

The background is a full-page abstract watercolor wash. It features a variety of organic, flowing shapes in shades of pink, magenta, peach, and light yellow. The colors are layered and blended, creating a soft, ethereal, and textured effect. The overall composition is non-representational and visually soothing.

DOREEN EL ZEIN
WAKING WORLD

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Waking World

What
a high window.

The sea
licks
caves.

You see the problem,
in world making
is the world.

Diving beauties,
the underworlds'
hot insides.

In the world-making of Doreen El Zein, apparently peaceful shapes morph easily towards form, but rarely reach a recognisable state. A fluid translucence pervades, unconcerned by shifts in colour and tone, guided rather by changes in temperature, the swaying depths of warmth and cold.

Looking out to the rooftops of the Beirut skyline from her Clemenceau studio, El Zein is a person at peace, or at rest. Yet, one feels she can surprise herself with what emerges from her brush, from this place. Resolutely composed, she takes the viewer with her as she roves in an underworld of her own making, cool blues and purples twist around warm reds, orange, yellow, her paintings recognisably dream-like, liminal landscapes.

A contrast begins to emerge, a movement between warm and cool, the spaces she shapes between fire and water, fires that burn at the base or the centre, licking the edges of caves and watery hollows.

Zein's gentle painterly expression is tempered by the intensity of contrast, and reveals its depth over time, through looking and allowing spaces to exist inside and around each other, and through this gaining a sense of her process. If her gift is in the continual morphing of form, the unending wonder of what a form might reach, she comes to terms with her peace in the relationship with intensity, the darkness inside the light.

What water quenches those fires, or refuses to let them die, what peace is disturbed by muted, mutable darkness.

The world is on fire, it's what we hear, literally and metaphorically, it's what we hear, what we know.

Increasingly, one feels, Zein's world is on fire, her peace no longer fully contained in her watery world.

The intensity that emerges is strong, and yet retains its mutability, its resistance to form. Here is fire, a tree that might yet be the skull of an animal, and over there a purple shadow snakes towards the edge of a canvas. There may be darkness in these forms, but Zein's darkness retains the same amorphous quality as her light. This almost equivalence between light and dark is an unusual quality. While the confusion of light is somehow familiar – its watery transformation is known - to retain this translucent clarity within the encroaching fire and the darkness, this is something to notice. There is a hope in the continually transforming darkness, as much as there is in the light.

What
a high window.

Resistance
amorphous
light.

Amy Todman
Beirut, January 2026





Mixed Media on canvas | 120 x 120 cm | 2025



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Mixed Media on canvas | 100x100cm | 2025



Mixed media on canvas | 100 x 100 cm | 2025



Mixed Media on canvas | 120 x 120 cm | 2025



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About Doreen El Zein

Doreen El Zein (Born in Beirut), graduated from the Beirut University College (Lebanese American University) in 1982 with a degree in Fine Arts. She continued her studies in art at the Byam Shaw School of Arts (Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design) in London, where she lived for the next fifteen years.

Beginning her career in special paint effects and furniture finishing, her work has evolved to include painting and sculpture in mixed media with a focus on paintings developed through densely layered multi-media washes that at times give way to transparent overlapping veils of colour expressing her inner world.

She held her first solo exhibition at Agial Art Gallery in Beirut in 2017 and has participated in various group exhibitions including Visual Art Forum, Unesco Palace (2016); Lebanese American University Fine Arts Alumni Biennale, Beirut, Lebanon (2016); Prolekult, American University of Beirut, Beirut Lebanon, 2016; Vento d Oriente, Venice Italy, 2016; Rebirth of a Nation, Beirut Exhibition Center (2015); International Women's Day, Haigazian University Art Center, Beirut, Lebanon (2013); Hamazkayin Gallery (2012, 2016); Schizzo gallery, Beirut, Lebanon (2014) and Rochane art gallery, Beirut, Lebanon (2012). Her work is held in a number of private collections.



