

The background is an abstract painting with a very thick, impasto texture. It features a range of blue tones, from deep navy and teal to lighter, almost white, areas where the paint has been applied more thinly or where it has dried and cracked. There are also patches of green and yellowish-white, particularly on the right side and bottom. The overall effect is one of intense physicality and organic, almost geological, forms.

**HALA MOUZANNAR**

La chasse aux papillons



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## The “Hole”-ness of Being

Autoimmune diseases are rife in our contemporary world: MS, Lupus, Psoriasis, Cystitis, Rheumatoid Arthritis (to name but a few). They are not contagious, but they afflict greater numbers of people in times of social crisis. In the last few months alone—most palpably after the August 4 explosion in Lebanon (to say nothing of the rest of the world) and amid a continuously worsening economic crisis—it seems that these rather new and peculiar maladies have vitiated whole swathes of the population. Autoimmune diseases are historically specific to (late) capitalist modernity. On a basic level, they are symptoms of our highly innervated experience within unprecedentedly speedy times. Their prevalence and indeterminacy point to the untenable separation of physical disorders and chronic pain from emotional distress; that is, to the impossible chasm between body and psyche.

Hala Mouzannar, whose pain(ting) precedes recent crises, gives prominence in her work to the materiality, and vicissitudes, of the flesh. She dwells on the material surface of her canvases, creating tears, crusts, and chutes from the manipulation of a mélange of stone powder, silicon, latex, gauze, and oils. Her series of works are grouped according to technique: *déchirure*, *dégradation*, *petit couteau*, *grand couteau*, *chute*, *plaie*, *peau*, *gaze*, and *texture*. In her practice, technique becomes a rubric for the work’s conceptualization and reception. The formation of differently textured surfaces, in a range of exuberant and at times corporeal colors, invokes in the viewer visceral bodily sensations of both (interested) pleasure and perturbation.

It is uncomfortable—if not wholly discomfiting or disturbing—to confront her work. This is not simply because we are reminded as viewers of our imperfect and ailing bodies (that we are not floating heads). It is rather that her work confronts us with the literal wound of our being—the cut that is constitutive of our existence. It is instructive here to remember Freud’s claim that affect (unlike an idea or memory) is not repressed. It is displaced and remains on the surface. In Mouzannar’s artwork, this displacement serves as the guiding metaphor.

Her work, however, is not an invitation to reconcile affect with a supposedly corresponding idea—in other words, to “remedy” a psychical issue underlying physical pain; to resolve form with content. It offers no cure, though as viewers, we are doubtlessly tempted to cover up the “hole” with which we are presented by calling the work beautiful (thus making it, and ourselves, “whole”). It is perhaps only art that has the capacity to reveal to us glimpses of our lack. Hala Mouzannar’s work creates the conditions to prompt such encounters.



## Chasing Butterflies

“For things as for souls, the mystery is inside. A reverie of intimacy—of an intimacy which is always human—opens up for the man who enters into the mysteries of matter.”

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*

The matter and material I create is at times rough, dusty or sandy, and at other times tormented and even torn. It is at the same time icy, sometimes even transparent and even fragile. This research into materials and textures expresses sensations that we feel when we suffer in our bodies.

As part of a generation that witnessed a panorama of violence in its youth, I interrogate trauma and pain not only as objects but as dynamics of power. In my work, skin has very rapidly imposed itself as a manipulable object capable of exploring this problematic. Skin becomes a metaphoric battlefield of the psyche, or of the process of injury, healing, and necrosis that itself echoes psychological dynamics.

The execution of my work is particular in that it extends over several weeks. I work many canvases at the same time and horizontally. As days go by, layers of paint, latex, varnish, and oils are superimposed on the canvases. I then manipulate them, zone after zone, creating heteroclitic islets of textures inspired by the reaction of organic tissue to trauma. As the layers I apply progressively dry, I interact with the painted material as if I were touching skin—or shaping it. I create wrinkles and tears and I exaggerate a bit the effect of gravity that our bodies undergo with the wear of time. The canvases patiently await the pain to metamorphose in them.

Ultimately, my aim is to spark a conversation between the (pain)ting and the viewer: pain is sometimes triumphant (overflowing and invading space) and sometimes controlled (discreet and even adulatory). I want to show the ambivalence and the different nuances of our relationship to our pains—when they dominate us, or inversely, when we master them. My paintings rest doubly on the passing of time: the time I spend working on each work and the time our bodies—and above all our souls—need to mend their wounds.

Hala Mouzannar, 2021







Déchirure n.1  
Oil on canvas | 90 x 110 cm | 2018



Déchirure n.2  
Oil on canvas | 90 x 110 cm | 2018





Déchirure n.3  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2018



Degradation n.1: Dégradation  
Oil on canvas | 80 x 60 cm | 2018





Degradation n.2: Aggradation  
Oil on canvas | 80 x 60 cm | 2018



Degradation n.3: Regradation  
Oil on canvas | 80 x 60 cm | 2018





Petit couteau n.1  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2018



Petit couteau n.2  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2018



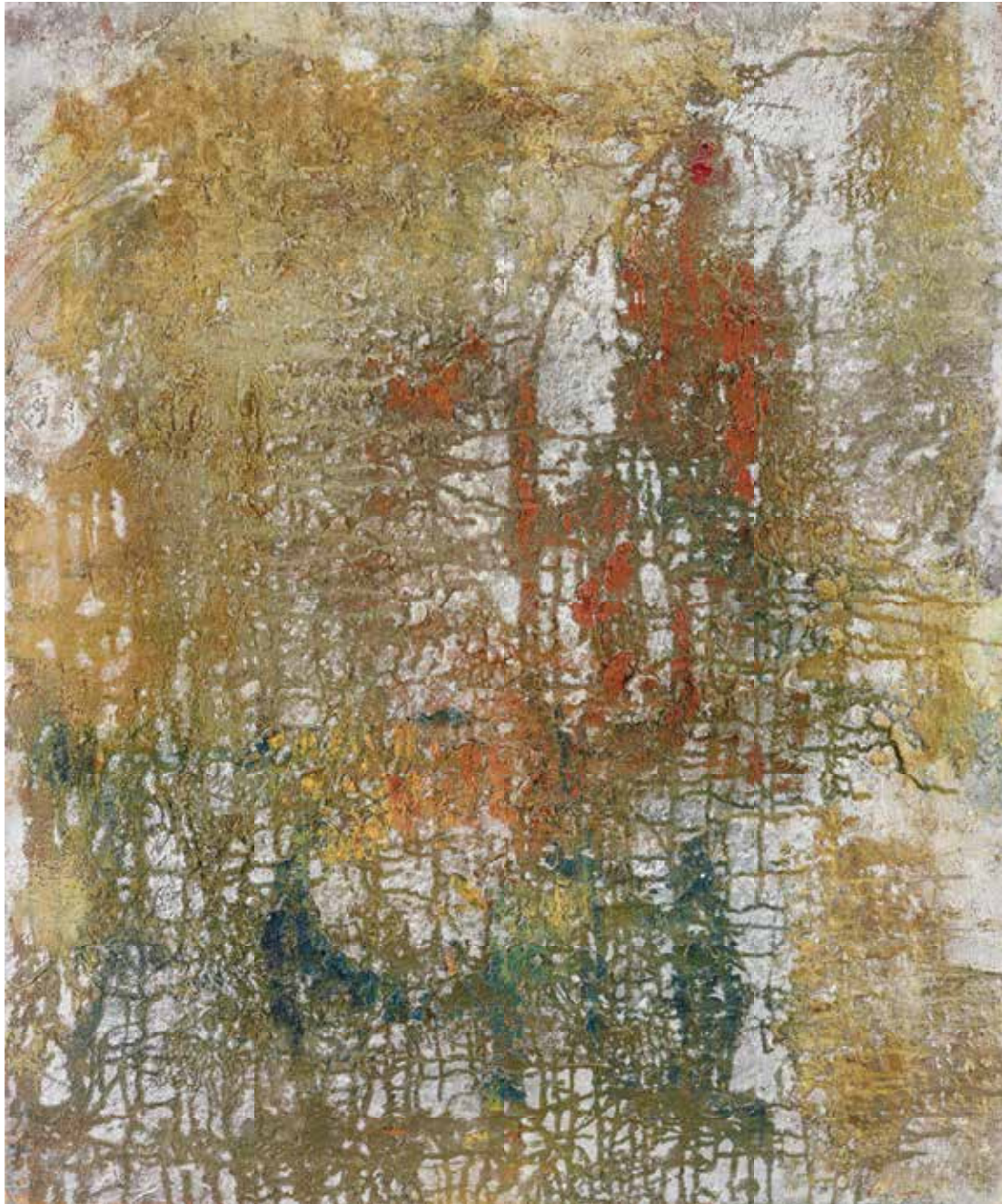


Petit couteau n.3  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2018



Grand couteau n.1  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2017





Grand couteau n.2  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2017



Traces du Passé  
Oil on canvas | 100 x 80 cm | 2019





Chute n.1  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2019



Chute n.2  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2019





Chute n.3  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2019



Chute n.4  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2019





Chute n.4  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2019

[Detail ►](#)







Plaie n.1: Sercine  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2021

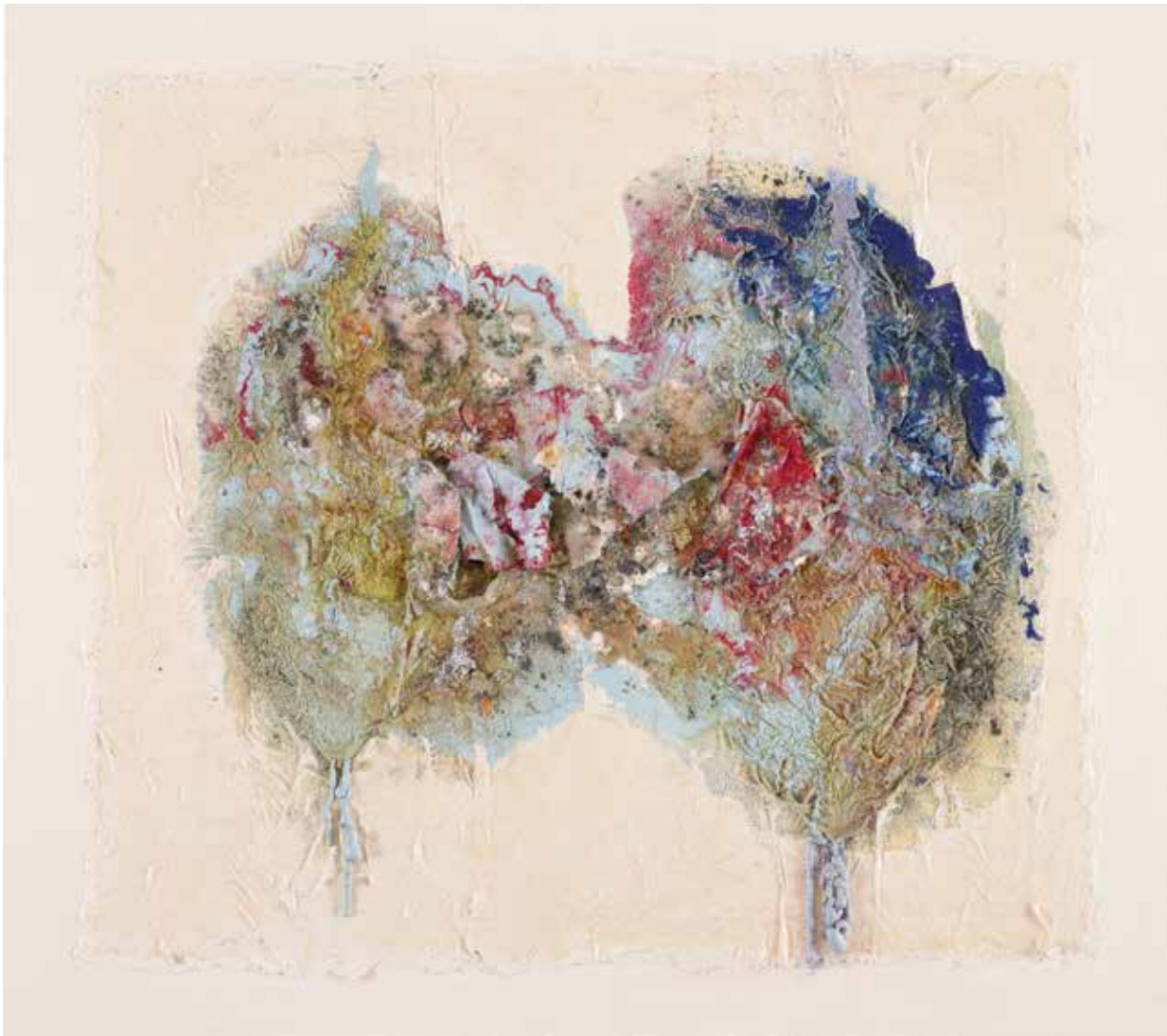


Plaie n.2: Sucrée  
Oil on canvas | 120 x 100 cm | 2021





Plaie n.3: Revêche  
Oil on canvas | 100 x 120 cm | 2020-2021



Plaie papillon: Papillionide  
Oil on canvas | 90 x 80 cm | 2020-2021





Plaie papillon rose: Dragueuse  
Oil on canvas | 60 x 80 cm | 2020-2021



Petite plaie: Apprivoisée  
Oil on canvas | 100 x 80 cm | 2020-2021





Peau Blanche n.1: If Men Were Eggs  
Oil on canvas | 50 x 70 cm | 2020



Peau Blanche n.2: If Men Were Eggs  
Oil on canvas | 50 x 70 cm | 2020





Peau Rouge n.1: Still Fresh  
Oil on canvas | 50 x 70 cm | 2020



Peau Rouge n. 2: Still Fresh  
Oil on canvas | 50 x 70 cm | 2020





Gaze n.1: There is a Door  
Oil on canvas | 110 x 90 cm | 2021



Gaze n.2: There is a Door  
Oil on canvas | 90 x 110 cm | 2021





Gaze Bleu  
Oil on canvas | 60 x 80 cm | 2021



Gaze Petit  
Oil on canvas | 50 x 70 cm | 2021



Textures



Texture Beige  
Oil on canvas | 50 x 40 cm | 2020 - 2021



Texture Yellow  
Oil on canvas | 50 x 35 cm | 2020 - 2021



Texture Green  
Oil on canvas | 50 x 35 cm | 2020 - 2021



Texture Red  
Oil on canvas | 50 x 35 cm | 2020 - 2021









## Hala Mouzannar

Born in Beirut in 1968, Hala Mouzannar came to the world of art after decades of experience in the creative industry. She worked as a media planner for Leo Burnett Beirut, as a media executive for Future Television, and as a director of acquisitions for Aïzone. In 2005, she founded *Madame Rêve*, a costume jewelry store and company where she also worked as a creative stylist. She shifted to a painting practice in 2015. She holds a BA in Business Administration from the American University of Beirut and has recently earned an MFA in the Visual Arts from Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts. Her group exhibitions include Arthaus Gallery (2021), *La Maison Abandonnée* (2021), and *Green Cedars* at the French Embassy in Beirut (2019). *La Chasse aux Papillons* is her first solo exhibition.

### Education

- 2021 MFA in Visual Arts, Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA), Beirut, Lebanon.
- 1989 BA in Business Administration, American University of Beirut (AUB), Beirut, Lebanon.

### Group Exhibitions

- 2021 La Maison Abandonnée, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2021 Arthaus Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2020 *Green Cedars*, The French Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon.

### Other

- 2005-2015 Founder and Creative Stylist, Madame Rêve, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2003-2005 Director of Acquisitions, Aïzone, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 1995-1997 Media Executive, Future TV, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 1993-1995 Media Planner, Leo Burnett, Beirut, Lebanon.



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