

YOUSSEF AOUN
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An Inner Migration

For Youssef Aoun, his multi-dimensional work combines abstraction with natural and mineral products, making use of a range of textured materials, including acrylic, sand and marble powder, which he blends into lines, colours and shapes.

In his own words, his 'mysterious spiritual and sensual universe opens a door to a subtle merger of the body into nature', noting that in his work he has undertaken '...an inner migration, drawing and painting in the image of migratory birds that do not need to see their destination'.

To an outside eye the paintings of Youssef Aoun might speak first to extremities, his large canvases full of contrast, blackness a contrast to swathes of white. Yet for Aoun, black is not a signifier of darkness, nor white of the light. His use of these high contrast tonalities serves another purpose.

Nonetheless, drama appears in this work, intrigue, a kind of chiaroscuro without the reprieve of three-dimensional form, light source, this or that reality. Throughout this body of work affect emerges through contrast playing out through tone as well as texture, the combination forming a grit, hardness, crystalline quality, held within the strong play of distinct layering, colour and tone.

In my own exploration of Aoun's work, a lightness came to mind, not necessarily that of light in contrast to dark, but rather the lightness of air, of light and dark as a kind of index of density, of what is thick and what is thinner.

I don't want to talk about butterflies. The evident lightness, thinness, the somehow opaque transparencies, should not perhaps connect directly to such delicacy as a winged insect, a thinness in which in this world of Aoun, a contrast will always appear. But this is a butterfly, amidst the grit, formed from grit, from movement, from the diaphanous coming up against its opposite. The paint is thick, smeared with confidence, perhaps as much care as there is in any stroke but thick, thick, even before the granularity is extended, highlighted. What is this thickness underneath it all. Thickness again and again.

Thickness among the down strokes of what is light.

The deep black paint seems to squat, a top layer not covering the light, not crushing the butterfly, but almost caressing, following, creating a depth that is related to the layers of paint but comes also from the use of black, the heaviness of the texture.

What is under and over, covered and covering, similar form, and unexpected energetic movement of paint. There is a distillation into essence and then a fracturing. In fact, this is a fracturing that seems to return throughout Aoun's career. With Aoun, there is a sense that his forms circle around the figure, creatures, recognizable in their energetic flurries, the feel of being alive, if always alluding to the trauma of that state. And indeed, the work speaks to the wound.

Did you notice that the colours do not mix, that the canvas hold a definite edge one on top of another a scarce outline here and blue peeks out from under black.

Here, matt grey sits atop every layer, a background over black in a thinner application, the feeling of a mix created while the individuality of the layer is retained. In a sense, Aoun's particular application of paint creates thickness in the sand.

Thickness and a distinctiveness the work not collapsing into itself but connecting across layers.

Such a speckled and textured black paint flecked with lighter tones, at times appearing like light. Something to look into as thickness coincides with thin air, night.

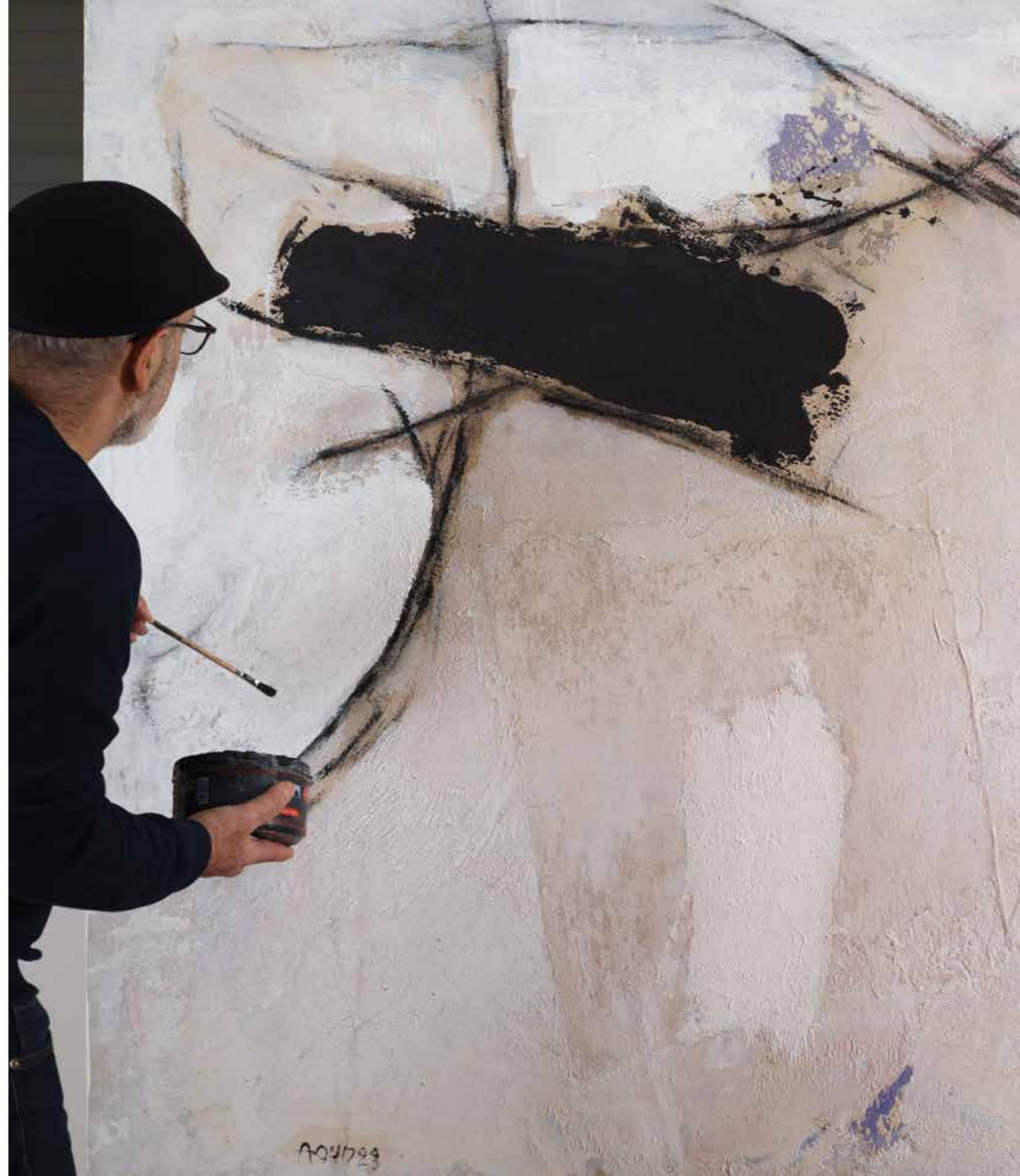
I think again of the butterfly the diaphanous under the weight but the dark now is also light, clear, crisp, a layer to look through.

At times the sand seems to have been thrown onto the canvas, another layer at others integrated, within.

This is not sparkle, surface, it is a serious grit, doing work that Youssef's paint is rarely allowed to do, mingles, connects across colours, applications of paint. The grit is present, in the presence of colour as a separator, the grit is binder, connector. Integration is met with disintegration in Youssef's application of paint, much as the forms mutate energetically, so too do the materials enter.

In the words of Aoun 'the image of migratory birds that do not need to see their destination'.

Amy Todman
Beirut, February 2026



Rencontre I
Mixed media on canvas | 200x150 cm | 2023



Identification I
Mixed media on canvas | 195x140 cm | 2025



Ascension du Blanc
Mixed media on canvas | 195x140 cm | 2025





Sonorité Ardente I II III
Mixed media on canvas | 50x40 cm each | 2025



Noir Abandonné
Mixed media on canvas | 202x190 cm | 2024



Envol I
Mixed media on canvas
195x300 cm | 2025



Envol II
Mixed media on canvas
195x300 cm | 2025



Ode blanche I II III
Mixed media on canvas | 50x40 cm each | 2025

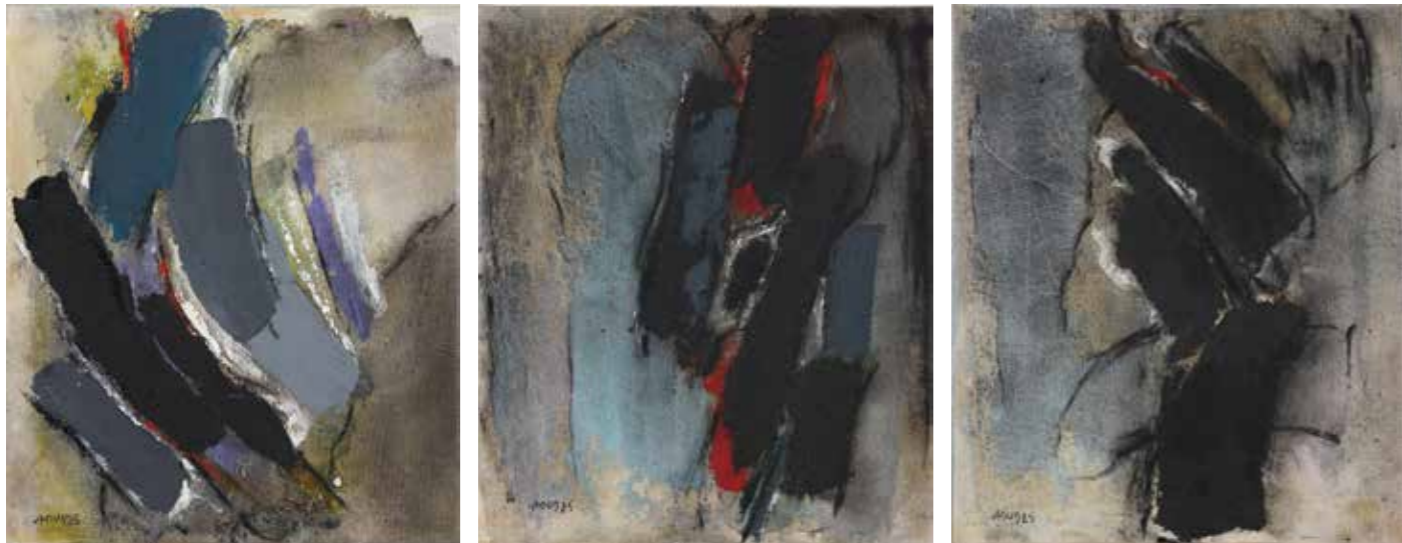
Rencontre II
Mixed media on canvas | 140x195 cm | 2025



Mélodie Bleue I II III
Mixed media on canvas | 43x30 cm each | 2022



Noir Perdu
Mixed media on canvas | 140x198 cm | 2023



Eclipse rouge I II III
Mixed media on canvas | 60x50 cm each | 2025



Eclipse de l'Esprit I II III
Mixed media on canvas | 50x40 cm each | 2025



L'Arbre de l'Inconnu
Mixed media on canvas | 198x168 cm | 2024



Blanc Inhérent
Mixed media on canvas | 198x168 cm | 2024



Le Porteur
Mixed media on canvas | 198x168 cm | 2024



Figure Perdue I
Mixed media on canvas | 75x50 cm | 2025



Figure Perdue II
Mixed media on canvas | 75x50 cm | 2025



Fleurs Flétries I II III
Mixed media on canvas | 60x50 cm each | 2025



Automne 2025 I II III
Mixed media on canvas | 50x40 cm each | 2025



L'Esclave Affranchi I II III
Mixed media on canvas | 60x50 cm each | 2025

Retour X – I II III
Mixed media on canvas | 60x50 cm each | 2024

About Youssef Aoun

Youssef Elias Aoun was born in 1965 in Kfarwe, South Lebanon and lives in Beirut. He holds a Higher Degree from the Lebanese University, Faculty of Fine Art (1989) and a Masters in Fine Arts (Painting and Printing techniques: lithography and etching) from the Lebanese Academy of fine Arts (ALBA) (2005). In 1993 and 2004 he undertook several internships at the Beaux-Arts de Paris, France in lithography and etching. From 1990 until the present, he has been a teacher at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA), and from 1999 until 2005 was a teacher at the Lebanese American University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Beirut.

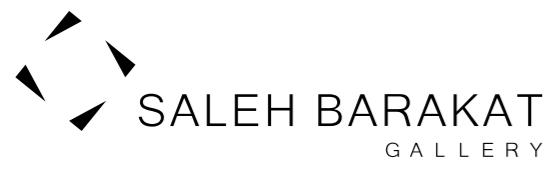
His many solo exhibitions include presentations at the Lebanese Academy of fine Arts (ALBA), Lebanon (2015); Sultan Gallery, Kuwait (2012,2013); Agial Art Gallery, Beirut (2012); Mers-Les-Bains, France (2009); Sultan Gallery, Kuwait (2007); Centre Culturel Français, Beirut (2007); Gallery Magenta, Vimercate, Milan (2006); Gallery Claudine LEGRAND (2005); Galerie Janine Rubeiz Beirut (2004); Manif Seoul (2002); Galerie Epreuve d'Artiste (2001) Lebanon. Mac 2000, France (2000, 2001, 2003).

Youssef has been part of numerous group exhibitions, including, Galerie Cheriff Tabet et Sherttowear Khan Sacy (2025); L'Art Abstrait au Liban, Saleh Barakat Gallery, Beiteddine, Lebanon (2023); Nour Ballouk Gallery, Grand Opening, Lebanon (2023); Dessine-moi un cèdre, dessine-moi la Méditerranée, Salon Monaco Méditerranée, Monaco (2022); Dessine-moi un cèdre, Hymne au Liban, Galerie Modus, Paris, France (2021); Voices from Lebanon, Contemporary prints by Lebanese Artists, Cincinnati, USA (2020); 30th Anniversary of Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France (2018), Beirut Art Fair, Galerie Aida Cherrfane (2016); Abu Dhabi Art Fair and Beirut Art Fair, Agial Art Gallery (2012); Strasbourg Art Fair, France, Galerie Epreuve d'Artiste (2001), ARTUEL, Galerie Epreuve d'Artiste (2001); 7th International Biennale of Cairo, Egypt (1998).

He has been the recipient of a number of awards including Sharjah Biennial, U.A.E. (Prize of the Jury 1995); XVI Autumn Hall, Sursock Museum, Beirut, Lebanon (Dorothy Salhab Kazemi Prize for Young Artists 1991 and 1995). He has also organised many workshops and symposia, as well as curatorial projects. Notable examples include, "The Art of Table Setting" workshop with Werner Bowens (Dutch-French artist) ALBA, Lebanon (2012); Engraving and Screen-Printing Workshop with Rimer Cardillo (American-Uruguayan artist) ALBA, Lebanon (2010); Lithography Workshop with Patrick Devreux (French lithographer from the INSBA) ALBA, Lebanon (2004); El-Chouf Symposium on Mixed Media Painting, Baakline, Lebanon (2001); Engraving Workshop with Jean-Pierre Tanguy (French engraver from the INSBA) ALBA, Lebanon (2000) and the curatorial project Polish Exhibition, Polish Engravings, ALBA (2012).

His work is held in a number of private collections including Sursock Museum, Lebanon; The National Museum, U.A.E; Bibliothèque Nationale de France, France; National Museum, Dubai; Émirats Arabes Unis., Ministry of Culture, Lebanon; National Museum of Qatar and Audi Bank, Lebanon.





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