

A Variety of Forms: The Celine Art Project

BY CHRISTOPHER ALESSANDRINI | AUG 14, 2024

Since 2019, the Celine Art Project has invited contemporary artists – including Kim Yun Shin, Simone Fattal, Mimosa Echard, Ma Qiusha and Kim Dacres – to collaborate with the respected fashion house via site-specific installations and acquisitions that illuminate the dynamic relationship between art and fashion.

KIM YUN SHIN | SIMONE FATTAL | MIMOSA ECHARD | MA QIUSHA | KIM DACRES

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Soon after joining Celine as Creative Director in 2018, Hedi Slimane launched the Celine Art Project. Since then, the couture house has commissioned site-specific installations and acquired distinctive artworks for its flagship locations around the globe – from iconic storefronts on Madison Avenue in New York and New Bond Street in London to a newly revamped boutique in Taipei 101. The collection includes more than 50 artists, whose bold, formally sophisticated works complement the designer’s forward-thinking aesthetic and his commitment to elucidating the continuities between art and fashion.

Throughout the early 2000s, Slimane photographed the underground scenes of Berlin and London, capturing their grit and glamor in extraordinary black-and-white portraits that distilled the cultural moment. This sensibility – cerebral, intimate, slightly punk – remains visible across the wildly heterogeneous collection he has assembled for Celine, where the marvelous and strange prevail in equal measure.

Simone Fattal



SIMONE FATTAL, *STATE OF THE SKY 11*, 2013. IMAGE COURTESY CELINE MUNICH. PORTRAIT OF SIMONE FATTAL COURTESY KARMA INTERNATIONAL © BERNARD SAINT-GENÈS

“Archaic forms are very natural to me,” Simone Fattal says. Ancient literature and mythology were her earliest sources of inspiration, kindling in the young artist an intense desire to write – but after studying philosophy at the Sorbonne and falling in with a bohemian set, she turned instead to painting. The driving questions of epic poetry, however, have remained central to her practice. Traceable across the Paris-based artist’s oeuvre is a sincere and urgent search for origins.

Fattal’s paintings in Celine’s collection, on display in Munich and Miami, are from her “State of the Sky” series, which was completed during a shockingly prolific two-month window in 2013. Abstract compositions rendered in black and white, they are stark, geometric representations of the night sky – the first serious paintings she’d made since abandoning the medium in 1980 after fleeing the Lebanese Civil War with her partner, the artist and writer Etel Adnan, for Sausalito, CA. There, Fattal founded her legendary independent publishing house, Post-Apollo Press, named in the hopeful afterglow of NASA’s Apollo program.



SIMONE FATTAL, *STATE OF THE SKY 7*, 2013. IMAGE COURTESY CELINE MIAMI

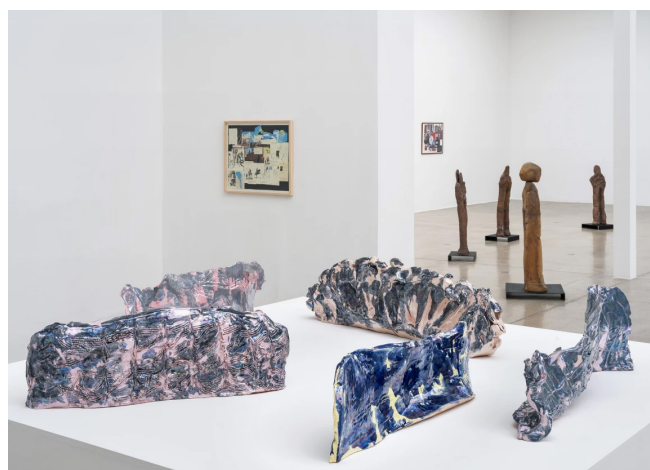
“They were like celestial bodies that go through the night. ... They stopped as they came – suddenly.”

- SIMONE FATTAL

The series, a powerful distillation of Fattal’s lifelong fascination with the cosmos, began without prelude or warning. “I made one black line on a canvas,” Fattal says of the first image, and while she’d never bothered enforcing arbitrary formal constraints – strict dichromatic palette, line and edge – the paintings obeyed this austere logic of their own accord. Their production was mysterious, propulsive; some days she finished up to three canvases. “They were like celestial bodies that go through the night,” she says. Several weeks later, the impulse vanished. “They stopped as they came – suddenly.”

Fattal’s yen for experimentation has resulted in a multidisciplinary body of work that defies categorization. Life and art flow together, yet biographical information is disclosed sparingly, in a gentle refutation of any demand for straightforward confessionalism. Her short film *Autoportrait* (1972/2012) is a entrancingly oblique audiovisual collage of monologues, family photographs and conversations with friends – a “cinematic self-portrait” of the artist as a cautious but curious young woman, eager to encounter the self through a camera lens.

Following *Works and Days* (2019), her first North American survey, Fattal received widespread acclaim for her ceramics. She initially engaged the medium in 1988, finding that it satisfied her desire for contact with the primordial elements. (Her earliest sculpture was a modest, gray-glazed man: crudely elegant and stolid, a forceful presence.) These earthen figures “come more from literature than from any history of art,” and they often embody recurring archetypes – warriors, gods, prophets, kings – or specific characters from epic poetry or myth, like Gilgamesh and Ulysses.



SIMONE FATTAL, *METAPHORS*, 2024. INSTALLATION VIEW, SECESSION. PHOTOS BY IRIS RANZINGER, COURTESY KARMA INTERNATIONAL



SIMONE FATTAL, *METAPHORS*, 2024. INSTALLATION VIEW, SECESSION. PHOTOS BY IRIS RANZINGER, COURTESY KARMA INTERNATIONAL

The forms seem both ancient and modern, as if they've lain dormant in the earth for thousands of years. Yet they also bear unmistakable traces of the artist's hand, their rugged surfaces pleasingly manipulated, worked over with great care and attention. At the Louvre, a favorite haunt from Fattal's student days, 18 of her sculptures are currently installed among the galleries of Mesopotamian, Phoenician and Cypriot antiquities.

The heady anachronism of Fattal's exhibition at the Louvre finds its analogue in her majestic collages. She considers them transcriptions of her enduring preoccupations – archaeology, landscape, modern art: “They explain exactly what I'm trying to say.” Their titles insinuate through wry description; *They Found Weapons of Mass Destruction* (2016) constellates imagery from the US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq with illuminated manuscripts, old maps, photography of the moon landing and Pope John XIII: a kaleidoscopic frenzy of associations that exposes the perverse and ongoing entanglements of empire.

In these densely allusive tableaux, it's possible to discern the grain of Fattal's intelligence – how she orchestrates these fragmentary records of life on earth in all their humor, horror and absurdity. They are, Fattal says, “meant to be read like Persian miniatures – together, and one after the other.”