

An abstract painting with a dominant blue color palette. The composition is filled with dense, black, scribbled lines that create a sense of movement and complexity. In the center, there are faint, sketchy outlines of human figures, possibly a group of people. The background is a mix of various shades of blue, from light turquoise to deep, dark navy. There are also some splatters of other colors, including a bright yellow diagonal line on the left side and some pink and orange spots. The overall effect is one of intense energy and emotional depth.

selma feriani

FALLEN ARCHETYPES

THAMEUR MEJRI

FALLEN ARCHETYPES

At times when Western settler-colonialism continues to exonerate itself from moral and political condemnation, when disfigurements of history are perpetuated, our consciousness is alarmed, imminently and triumphantly, to the perils and injustices of imperial politics. Thameur Mejri's previous body of work, where his intellectual and artistic mission sought to criticize and deconstruct his oriental environment through occidental tools, has shifted contrapuntally. Disillusioned and disenchanting with the hegemonic occidental model – a sentiment triggered by the ongoing rationalization of dehumanizing acts – the artist relies on that very model's parlance as to decolonize and deconstruct its defects and fissures. *Fallen Archetypes* is a series of several variations, as he terms it, from Mejri's upcoming solo show. To this end, through this newest body of work, he examines what happens in the painting and through the painting, where indifference bids farewell, and affect becomes activated; it strikes back with force.

Yet in this series, Mejri perceptively segues from collective consciousness towards a subjective terrain. Similar to the lot of his contemporaries, by bearing

witness to watershed historical and civilizational sequences that have hitherto reshuffled the socio-political landscape, the artist resists the *vis inertiae*. The susceptibility to the latter is indefinitely negated. His faculties are invigorated, and so are his intellect and intuition, however retributive the undertaking might be. The succession of turbulent catastrophes and perpetual tribulations flicker, jolt and agonize his senses; a residuum whence he departs, metabolizes and, acutely, elucidates its emanations. Essentially, "the future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, presented, as a sort of monstrosity".¹ How will Mejri, faced with the forecasted tremors, reconcile with the oxymoronic stylistic-versus-thematic ambivalences that beset him? An intervention would thus entail a consensus, in so far as he would allow his academic visual retention to be harnessed to serve his ends. Indeed, neither any physical nor epistemological impediments could frustrate the periodization of his solemn expression. Rummaging across the fundamentals of his discipline, his precedents and their underlying practices, he

engages in a painstaking investigation about traditional techniques, particularly academic and anatomic drawings through a contemporary lens.

Combining a quasi-architectural as well as a philosophical logic, the exhibition addresses the notion of self-concept *vis-à-vis* the edifice of painting, discourse and power, alleging thereby his Foucauldian affinities. For Mejrì, self-determinism is an illusion; it remains a fatal figment. Awareness however, or the lack thereof, is a constant catalyst for his current process.

Beyond the methodically copious structures, a wound is laid bare, transparent for some, while, perhaps by means of transference, poignantly perceptible for others. It is all too reminiscent or symptomatic of this Barthes quote, "I keep the wound open. I feed it with other images, until another wound appears and produces a diversion".² Tumults are whispered. The mutism of a flat surface lurks behind voiced uproars.

In front of Mejrì's compositions, impelled to plumb the depth of their compounded enigmas, at times we gaze at the canvases' upper edges, in anticipation of an impending fall, whilst at other times we observe as it has already unfolded. We stand as beholders,

disarmed, ceded of our authority and poise, in front of what may have been consciously buried. We are indeed not immune to their spectrality. The densely packed paintings are in concordant engagement as they echo one another, albeit in confrontation *ad infinitum*. Revelations are lodged within the constellations of guideposts – elements that the optic cannot evade nor repel. On planes of deepening reds and greens, smeared by gusts of diagonal lines, where blues are unusually threatening and hostile, the seemingly accidental is in fact intentional in its defiance. On certain canvases, hieroglyphs, motifs that are ritually superimposed in his work, spatter and cascade on restless fabrics that veil a kind of mental pentimenti. On other canvases, such as *Fallen Structures*, a rather reductive palette is employed, where torrential shuffled lines swiftly and explosively invade and disconcert the muted surfaces. Mejrì's impulse to amplify was followed by an intention to simplify. Yielding more value to the techniques, he states that, "the significance is dictated by the practice, design, materials, and my interaction with the formats". It is precisely via this iconographic repetition and consistency where the encounter between the artist and his canvas lays, where all is marked by doses of intensity amidst the inherent fragility of his medium, namely charcoal. Simultaneously, the vigorousness of the fall

is counterpoised by the frailty of anatomical forms that levitate and writhe, an invisible thread colliding vulnerability and violence. These silhouettes, or half-silhouettes, appear altogether upside down, upended, suspended in action, or collapsing, as if entering a chasm that seems to parasitize them.

The convulsions are protuberant. The gesticulations are portending. The appearance of threat is instantaneous. All is amplified.

The vaunted archetypal model, once venerated by Mejri, is presently a subject to cognitive destruction: an absolute downfall of its referent totems. Plainly or obliquely, repressively or manifestly, he virtualizes a mordant palinode that is inherently testimonial. The artist illustrates a liminal phase where he resides, on both a personal and a cultural level, where “the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear”.³ He seeks to reinterpret the language of paint, by means of mutiny and dissent, as to translate the immediacy of his tragic vision of the world. The brushwork is all the more important as his color palette denotes more than a mere reminiscence of atmosphere; the aggregation of hues and elements signals an eruption, a solfatara, a muffled noise, a

cacophony, a cue for imminent catastrophe and hostility, potentially echoing an ecological stance, as Mejri ponders whether or not we are in harmony with our environments. Often defying gravity, the highly visible contours of his figures’ disassembled limbs, legs and hands, enhance Mejri’s lucid facture where the act of crucifixion is reinterpreted – hence sparking a dialogue with Grünewald for instance. The postures and scales are imperatively of direct significance for they serve as a coda to his open ended questioning on the alienation, fall and demise of Man. The violent motion overlaid on the canvas evidently bespeaks our current positions in the world, how we are in a state of constant menace, alerted, and in crisis.

Blurring the demarcation between abstraction and reality, externalizing oneself from the mechanisms of introjection, we are absorbed in quicksand-like surfaces, wrestling with our equilibria, as we are engulfed in a final catharsis.

Racha Khemiri

Tunis, April 2024

1 Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p.5.

2 Barthes, Roland. *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*. Penguin Group, 1990, p.80.

3 Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers, 1971, p. 556.

THAMEUR MEJRI

b. 1982, Tunis, Tunisia

Lives and works in Nabeul, Tunisia

Thameur Mejri investigates complexities of human existence by identifying parallels between paradoxical ideas of violence, innocence, guilt and shame. He blurs the boundaries between public and private in an effort to confront individual and collective values, particularly in contemporary Tunisian society.

The human figure acts as a central element throughout his compositions, the vigorous manner in which Mejri places the figure onto the canvas, reflects the relationship between painting and painter, suggesting self-portraits that battle to fully emerge and reveal themselves. There is an interplay between painting and film. He approaches painting as a film director and he films with the vision of a painter, allowing for the qualities of each discipline to manifest upon one another; the chaos and movement in his paintings are a testament of this. Through his drawings, vast compositions on stretched or floating canvases as well as murals, Thameur Mejri's works question the notions of humanism

and the construction of human beings on a social scale, by representing several paradoxes that emerge from political and cultural practices.

He graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts in Tunis, and he is currently teaching at the Higher Institute of Fine Arts in Nabeul.

He has exhibited widely, including the 13th Cairo Biennial, Cairo, Egypt / Dakar Biennale of Contemporary African Art, Dakar, Senegal / N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art, Detroit, USA / New York International Independent Film and Video Festival, New York, USA / Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) L.I., New York, USA. He also has had solo exhibitions at Jack Bell Gallery, London, UK / Gallery 1957, Accra, Ghana / Selma Feriani Gallery, Tunis, Tunisia & London, UK / B7L9 Art Station, The Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Tunis, Tunisia / MAC Lyon, Lyon, Paris / Montague Contemporary, New York, USA / Uitstalling Art Gallery, Genk, Belgium.



Thameur Mejri

Dawn of Men, 2024

Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on a sail cloth

680h x 350w cm

(TM-000180)



Thameur Mejri
Fallen Archetypes , 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
200h x 180w cm
(TM-000166)



Thameur Mejri
Fallen Archetypes 2, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
250h x 220w cm
(TM-000173)



Thameur Mejri
Fallen Archetypes 3, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
200h x 180w cm
(TM-000175)



Thameur Mejri
Archetype 1, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
180h x 130w cm
(TM-000162)



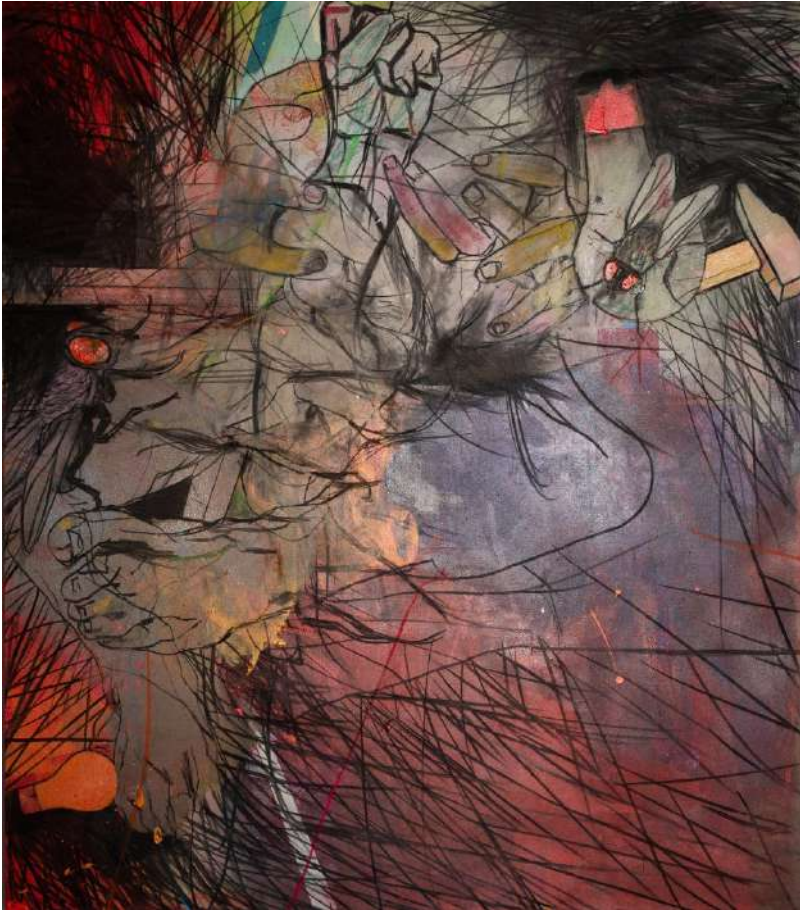
Thameur Mejri
Archetype 2, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
140h x 160w cm
(TM-000168)



Thameur Mejri
Archetype 3, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
150h x 180w cm
(TM-000177)



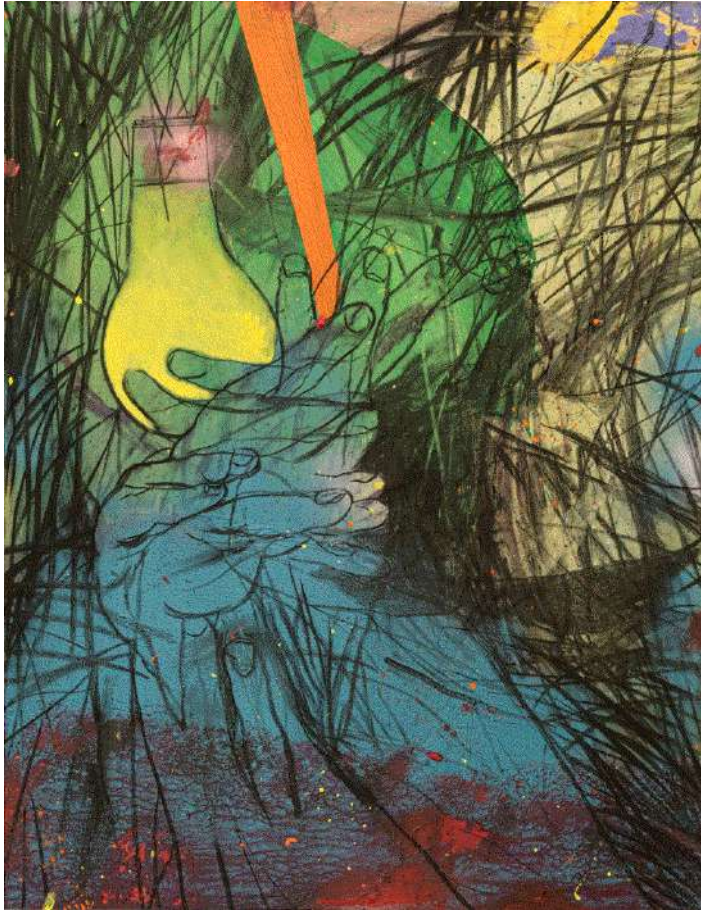
Thameur Mejri
Archetype 4, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
180h x 150w cm
(TM-000164)



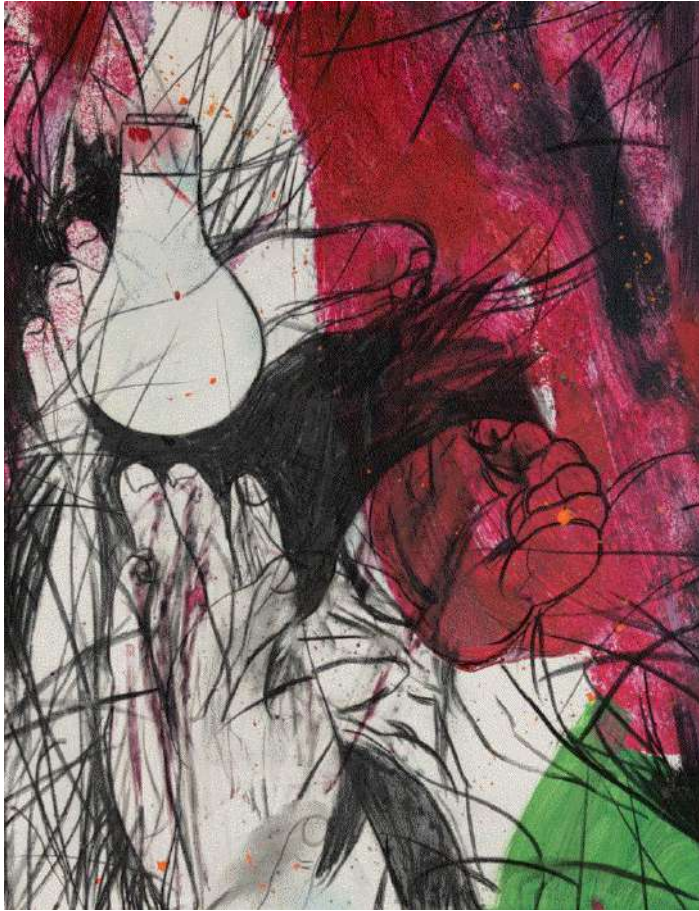
Thameur Mejri
Archetype 5, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
160h x 140w cm
(TM-000160)



Thameur Mejri
Archetype 6, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
160h x 140w cm
(TM-000167)



Thameur Mejri
Fallen 1, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
90h x 70w cm
(TM-000169)



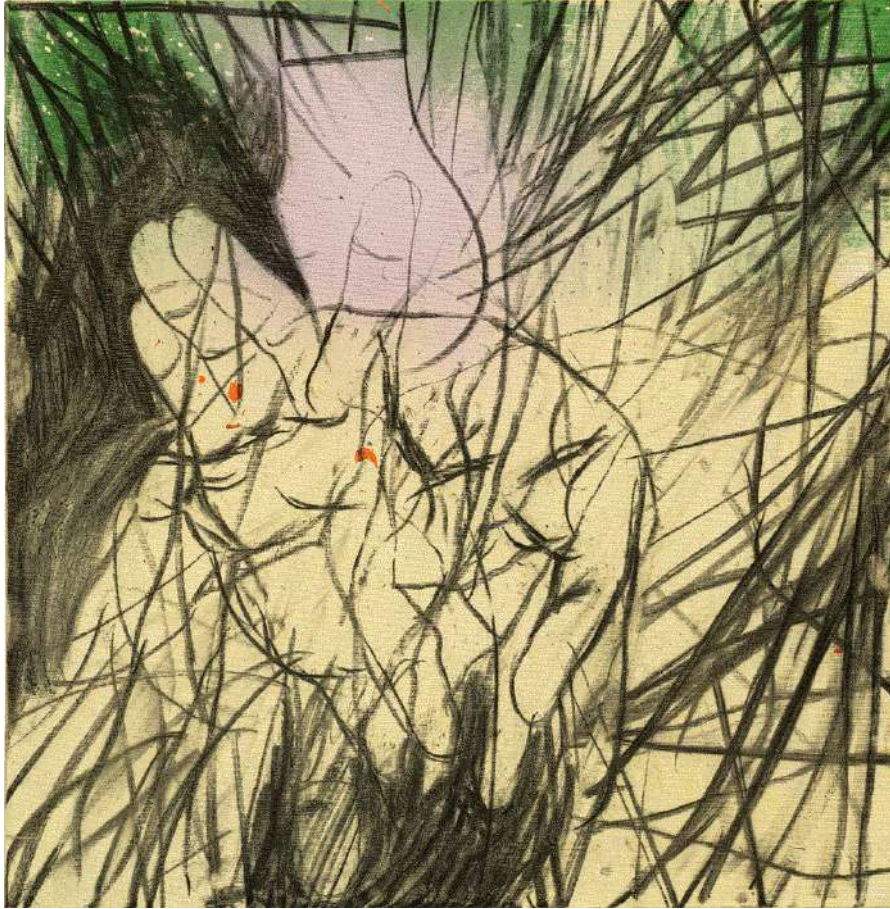
Thameur Mejri

Fallen 2, 2024

Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas

90h x 70w cm

(TM-000170)



Thameur Mejri
Fallen 3, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
50h x 50w cm
(TM-000179)



Thameur Mejri
Fallen Structures, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
150h x 180w cm
(TM-000163)



Thameur Mejri
Fallen Structures 2, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
150h x 180w cm

(TM-000171)



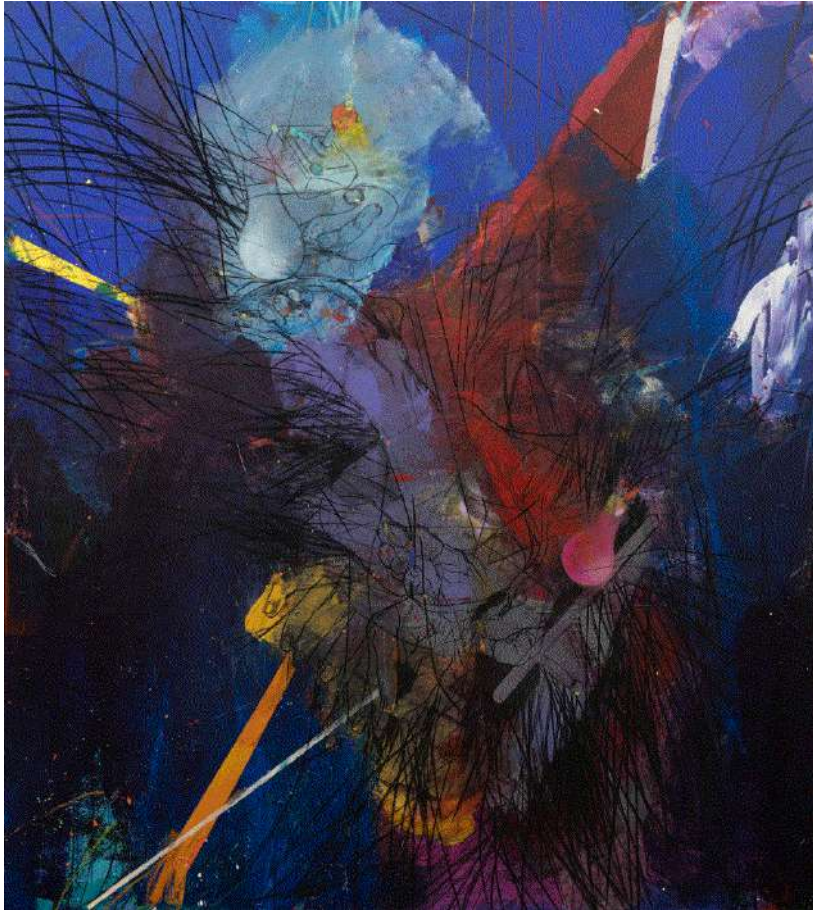
Thameur Mejri
Fallen Structures 3, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
150h x 130w cm
(TM-000174)



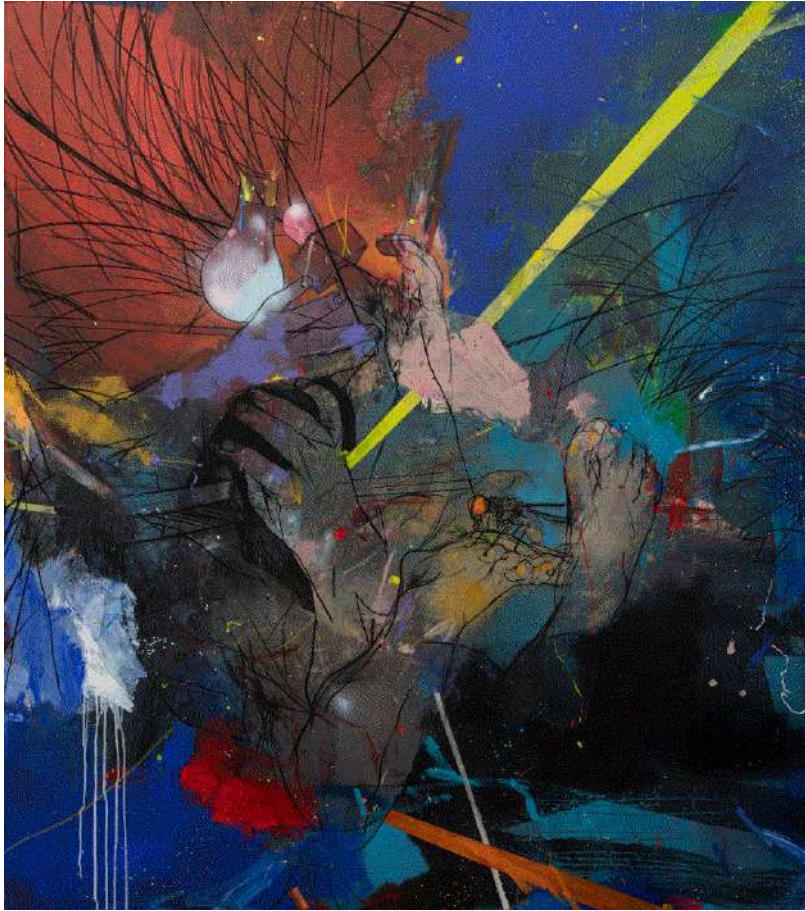
Thameur Mejri
Fallen Structures 4, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
150h x 130w cm
(TM-000159)



Thameur Mejri
I Always Speak the Truth 2, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
180h x 200w cm
(TM-000161)



Thameur Mejri
The Great Below 1, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
220h x 200w cm
(TM-000178)



Thameur Mejri
The Great Below 2, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal and pastels on canvas
220h x 200w cm
(TM-000172)



Thameur Mejri
Untitled, 2024
Acrylic and charcoal on canvas
50h x 50w cm
(TM-000176)







