



Mouna Rebeiz

PRESS
KIT **23 APRIL-
27 NOVEMBER
2022**

St George's Anglican Church
Campo San Vio, 30123 Venice VE

59th Venice Biennale – Republic of San Marino







Mouna Rebeiz

Curator: Ami Barak



PRESS RELEASE

MARCH 2022

Opening Exhibition

Wednesday,
April 20th 2022
6pm – 9pm

**Chiesa Anglicana
di St George -**
St George's Anglican Church

Campo San Vio, 30123 Venice VE
59th Venice Biennale – Republic of San Marino

From April 23 to November 27, 2022, for the 59th Venice Biennale and under the patronage of the Republic of San Marino, the Lebanese-Canadian artist Mouna Rebeiz is presenting “The Soothsayer,” a body of new works that invites the viewer to a symbolic and metaphoric journey in the St. George Anglican Church in Venice, Italy.

The title of the exhibition, “The Soothsayer,” refers to the character of Shakespeare’s tragedy who warned the emperor Julius Caesar of his premeditated assassination in the Senate, but who was ignored and called a “dreamer.” Mouna Rebeiz uses the idea of premonition as being one of the artist’s missions.

The artist takes an interest in the unlikely meeting point between artificial intelligence and the mystic. Three works dialogue with each other and guide the visitor along the path of his own discovery and that of humanity: a majestic set of the revisited 22 Major Arcana of the Tarot of Marseille, a puzzle of colored pieces and an abstract totemic sculpture.

Arranged in an arc along the central nave, the reinterpreted 22 Major Arcana of the Tarot of Marseille, painted on polished aluminum plates using a singular pictorial technique, symbolize the psyche’s original core and of self-awareness.

The puzzle wall of colored pieces, upright behind the holy water font, symbolizes the boundary between the real and the great beyond, in which ancestors, spirits, wisemen and new divinities cohabit. The puzzle pieces that compose the wall are associated with a production system of a prophecy through the sense of touch. It is projected in the church’s space in a textual form.

A totem composed of transparent puzzle pieces made from recycled Plexiglas is in the entrance of the nave. It is also an offshoot of the gods, ancestors and wisemen who reign in another dimension and who choose to communicate with us. We can read on the totem, in gothic characters, the first quatrain of Charles Baudelaire’s Correspondances.

In the very center of the St. George Anglican Church of Venice, the meditative vocation of the three elements of the performative work takes on its full dimension.

ABOUT MOUNA REBEIZ

A Lebanese-Canadian contemporary artist, Mouna Rebeiz lives and works in London. Her remarkable style was shaped in contact with master works stretching from the Renaissance to the present day. She makes use of these varied influences and a singular pictorial mastery to capture the meaning and existential queries of the human being. A psychologist by training, her work constitutes a vast reflection on the human psyche.

ABOUT THE VENICE BIENNALE

The Venice Biennale is one of the oldest and most prestigious artistic events in Europe and the world. Since 1893, it has given pride of place every year to contemporary art, dance, music, cinema and architecture in Venice’s most emblematic sites.

THE SOOTHSAYER, Mouna Rebeiz
St. George Anglican Church - Campo San Vio, 30123 Venezia VE, Italia



L'indovino

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INTRO- DUCTION

Ami Barak, Curator

Mouna Rebeiz is an artist of remarkable talent and unclassifiable personality. Of Lebanese-Canadian origin, she lives among painters, musicians, and poets. Her classical training in the beaux-arts leads her to draw inspiration from the repertoire of Old Master painting, though she just as often creates sculptures and installations. Through dedicated effort she has developed her own pictorial grammar and a characteristic and distinctive style. Over the years, she has been adventurous in the realms of abstraction. Yet the female body is a recurring theme in many of her works.

Mouna Rebeiz's project for Venice is called *The Soothsayer*. The title refers to a minor character in Shakespeare's tragedy, Julius Caesar. Despite speaking only nine lines, his role is pivotal, since it is he who warns the emperor to avoid going to the Senate on the 15th of March, as he will certainly die. In the play, Cesar ignores the soothsayer's warning, calling him a "dreamer".

Throughout her career, Rebeiz has been fascinated by the mystery of life and the hidden meanings of existence. Recently this quest has taken the form of examining the unlikely meeting point between artificial intelligence and mystic. What will tomorrow be made of? Are these technologies changing our ways of thinking? As an artist, she must grasp this mutation in her own way, becoming in a sense a whistleblower. Her installation stages the lines of force of a "cognitive ecology" likely to reconcile man with technology.

It is in Venice's Anglican church, Saint George's, near the Accademia, that Rebeiz presents three works whose interaction takes the form of a complex performative ensemble, to be understood as conversation taking place as much on the symbolic as the metaphorical level. In the central nave of the church, the spectator sees the twenty-two cards of the Major Arcana of the Tarot of Marseille reinterpreted in Rebeiz's particular technique, using oil paint, at times highlighted with BIC ink or with gold leaf, on mirror-polished aluminum plates. On their backs appear a pink harlequin diamond pattern. The oversized cards are arranged in semi-circles on both sides of the nave, symbolises the original core of the psyche.

Certain cards derive their characters and motifs from the iconic paintings of such masters as Michel-Angelo, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Peter Paul Rubens, Lucas Cranach the Elder, Giovanni Bellini, Jacopo da Pontormo, Antoine Watteau, William Blake, Gustave Moreau, or Honoré Daumier. Traditionally, the Major Arcana of the Tarot of Marseille concerns self-knowledge. Each card in the Major Arcana can be read diversely, as they were conceived to embrace both positive and negative interpretations and the symbolic content of each card contains several meanings that constitute a coherent whole. Hence, each viewer must determine which meaning is the most appropriate for his or her situation. Several relevant meanings can sometimes be retained.



The other work in this display takes the form of a wall composed of thirty-four interlocking puzzle pieces. Each piece has a different shape and color and some are associated with a system of producing a prophecy by touch. It is broadcast in text form and projected on the wall of the church. The puzzle symbolizes the border between the real and the beyond, where ancestors cohabit with spirits, sages, or new divinities.

The third work, located at the entrance of the church, is a totem composed of transparent puzzle pieces, each 6 cm thick, made from recycled Plexiglas. The totem is also an emanation of the gods, ancestors, sages, who reign in another dimension and who choose to communicate with us through this medium.

Painted in Gothic characters resembling the titles of the Tarot mysteries, where the pieces of the totem connect, are verses from the first quatrain of Correspondences by the poet Charles Baudelaire:

*"In Nature's temple, living columns rise,
Which oftentimes give tongue to words subdued,
And Man traverses this symbolic wood,
Which looks at him with half familiar eyes."*





Seiya T, 2022
Puzzle pieces made
from recycled plexi
240 x 50 x 6 cm

Above the illuminated cards, a prophecy which will later be found on paper or sent by email is projected on the walls of the church. “A link between sacred and profane”, was Rebeiz’s idea. “The works will remain in place during services in this very religious atmosphere.” An actual tarot deck on paper might stem from Rebeiz’s delicate paintings on polished aluminium.

In twenty-two cards, from The Fool to The World, Mouna Rebeiz proposes an original reading of the tarot cards. She transforms them into new mirrors of the soul, brings together universes that everything seems to drive apart (Bellini and Cranach the Elder meet Uderzo and Tim Burton), and makes a highly personal Jungian synchronicity possible.

The Soothsayer is another step in her artistic research, where beauty grazes itself on the asperities of ugliness, where trash perverts elegance, where classical culture triumphs over facile pornography, vulgarity, and outrageous narcissism. Here she pursues her exploration of the human being and psyche, as commenced in “Le Tarbouche”, her very feminist series shown at the Saatchi Gallery, London, in 2015. Once again, she bridges the wide gap between cultures as she did in 2017 with “The Way of the Opera, from Wagner to Vangelis” at the Galerie Pierre-Alain Challier in Paris. She broadened her scope on an even larger scale in January 2022 with the sculpture she presented at the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC).

With The Soothsayer, Mouna Rebeiz has succeeded at leaving her easel behind and dared to gamble on the immersive installation. Sensitive, cognitive, and experimental.

The Soothsayer
Exhibition view, 3D
simulation



The setup serves as a metaphor for our contemporary society in which man is all-powerful, to use the words of Protagoras, the measure of all things, and in which all mystery or mysticism is annihilated by the power of technology. But is identity reducible to an algorithm? Is the future predictable by a machine? Have we exhausted all the mysteries that embrace life and humanity? Has the World said its last word?

The Wall, 2022
Interactive puzzle wall
made from
recycled plexi
260cm x 248cm x 21cm





L'indovino

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BIOGRAPHY

Mouna Rebeiz

Even as a small child, Mouna Rebeiz's creativity and special fervour for the plastic arts were manifested. Born into a family of artists — musicians, painters and poets — her paintings resonate with the music and verse that infused her childhood.

Fascinated by the complexities of the human psyche, Mouna studied Psychology at the Sorbonne and at Saint Joseph University. Once she completed her Master's degree in Psychology, she started a family of her own, dividing her time between Europe and the North American continent. In 1995, she was accepted at the Atelier Cépiade in Paris, where she met Alix de la Source. A specialist of 17th and 18th century painting, and lecturer at the Louvre, Alix introduced her to the techniques of the Great Masters and helped her evolve her personal style.

From her courses in patinas in Paris, to those on the Renaissance, from the expertise of Abraham Pincas, painter and head of the Painting and Techniques Atelier at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris to that of the great Lebanese painter, Mohamed el Rawas, her professor at the Institute of Fine Arts in Beirut, Mouna continually refined her technique, to better capture the pulse of life in her paintings.

Selected solo shows:

- 2022 | **Colour Power**, Leila Heller Gallery, *Dubai, United Arab Emirates*
- 2019 | **The Lebanese Embassy** with the British Lebanese Association, *London, England*
 - | **The Chelsea Arts Club**, *London, England*
- 2018 | **The Trash-ic**, Saatchi Gallery, *London, England*
- 2017 | **La voie de l'opéra**, Galerie Pierre Alain Challier, *Paris, France*
- 2015 | **Le Tarbouche**, Saatchi Gallery, *London, England*
- 2013 | **The Betty Boop Collection “A-Part-Être”**, Galerie Hubert Konrad, *Paris, France*
- 2012 | **The Betty Boop Collection “L’Être et le paraître”**, Galerie Pierre Alain Challier, *Paris*
- 2008 | **Hymne à la vie**, Galerie Daniel Besseiche, *Paris, France*

Selected group shows:

- 2022 | **A Harmony of Different Voices**, DIFC Sculpture Park, *Dubai, United Arab Emirates*
- 2020 | **Togeth'Her (Madame Figaro)**, La Monnaie de Paris, *France*
 - | **Oeil de Bic**, Fondation Bic, *Paris, France*
- 2013 | **Le Rouge et le Noir, Art 13**, Meshkati Fine Art, *London, England*
- 2012 | **She views herself**, Fondation Paul Ricard, *Paris, France*
 - | **She views herself**, Banque ODDO, *Paris, France*
- 2007 | **Art Capital**, Grand Palais, *Paris, France*
- 2006 | **Salon des Indépendants**, Grand Palais, *Paris France*



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BIO- GRAPHY

Ami Barak

Ami Barak is an independent curator and advisor based in Paris. He initiated numerous projects and exhibitions in France and abroad, among them:

- 2021 | 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 |An anniversary**, a compass for the future, Jecza Gallery, Timisoara, Romania
- 2021 | who protects us from the slug slide that passes over the knife blade without caring**, Sector 1 Gallery, Bucharest, Romania
- 2021 | Jacqueline de Jong – Potato Blues Art by Goralska, Luxembourg**
- 2021 | Nira Pereg – Twilight Zones, Braverman Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel**
- 2021 | Julian Mereuta - The Invention of Me, Sector 1 Gallery, Bucharest, Romania**
- 2021 | Ana Adam - Life vest under your seat, Mnac, Bucharest, Romania**
- 2020| Pusha Petrov Unspoken and other images**, Jecza Gallery, Timisoara, Romania
- 2020| Pusha Petrov Descoase - (Un)stitch, Borderline Art Space, Iasi, Romania**
- 2020| Ana Adam Drawing is a witchcraft or the other way round** – Jecza Gallery, Timisoara, Romania
- 2020| Quo vadis homini** -, Danube Dialogues Festival, Novi Sad, Serbia
- 2019 | Ana Adam - Peste Fire – Hangs by a thread**, Borderline Art Space, Iasi, Romania
- 2019 | Causal Loop Curated_by Charim Gallery, Vienna Austria**
- 2019 | subREAL – a premonitory vision of glocal**, Prismes Paris Photo
- 2019 | subREAL – Serving Art Again**, Jecza Gallery, Timisoara, Romania
- 2019 | Dominique Blain – Displacements**, Canadian Cultural Center Paris, CCC-OD Tours 2020, Château de Chambord 2021
- 2019 | Ex-East, past and recent stories of the Romanian avant-gardes**, Espace Niemeyer, Paris
- 2019 | La Brique, the Brick, Cărămidă**, Kunsthalle Mulhouse, France
- 2018 | Role-playing – Rewriting Mythologies** – Daegu Photo Biennale, South Korea
- 2017 | Life- A User's manual** – Art Encounters Biennale of contemporary art, Timisoara, Romania
- 2017 | What does the image stand for?** – Momenta Biennale of contemporary image, Montréal, Canada
- 2016 - 2017 | Julião Sarmento The Real thing** – Fondation Gulbenkian Paris | Peter Kogler Next ING Art Center, Brussels
- 2016 - 2017 - 2018 - 2019 - 2021 | Le Salon de Montrouge** 61st, 62nd 63rd 64th & 65th editions – Paris Montrouge
- 2015 | Taryn Simon, Rear views**, star forming nebula and foreign propaganda bureau – Jeu de Paume, Paris
- 2014 | Stuttering** – Melik Ohanian, Crac, Sète, France
- 2013 | Off to a flying start** – Scotiabank Nuit Blanche, Toronto, Canada

Former president of IKT (International Contemporary Art Curators Association).
<https://amibarak.com/en>



ARTS ET EXPOSITIONS / 25.04.2022

Biennale de Venise : notre top des expositions 2022



AAI (System's Negative) (2016) de Agnieszka Kurant, présentés dans l'exposition « Planet B », Palazzo Bollani, Biennale d'Art contemporain de Venise, 2022 (@Guy Boyer)

La Biennale de Venise, c'est aussi une kyrielle d'expositions d'art contemporain à visiter en marge des pavillons officiels. Découvrez notre sélection 2022 !

La Biennale d'Art contemporain de Venise 2022 a ouvert ses portes au public ce samedi 23 avril. Cette 59e édition s'est déjà révélée être tout à la fois historique, surréaliste et féminine (voir notre article dédié). Laissez-vous guider à travers la ville, de fondation en musée, de chapelle en pavillon, à la découverte des expositions à ne pas manquer cette année. Ce parcours est un complément indispensable à la visite des pavillons nationaux et du pavillon central des Giardini et de l'Arsenal.

Surréalisme chez Peggy Guggenheim

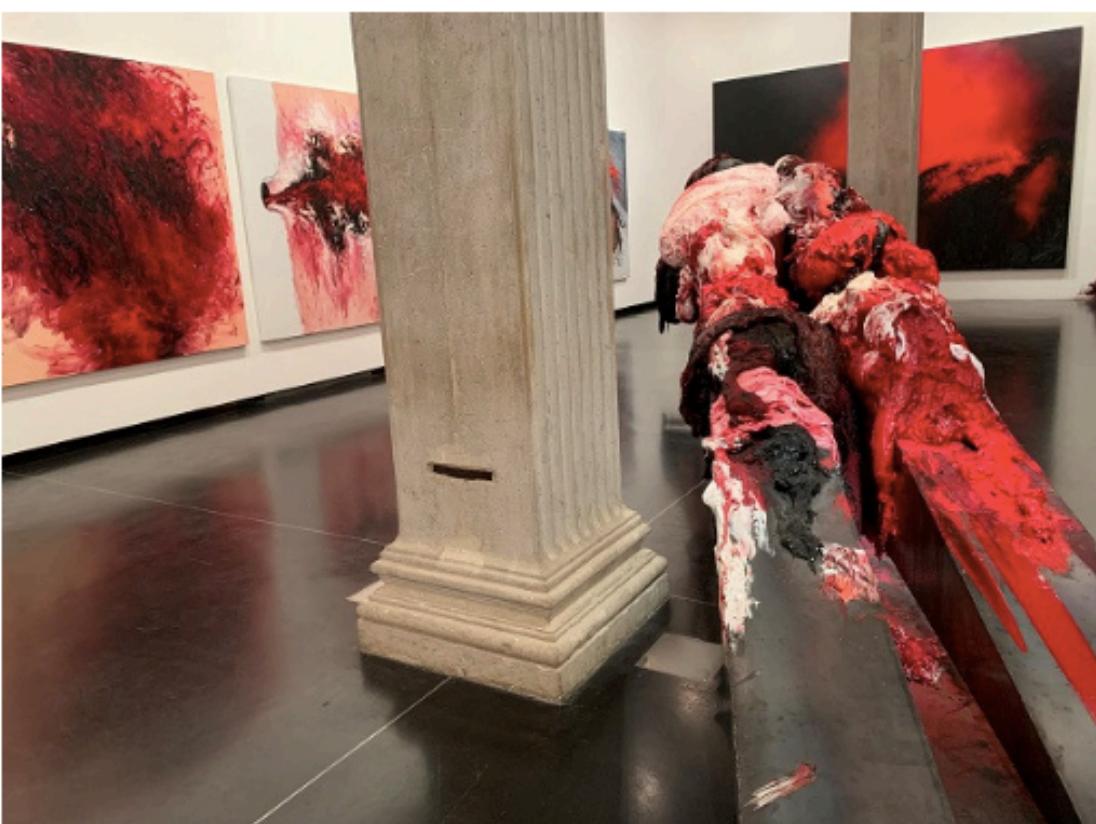
Avec « Surréalisme et magie », la Fondation Guggenheim aborde un sujet assez peu traité, à savoir l'intérêt marqué des artistes surréalistes pour l'ésotérisme. Le sujet paraît pourtant évident tant les œuvres de ces créateurs explorent l'intérieurité, l'inconscient et l'imagination libérée. En une centaine de toiles et sculptures allant de René Magritte à Leonora Carrington, l'exposition révèle des mondes et des personnages fantastiques mais le dessin vire parfois à l'anecdotique et au décoratif. On y découvre les recherches de Key Sage et de Remedios Varo, peu montrées.



Ofelia (1937) d'André Masson, présentée dans l'exposition « Surréalisme et magie », Fondation Guggenheim, Biennale d'Art contemporain de Venise, 2022 (©Guy Boyer)

Kapoor en rouge et noir

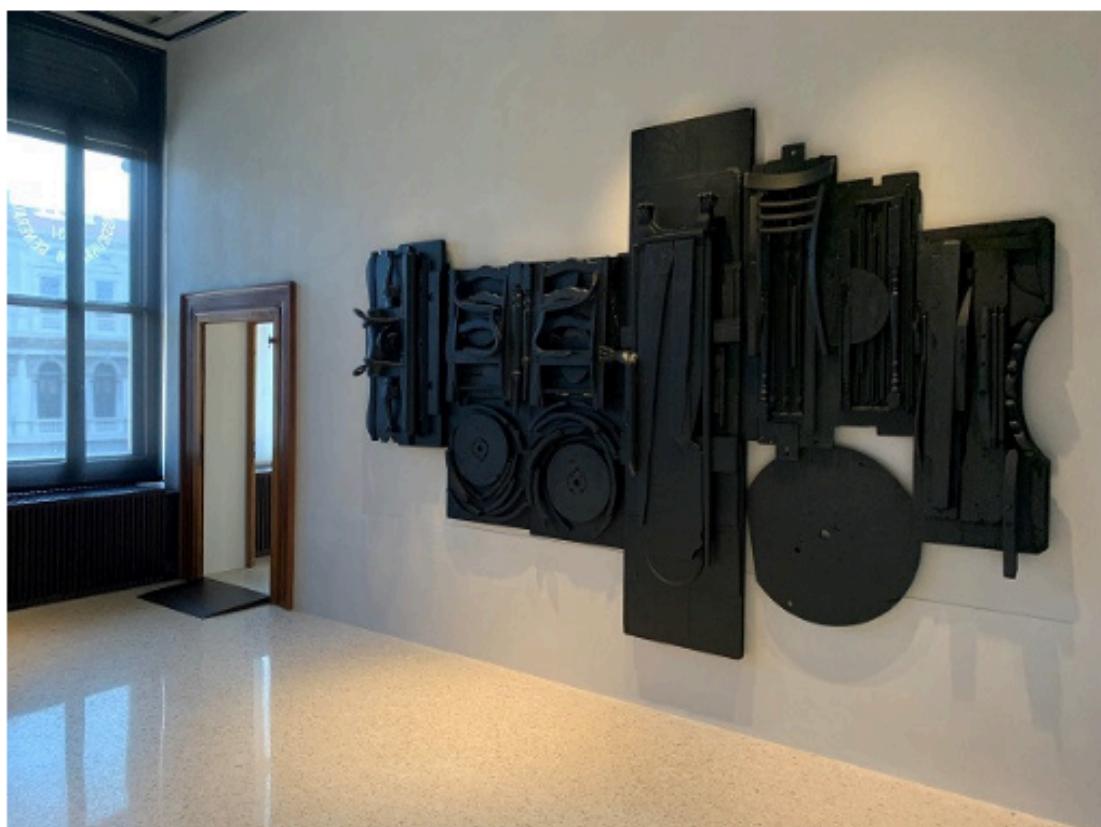
Rouge comme du sang pour les projections de cire et les grandes toiles d'Anish Kapoor à l'Accademia. Noir profond pour d'autres petites peintures faisant des clins d'œil à Malevitch et au noir sur fond noir. Le Vantablack utilisé fait mouche et les visiteurs s'interrogent sur l'absence de réflexion lumineuse à la surface des objets peints. Il faut également se rendre au Palazzo Manfrin à l'autre bout de la ville, devenu le temple de l'artiste indien qui a représenté la Grande-Bretagne à la Biennale de Venise en 1990.



Shooting into the Corner (2008-2009) de Anish Kapoor, présenté dans l'exposition « Kapoor », Gallerie dell'Accademia, Biennale d'Art contemporain de Venise, 2022 (©Guy Boyer)

Louise Nevelson en rétrospective

Aux Procuratie Vecchie, sur la piazza San Marco, voici une superbe rétrospective de la sculptrice américaine Louise Nevelson (1899-1988), qui a représenté les Etats-Unis à la Biennale de Venise en 1962. On y voit aussi bien ses élégants collages de bois des années 1950 que ses iconiques constructions noires ou blanches. « Je ne veux pas que les couleurs m'aident », disait la grande dame. Ses monochromes monumentaux en trois dimensions prouvent qu'elle avait raison.



Untitled (vers 1976) de Louise Nevelson, présenté dans l'exposition « Louise Nevelson », Procuratie Vecchie, Biennale d'Art contemporain de Venise, 2022 (©Guy Boyer)

Vuitton voile et dévoile Katherina Grosse

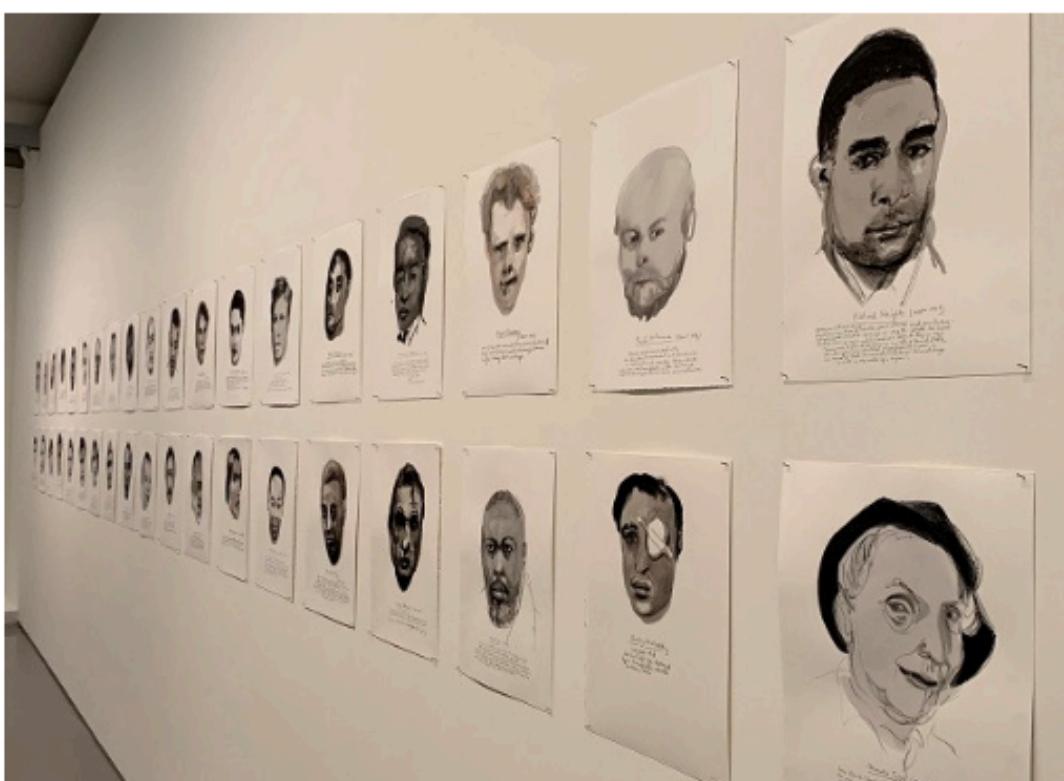
En attendant à Paris l'ouverture de l'exposition « La couleur en fugue » (du 4 mai au 29 août), où Katharina Grosse exposera ses voiles colorées, l'Espace Louis-Vuitton Venezia propose une vaste installation (du 23 avril au 27 novembre). Au deuxième étage, l'artiste allemande a recouvert d'un voile une corde, une chaise pliante et des chaussures. Une atmosphère mystérieuse, pas désagréable, a pris possession de l'espace. On s'interroge sur le recouvrement de ces objets de la vie quotidienne. Comme un flux coloré. Comme l'acqua alta de Venise.



Apollo, Apollo (2022) de Katharina Grosse, présenté à l'Espace Louis-Vuitton Venezia, Biennale d'Art contemporain de Venise, 2022 (©Guy Boyer)

Marlene Dumas se met à nu au Palazzo Grassi

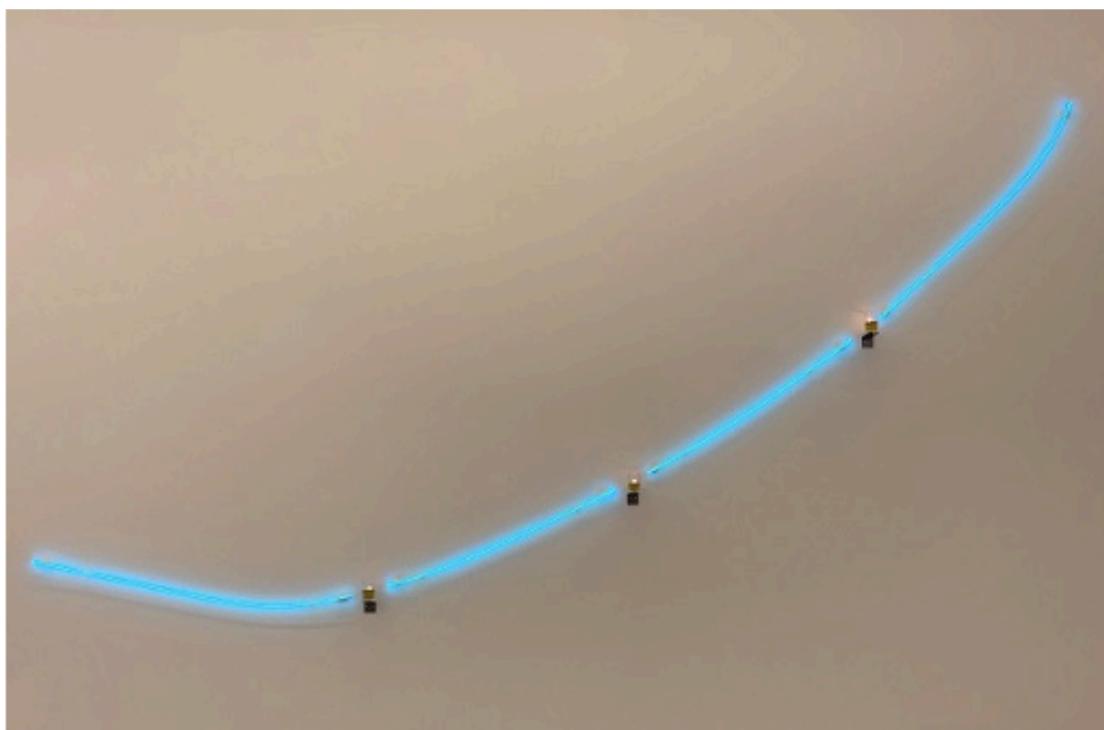
Sur les deux étages du Palazzo Grassi (du 27 mars au 9 janvier), Marlene Dumas se met à nu ou plutôt met à nu ses modèles masculins ou féminins. Petits et grands formats dévoilent des corps solides, très sexués. La plus belle partie de ce grand corpus d'œuvres reste les dessins au lavis. Gueules criantes de la série Vénus & Adonis (2015) ou visages des écrivains célèbres de la série Great Men (depuis 2014), rien n'est à délaisser tant, en quelques coups de pinceaux, Marlene Dumas donne la vie.



Great Men (depuis 2014) de Marlene Dumas, présentés dans l'exposition « Marlene Dumas », Palazzo Grassi, Biennale d'Art contemporain de Venise, 2022 (©Guy Boyer)

La galerie Tornabuoni met le feu

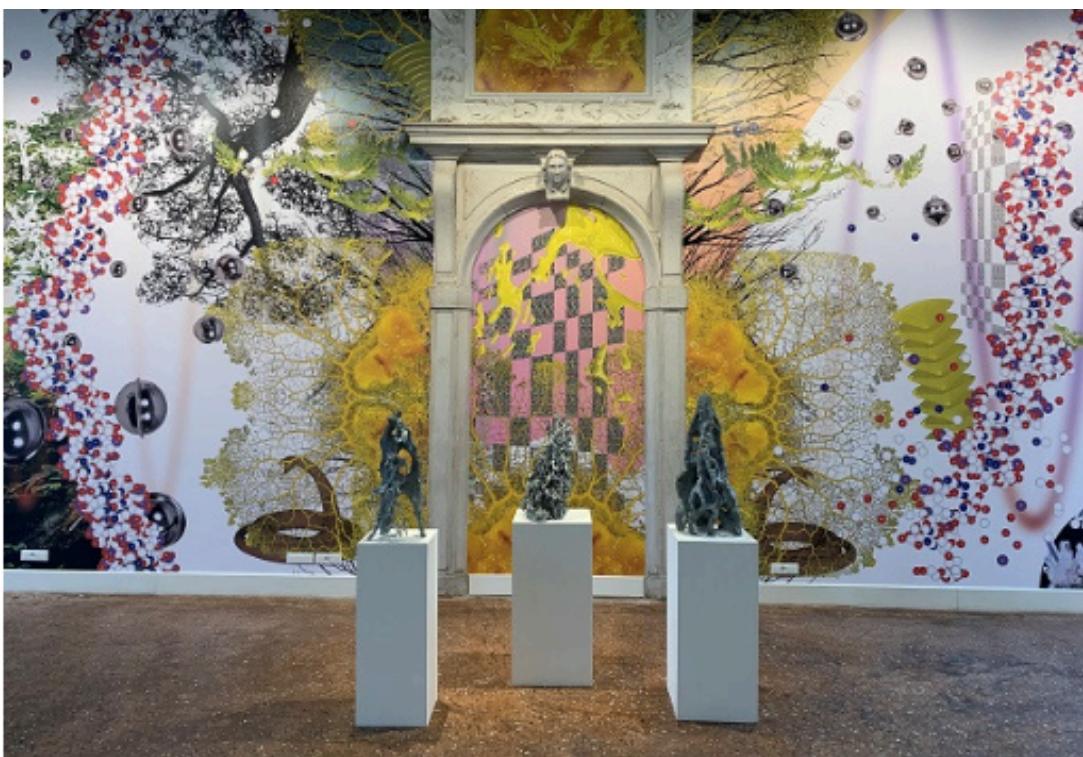
Avec « On Fire » à la Fondation Giorgio Cini, à côté de San Giorgio Maggiore, la galerie Tornabuoni réussit un superbe accrochage d'œuvres faites par ou mettant en action le feu. Le parcours commence bien sûr par Yves Klein, puis Alberto Burri et ses plastique fondus, Pier Paolo Clazolari et ses tubes fluorescents interrompus par des bougies accrochées au mur. Mention spéciale pour Jannis Kounellis utilisant la flamme pour animer ses sculptures d'acier. Lorsque l'exposition se termine, on en redemande encore.



Senza titolo (1971) de Pier Paolo Calzolari, présenté dans l'exposition « ON Fire », Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Biennale d'Art contemporain de Venise, 2022 (©Guy Boyer)

L'environnement selon Nicolas Bourriaud

Radicants, la coopérative nouvelle génération d'ingénierie culturelle de Nicolas Bourriaud, propose au Palazzo Bollani une réflexion sur l'environnement vu par 27 artistes contemporains. Hormis les toiles classiques de Per Kirkeby et de Kendell Geers, tout a un côté neuf, vivant, réflexif. Agnieszka Kurant mélange un vrai bonsaï de 74 ans à sa réplique en résine bleue et s'interroge avec ses coraux blancs sur les changements climatiques tandis que Dana-Fiona Armour aligne ses pneumatophores violets, qui s'apparentent à des objets hybrides très humains.



AAI (System's Negative) (2016) de Agnieszka Kurant, présentés dans l'exposition « Planet B », Palazzo Bollani, Biennale d'Art contemporain de Venise, 2022 (©Guy Boyer)

Almine Rech expose Claire Tabouret

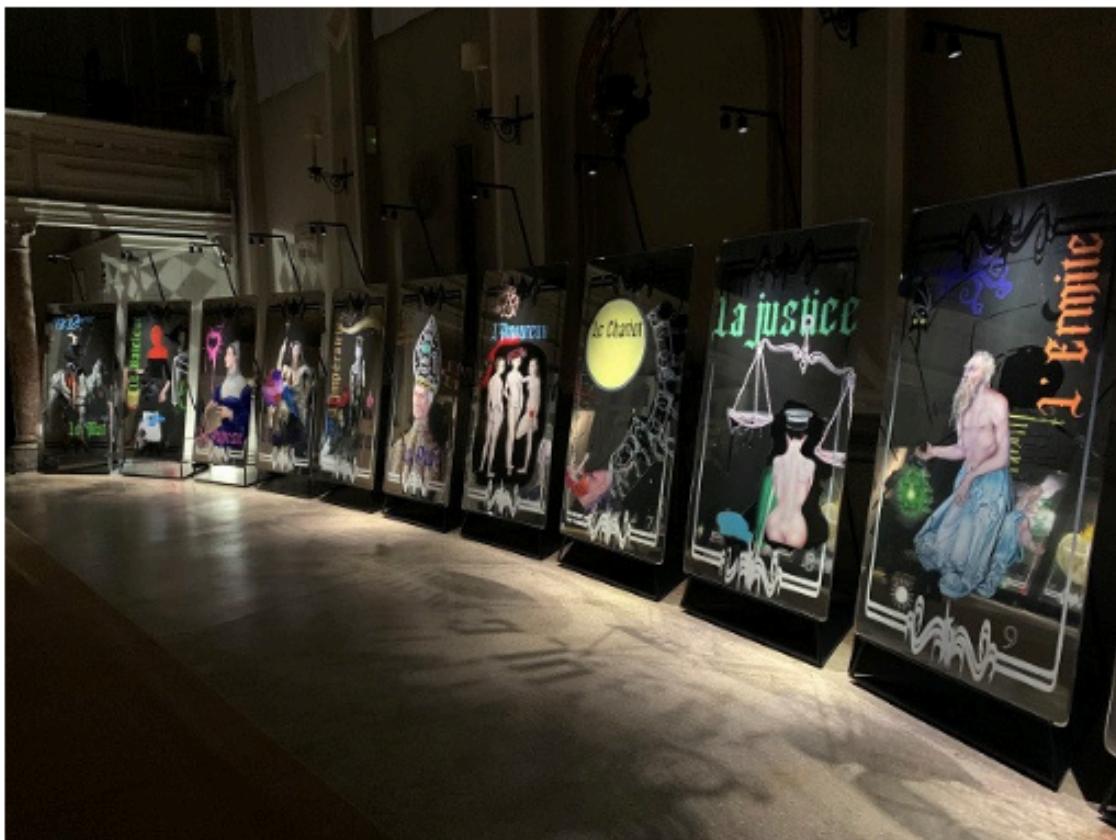
Beaucoup de marchands exposent à Venise les œuvres de leurs artistes. De Daniel Templon avec les sculptures et peintures démesurées de Kehinde Wiley à la Fondation Cini (du 23 avril au 24 juillet) à Almine Rech avec celles de Claire Tabouret (du 23 avril au 27 novembre). Dans le jardin, une jeune fille en maillot de bain rayé se transforme en fontaine tandis qu'à l'intérieur du Palazzo Cavanis des portraits individuels ou de groupe montrent des personnages au maquillage dégoulinant. La matière épaisse de certaines toiles rend encore plus présentes ces visages impassibles.



The Team (2016) de Claire Tabouret, présenté dans l'exposition « I am spacious, singing flesh », Palazzo Cavanis, Biennale d'Art contemporain de Venise, 2022 (©Guy Boyer)

Le devin de Mouna Rebeiz

Réinterprétant l'iconographie des 22 arcanes majeurs du tarot de Marseille et en mêlant détails de tableaux de maîtres anciens et motifs de la culture populaire, la Libano-canadienne Mouna Rebeiz crée une installation interactive dans l'église Saint George, entre l'Accademia et la Fondation Guggenheim. Le visiteur doit appuyer sur un mur de puzzle qui déclenche l'éclairage de quatre cartes et donne une prophétie personnalisée. C'est le mariage de la divination et de l'intelligence artificielle.



The Soothsayer (2022) de Mouna Rebeiz, présenté dans l'église Saint George, pavillon de San Marino, Biennale d'Art contemporain de Venise, 2022 (©Guy Boyer)



Guy Boyer
Directeur de la rédaction

whitewall

CONTEMPORARY ART AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

WINTER 2023

The EXPERIENCE ISSUE

DIANE DAL-PRA - WILLIAM KENTRIDGE - SHEPARD FAIREY - GABRIEL RICO -
AMÉLIE BERTRAND - ROSE B. SIMPSON - THANDIWE MURIU



MOUNA REBEIZ

Making multifaceted works guided by a heightened sense of spirituality.

By Eliza Jordan
Photographs by Steve Benisty

The London-based French-Lebanese artist Mouna Rebeiz approaches her work from a personal and spiritual standpoint. With a background in clinical psychology from universities in Paris and Beirut, it wasn't until Rebeiz took a class by Alix de la Source that she learned of her own magic in art. For ten years under Source, a 17th- and 18th-century-style painter and lecturer at the Louvre Museum, she learned the techniques of old master painters and spent her early career re-creating such works. She has since broadened her creative practice to include other mediums and techniques, embracing sculpture and technology, and showing at spaces like Saatchi Gallery in London, Fondation Paul Ricard in Paris, and Menasart Fair in Beirut.

For the Republic of San Marino at the 59th Venice Biennale, she presented an immersive and interactive AI installation of sculptures and paintings on mirrors, named "The Soothsayer," at the St. George Anglican Church, that recalled spiritism and tarot card readings. Last fall, her solo show in New York at Leila Heller Gallery, "Totems," followed themes similar to those in Venice. Esoteric to some yet imperative to Rebeiz's practice, mystic and spiritual threads represent deeper meanings for which the artist is constantly searching. Whitewall spoke to Rebeiz about her recent work and a sonic collaboration with Bang & Olufsen for the World Cup.

WHITEWALL: Upon entering "The Soothsayer," guests activated the exhibition and were assigned a tarot card reading. "Where did the idea for this exhibition begin?"

MOUNA REBEIZ: Before "The Soothsayer," we were isolated because of the pandemic. I wanted to speak about the emptiness in our existence—the physical void. We were all isolated, and I felt so much emptiness. I was walking through the deserted street of Beirut with my sister, and I felt that intense void. It was quasi-sublime, something very attractive. Then, I turned toward the [Giorgio de] Chirico tarot and the divine.

It reminded me of the physicist Marie Curie. When she lost her husband, she went into spiritism. When you lose all hope, you need somewhere to hold on to the hope and the truth. And since we are in the age of artificial intelligence, I decided to connect it with the art of *divinación*. So I ditched the fortune teller, and I linked all of the tarots with AI.

WW: In "The Soothsayer," you chose old master paintings to pair with tarot card themes. How did merging these two fields feel?

MR: When I was working on the subject while we were still in COVID, I was driven back to my training. I needed to anchor myself in time, so I wanted to revisit the old masters. I have a huge bibliography of catalogs, a huge library. I went on the floor with all of the books to see the old masters' repertoire. The new comes from the old, so I turned toward the future, but I never lost sight of tradition. I was inspired when I went through all the old masters, and I started picking out the images that corresponded to each theme of the tarot cards.

At that time, I wasn't very knowledgeable in tarot. I was only amazed by the pictures, but I had never drawn any cards. When I started to read about it, I decided to revisit the old masters, and intuitively everything came to my mind.

The images I picked were more or less accurate. How? I cannot tell. I was surrounded by a lot of magic.

WW: In your 2018 show "The Trash-ic or Trash in the Face of Beauty" at Saatchi Gallery, you presented a rendition of Raphael's Three Graces painting, named *I Selfie Therefore I Am after your friend and the philosopher Elsa Godart's book with the same title*. Hung on a wall, it showed three women taking selfies in front of New York, and was surrounded by Godart's books stacked as totems. How did this lead to your New York exhibition "Totems"? What will the visitor experience be like?

MR: A forest of 14 totems with mirrors on the ground. The atmosphere will be very dark, with the whole room covered in black fabric. There will be a lot of reflections, and the light will play a very big role in the installation.

For the show at Saatchi Gallery, I built totems, and I asked the audience during the opening to come and take one book. Doing so, the totems became less and less until they disappeared. The audience digested the whole process of the selfie. They took over the totems completely, and then it didn't exist, so it's a process of digesting the whole process.

Then, during COVID, I wrote on the theme of flower power. What would be the flower power of 2020? Inside that theme, I wanted to make a world map out of puzzles. I did the puzzle—the same puzzle that you can see out of the totems—in two pieces, and I wanted to include in it pictures of countries. I wanted to take the world map and the countries the way I see it; from Mouna's eyes. From that, while I was working with the puzzles, I made it stand and then said to myself, "Why don't I build up a totem?" This is how the totems were born. I ordered more puzzles and started to put them on one another until I reached the figure of the totem.



WW: Why do you feel you're drawn to totems and tarot cards?

MR: Tarots and the totem have the same root. They are archetypal. They've existed since the beginning of humanity. They are thousands and thousands of years before religion. The totems are not for divinity purposes, but the tarots are. It's all about archetypes and synchronicity. But the totems, the process of the initiation is to let them stand in front of the totem, the pole, and have an astral journey. The totem is about the cosmic and the telluric. The cosmic is the high point and the telluric is the base, where you have all the memories of the ancestors. What has been done during ages and thousands of years didn't disappear, it is stored somewhere—like a computer. When the initiate would travel in their mind up and down, they link the cosmic with the telluric, with the memory of the ancestors, in order to translate it into their time. That's what the totem is about. It's like our spine. It's the DNA of our civilization. It's all that has been said and written since the beginning of time until now.

WW: For the World Cup in Qatar (November 20–December 18), you partnered with Bang & Olufsen to customize headphones for the English team with puzzle pieces on the product. What relationship do you see between art and sound?

MR: Music is the base of everything. Before human beings drew, sounds existed. Music is universal; it's the only art that goes right into your soul without getting into your mind. When you draw, it might go through your brain, but when you hear music, it goes straight to your soul.

CULTURE — APRIL 21, 2022

Step Inside Lebanese-Canadian Artist Mouna Rebeiz's Unique Venice Biennale Art Exhibition

by JEANNINE YAZBECK

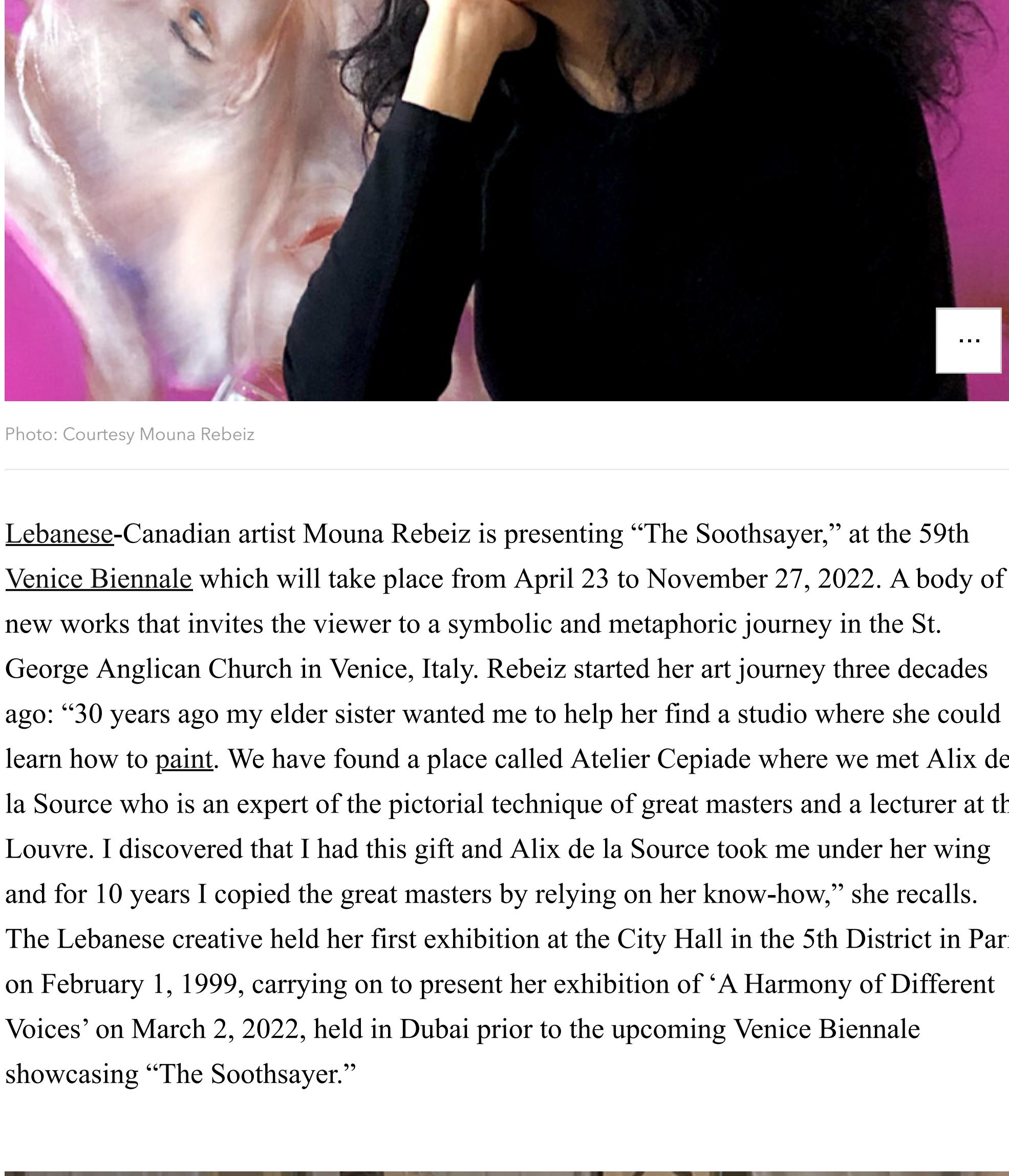


Photo: Courtesy Mouna Rebeiz

Lebanese-Canadian artist Mouna Rebeiz is presenting “The Soothsayer,” at the 59th Venice Biennale which will take place from April 23 to November 27, 2022. A body of new works that invites the viewer to a symbolic and metaphoric journey in the St. George Anglican Church in Venice, Italy. Rebeiz started her art journey three decades ago: “30 years ago my elder sister wanted me to help her find a studio where she could learn how to paint. We have found a place called Atelier Cepiade where we met Alix de la Source who is an expert of the pictorial technique of great masters and a lecturer at the Louvre. I discovered that I had this gift and Alix de la Source took me under her wing and for 10 years I copied the great masters by relying on her know-how,” she recalls. The Lebanese creative held her first exhibition at the City Hall in the 5th District in Paris on February 1, 1999, carrying on to present her exhibition of ‘A Harmony of Different Voices’ on March 2, 2022, held in Dubai prior to the upcoming Venice Biennale showcasing “The Soothsayer.”

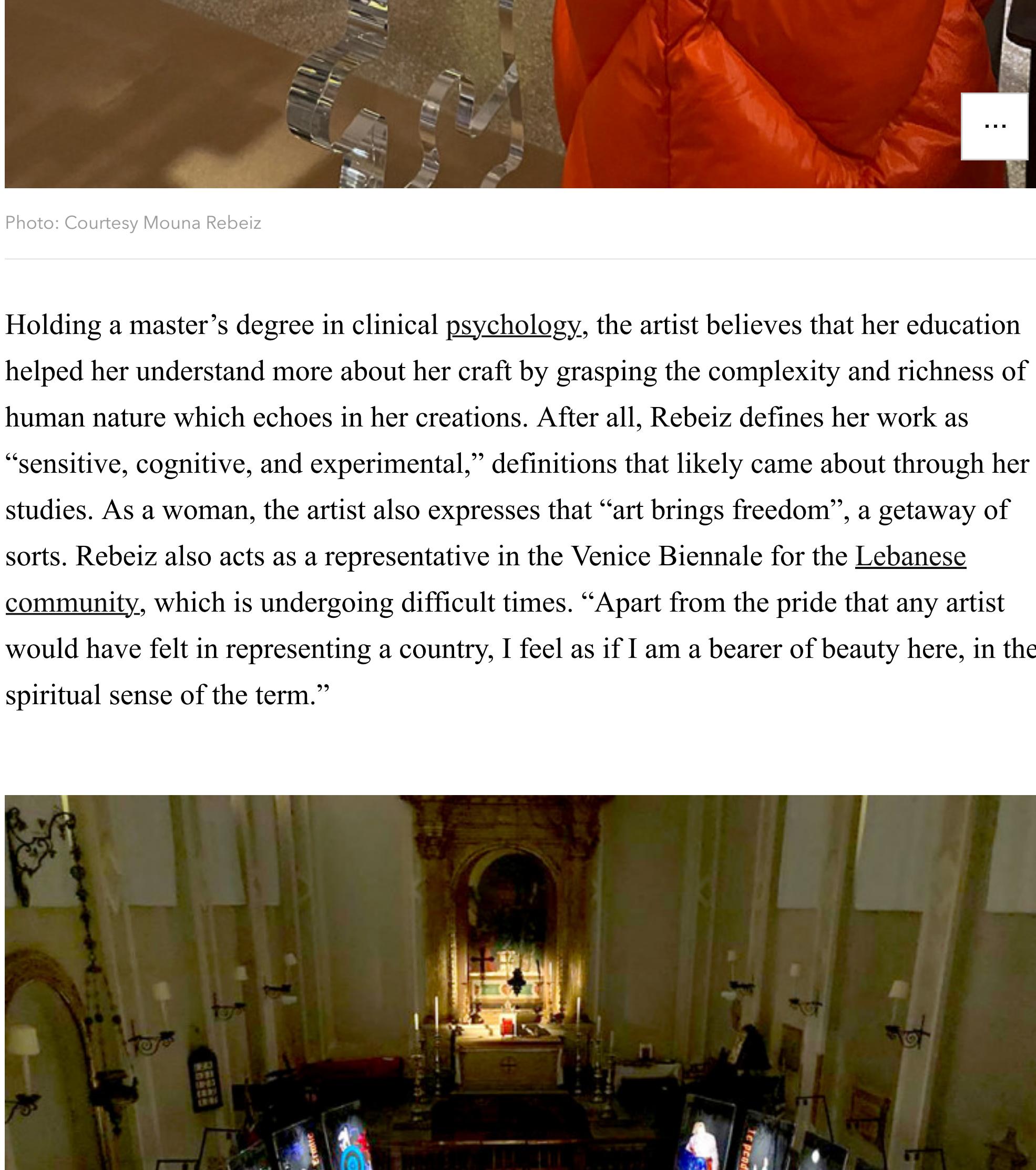
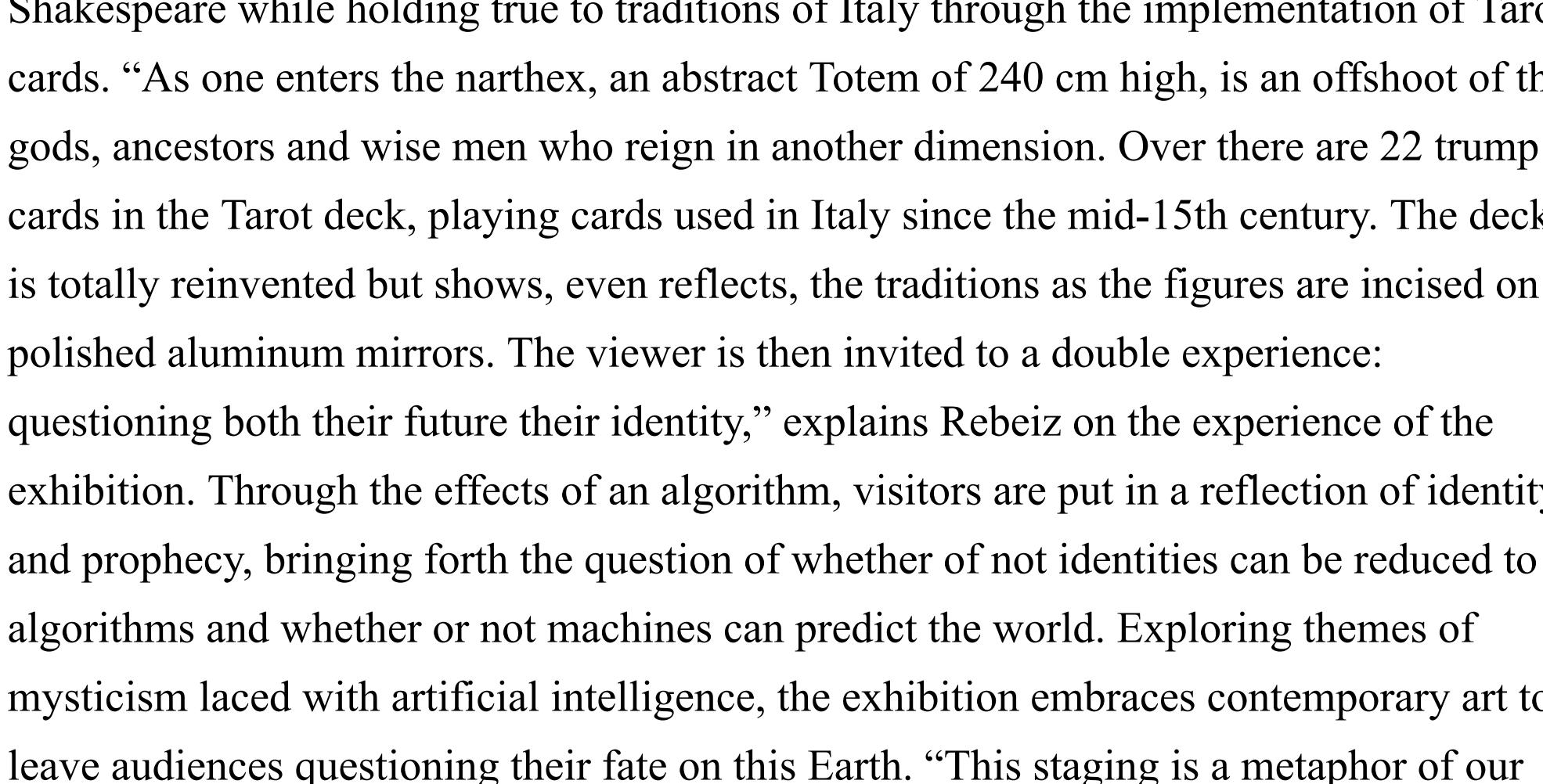


Photo: Courtesy Mouna Rebeiz

Holding a master’s degree in clinical psychology, the artist believes that her education helped her understand more about her craft by grasping the complexity and richness of human nature which echoes in her creations. After all, Rebeiz defines her work as “sensitive, cognitive, and experimental,” definitions that likely came about through her studies. As a woman, the artist also expresses that “art brings freedom”, a getaway of sorts. Rebeiz also acts as a representative in the Venice Biennale for the Lebanese community, which is undergoing difficult times. “Apart from the pride that any artist would have felt in representing a country, I feel as if I am a bearer of beauty here, in the spiritual sense of the term.”



Drawing inspiration from William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, the chosen title “The Soothsayer” derives its name from the character in the play that warns Caesar of his premeditated assassination, but was ignored and deemed a dreamer. The theme of the collection alludes to fortune telling, identity, and fate, all present in the infamous play by Shakespeare while holding true to traditions of Italy through the implementation of Tarot cards. “As one enters the narthex, an abstract Totem of 240 cm high, is an offshoot of the gods, ancestors and wise men who reign in another dimension. Over there are 22 trump cards in the Tarot deck, playing cards used in Italy since the mid-15th century. The deck is totally reinvented but shows, even reflects, the traditions as the figures are incised on polished aluminum mirrors. The viewer is then invited to a double experience: questioning both their future their identity,” explains Rebeiz on the experience of the exhibition. Through the effects of an algorithm, visitors are put in a reflection of identity and prophecy, bringing forth the question of whether or not identities can be reduced to algorithms and whether or not machines can predict the world. Exploring themes of mysticism laced with artificial intelligence, the exhibition embraces contemporary art to leave audiences questioning their fate on this Earth. “This staging is a metaphor of our contemporary society where man is all-powerful, or in the words of Protagoras, the measure of all things, and where all mystery, or mysticism is annihilated by the power of technology,” elaborates the Lebanese artist. This immersive experience is not the last for Rebeiz, as the future awaits another showcase in New York for her.

Mouna Rebeiz is represented by Leila Heller gallery. She just had her first solo show, *Colour Power*, in the UAE at Leila Heller Gallery Dubai. Currently she has her “Totem” sculptures on view at the Dubai International Financial Center. Her next solo show will be at Leila Heller Gallery New York in early 2023.

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