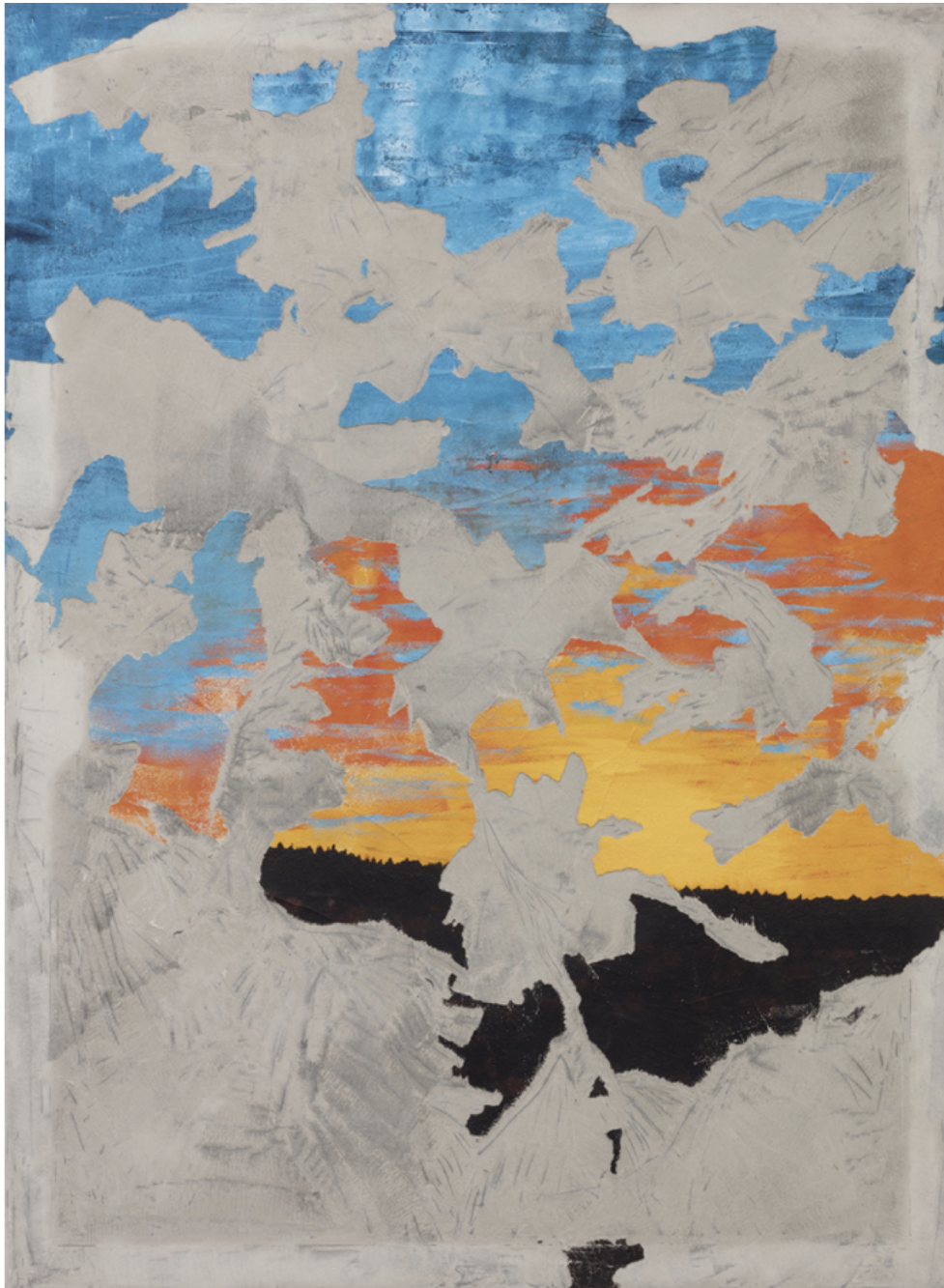


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Latifa Echakhch, *Sun Set Down*, 2020, acrylic paint, concrete, vinyl, and fiber on canvas mounted on aluminum, 78 3/4 × 59 1/8". From the series "Sun Set Down," 2020.

Latifa Echakhch

KAUFMANN REPETTO

With her exhibition "The After," Latifa Echakhch led us into the memory of a collective rite, transporting us, in an era of social distancing, to the scene of some just-concluded event, perhaps a concert, in a remote place, perhaps a forest. In a gallery whose walls and floor were completely covered in black, she staged an encounter between two new groups of works, all from 2020: five sculptures, *After 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5*, which she created using theatrical lighting trusses, and three paintings of sunrises, two of them diptychs, all titled, like the series they comprise, *Sun Set Down*.

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In the first instance, the metal components usually used to support stage lights stood out like rigid Minimalist simulacra, sometimes resting against the walls, sometimes overturned on the floor—in other words, no longer arranged according to a “functional” logic. On each of them, moreover, were signs of possible human presence, whether real or imaginary: a leather handbag, a pouch, a jean jacket, a shopping bag, a hooded sweatshirt, a purple shirt. The show’s title corroborated the suspicion that the scene represented the aftermath of a performance: time to strike the set and maybe have an afterparty.

On the walls, the yellows and oranges of the paintings were strikingly luminous. The artist created them using an unusual technique somewhat reminiscent of fresco: After applying a layer of black paint on the canvas, she covers it with concrete about a quarter of an inch thick, then she paints over this substrate with saturated acrylic colors. Once the materials have dried, she removes sizable areas by scraping into the concrete. In her previous paintings created via the same method, viewers could clearly recognize the painted subjects, but the new ones deconstruct the representation—of a sunset in each case—to the point where we are invited to

What once again comes to the fore in Echakhch’s practice, particularly in these new works, is the dichotomy between gesturalism and formal harmony. In the paintings, one’s attention migrates to the gray portions where the color has been forcibly removed, revealing the tracks of the putty knife used to scrape away some of the concrete. Between exaltation and threat, the action of removal—the destruction of the twilight landscape—seems to castigate the beauty of nature even as it reverberates with nostalgia. In the sculptural structures, the left-behind bags and items of clothing also seem to serve as warnings from the artist: They are not casually draped over but knotted to the beams, like memories that will not leave us alone. Take the gold evening gown of *After 2*, for example; the artist installed it to one side, in the only area of the gallery in shadow: the darkness where the boundaries between the walls and floor disappeared and the lighting trusses seemed to rest in a cosmic void. I wonder if the painted landscapes might not be a wake-up call for the fate of our planet. And yet this aesthetic of the relic is presented with tremendous equilibrium, striking a pleasing balance.

Ultimately, the artist’s ability to create unexpected settings was translated here into an effort to remain conceptually on that subtle line between contraries (gesture and form, image and abstraction, destruction and creation) that is like a mountain ridge where the past has left its traces and the future—in other words, the expectation of an “afterward” that reverberated in the show’s title and in the wordplay of *Sun Set Down*—has yet to appear. Without those verbal cues, one might have read everything very differently. And why not? The end of something can lead to a new, unanticipated scenario.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

— Veronica Santi

