

## Mireille's Nostalgia

By *Mohammad El Rawas*



**Untitled #1**, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 268x160cm - Courtesy of the artist and Art Sawa.

Looking at the paintings of Mireille Merhej from a distance, one instantly recalls the works of Jacques de la Villegle, Mimmo Rotella and Raymond Hains among many artists who have adopted the iconic style of de-collage or ripped street posters. When we get closer to Merhej's canvases however, we discover when scrutinizing their surface material that her images are in fact painstakingly painted in acrylic and are not simply collaged or de-collaged torn printed posters and pages of color magazines. This leads us to place her work into the realm of photo-realism and brings to mind -in

particular- Malcolm Morley's photo realistic paintings in the mid sixties which were drawn from mundane post cards of ships. Mireille's work is not actually based on found images of torn street posters but on small collages, which she makes out of carefully, chosen torn bits and pieces of pages from color magazines. Accordingly, the statement of her works is not merely about the final visual outcome but also about the process of making them; this process underlines the differences between the "apparently" accidental act of tearing strips of paper to create an original collage on the one hand and the act



Untitled #4, 2009, acrylic on canvas 105x120cm - Private Collection.

of carefully working out the blown up paintings on the other. The adjoined and juxtaposed images and texts in Mireille Merhej's paintings take us into a journey across time and Pop culture's: they mirror the worlds in the eye of the artist who is inviting us to escape from the burden of our mundane and stressful environment and visit her Pandora's box of la Dolce vita. As she explained "In my works, I try to transform scattered images floating in my mind into an interesting work of art". It is her ability to convert imagination into something more real that lies at the basis of her art; It is her attempt of putting back together all those personal and nostalgic memories into an acceptable form like putting together a broken piece of pottery, knowing that traces of fractures will always remain. Mireille admires her past and cherishes what it

contains. She find it inspirational, mystic, each one of the images she select is related a story whose importance has not faded to her.

#### *About the artist*

*After completing her AA in graphic design and BA in fine arts in LAU Beirut Mireille headed to Paris where she lived and obtained her Master in decorative painting. Since the year 2000 Mireille has been working with renowned Lebanese interior designers painting murals, ceilings and walls with different techniques and textures for residential and commercial spaces. In 2009 Mireille abandoned her work to create her own creative art work, mostly paintings on canvas where she deals with her nostalgia for her past memories and childhood using images from magazines news papers or pictures taken by the artist herself. Mireille currently lives and works in Beirut.*