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PAINTING'S RITUAL:

Chantal Khoury places herself at the intersection of a world that is being made and a world that has been unmade. A Canadian artist whose parents emigrated to Canada from Lebanon, she has lived in Fredericton (where she was born), Guelph (where she studied), Toronto and Montreal, where she now lives.

One of the first things you notice about Khoury's paintings is how fluid they are. That fluidity acknowledges both their surface and the way in which we read their content. We're never entirely sure what we're seeing: What is that object? Is it holding together or breaking apart; is the figure a man or a woman; is it human or animal? Khoury wants that perceptual instability because it is commensurate with the Lebanese history she inherits and the history that has been erased and is unavailable to her. The inheritance is told through the objects she has painted—the finger bowls, water jugs, rose petal boxes and the carafes—some of which are domestic staples and others personal heirlooms. The unavailable history is a result of the wars and disasters that Lebanon has experienced over the last 50 years, including the Civil War from 1975 to 1990, the war with Israel in 2006 and the port explosion in Beirut in 2020. She is using her work to both honour her lineage and, as she says in the following interview, "to negotiate this inherited trauma"

Chantal Khoury and the Art of Honouring Resistance

by Robert Enright

that is an inescapable part of her cultural identity. The questions become: How do you represent an erased history, and what objects and customs can be used as the basis for any possible cultural reclamation and rebuilding?

The other thing that contributes to the migratory nature of her paintings is her own personality. Khoury admits to a low tolerance for boredom, and as a result is quick to change what she is painting and how she is painting it. She often works on numerous paintings at the same time, and realizes they are all part of a larger project of production. "I never see a singular painting as being on its own," Khoury says. "I see my whole practice as one theme that is evolving."

Khoury's family history is richly complicated. She was raised Roman Catholic on her father's side and Greek Orthodox on her mother's. This doubled religious inheritance provided her with what she calls "layers of strong and lingering images." One image that has consistently appeared in her work is the figure of Mary, the mother of God in both the Catholic and Maronite traditions. What is most interesting is the manner in which this figure has shifted; she has moved from her religious identity as the mother of Jesus to Aphrodite, the ancient Greek goddess of love and beauty (her Roman name is Venus). This transformation is in part a cultural migration into the Mediterranean. Khoury

recognizes that these figures bring meaning outside their form. In this frame the female figure's main attribution is not giving birth to a god but giving birth to herself. Khoury's Aphrodite doesn't need a seashell on which to enter the world; she comes full-bodied and resplendent as a sensual woman.

Her divine figures are enigmatic embodiments. In a pair of paintings that allude to the birth of Venus called *She Rises from the Sea, Holding Her Locks* and *She Rises from the Sea, Again*, both 2023, her character changes from ethereal delicacy to hypnotic majesty. Some incarnations have a darker side. The doubled figures in *MaryMary*, 2023, wear diaphanous gowns and their heads are looming rather than luminous; the halo above the Mary figure on the right is more infernal than radiant.

The tension in Khoury's art becomes evident in the way she uses her familiar objects. They function simultaneously as containers and emblems of constraint. A two-handled jug appears in a number of paintings. She paints it in various sizes, initially in *Ibis Birds*, then slightly smaller in *Offering*. But its largest iteration, *Outpour*, gives the jug more body and changes the nature of its depiction. Both the earlier works include a number of ibis birds on the vessel's surface, but that changes with *Outpour*. Whatever cascades from the top of the jar through to the bottom of the painting seems to be light more than liquid. The enveloping rhythm that held the birds in place remains, but it is less concerned with representation than with registering gesture. The subject of the painting has become movement. Still, the container holds; it does not fall apart.

The painted world remains elegantly seductive as her subjects give over to the method of their rendering, to what Khoury describes as her "sustaining obsession." "I'm not afraid to say that I really love the material of oil paint." A recent diptych embodies her painting's elusiveness through the figures of the dancer and the steed. Both these subjects have been part of her painted world for some time and, on the basis of the names given this recent pair of paintings, will remain so for some time longer. *Eternal Dance* and *Eternal Steed*, a pair of matching paintings, were composed to hang side by side. The movement in both is so intense as to be almost hallucinatory. The dancers—there seem to be as many as four in a floating *Dapke*—drift out of the painting's upper reaches, while the steed leans into its movement with a propulsive velocity. The animal has a rider but you can't distinguish between them.

In her focus on the dance and the horse, Khoury is acknowledging the celebration and the longing that are her cultural inheritance. The *Dapke* is the dance of collective resistance, and the horse is the symbol of devotion in the Persian legend of Qais and Laila. But Khoury shifts the meaning of the longing; hers is "not a love story about a man and a woman" but a cultural story "about loss and retrieval." In her narrative the steed catches up to the dancers and transforms evanescence into presence, the fleeting into the found.

Chantal Khoury, the recipient of the 2023 Plaskett Award, has been included in 16 one-person and group exhibitions since 2021. She has exhibited in New York, Los Angeles, Dallas, Toronto, Montreal, Stockholm, Amsterdam and Bucharest. She was interviewed by telephone from Montreal on October 3, 2024.

BORDER CROSSINGS: I know that your dad is an artist and your mother is a gallerist. What was it like growing up in that environment?

CHANTAL KHOURY: I feel like I fit a stereotype because I wanted to be an artist since I was six years old. It wasn't a popular ambition in Fredericton where I grew up in the early '90s. I didn't really have anyone around me wanting the same things, other than my dad. He immigrated as a child with his parents in the '50s and he dreamt of pursuing an artistic career. He even got into a fashion school, but his parents didn't let him continue. Once they came to New Brunswick, their story was a typical one of people working hard to rebuild their life. My parents ended up running three retail stores in the Fredericton mall, which they did for 20 years. I remember them quite clearly as business people, and then there was this shift, almost overnight. So in his 40s my father turned to painting. In Fredericton he met Molly Lamb Bobak; she was the first woman war artist in Canada, and she was his mentor for a few years. That gave him encouragement, which in turn gave me encouragement. From then on, I always had that support. But every time I go back to visit Fredericton, I see my dad's immense repertoire of work that's never been shown. He would make still lifes with elements of objects from Lebanon, and I wonder if I'm doing the same thing in my work. He built a small studio in our house and his paintings were colourful and beautiful and very painterly. My mom settled into being his art dealer, which was a natural role for her because she loves meeting people. So from a very early age, I grew up watching both sides of the art world. It gave me the tools to decide what I wanted.

You were raised Roman Catholic. How influential was that when you began to make art?

We were practising Catholics up until my grandparents passed. They lived right across the street in Fredericton, so I had layers of strong and lingering images coming at me. Those religious qualities and influences in my upbringing were a never-ending resource for me. And the religious landscape of Lebanon is so deeply intertwined with

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Chantal Khoury, *Eternal Dance*, *Eternal Steed*, 2024, diptych, oil on canvas, each 182.88 × 213.36 centimetres. Courtesy the artist.

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1. *Finger Bowl VI*, 2022, oil on canvas, 30.48 × 30.48 centimetres. Courtesy the artist.

2. *Finger Bowl of Riders*, 2024, oil on canvas, 91.44 × 121.92 centimetres. Courtesy the artist and Coulisse Gallery, Stockholm.

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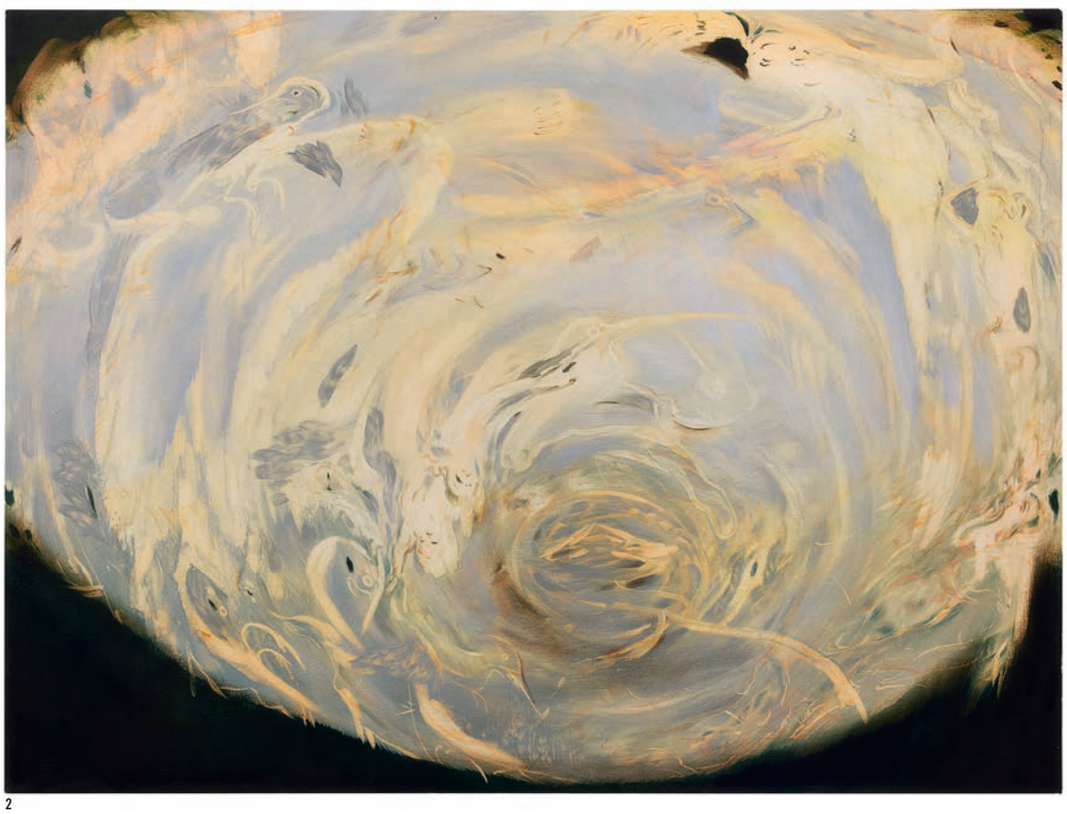

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so many other histories. My mom actually has Greek Orthodox ancestry and there's Maronite in there. So it's a mix, which is essentially what the country is like. At certain points in history, that mix brought people together.

So your upbringing was layered and satisfying?
Yes, but Fredericton in the '90s was very different from what it is today. I came to Montreal at 19 because I was searching for culture and diversity. I knew I was different from my friends in day-to-day things and I remember feeling grateful for it. Like my school lunches were different. It's nothing to talk about today, but it was at the time and in that area. My parents were unconventional, and they didn't do things the way other families did. I was very lucky because that enriched how I thought about things.

Was society making you feel outside, or was it something you were generating yourself?
I was too young to think about that. I'm as much a Maritimer as I am a Lebanese, and as an adult I had to reconcile that I am both of these things. But to be frank, I didn't feel accepted when I was growing up. It was only later that I realized those things. That said, I also formed meaningful friendships and had a few memorable teachers in Fredericton who played crucial roles in shaping who I am today.

What made you choose Montreal as the city where you would find the cultural diversity you were looking for when you were 19?
My older brother was studying at McGill, so I went to visit him. I was only planning to stay for a few weeks, but I ended up staying for 13 years. I didn't even know Concordia University existed when I came here. I enrolled and then I saw all these communities that I wanted to be a part of. From there it was just a natural progression. I was a serious painter, but I hadn't been exposed to contemporary art as much as other people who were my age. Growing up in eastern Canada, I didn't have much of a connection to those conversations. So I did a lot of growth during my Bachelor of Fine Arts.

What's become apparent is that you're engaged in this swirling phantasmagoria of a painted world. Do you think you have a style that I would recognize as a viewer and that you recognize as a maker?
Others tell me that I have a style. I'm not afraid to say that I really love the material of oil paint. It has been a sustaining obsession but not through traditional techniques. What interests me is how I can manipulate and use it to my advantage across a wide spectrum of possibilities. So that sensorial sensibility that you mention can't help but come through in the work. Maybe that's something I got from watching my dad in the studio. He works the same way; he's a very painterly dive-into-the-material kind of artist.

Give me a sense of how a painting comes into being.
I approach the process like watercolour where you're layering light to dark. The materials and the mediums are classic: oil, spirits and pigments. Some painters have a very methodical procedure: it's 50/50 split between mineral spirits and oil, but I like to play with those ratios to get different effects in the work. The glazing aspect happens with how much pigment is in the material.

There's a liquidity in your work. Do you want me to be able to distinguish animals from humans? When I'm looking at these paintings, I'm often wondering what it is I'm looking at.
I definitely don't want you to know what it is at first glance. That's the important part for me. I get bored quite easily staying within a certain spectrum of abstraction and representation. If the painting is too easy to read right away, then I'm bored, and therefore it's not complete for me. I'll come back to the studio the next day and do something to the work because it's rendered too much, or what's happening is too obvious.

Is there the possibility of reading a measure of pentimento in looking at the work, of reading what it was before it got fundamentally altered?
Yes. *Holy Carafe* (2023) is one of those paintings. I was in a very ephemeral state of mind while painting it and so at the end I manipulated that one to be air.

How do you feel your work has changed over the last few years? One of the things that occurred to me is that you have moved from space to object. In your earlier work figures were inside arches and were contained within a consciously rendered space. Now it seems that you are able to make the object the space, and that's where the sense of atmosphere in your painting emerges.
That's an interesting observation, which I hadn't noticed. I often repeat subjects, but as I said I also get bored quickly. So when I'm obsessed with an idea, I have to keep painting it because I feel like there's always going to be another way to see it. I think that's pretty obvious in the subjects I use. It's a matter of perspective. There's the Virgin Mary, who comes up often, and more recently Venus, who comes out of my Greek Orthodox side. I don't feel that I'm done with either of them yet because there are so many ways to play with them. They also bring meaning outside their form. Venus, for me, is less about Venus and more about the Mediterranean. I remember a conversation I was reading between Etel Adnan and Simone Fattal in a publication called *Thus Waves Come in Pairs: Thinking with the Mediterraneans*. The book was a gift from a dear painter friend. They were speaking about the Mediterranean and how it lives on beyond the sea itself, despite ongoing colonization. We have a Mediterranean idea that continues to exist, for example, through the Mediterranean food we eat and highly praise in the West. It's less obvious when you look at the work, but that's what I think about when I'm painting.

There's also a terrific amount of joy in your work and it manifests in a lot of dancing. You say you're bored easily, but you also seem to be easily made happy.
I'm glad you brought up the dancing because I've been thinking about that, especially in my current work. It comes from the *Dapke,* a folkloric line dance that crosses all the countries within the region. It's a joyful dance that I grew up doing at

MaryMary, 2023, oil on canvas, 25.4 × 20.32 centimetres. Courtesy the artist and Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles.

every function, every celebration, every wedding. It's become a symbol of resistance from a certain darkness. Those two things—celebration and resistance—play well together. If you notice, my *Dapke* dancer will never be alone. The strength is always in numbers. There's a minimum of two dancers. So it's about linking with other people. I see a lot of power in that.

Do you regard painting as a kind of ritual and, if so, do you recognize its ritual component after it's made, or does it happen in the making itself?
I love this question because I think it's both. The ritual in the making comes out of habit. There were many years in my life after finishing my BFA when I was serving tables in Montreal just to sustain my studio practice. I always made sure I had a studio, whether it was a room in my apartment or a separate space. It wasn't a ritual based on choice but one borne out of necessity, and it's been like that for a long time for me. But then there's the ritual that comes with recognition. There's an urgency. As an artist I seek to honour a lineage while at the same time I have to navigate this inherited trauma. I think that comes later and is a little less fully formed.

You use glazing to build up a surface and then you use erasure to take parts of it away.
Yes. I was thinking about erasure more prominently a few years ago. I love film, and the idea of erasure came from reading I was doing about film theory. When people describe film or talk about experimental film, that closely relates to how I think about painting. I was reflecting on an idea from Jalal Toufic, a Lebanese writer, who believes that an artist's duty is to either "resurrect what has been withdrawn" or "disclose the withdrawal." I was thinking about erasure in terms of the continuation of cultural withdrawal. At the time, I was erasing as an immediate metaphorical gesture of withdrawal and then to bring in presence. Today, I don't think about erasure as much when I paint; it just happens because it's part of my repertoire of techniques.

I remember a lecture you gave at the McClure Gallery where you said you regarded erasure as "a productive metaphor for identity-forming within a diasporic condition." You were thinking of erasure in a political and cultural context because so much of Lebanese culture had been erased by history.
Definitely. It is still being erased. I speak through painting and that idea is still there; it's always going to be there, but I don't have more to say about it. Now it's about searching for whatever sensibility that will evolve from that cultural erasure.

Tell me about scale in your work. You make big paintings and then you also have this capacity to make small, very intense paintings. When you go into the studio, what drives you to make a painting or series of paintings in any size?
I'm so attached to small-scale paintings and they are just as important as the large-scale ones. In the past I was committed to them because I was painting objects. I was literally referencing objects that were around me. Amplifying them made no sense to me and I wanted to keep them at scale. Then I needed to be challenged. So I get out of my comfort zone when I work large, and that's when I'm trying to express the same ideas in a more embodied, less contained painting. But I really love working in both scales and everywhere in-between. It's a matter of control; when I feel like I'm too much in control—and this goes back to the boredom thing—then I go big.

Many of your paintings are named after aspects of religious worship: *Holy Water*, *Lambs of God*, *Sign of the Cross*, the *Immaculate Conception*, not to mention the vessels and the offerings. The titles carry a sense of meaning within a religiously recognized context. Are you thinking of a secular religion when you're making and naming these paintings?
I was going to say the names are always related to the painting, but there are times where I go through series and I like to title the work in a more poetic way, or I will title work in a very literal way: water jugs, for instance, or a carafe. And that is about a mood, or what I'm reading or what I'm thinking about. Art making is a learning process that evolves in response to what we encounter. It demands constant, critical self-reflection, especially regarding the language we use to describe it. I think the Venus works become more poetic because those ideas are a little wider for me. I like to play with language and how I present it to the viewer, and I don't have strong feelings either way. I think it's important not to do the same thing, and in my next series of paintings I don't know where I'll get the titles from. But that's part of playing and getting out of the comfort zone of training your work.

You have referred to this solitary and majestically beautiful woman who appears in your work. I see her as Mary and you have mentioned Venus. Did Mary transform into an image that didn't necessarily have a religious association but had one that was specifically about beauty and the Mediterranean context? Is she an evolving figure in your work?
Definitely. They all are. They're always trying to offer new ways of seeing or new ways of expression. The Mary whom we know today in the West is an image of a veiled White woman, but she's so many other things. I say this carefully, but Venus and Mary are the same person, or they come from the same idea across many cultures because there are so many histories before them that looked very different. There's also this matriarchal power that I grew up with through my grandmother and mother, and that shows through in all the women figures. My figures are not religious; they are meant to honour that power.

When I see *She Rises From the Sea, Again,* I immediately go to Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*. Everybody from Boucher to Poussin and Cabanel and even Warhol steals that image. When I look at your figure rising from the sea, I want to place her in that narrative art historical context. Do you do the same thing?
Yes. I don't know if I would've agreed with you two years ago. When I go into the studio to make a painting now, it feels like I'm entering a world that I've built up over many years. It's like entering a doorway that just keeps getting bigger. I used to paint from the physical objects that I inherited or grew up with, but I've painted these forms so many times that I now rarely reference an image. I know the skeletons by heart, and I jump from there with each series. If I need to pull an idea out or render it more, then I'll

Two Divine Poses, 2023, oil on canvas, 167.64 × 152.4 centimetres. Courtesy the artist and TAP Art Space, Montreal.

look for a source. But you're right, the world that I'm not done with is etched in my head. I just have to find new ways of using it. As an example, the animals have moved from being references taken from a tapestry into a symbolic realm.

How are finger bowls used in your household?
Those objects are quite common in a domestic setting, and they're used for everything. You know, the Mediterranean platter of finger food. But they're special for a more personal reason. I have the finger bowl that my grandmother in Lebanon had and because I didn't grow up with her, those little objects are very important to me.

Do you work on a number of paintings at the same time? What's the sequencing in the studio?
I work on many at the same time and I'm always jumping back and forth. That's the only way I can complete a painting. It's the way my brain works. You can think of it as executive functioning; I need to start a few things in order to complete one of them. And it allows me to go back and forth and get new ideas. I do have a pile of paintings that are technically rejections right now, but I've learned not to completely get rid of them. I can go back to them in a couple of years and see something new because as you change, the meaning comes retrospectively.

When I look at your *Six Headed Angel*, I see it as a response to another mythology, the Greek three-headed dog, Cerberus, who controls entrances and exits from Hell. Why does your angel have six heads? You also have a six-headed lamb in the *Six Lambs of God*.
Six is a natural number that often comes to mind. It reminds me of balance. I like the figures that I paint, whether an angel or a person, to be able to perceive multiple aspects of reality at the same time. Those figures have to know more than I do if they're going to transcend histories and singular identities. The beauty of putting meaning on something is that it spans cultures. It's fun to play with those.

In this conversation so far you've used the word "play" several times.
I think play is essential. If I'm not in a mode of play, I'm not going to make work I can stand behind. It took me a long time to understand that. I think that's true for a lot of people because essentially we're just grown-up children playing in the studio. And if you don't have that sensibility and that perspective, the expressive quality that you want in the studio can become too contrived. So play is important for me. I try to have fun. When that's not happening, I need to get a coffee or something and not be in the studio. Then when I return, I can try to get back into that mode.

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1. *Offering*, 2024, oil on canvas, 40.64 × 50.8 centimetres. Courtesy the artist and Jack Barrett Gallery, New York.

2. *She Rises From the Sea, Holding Her Locks*, 2023, oil on canvas, 152.4 × 121.92 centimetres. Courtesy the artist and Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles.

3. *She Rises From the Sea, Again*, 2023, oil on canvas, 152.4 × 121.92 centimetres. Courtesy the artist and Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles.

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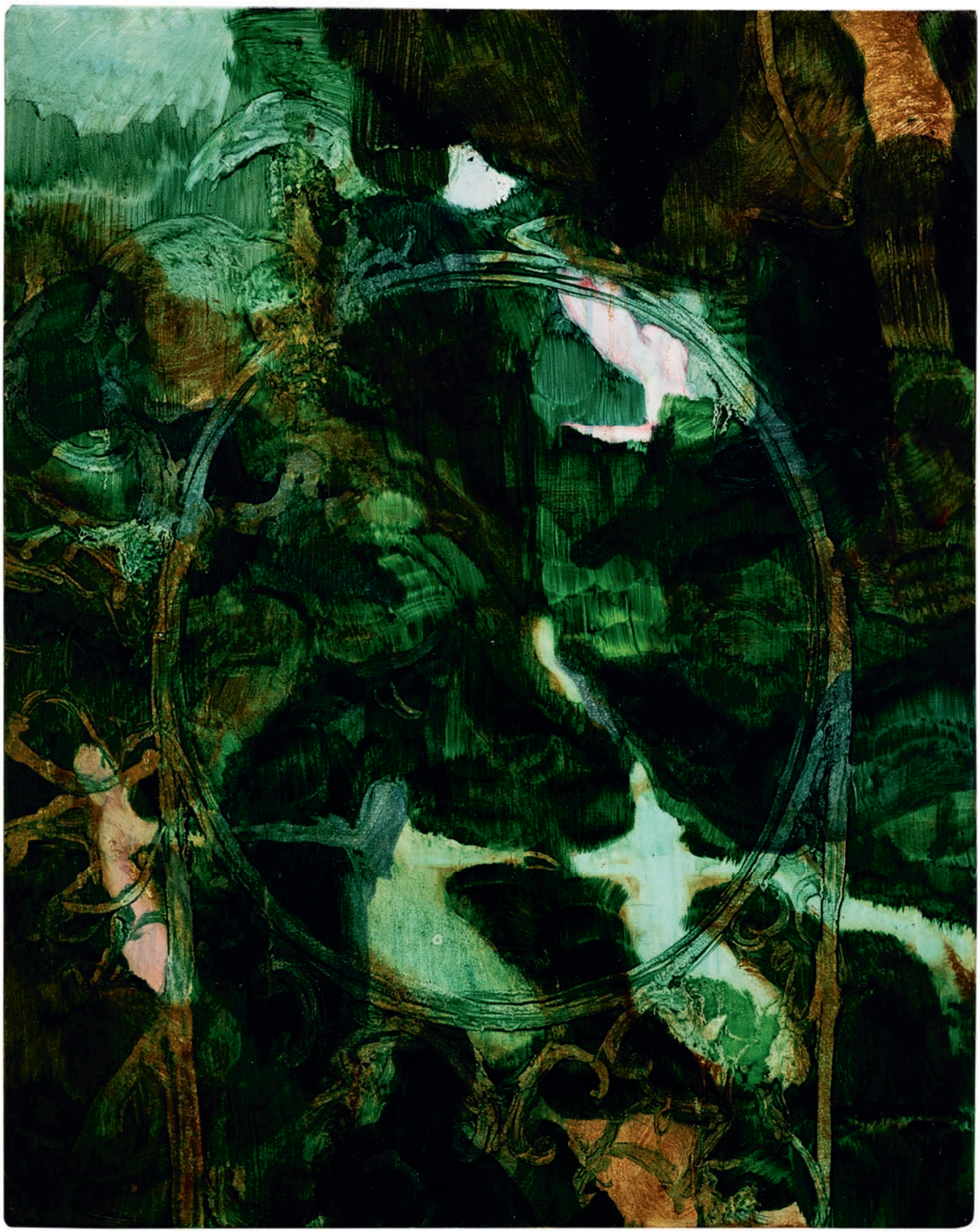
What's the source of the figure in *To Shine of Mist* (2024)?
It's Aphrodite, another Venus. There was an image of a statue that I remember seeing in my grandmother's house and I was looking for it online. I knew it was Venus. So this painting comes from an online image that was the closest thing I could find that corresponded to that memory. I wanted to re-create this particular image of Venus and anchor it, but I wanted it to embody a water-like, ephemeral and misty feeling.

The face of that figure is distinct and beautiful and seductive. There's a calming quality in looking at that image, and you get a lot out of what seems very little. Is getting so much emotional mileage out of such a diaphanous figure intentional?
Yes. I'm always trying to capture just enough for me to know it's there. From a purely formal perspective, when I over-render, I lose the idea. I'm not a realistic painter and I never intended to be one. You're right in that I try to capture something with little actual material. On the other hand, I use a lot of material when I'm layering. The painting you're talking about was not done with a lot of glazing and layering; the figure itself was realized with one layer of washes.

Your divine presences are also very compelling paintings. It's the figures themselves that seem to occupy the viewers' attention. What are you getting at with those divine poses?
I think of longing when you ask me that question. Longing is a very important state for me. It's in the horses, it's in the *Dapke* dancers: it's in all the figures that I paint. I need to keep it as an idea that I don't have and that I'm looking for.

"Longing" is a lovely word. Let me introduce another one: "haunting." Are your figures a kind of ghosting?
I think they're not there and I want them to be closer. The longing is stronger than being haunted by them. For instance, the horses have so many meanings in Arab culture. Longing, but also strength and resilience and livelihood. The horses were around me and everyone knows what they look like. They come up in tapestries. But for me, they're forms of longing that come through in the legend of Qais and Laila. It's a romanticized love story in Persian culture that has Arab origins. Qais is often depicted as a horse who symbolizes undying love and devotion. He's running and searching for Laila and is always longing for her. But the longing in my work is not a love story about a man and a woman; it is about loss and retrieval.



Dapke, 2021, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 60.96 centimetres. Courtesy the artist and Birch Contemporary, Windsor.

A corollary to the question I asked you about building a mythology of your own is that you're also building a mythology for the world and the place you come from.
Definitely. I think about the *Dapke* dancers when you bring that up. The playful aspects can be seen in the extent that my work can be interpreted as imaginary or dreamlike or ephemeral or haunting. But the reasons why I initially choose subjects like steeds and the *Dapke* dancers are to sustain them. It's similar to the way I was speaking about the Mediterranean; it's not about a geographical location anymore. It's about existing beyond borders and boundaries.

When I look at your work, the painting tradition that will come to my mind is symbolism. I'm thinking specifically of painters like Gustave Moreau and Odilon Redon, whose apparition-like figures suggest a certain kind of decadent enchantment. You don't go in that direction, but I do sense in your work the possibility of a dark seduction. Do you want to talk a little bit about what might be read as the darker side of the work that you do as well?
That part comes from ancestral experience and from the politics of a colonized history. I think that darkness is always there, and it motivates me to keep working in this world and in this framework.

I look at *Adrift* (2023), a small, 12 x 16-inch painting. Being adrift is an interesting concept; in painterly terms it can refer to composition by field or all-over painting. But it can also have a psychological measure. What did *Adrift* mean when you made it?
I painted that when I was moving back to Montreal from Toronto. I think it's good to be destabilized once in a while. If you don't shake up what stabilizes you, then things can become too contrived. At the time I wouldn't say I was feeling lost in any way, but I definitely was not feeling grounded. I think discomfort is essential for one's work to change and evolve.

The word "beauty" was a four-letter word that has been largely rehabilitated; painters are allowed to make beautiful things. You seem to have this capacity to make images of uncompromising beauty, a world of "lace and petals." Is that what you're after?
Yes. I always have been. That was my first entry into art making. It wasn't from the perspective of theorizing what I was doing; it was from the making. I was painting princesses when I was a kid. So I try to make beautiful paintings, but I want them to be beautiful for me. And if they're not, then they're not complete. As much as I value the viewer, the beauty is for my own satisfaction.

You do a painting called *Oil and Water*, and I have a sense that you don't really believe that oil and water are mutually repellent. You want them to flow into one another, not to resist one another.
Definitely. That's where the fun is.

You seem endlessly inventive.
When something happens in my career that motivates me, I grab it and use it as fully as I can. It's more about honouring a lot of sacrifices that have been made for me. If I don't work in this way, it also dishonours all the work that I've done up until now. So when I'm motivated, I run with it. Like I said, it's an itch that I can't fully scratch, so the only thing I can do is keep going.

As I look at the work, I can see that certain things keep coming up. It looks like there's a pattern. Do you ever consciously decide that you'll do a series of finger bowl paintings, or a series in which animals turn up and then your menagerie comes to the surface? Is that the way you work, or is it actually more individual than that?
I would say it's the opposite. I think all of my series bleed into each other. I don't begin a series thinking about one theme. Any series I'm working on comes from a previous one, and some of the bodies of work have more of a clash because I'm in the middle of what might be a transitional theme. But I really don't separate them that much, and especially not on the level of an individual painting. I never see a singular painting as being on its own. I see my whole practice as one theme that is evolving. So the series are more of a time frame, or I'll have a specific goal where I'm trying to make a more complicated world, or use a new palette for more practical decisions. It's only later that the ideas come.

Do colours have specific meanings for you? It seems like there's a consistency in your palette. How do those choices come about?
They used to come from the objects, and now that I've distanced myself from the physical objects themselves, I look for colours that are transparent to help me write the message I'm trying to write with the work. I stay away from more opaque colours or pigments and that's a formal choice. I think the palette often goes back to water, which is a common theme for me. Earth tones are very common. I'm not going to go into the fluorescence so much because that just wouldn't make sense for me.

You've done a series of at least two paintings called "Peacekeeper." Is this a reference to a geopolitical world outside the studio?
Yes, what's going on right now is definitely not specific to one people. All of us—my Palestinian friends and my Jewish friends—have been checking in on each other. I was making the "Peacekeeper" paintings while mourning the genocide in Palestine, and now there is Lebanon.

You've twice referred to the new work you're doing. What is it?
It intentionally focuses on *Dapke* dancers because that theme has persistently woven in and out of my work. I feel an urgency right now to keep the meaning of the *Dapke* dancer prominent.

Do you listen to music in the studio?
Once in a while I'll put a podcast on, but I actually don't listen to anything when I'm painting. I find it more of a distraction now. I like the silence. ▮