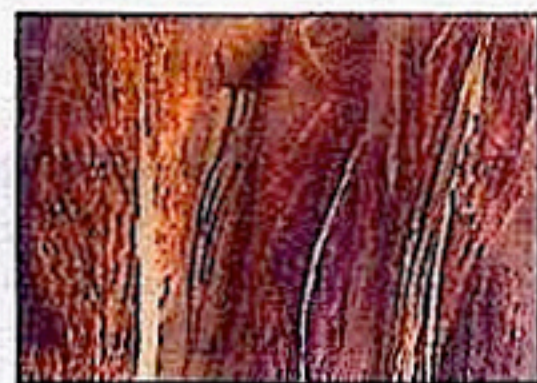


WEEKEND Review

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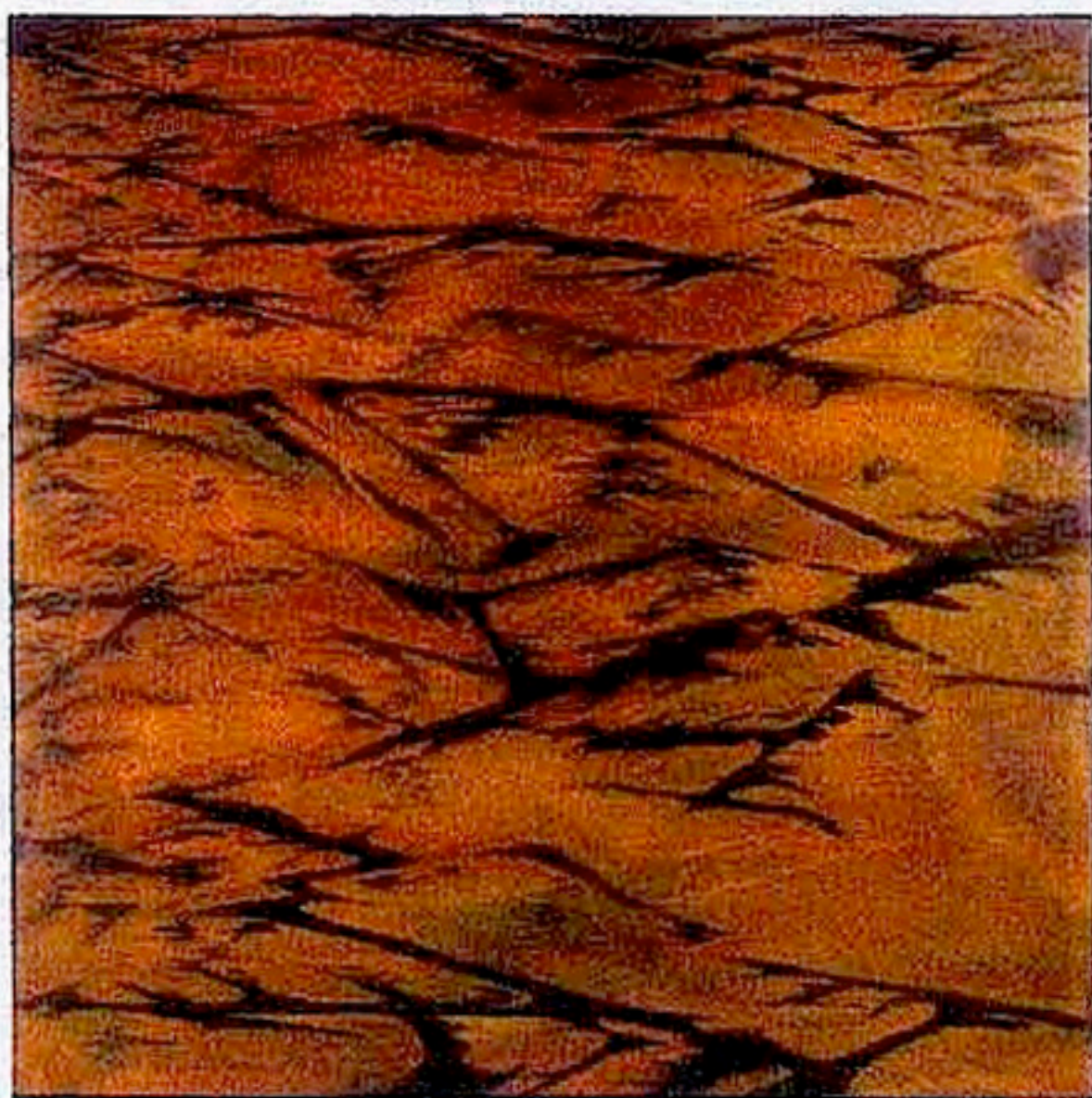
**Sticky times
for rice in**



ARTS

**Carlos Acosta
on ballet**

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2007



Elemental experiments

An artist explores the realm of space, matter and impermanence to create a fantasy world

By JYOTI KALSI
Special to Weekend Review

Christina Mamakos takes inspiration from the endless sea, the ever-changing desert and centuries-old boulders to explore concepts of matter, vastness, space, transformation and impermanence. Interestingly, she uses the very elements her work depicts to create her singular artworks.

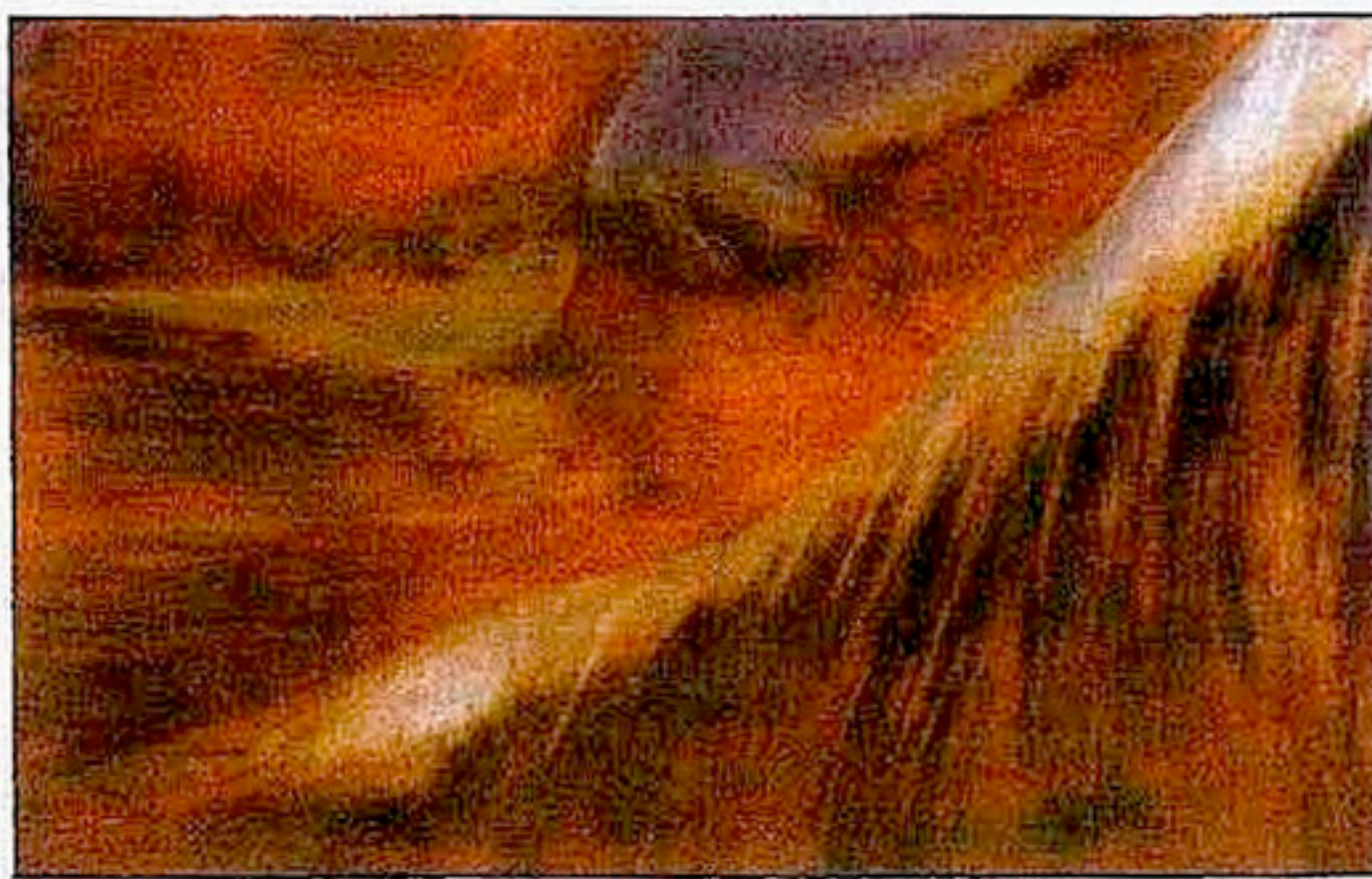
Her raw, earthy desertscapes are not painted with a brush on canvas. The undulating dunes are the result of rust formed by the effect of seawater on steel plates and further burnished with acid and sand, like a daguerreotype etched on the steel.

In her latest exhibition at Total Arts Gallery, titled *Scape 2007*, the Greek-American artist has created a fantasy environment that engages viewers in a novel aesthetic experience. Desert images on steel plates are suspended back to back with seascapes on canvas. A video of the surface of the sea, projected on the ceiling, adds to the viewers' experiences of space, motion, liquid and solid in all its forms, producing a sense of being within, outside and underneath the elements — all at once.

Melange of emotions

Christina was born in San Francisco. She studied fine art at Oxford, comparative literature at Harvard University and music at Sorbonne University in Paris before moving to Athens. The title of her exhibition comes from the fact that it is a combination of mountainscapes, seascapes and desertscapes.

"In this series of work, I have approached my explorations of space and matter as playful reflections of melancholy, impossibility, solitude and fantasy. I have used the



In the *Scape 2007* series, Christina Mamakos creates a fantasy environment that engages viewers in a novel aesthetic experience

themes of sea, sand and stone to create internal space for the viewer, providing a topos for imagination and memory," Christina says. "Topographies of vastness — sea, desert or rocks — are universes of liquid, sand and light, where anything above the surface becomes unavoidable, creating a silhouette against the sky, sand or sea, containing within it the possibilities of a mirage. I want to invite viewers to immerse themselves in this imagery so potent with magic and animism."

About her unique techniques and materials, Christina says: "I have used corten steel plates instead of the standard zinc plates used for etching because they are sensitive

to rust and corrosion. Rusted with seawater, etched with acids, burnished with sand and borne by tools, the images emerge from the steel plates [to] reveal various possibilities of matter and their relationship to psychological space. The images are alive to time as they slowly continue to corrode in relation to the elements they are surrounded by. It was amazing to explore this transformation of matter as solid and impenetrable as steel.

"Although two-dimensional, these etchings have a sculptural feel that I hope conveys the tangible impermanence of desert forms and the tactile and sublime quality of the awesome elements of nature," she adds.

Every element in Christina's multimedia installation is carefully thought out. The seascapes are from an earlier series called *Mare Nostrum*, where she explored water and the symbols apparent on the surface of the sea in a quest to understand the code of nature, the language of matter and the voice of things that make up the world. Her paintings of boulders explore space and our relation to it.

Fascination for form

"I was fascinated by the human forms of rocks and their displaced centre of gravity that made the stones seem to be in motion — as if about to tip over although they have been in place for centuries," she says.

"By exhibiting the seascapes back to back with the steel desertscapes, I have tried to create a fantasy topography. The underwater video projection on the ceiling gives the viewer a feeling of being in a sort of underwater desert. I have tried to create a psychological space derived from a physical experience of the work," Christina says.

The artist is excited about exhibiting her work in Dubai. "To me, this city represents the possibilities of a promised land — a new universe that has emerged from the desert like a mirage. This is a city of delights on the cusp of development, where the East meets the West, perhaps to mingle and not merge. It also sits perfectly in relation to my work as it is both a desert and sea culture. The architectural explorations offer an unusual opportunity for an installation in the industrial yet desert environment of Al Quoz."

Scape 2007 will continue at the Total Arts Gallery, Al Quoz, until November 4. The gallery is open from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 7pm daily except Fridays.