

**Clotilde Ancarani dresses down****Exhibition uses fashion as a jump-off to commentary on all things feminine**

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*Review*

BEIRUT: Fashionistas of Beirut have an option other than shopping in the form of Galerie Alice Mogabgab's latest show, which is devoted to the recent, multidisciplinary work of Chicago-born, Brussels-based artist Clotilde Ancarani. Many of Ancarani's lush, expressive canvases feature dresses painted in various colors to suggest the shades of difference between being a girl and being a woman.

Of course, the artist's subject isn't solely fashion fetish or a tonic for closet clothes hounds. Ancarani's treatment of the dress involves a few feminist undercurrents. The dress in her paintings functions like a mask that signifies the many changing roles a woman in society plays, from mother and wife to artist and creator - and most of all, a woman of desire.

In emphasizing the dress over the figure, Ancarani toys with presence and absence as well. She doesn't paint the dress as a static object of

beauty but rather as a living thing. Ancarani's subject triggers a search for identity, replete with questions and doubts. Just as the artist exposes herself in her work, she also builds her own armor.

Ancarani, who is of Italian-American descent, was born in Chicago in 1965. She studied journalism in the US, and now lives in Belgium with her four children. She discovered art 10 years ago and has been exhibiting her work steadily since 1999.

In 2007 alone, she has had shows in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and now Lebanon. The current outing at Galerie Alice Mogabgab is entitled "Reserve aux Dames."

She often works in series, covering numerous canvases with flowers, antique fans and feathers. Her subjects are, more often than not, rendered in bold strokes of white paint set against darker, moodier grounds.

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One of her paintings on view in Beirut depicts a fan in what appears to be antique lace. The composition is covered with neutral tones, except the corner of the fan, which looks as if it had been dipped in wine or blood.

In addition to her mixed-media works on canvas, Ancarani also creates sculptures, paints on old plates and creates works that are perfect circles rather than traditional squares or rectangles.

Ancarani's dress paintings are balanced by a striking series of sculptures that resemble a dressmakers' mannequin. Her gowns appear like Greek statues, often with one shoulder strap missing, as if it had been lost to time. In her three-dimensional pieces, she emphasizes the curve of the breasts and suggests

movement in her ability to capture swishing fabric in, say, stolid bronze.

Some of her sculptures depict full length gowns that cascade to the floor. Others fall to what would be mid-calf, were there actually a woman beneath the garment rather than a suggestion of empty, though perhaps haunted, space.

According to gallery owner Alice Mogabgab, Ancarani captures the hard and soft sides of femininity and uses the dress as both camouflage and a barrier, erected between the artist's interior world and society. Clearly a sensualist, she also, according to Mogabgab, encourages viewers to feel the work literally, to understand its materiality by touch.

**Clotilde Ancarani's** exhibition of paintings and sculptures entitled "Reserve aux Dames" is on view at Galerie Alice Mogabgab on Gouraud Street in Gemmayzeh through November 3. For more information, please call +961 3 210 424 or check out [www.alicemogabgab.com](http://www.alicemogabgab.com)