



Embajada de la República  
del Ecuador en Catar

## “The Great Awakening”

### **Supporters and Organizers:**

Cultural Village Foundation-Katara, Embassy of the Republic of Ecuador in Qatar

**Artist:** Maria Veronica León Veintemilla

**Venue:** Katara Cultural Village, Katara Art Studios, Building 19, Gallery 1

The art exhibition titled “The Great Awakening” was successfully inaugurated by the General Manager of the Cultural Village Foundation-Katara, Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim Al-Sulaiti, and the Ecuadorian envoy to Doha, Kabalan Abisaab on Monday January 16, 2017 at Katara Cultural Village, Building 19, Gallery 1.

The opening ceremony was attended by VIP representatives from various diplomatic missions and media representatives. Featuring for the first time in Doha the artworks of Maria Veronica Leon, the international Ecuadorian artist living in Dubai. The exhibition consists of 38 pieces of art made in Dubai and Paris and highlights Katara’s endeavours to promote fine arts among the public.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Al-Sulaiti said: “The Cultural Village Foundation-Katara is presenting the sophisticated artwork of the Ecuadorian artist Maria Veronica; conveying her interpretation of the Gulf Region, through the medium of fine art.”

For his part, envoy Kabalan Abisaab said: “I am delighted to welcome you tonight to this event that is embellished by your esteemed presence, when creativity embraces beauty, through the art paintings of the Ecuadorian and international artist Maria Veronica Leon.” Following his opening speech, the Ecuadorian envoy expressed his appreciation and gratitude to the Cultural Village Foundation Katara for the initiative.

The artist, Maria Veronica has adopted a highly technical style in her pieces that range across paintings, drawings, photography and video art. She explained how the vibrant and stimulating energy of the gulf region have been her inspiration for the exhibition. Most of her paintings focus on Arab women in various settings, including an impressive piece of HH Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al Missneb, Former First Lady of the State of Qatar and mother of the current Emir.

Thanks to an impressive public assistance and to a resounding success, the exhibition has been extended until February 7. Hundreds of visitors from all over the world and of all ages have visited “The Great Awakening”, including famous musician Paco Renteria and other personalities of politic and diplomatic sectors. The Arabic public including Saudi Arabia visitors have been very receptive to the artworks of Maria Veronica, particularly to her works inspired by the Arab Culture.

Regarding to press, excellent comments, articles and interviews have been published in all of Qatar’s Newspapers as Qatar Tribune, Al Arab, Al Watan, Al Shark, Gulf Times, and Peninsula Daily News among others.

Maria Veronica was born in Guayaquil, Ecuador. She has represented Ecuador at the 56th Biennale di Venezia, with the exhibition “Gold Water: Apocalyptic Black Mirrors” in 2015. Prior to that in 2007, she also presented her work at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Biennale at the Latin American Pavilion IILA.

From 1998 to 2013 she lived and worked in Paris, where she also became the first contemporary Ecuadorian woman artist to exhibit in a Parisian museum: Le Petit Palais (2008). She was invited to make a solo exhibition at Galliera Museum, Paris (2006), and selected by The Cultural Affairs Department of Paris for “La Nuit Blanche” (2004).

Since 2014 Maria Veronica lives and works in Dubai, where she became the first Latin American artist to have a solo show in U.A.E., and to be represented by a gallery in Dubai (Cube Arts, DIFC).

In 2016, after exhibiting in MACRO, Museum of Contemporary Art in Rome, Maria Veronica became the first contemporary woman artist from Ecuador to have a solo show in a museum in Rome. The same year she was designated in Ecuador "Woman of the Year in Arts and Culture"; she is a key artist in the History of Ecuadorian Art and one of today most dynamic artists from Latin America.

Commenting on the exhibition the artist said: "The Arabian Culture is a fascinating world of mysticism, mystery and magic; its fantastic stories and sceneries enrich my spirit and guide my creativity towards the realization of an art in harmony with the Region,"... 'I feel integrated to Arabia and the Gulf in a new awakening for my conscience about life and to the eternal search for learning and evolution; this is in itself my main motivation. These new cities are contemporary phenomena; great pluri-cultural puzzles, that today more than ever offer extraordinary platforms of evolution, and manage with fluidity the interactions of the different cultures and talents inhabiting them. I call "Unison" the spirit of these amazing spaces because thoughts, words and deeds are played symphonically in harmony with nature; it is a very positive evolutionary choreography for an amazing new multicultural dance. My new life here is a great lesson in renewal and an opportunity to be universal.'

Today, these traditionalist cities par excellence have become leading cities of fundamental changes for the Region, and in some cases have even dissolved the entrenched social differences of gender. With a multitudinous pluri-cultural confluence they have become favourable accelerators of overcoming and knowledge. Qatar is one of these examples, a new social design for a new dimension of progress and cultural expansion that applies a very interesting formula: tradition and evolution. These leading cities gestate a great movement, an example of new life, organization and culture; but although their own complexities and their unleashed rhythm for progress, one may breathe and be inspired by the magical natural surroundings like the wealth of the desert or the blue treasure of the Arabian Sea.

We live stimulated by a galloping neo-futurism, but appeased by the original tranquillity of the desert and the authentic and generous spirit of fresh people, who here practice tolerance and great civility that does not exist in the so-called developed worlds. "

**In the text: "Quantum Link" (March 2016, Paris), French curator David Rosenberg states:**

"... Maria Veronica León V, famous native Ecuadorian artist who currently lives and works in Dubai, perpetuating and transcending, in her own way, her rich cultural heritage. Through her life, her commitment and her art, she invites us to renew, reinvent and rebuild the intimate relationship we have with nature, with ourselves and with the essence of reality. Why are we here? What are we supposed to do? What is the nature of our dreams and visions? Why are we embodied in a visceral habitat that binds us to a cosmic dimension? It is indeed a deep questioning, but following Maria Veronica on her path of creation, we feel that the answers are all linked to our most innate creativity.

White light, blue water, dark stars, green dollars, gold and furnace are as various aspects of our body-mind-spirit connection and therefore part of an "oeuvre d'art", total artwork, mixing video, engraving, photography and performance, producing what the artist defines as "techno-theatre", or "techno-opera", blending new philosophical and sociological approach with the esoteric and hermetic tradition. That is how Maria Veronica embarks us on a physical and spiritual journey, a quest for meaning and self-reflection exploring a metaphorical El Dorado where Gold and Water reveal themselves as our ultimate fate, the alpha & omega of our human destiny. Primary matters, Nature and the body of the artist turn into vectors of artistic expression: it is an integrative process where concepts, thoughts and emotions blend and resonate in various ways, reaching a point of incandescence where a new state of mind is created, reborn and purified..."

"... Social and spiritual consciousness, the journeys, the crossing of borders (or limits), the unification of diverse cultures and traditions, the mixture of verbal and nonverbal approaches (such as dance or guttural singing) ... These are some of the different aspects of her art and her life today ..."

### **Descriptions and words by the artist about some of the artworks of the exhibition...**

#### **"Sheikha Moza", Acrylic and Oil on canvas, Dubai 2016**

Maria Veronica has included in the exhibition the portrait of HH Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al Missneb; inspired by her extraordinary perkiness and dynamism, her decision and great contribution to the cultural development of Qatar, mainly through her commitment to the area of Education and her participation in different international fields with the UN, UNESCO among others, and her enthusiasm for Fine Arts. Maria Veronica is guided by this very particular figure and life story that has decoded the image of the traditional Arab woman, stripping herself of her veils, becoming a leader and an "integrationist bridge" between East and West, in order to carve a better destiny for Arab women and for their culture. Her ideal example is a deep motivation for Maria Veronica, who portrays her in one acrylic and oil painting on canvas of 240 cm x 154.7 cm, with a range of gold and bronze metallic tones characteristic of Arab culture; the burgundy background is representing the flag of Qatar; intense and rhythmic lines speak of the musicality with which the artist performs; the garb, the distinction and delicacy of HH Sheikha Moza's fine and magical attire, to the pace of Thousand and One Nights, reflects the tenure, elegance and abundance not just hers, but of the today's Arab woman in these neo-metropolis of great vital force, exemplary new centres of social development.

#### **"Sheikha Diamond", Oil on canvas, Dubai 2014**

"Sheikha Diamond represents Arab women contemporary professionals, women of vanguard and brilliant consciousness; these very interesting avant-garde leaders are in the sectors of Culture, Education, Politics and different areas of the society. Progressive, committed, good spirit, supportive, and thus also glamorous and graceful. The art of the traditional black abaya arises from a red background in acrylic and oil on canvas; the Arab woman with a crystallized diamond face symbolizes the transparent origin of a brilliant intellectual mind, in fusion with a direct and eloquent speech. The capacity to conceive shapes and contours is inherent in the woman's body. In this world of numbers economic fundamentals require the ability of women, they have demonstrated their management skills in almost every academic field. "

#### **"Times of Splendour", Acrylic on canvas, Dubai 2014**

"The wisdom of Man and the power of the Falcon are associated in this painting; with these penetrating eyes or windows of the soul I want to represent the transmission of Nature, the great ancestral energy and the knowledge of the elders to the young; the passage of the great force from Arabic ancestors to the new generations as their precious heritage. The observer can feel the power that is behind this Culture and its new cities, as well as the splendid and magnificent constructions, growing majestically into goals set by the founding Fathers. I use colours black, grey to interpret strong constructions, yellow represents the sunny skies, blue and green project the mystery of water undines born in the Arabian Sea. The Falcon is used as a Big Brother icon, projecting its natives and residents the feeling of grandeur and security in the Land. Squared straight traces are combined with curves, circles amidst a subtle environment..."

#### **"The Duchess of Galliera", Oil on canvas, Paris 2006 – Dubai 2014**

"...I include this work of art that speaks of collecting in contemporary art, as Maria Brignole Sales or Duchess of Galliera generously performed the role of the collector woman in Paris in the nineteenth century and the cultural milieu of the time, -word has gained so much ground in the international art market and the development of today's cultures-, but in their time women collectors were not habitual, she was an exclusivity; her quality as a great patron implied the high cultural commitment she had with Paris and the world, today the number of women collectors is very wide, although not in certain regions. I had to do some portraits of Duchess of Galliera when I was invited to exhibit at the Museum Galliera or Fashion Museum in Paris in 2006..."

## **Extract from the text "Maria-Veronica León V, or the art of portraying" By Ileana Cornea, Paris / 2008**

The cycle of canvases depicting the Duchess of Galliera is exemplary. The famous patron of Genoese arts interpreted by the artist becomes the heroin of a real epic that crosses the ages. Maria Veronica León paints her friends, celebrities, mother and daughter... Flat and face on.

Each of her effigies are intimately linked to a pictorial space which is his/her own. Rounded, fertile forms cross the body; Incan, constructivist, rhythmical geometric shapes obtained with bold colours. Symbols like Kabbalistic writings of which only the initiates know the secret meaning can take up the whole canvas transcending the figure.

Oils, collages, acrylics, computer generated images, no matter what the material, it's the result that counts. Boldly allegorical and cosmic, taking inspiration from the nature she distorts, drawing on her psyche, taking from the cartoon what she needs, her painting is an aesthetically transgressive painting.

The floral motifs on the Duchesse of Galliera's dress, the necklaces like marine algae, the effects of precious stones and shells in the portrait of Philippe Ferrari ...She loves camouflage effects...Make-up, fabrics, very simple clothes, sometimes skilfully adjusted and frothy lace, hide, envelope, metamorphose the model. She sometimes uses CDs as a collage. With their flashing light, like aggravating and provocative contemporary mosaics, these ordinary materials reflect the light, irritating the viewer.

The ostentatious demonstration of this mundus muliebris [woman's world] compares her to Léonore Fini. A dark ecstatic sphinx, Léonore Fini is already part of history while Maria Veronica León invents a post-contemporary world with the pulsating rhythm of techno. In one of her self-portraits to which she gave the exotic title "La Emperadora de China" she depicts herself, sitting in the lotus position, wild, half green and half red, an extravagant show-off. She wears a tie, splits her painting because she is rebelling against the conventional milieu in which she grew up, because she is not what you might think of her, because she is above all a free painter and woman!

Like Klimt, she loves gold. For the Austrian painter, the glow and shine of this precious metal is reminiscent of Byzantium. For Maria Veronica León, the Incan spirituality, the light of the Andes, the solar dimension she encircles her figures with. They look at us right in the eye, lofty and morganatic or smiling, as if posing always on show, never letting go.

## **"The Gold Rush" by Ileana Cornea, Paris / May 2015**

Contemporary art is rediscovering gold, this exceptional material, fascinating in its lustre and splendour, which brought glory to Ravenna and was restored to use in art by Gustave Klimt.

In the 21st Century, Louise Bourgeois, Anish Kapoor, James Lee Byars and many other artists boldly revive the tradition of the time of the pharaohs, an imperturbably enduring tradition: "gold is immortality" is the Brahmins' constant refrain.

"Gold has no part to play in the mythologies of Homo faber." The historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, spent his lifetime studying this question: "Gold is a creation of Homo Religiosus." It was the first metal used by man, even though he could not use it to make tools or weapons. "Throughout History and technological innovations, from the use of stone to working bronze, then iron, and finally steel, gold has never played a part."

Alchemists wanted to turn other metals into gold in order to cure their imperfections. Through this noble material, art touches on the sacred: "The essential symbolic value of gold has never been tainted despite the progressive desacralization of Nature and human existence."

There is red, black and lots of gold in Maria Veronica León's painting, the enigmas of her symbolic world exploding from their fiery fusion. Yellows, greens and blues fuse in a variety of shapes, including squares, circles, trapeziums and pentagons; they splutter into triangles and even more elastic geometric shapes. Her line unfurls such an extraordinary tangle, what can you say? Maria Veronica León's painting is disconcerting in its originality.

A willing secessionist, she eludes the golden nets she inherits from the Austrian painter who could easily have been her ancestor, but there are others before him, anonymous pre-Colombian artists from whom she gains this inheritance that binds her to the sun.

Her lyricism, freedom and courage make her different; a female artist whose attitude reminiscent of the mythical Penelope weaves her intrigues in the name of civilization and peace.

Like the Homeric woman, she diverts her craft and directs it towards her own vital experience, thus transforming reality into legend and legend into a wonderful dream.

From the portraiture she has practiced for years, she is moving towards her phantasmal memory and from the likeness of the model to the probability of her adventure.

When her palette darkens in a dramatic movement, incandescent red evokes the Dantesque movement of the lava, deep, dark blue tries to calm the catastrophe, a draped silhouette stands out like a pyramid, instead of the face, a star.

Like Munch, she emphasizes the voluptuous language of lines, like Beardsley she loves luxury. Her lines meet; forming her abstract geometric shapes, and this is how she conceives cities, articulating their volumes by organized agglomerations of shapes. Civilization has a horror of the void, but the black hole is lying in wait for it. If souls petrify in a world of stars, and numbers rule the world, humanity would have to start from zero.

**Exhibitor:**

Maria Veronica León. Works and lives in Dubai  
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**Venue:**

Katara Cultural Village  
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