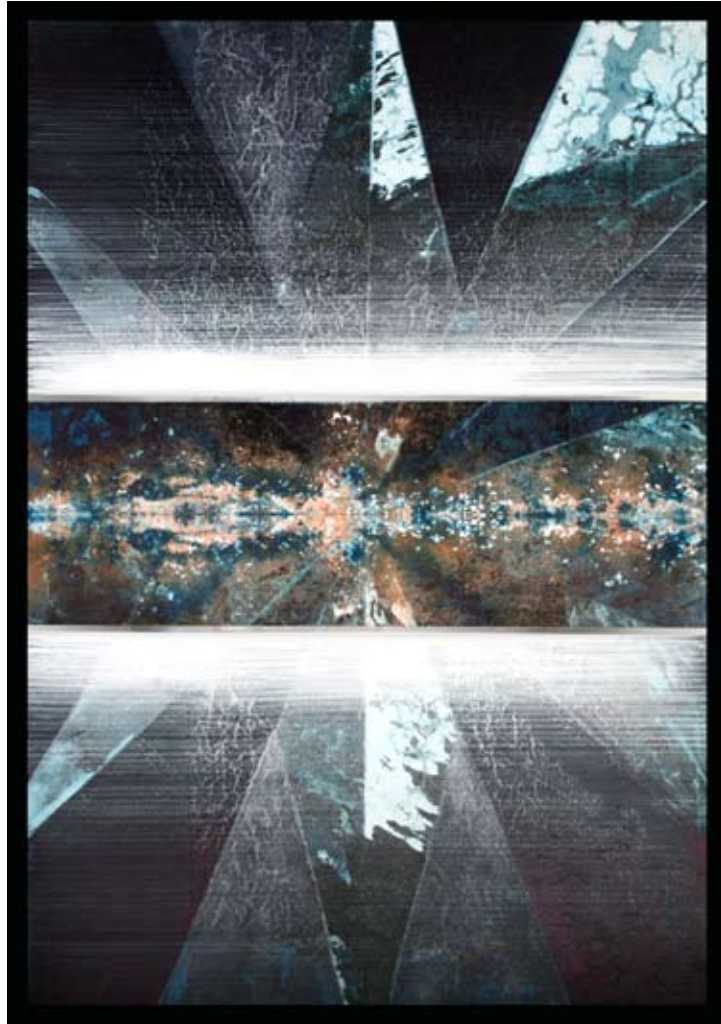


Untitled  
Mixed Media on Canvas  
126 h. x 141 w. cm  
(2008)





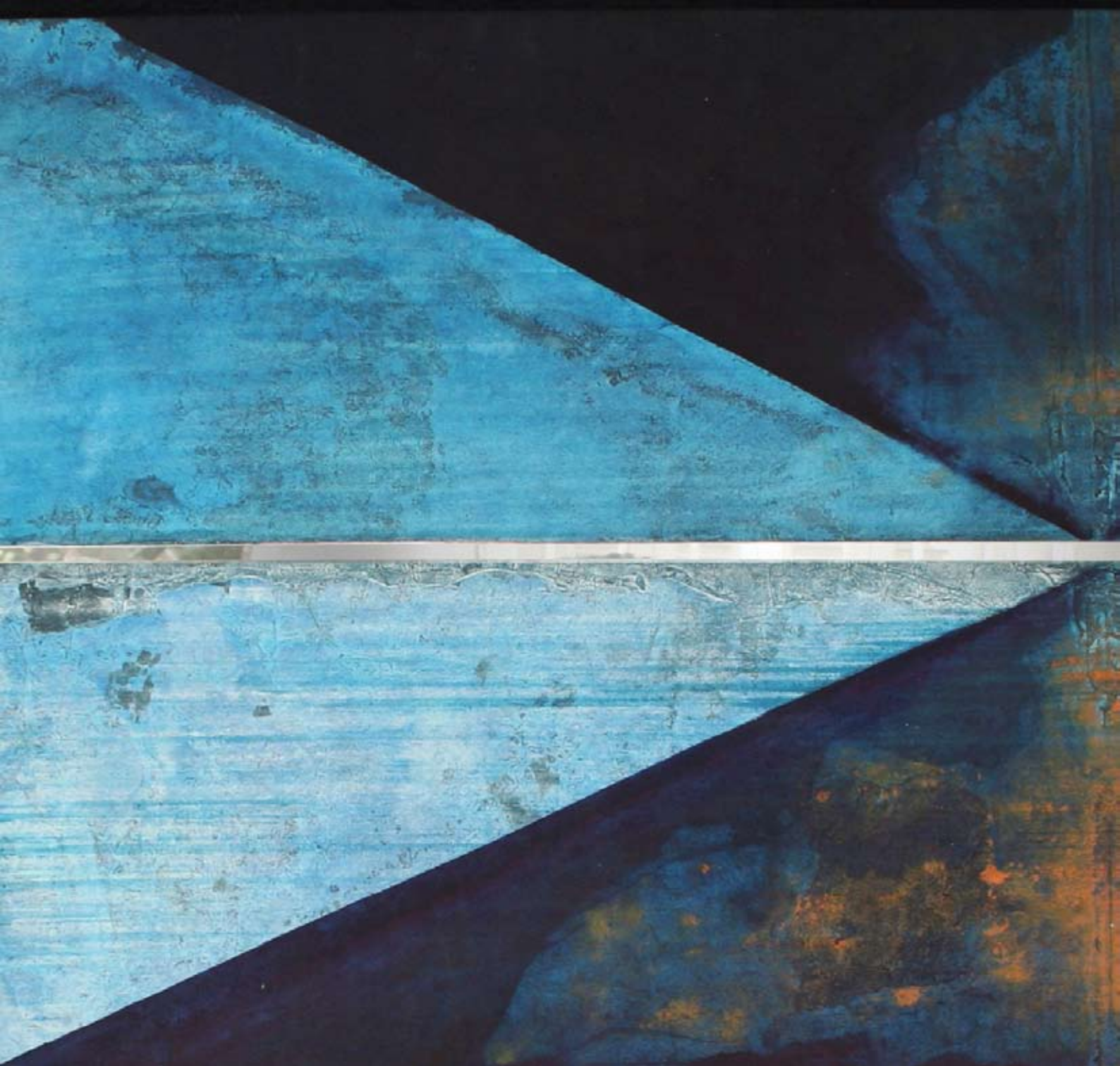




Untitled  
Mixed Media on Canvas  
193 h. x 137 w. cm  
(2008)









Untitled  
Mixed Media on Canvas  
98 h. x 91 w. cm  
(2008)



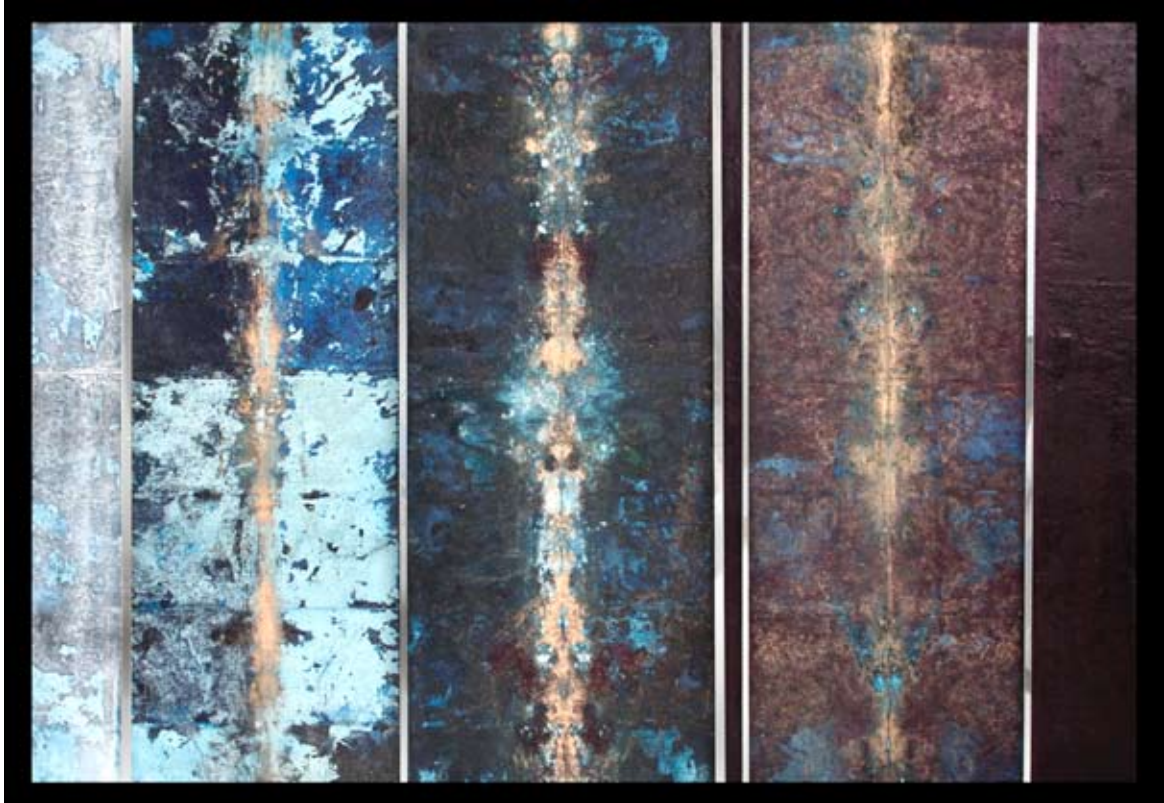






Untitled  
Mixed Media on Canvas  
110 h. x 125 w. cm  
(2008)





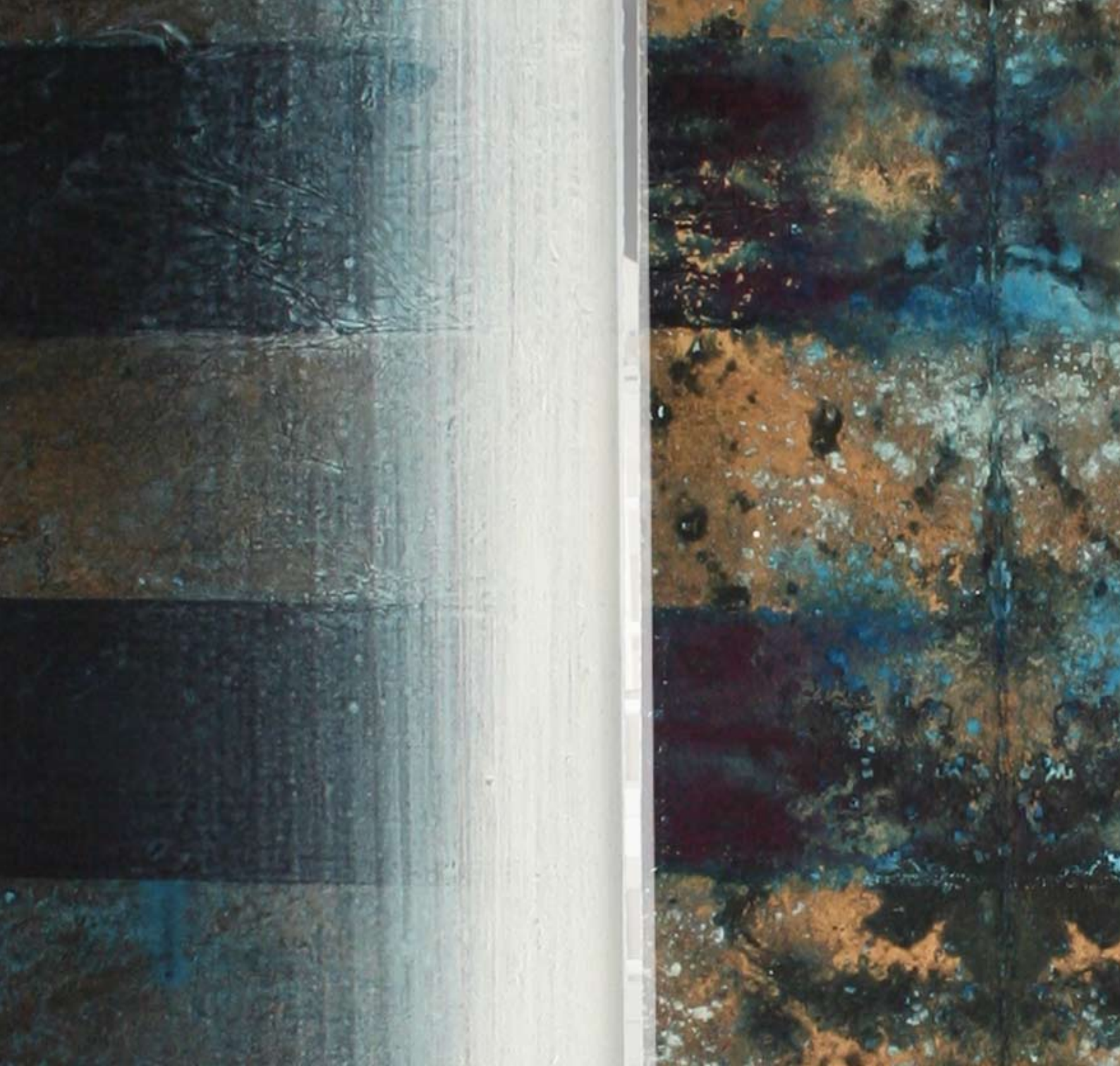




Untitled  
Mixed Media on Canvas  
86 h. x 126 w. cm  
(2008)









Untitled  
Mixed Media on Canvas  
172 h. x 90 w. cm  
(2008)







## Meriem Bouderbala Biography

Meriem Bouderbala was born in Tunisia. She studied painting and engraving at the school of Beaux-arts in Provence from 1980 to 1985 and completed a national diploma in the arts. Meriem moved to London in 1986 to study engraving at the Chelsea School of Art.

Since 1986 Meriem has exhibited her artwork frequently in both France and Tunisia; including exhibitions of her veils in Lyon (Galerie Olivier Houg, Lyon, 1998). In Tunisia Meriem has exhibited her work a number of times both in Sidi Bou Said and central Tunis. Group exhibitions have taken her as far as Washington where she participated in an exhibition of Women in the Arts at the Museum of Women (1994) and at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Lisbon. Meriem continues to exhibit her work widely and a number of pieces can now be seen as part of the permanent collection of the Arab world Institute in Paris.

Meriem's work has received wide recognition and she has won a number of prizes and important commissions. In 1993 she won the prize for best artist at 'Art Junction International' in Cannes and in 1997 the 'Espace Paul Ricard 1997' prize. Meriem has completed a number of public commissions for the Tunisian Minister of culture, ELF Fondation (Paris), the Arab World Institute (Paris) and the French Institute of Cooperation (Tunis). Her work has also appeared as illustration in a number of books including the poems of Tita Reut.

Meriem has been important to the development of contemporary art and theory in both Tunisia and North Africa and has played a conscious role in supporting and diversifying its reach. In 2003 she became a representative and organizer of a group for contemporary art in the Medina of Tunis. In 2006 Meriem became a commissioner for the Tunisian Party and advocated the exploration of North African and Middle Eastern art. She also participated in the opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Algeria in 2007.

Meriem's work is theoretically conditioned by her passion to explore and exploit the potential of 'minority art', or contemporary art that works outside of traditional schools of thought. For Meriem Tunisia is advantageously free from the restraints in contemporary art that have effected other southern Mediterranean areas. She feels that the Tunisian art scene is still exploring and weaving an artistic identity, which produces a fertile contemporary art dynamic. Today Meriem lives and works between Paris and Tunisia, and believes this multiple membership of the two communities to have a central influence on her work.

In their physicality, Meriem's artworks explore a multiplicity of themes including femininity, chaos and culture. They each seek to build a bridge of understanding amongst themes of chaos. Her artworks represent a method for conceptualising difficult or impossible subjects. She uses many mediums including textiles, with a focus on natural products such as water, sand, powders and metal. Her palette is explorative, using rust and natural dyes, supported by the use of varied papers and canvases.

## Solo Exhibitions

- 2008: "Universe" Le Violon Bleu, London, UK
- 2007: Galerie Amar Farhat, Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia.
- 2003: "Etoffes cutanées" Galerie Amar Farhat, Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia.
- 2001: "Hamam", Galerie Amar Farhat, Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia.
- "Dissolution" Galerie Alain Couturier, Nice, France.
- Performance "Ostention" Eglise Saint François de Paul, Nice, France.
- 1999: "Zaouias" Galerie Amar Farhat, Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia.
- 1998: "L'étoffe des cauchemars" Galerie Olivier Houg, Lyon, France.
- "Visions d'une grande peste" Espace Paul Ricard, Paris, France.
- 1996: "Oeil noir" Galerie Médina, Tunis, Tunisia.
- 1994: "Il écrivait du doigt sur le sable..." Galerie J. Mercuri, Paris, France.
- 1993: "Eclipse" Galerie Lola Gassin, Nice, France.
- "Tohu Va Vohu" and "Le Monde de L'Art" Galerie Le Monde de l'Art, Paris, France.
- 1992: Galerie Vecchia, Bastia.
- 1991: "Epreuve" Galerie Keller, Paris, France.

## Group Exhibitions

- 2001: "Carthage et l'art contemporain" Tunisian Ministry of Culture, Tunisia.
- 2000: "Oliviers" Universal Exhibition Hanover 2000, Hanover, Germany.
- 1998: "Invitation to Love" Bedroom Gallery-Bathroom Gallery, SKALL, Paris, France.
- 1997: "Je ne quitterai jamais mes amis" Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt, Paris, France.  
"Jeune Peinture" Salon, Paris, France.

1996: Permanent Collection of the Arab World Institute, Paris, France.  
"Chassé-croisé... Peintres Tunisiens et européens au XXème siècle" Exhibition highlighting the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, Palais Kheredine Pacha, Tunis, Tunisia.

1995: "Tunisie: regard sur l'art contemporain" Espace Ecureuil, Toulouse, France.  
International Fair of Contemporary Art, Galerie J. Mercuri, Strasbourg, France.  
"Tunisie: regard sur l'art contemporain" Arab World Institute, Paris, France.

1994: "Women in the Arts" National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, USA.  
"La Méditerranée a du talent" French Cultural Centre, Casablanca, Morocco.  
"Autour de la Méditerranée" Galerie Lola Gassin, Cannes, France.

1993: "Art Jonction International" Galerie Lola Gassin, Cannes, France.  
"Méditerranée, jeux de lumières" Museum l'Ephèbe, Cap d'Agde, France.  
"Découvertes de Charles Juliet" Contemporary Art Centre, Lacoux, France.  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Lisbon, Spain.

1990: S.A.G.A., Grand Palais, Galerie Keller, Paris, France.

1989: "Z'Edition" International Fair of Art Editors, Grand Palais, Paris, France.  
Galerie Alain Oudin, Paris, France.  
"Les Ex d'Aix" Vasarely Fondation, Aix-en-Provence, France.

1988: ARCO, Galerie Lola Gassin, Madrid, Spain.

"Les femmes dans les arts plastiques" Grand Palais, Paris, France.  
"Les Niçois" Regional fund for Contemporary Art, Marseilles, France.  
Museum of Bastia, Citta del Arte, Bastia, France.

1987: "Art Jonction International" Galerie Lola Gassin, Nice, France.  
"Identité, Modernité" Galerie Monique Sarradet, Carcassonne, France.

1986: "Art-Venir" Espace Sextius, Aix-en-Provence, France.  
Tenth Biennale of Mediterranean Contemporary Art, U.M.A.M., Nice, France.