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El Zabri, Leila. *Fertile Dreams: Exploring Land, Transformation and Ritual in the Middle East*. Planted Journal, November 11, 2025.



Rema Ghuloum
Eternal Sun, 2025
Oil and acrylic-gouache on canvas
35 x 35 in
88.9 x 88.9 cm

Leila El Zabri: Your abstract landscapes often blur the boundaries between inner and outer worlds. In Fertile Dreams, how does your art mirror the act of dreaming or remembering? How do physical senses, such as sound, scent and touch shape your creative expression and your exploration of self?

Rema Ghuloum: My paintings are experiential and reflect states of being. I consider them to be more like atmospheres than anything else because they shape-shift depending on what one brings to them. They capture the essence or feeling of a place or something familiar that words fail to describe accurately, much like dreaming or memory. Liminal spaces that exist between internal and external worlds are what interest me most.

Memory functions in multiple ways in the work. I might have specific sensory associations with a color that directs a painting or a feeling that correlates with a palette that I will begin with, but it isn't fixed. It is a starting point or a guide. Involuntary memory can also be triggered unconsciously when I am developing the paintings or when one is viewing them. This interests me because it allows for a kind of time travel within the work. We all carry our own experiences with us when encountering artworks. I love that. I don't want my work to depict my emotions or control what others feel, but instead try to create experiences that feel boundless, free, open-hearted in an attempt to propel one to feel something. In this way, the paintings aren't static. They allow for the work to transform with each person.

Memory is created through my physical process of painting as well. My paintings synthesize the energy of moments in time and evolve through stages. As the primed canvases are propped on the floor I pour, splatter, squeeze, spray, and flick diluted paint onto them. The poured grounds become energetic fields that develop slowly. The canvases develop from each surface layered daily with thin stains of paint—scumbling, glazing and sanding in between. There is a tension that arises between the immediacy of pouring and the timely process of adding and erasing. An order or pattern is created through the chaos. Rather than illustrating these contrasts, the paintings combine opposing forces. Once dry the entire painting is sanded down so that hidden layers reveal something unexpected. The memory of each color and mark activates the next. The paint becomes embedded and integral to the surface in a geological way. From building up the ground, to then excavating it repeatedly over time, the painting materializes like the formation of a crystal. Each day, I apply the remaining paint left on my palette onto the edges of the painting. This gesture acts as a record of my process.

Synesthesia is a big part of my work. I am a color-tactile synesthete. I feel physical sensations when I see color. It is largely how I process the world. A feeling of a place or sometimes even a sound, scent, or taste might evoke different colors unconsciously. I don't necessarily recognize what I am trying to bring forth until a painting is done. I try to be as present with it and actively listen to the work as it tells me what it is. I trust the process.

I am also a Reiki healer and a long-time Vipassana meditation practitioner. This particular meditation practice is one that assists in cultivating a deep awareness of sensations in the body. I draw parallels between this form of mediation and my painting practice. When developing a painting rather than thinking about an image or something concrete, I think about sensations much like what one might feel. I consider how to depict parallel contrasting formal qualities that can coexist within a painting. For me, these subtle differences in texture, color, and surface mimic life and activate the energy in the work.