

« HYMN TO LIFE » AT MONTBLANC



Mouna Rebelz, De Profundis, Oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm



Mouna Rebelz, De Profundis, Oil on canvas, 200 x 300 cm



Mouna Rebelz, Moon, Oil on canvas, 195 x 304 cm

Mouna Rebelz exhibits "Hymn to life" at the boutique Montblanc at 7, rue de la Paix in Paris, until February 11th. An opportunity for Luxe Immo to meet the artist-painter and Elsa Godart, as well as Michel Adé, managing director of Montblanc France and Violante Avogadro di Vigliano, Communications Officer of the prestigious brand for French-speaking countries.



Mouna Rebelz and Elsa Godart



Marit Bohmer, Henriette de Clermont-Tonnerre, Sophie Nadez, Alexandre Zouat, Mado Maylis



Mouna Rebelz, The strip of pearls, Oil on canvas, 178 x 118 cm

Mouna Rebelz, artist-painter and Elsa Godart, philosopher, psychoanalyst and writer

Mouna Rebelz, you are showing "Hymn to life" for the first time, a series of nine canvases, in the boutique Montblanc at 7, rue de la Paix. Elsa Godart, you were the privileged witness of these recent creations. What ties do you both have?

Mouna Rebelz: The continuous question setting all the things that link me with Elsa Godart. The privileged link is Metaphysics, a dimension which touches me particularly and that I retranscribe in my way of painting, particularly in the making of my backgrounds. "Hymn to life" is a Caravaggio style series by the strong presence of chiaroscuro, which is symbolically the essence of painting.

Elsa Godart: I had the chance of accompanying Mouna Rebelz throughout the process of creation of this series. This relation was born from friendship. Dialogue and exchange are the heart of it. Mouna was always curious for this philosophical question setting which she increased through much reading: it is true that philosophical concepts allow giving words to a thought in germination or going even farther. The echoes between her concerns and mine were very strong. And I can tell you that the influence was reciprocal since my next book on femininity, around the mind of the philosopher Edith Stein, is dedicated to her.

Mouna Rebelz, how do you approach your paintings?

M.R.: I work with models and on photographs. First I make a sketch, use poses, take photos then draw. I ask for poses again if needed. The use of photography is a great help to me. I actually often work

at night, time at which it is difficult to call a model. Every painting is furthermore extremely long to accomplish, about one month at the rate of ten hours a day. I actually use an oil painting technology of the past, that of the 17th century. I first apply a sienna background on the whole canvas, then I draw the character. I once again apply this colour as well as another nuance, of burnt umber, to place the shadows and to create the chiaroscuro. I then work on the skin, which I apply in three layers and then I again pass in glazes. That is how the grand masters of the past proceeded. This is the reason why you have this depth for the skin which you would not have if you did not go through all these stages. Also for the backgrounds, because black is not applied on the white of the canvas but on the sienna colour, which creates this lacquer effect.

E.G.: This depth joins the Metaphysics concept that we spoke about a while ago.

The shape thus hugs the background.

M.R.: shape and background are always related. As Victor Hugo said, "shape, is the background that comes to the surface". We are on the same register. Both come from the same source, and the shape symbolizes the background.

You are showing here a brightly called "The Three Graces". Did you want to re-interpret the Ancients?

M.R.: Yes, I re-interpreted ancient themes several times. I also draw inspiration from references of the 19th century such as Stendhal's



Mouna Rebelz, Grace 7, Oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm

"The Red and the Black", or "The Danaïde" and "The Thinker" by Rodin. "The Origin of the World" by Courbet inspired me, for example, for a small painting that I simply called "Origin", hoping in evocation to go farther than Courbet. This re-interpretation done in 2005 was the starting point or as my notes. Later I did "toto" which is the corollary. I was not able to exhibit them here but I will certainly show them in Manhattan next September. I cannot tell you anything else about it at present.

What is your development? Did you always paint?

M.R.: I have a master's degree in psychology and I speak four languages. For two years I was model for the pleasure then I brought out a collection of upmarket ready-to-wear clothes in cooperation with Dominique Fourni, Canadian fashion designer. I then followed my husband to Canada, travelled a lot then lived in the United States. When I came back in France, I incidentally met Alix de la Source who is a

great master of the 17th and 18th centuries. She is lecturer and copyist at the Louvre, and worked with art restorers. She initiated me to painting and it was a great discovery for me, which has since become a passion. It was fourteen years ago. I worked with her till January 2005. For 10 years, I therefore had a very academic, very classical art education. I copied great masters a lot, in the Louvre. In 2005, I launched myself alone for more freedom. I directly approached the theme of the woman. By seeing the canvas by Courbet, I made my version called "Origin". All the nudes have, as I told you, stemmed from that painting. The woman is my favourite subject and beyond, sensuality. I am Lebanese: sensuality and the Middle East are two very related things.

From this fine knowledge of the work of Mouna Rebelz, Elsa Godart, you created "counter-realism".

E.G.: Actually, I proposed to Mouna Rebelz the idea of a new artistic current because very often, her art was excessively described as realist. After reflection on her method and her technology, on the true basis of her approach, I thus created a current called "counter-realism": Mouna Rebelz's style flirts with realism, it resembles it but is not similar. In her art, nothing can exist as it is in reality. For example, even though the bodies represented have a "realistic" appearance, their excesses and their proportions give an unreal impression. Her bodies always have something inexact and wrong, and in it that they manage to express an emotion. The same is true for the colours, which worked and revised, give the feeling of a perfectly realistic game of shadows and of light, while once again, it is a question of translating the insubstantial and unreal world. The first work of Mouna Rebelz is to translate feelings and emotions into painting. This is the very vocation of counter-realism. By choosing this name, I slightly diverted the phrase by Sacha Guitry: "I am against women, closely against". With



Mouna Rebelz and Nicole Duedi



Olivier and Yve Laporte, Mouna Rebelz, Elsa Godart, Stéphane Adès, Antoine Jumeau

counter-realism, we are against the real, closely against! It is a contemporary reinterpretation of classical realism, a manner of "diverting the real" to see it all the better.

M.R.: Emotion and feeling are indeed at the heart of the process. In my canvas called "De Profundis" for example, I wanted to represent an idea and a feeling, to express a pain, according to the work of Oscar Wilde with the same title. ("De Profundis" is a collection of letters that Oscar Wilde wrote to his young lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, from the prison of Reading Gaol, in 1897. He was imprisoned two years for "crimes against public decency", editor's notes)

How did this exhibition at the boutique Montblanc get organised?

M.R.: In cooperation with the Montblanc team and Michel Adé, managing director of Montblanc France.

E.G.: I add that the relation between brushes and feathers was obvious. I very much like this analogy: Montblanc gives a patina to its traditional fountain pens just as Mouna Rebelz works her ancient style canvases. In both cases, there is a varnish that has nothing to do with a surface varnish.

■ Marie-Estelle Fourmeaux

Violante Avogadro di Vigliano, Montblanc Communications Officer for French-speaking countries



Violante Avogadro di Vigliano

Boutique Montblanc, 7, rue de la Paix, Paris

Can you tell us about the genesis of exhibitions organised here, at the boutique Montblanc 7, rue de la Paix?

Violante Avogadro di Vigliano: In 2009, we created the Montblanc Prize for contemporary art in partnership with the international fair Docks Art Fair in Lyon, initiated by the gallery Olivier Houq of Lyon. On the occasion of the opening of the boutique the same year, we displayed, during one and a half month, the works of the laureate: Chiharu Shiota, a Japanese artist rather known at the time and now recognized. The initiative received such a welcome by the public that we decided to set up an exhibition policy. We thus give emergent or recognized artists the possibility of having an exhibition place in Paris. But this enterprise related to our boutique of 7, rue de la Paix is by no means an accident: the Montblanc Company is much involved in the fields of contemporary art and of art in general. We have for example a Cultural Foundation comprising a collection of more or less 150 works of modern and contemporary art. It has existed for almost 20 years. More generally, we are rather engaged in favour of art trades.

Is it possible to visit the Foundation?

V.A.d.V.: No, it is a private collection displayed in the firm's headquarters building in Hamburg, in Germany. The works are displayed to the advantage of the employees of Montblanc and of visitors. We do not have the vocation of making exhibitions.

How do you select the artists displayed at 7, rue de la Paix?

V.A.d.V.: Idea is organising exhibitions in relation with French or Parisian topicality. Let us review it to give you an idea, the programme in 2010. In January last year, during the Fashion Week in Paris, we displayed photos by Vincent Lapparent, fashion photographer who has covered the haute couture parades worldwide for 6 years. In February and March, we entrusted with two auctioneers an exhibition around writing. Seven galleries and seven artists were invited to give their views, among which the visual artist Pierre Blarouch or the Kalkuz artistic duet.



Boutique Montblanc, 7, rue de la Paix, Paris

In May, on the occasion of the Cannes film festival, we cooperated with Henry Tullio, photographer working exclusively for Paris Match for 40 years. The exhibition presented photos of personalities that marked him during the Festival for the past 40 years. Then, during the Football World Cup, we presented photographs of young football players on a beach of Southern Africa, by Andrea Silva, artist living between that country, Amsterdam and Paris. September was awarded by the Montblanc Prize of photography that we have been marking for 5 years in partnership with the L'Espresso magazine. A jury of a dozen people selects three laureates, young hopes or confirmed talents, which we display here to September. In November, in parallel to Paris Photo, we associated with the Aperture Gallery of New York, which exhibited half of its collection at the Carrousel of the Louvre and the other half in our boutique. Thus, our exhibitions are always related

to French topicality. January, 2011: we start off the year with "Hymn to life", a series of paintings that Mouna Rebeiz presented to us and that immediately enticed us.

The exhibitions are organised according to topicality, but how do you select the artists?

V.A.d.V.: I select the exhibitions in cooperation with Ingrid Roosen-Trinks, head of the Foundation and of cultural affairs based in Germany at the main office. She has great expertise and culture, and has so a sensitive eye.

Why are you so invested in this exhibition policy?

V.A.d.V.: We hope that the people who initially enter to purchase a Montblanc product also discover an artist. The purpose is the exchange. We give possibility to clients to make an artistic meeting. We are not an art gallery, only a place of exhibition. We get no percentage from the artist and do not do sales of works. Every person interested person is directly addressed to the artist.

■ Marie-Émile Fourneau

Michel Adé, Managing Director de Montblanc France



Michel Adé, General Manager Montblanc France

Montblanc and art are they two intrinsically linked entities?

M.A.: The territory of communication, natural I would say, of Montblanc is culture. Through the world of the writing, we strongly invested ourselves first of all into literary field. Then we passed to music. Mark being German, classical music and opera are indeed very important in Germanic culture. For some twelve years, we have turned to plastic arts. We also award, since 1992, the Montblanc Culture Prize that rewards every year famous patrons of the arts of Arts in 12 countries in the world. Montblanc and Culture therefore go very well together. This evening, we are at 7, rue de la Paix in Paris, the biggest Montblanc boutique in Europe which opened about two years ago and the areas of which allow presenting works of art. We presently welcome the artist Mouna Rebeiz whose talent you will be able to appreciate.

We have just begun the year. What are the developments of Montblanc for 2011?

M.A.: The Montblanc brand, more than renowned for the quality of its fountain pens, is developing more and more in watchmaking. In terms of product development and of strategy, watches are our "hobby-horse". It is now almost 15 years since we started in watchmaking but we are, I would say, more and more legitimate at this time. We have bought out two factories in Switzerland and we really want to make of

Montblanc an art watchmaking brand. Next week for example, I will be in Geneva at the Art Watchmaking Trade Show where we will present novelties in world premier (The trade show took place from January 17th to 21st of this year, editor's note). I suppose that it will have an important impact.

In your "heart trade" if I may say, fountain pens, you develop an impressive range of products. How do you select your designers?

M.A.: We have the chance of having an integrated design studio, which is in Paris. All worldwide creations of fountain pen are therefore made in Paris in terms of design. They are then manufactured in Hamburg in our workshops. Fountain pens remain for us the heart and the soul of the Firm and it is clear that we developed a large number of collections. The cultural on which we put the emphasis is translated by the creation of many fountain pens in homage to important artists, writers and painters, or to important architectural works. We also have a range of exceptional fountain pens edited at only a few copies for collectors worldwide, delighted to discover very sophisticated products, manufactured in our "Craftsmen's workshops".

What are the boutiques that you plan to open?

M.A.: We have just opened a boutique, on December 6th last, in Monaco, where up to then we had no space devoted to the brand. Monte Carlo will be a very important place for the brand. The princely marriage taking place in July, we hope for Montblanc to make 2011 a partly Monegasque year. We also opened a boutique in Megeve at 80% devoted to the brand. The French Riviera and winter sports stations are very important places for us. Besides, the name of Montblanc being linked to the mountain, we will certainly have future developments in some of the very nice French skiing stations.

Since when do you manage Montblanc France?

M.A.: For more than three years now. I am starting my fourth year. France was always a very important market for Montblanc because it is one of the countries most visited in the world, if it is not the most visited. The brand being international, we benefit of two very distinct clientele, (French and foreign) quite interesting to follow with great perspectives of development. Here, at 7, rue de la Paix; we have the chance of having rather specific creations and notably jewellery pieces. We have begun to develop in this field. This Parisian boutique is one of the only places where it is possible to see exceptional Montblanc pieces of art jewellery-making. For all these reasons, 7 rue de la Paix is therefore a very specific place for the brand.

■ Marie-Émile Fourneau

"Hymn to life" by Mouna Rebeiz, 10 February 11th, 2011
Boutique Montblanc, 7 rue de la Paix - 75002 Paris