

Portrait of Djabril Boukhenaïssi at atelier MA of Lee Ufan Arles, 2024 © Amélie Blanc



# À TÉNÈBRES, DJABRIL BOUKHENAÏSSI

Exhibition of the 2023 Art & Environment Prize winner  
presented by Lee Ufan Arles x Guerlain

Espace MA – Lee Ufan Arles  
5 rue Vernon  
13200 Arles, France

1<sup>st</sup> July - 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024

LEE UFAN ARLES x GUERLAIN

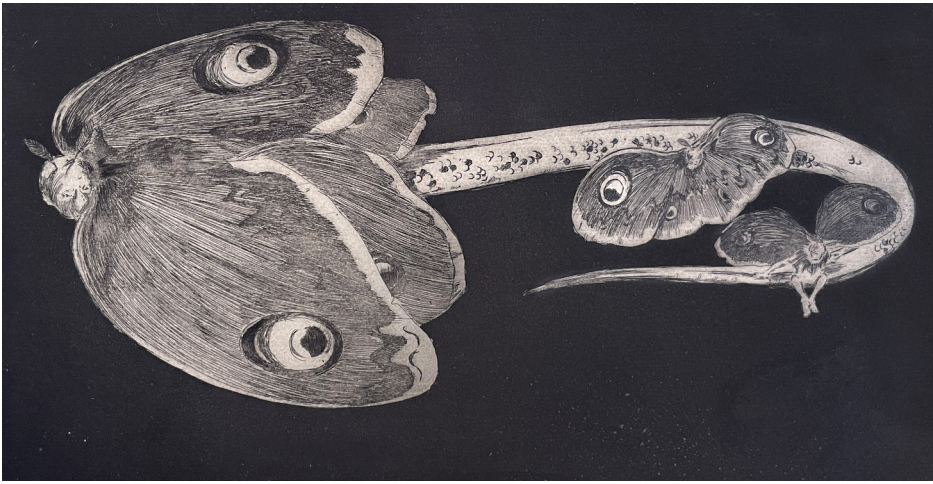
Art & Environment Prize



Work in progress, oil and pastel, 2024 © Djabril BoukhenaiSSI

“I'm 30 years old and belong to a generation that has lived its whole life with the word ‘disappearance’ playing in the background. Even as a child, people used to talk to me about the disappearance of jobs, for example, the disappearance of snow, the disappearance of species. Sometimes I'm quite astonished by humanity's responses. There's a kind of systematic resurgence of artificialisation of natural phenomena. There's no more snow, so we produce fake snow. There are no more bees, so we're proposing to make robot bees that pollinate.”

DJABRIL BOUKHENAÏSSI



Untitled, etching and drypoint on copper, 2024 © Djabril Boukhenaiïssi

Lee Ufan Arles and Maison Guerlain are delighted to announce an exhibition by the winner of the first Art & Environment Prize, Djabril Boukhenaiïssi. The exhibition *À ténèbres* will be on show at Espace MA from 1<sup>st</sup> July to 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024.

In 2023, Lee Ufan Arles and Maison Guerlain joined forces to create the Art & Environment Prize, an annual award that includes a residency and exhibition for a project that focuses on the fruitful and multi-faceted relationship between artistic creation and the environment. Selected from 381 entries by a jury chaired by Lee Ufan and made up of leading art world figures, the painter and engraver Djabril Boukhenaiïssi was given eight weeks to reflect and create in the ancient city.

## À TÉNÈBRES, DJABRIL BOUKHENAÏSSI

### POETICS OF REMINISCENCE

Born in 1993, Djabril Boukhenaiïssi graduated from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts de Paris in 2018. The exhibition *À ténèbres* presents a series of new paintings and prints based on the poetics of contemporary night and its disappearance, inspired by German literature, music and the experience of his residency in Arles. With this title, which takes up an expression that has been lost since the mid-nineteenth century and which referred to what we might now call 'nightfall', the artist evokes the idea that the disappearance of night leads to a diminishment that extends to all the arts, but also to language.

Djabril Boukhenaiïssi's application immediately piqued the interest of the Art & Environment Prize jury. The project presented by the artist and pursued during the residency highlights several elements that echo the values defended by Lee Ufan Arles and

Maison Guerlain, such as the artistic questioning of the relationship between human beings and their environment, the development of works as devices enabling the imagination to establish a poetic correspondence between the exterior and the interior, and his multi-faceted approach combining philosophy, literature, painting, drawing and engraving. Finally, it was an opportunity to offer the inaugural winner of the Prize the first artistic residency of his career.

**“Djabril was a real surprise and won us over with the evocative power and coherence of his work, his undeniable poetry and his frantic quest to capture on canvas or paper the last glimpses of a night that is slipping away from us.”**

ANN CAROLINE PRAZAN, DIRECTOR OF ART,  
CULTURE & HERITAGE AT GUERLAIN

For his residency at Lee Ufan Arles, Djabril Boukhenaiïssi has chosen to study a recent global phenomenon, the disappearance of the night caused by light pollution. On 19 January 2023, *Science* magazine published an article outlining current scientific knowledge on the consequences of light pollution and, in particular, the disappearance of our nocturnal environment. Over the last few decades, humanity has been moving towards a new relationship with the space around us. Part of the world's population cannot see the Milky Way, night is never visible in megacities and, in France, night-time lighting continues to be installed in the countryside, the second-biggest killer of insects after pesticides.

Among all possible ramifications of the ecological disaster caused by night-time lighting, Boukhenaiïssi sets out to explore the hypothesis that the real disappearance of the night also entails a metaphorical and symbolic disappearance. How, then, can we develop poetics of the night if we ourselves can no longer have the intimate experience of a real night? What form, then, would poetics of the contemporary night take, that is to say, of a night that has disappeared? It is this tension, between the disappearance of our nocturnal environment and the disappearance of night as an allegorical object, that the artist places at the heart of his work.

**“His project fits in perfectly with the positioning of the Prize and with the dynamics explored by Lee Ufan in his work, making our relationship with nature a central issue, without adopting an assertive environmental dimension. Like Lee Ufan, Djabril takes a global view of these issues and brings to them a variety of expressions. His links with literature and philosophy were also of great interest to us. All members of the jury were touched by his work.”**

JULIETTE VIGNON, GENERAL COORDINATOR  
OF LEE UFAN ARLES

It's a long-term project that began when he left school, with a cycle of engravings linked to Novalis's *Hymns to the Night* and Rainer Maria Rilke's *Poems to the Night*.

Through the works presented and title of the exhibition, the artist asks what we are going to lose (and what we have already lost) by losing the night. Here, light is essentially the extinguisher of a poetic imagination and imagery. This upheaval in our collective imaginations is also found in language, with the loss of expressions or words that took on their meaning in a context where darkness was present in everyday life.

With so many issues at stake, Boukhenaiïssi tries to respond to this disappearance by creating a fantastic grammar that he uses in his works. Illuminating everything means mastering everything. On the other hand, we abandon ourselves to the night, where everything blends together. In our homes, in our ever-expanding cities, in the countryside, in shopping centres and lifts, there is a 'white light' that constantly watches over us. There are no more unknowns, no more surprises. And by illuminating everything, we extinguish the stars and the dreams they beckon. We can no longer see the night. Worse still, we're destroying our own landmarks: the first humans used the stars to find their bearings for thousands of years. Today, with too much light, the constellations are disappearing and two-thirds of humanity lives without stars.

Like Van Gogh, who discovered the power of the night sky in Provence and immortalised it in *The Starry Night*, Boukhenaiïssi turns to the sky and asks us: “If I were in the same place today, would I still be able to produce this painting?” In his nocturnal explorations, where the glimmer of the stars reaches us only in uncertain snatches, Boukhenaiïssi uses a symbolic element to help us navigate the darkness: the moth. Using the motif of the moth, an insect that we often observe inevitably attracted by the lights of our street lamps, the artist



La fenêtre, etching and drypoint on copper, 2024 © Djabril Boukhenaiïssi

emphasises the transience of our lives and fragility of our dreams of a capitalist order disconnected from nature.

In short, Boukhenaiissi's work questions our relationship with the night and its poetic and symbolic potential. He helps us to understand that the sky is given to us not just to know, as Bachelard<sup>1</sup> once again reminds us, but to dream. It is an invitation to dream, to hope and to humility.

<sup>1</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *L'Air et les songes*, José Corti, Paris, 1990.



Lee Ufan at the Alyscamps, Arles © Claire Dorn

## DREAMLIKE WANDERING...

The residency and his wanderings around the city of Arles and the Alyscamps<sup>2</sup> provide Boukhenaiissi with food for thought in his creative output, in which fragments of architecture materialise, like ghosts, in the colourful mists of his pictorial works.

For the first time, the artist brings together in one exhibition two hitherto distinct aspects of his work: engraving and painting. Alternating between painted canvases enhanced with pastels and etchings, as well as small and large formats, Boukhenaiissi invites us to follow him on a hunt for the last nocturnal shadows. The artist has made the most of the residency, all works presented at Espace MA by Lee Ufan Arles conceived during his stay in Arles. This time of reflection and creation in the studio enabled him to innovate and experiment.

The works produced by the artist, which focus on several areas of artistic research, form a coherent whole in which paintings and prints respond to each other. These include the repeated use of violet to represent the night, the recurring motif of the moth as an eminently nocturnal animal, and the representation of the Alyscamps site in Arles as the setting for all compositions.

Boukhenaiissi seizes on certain motifs present in the nocturnal imagery of past centu-

<sup>2</sup> In 2022, in the necropolis of the Alyscamps, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Lee Ufan installed a series of thirteen works emblematic of his work, so that their dialogue with the ancient architecture of the site would give rise to a hymn dedicated to eternity.



Djabril Boukhenaiissi at atelier MA of Lee Ufan Arles, 2024 © Amélie Blanc

“I regularly went to Lee Ufan Arles to see his work. There I discovered the materiality of his paintings, particularly through a series of paintings made with pigments mixed with glue, which gives them a shiny, porous appearance. And it was in front of these canvases that I wanted to pay tribute to him, in my own way, using pastel, rubbing it excessively to give it a matt thickness.”

DJABRIL BOUKHENAÏSSI



Djabril Boukhenaiissi in atelier MA of Lee Ufan Arles, 2024 © Amélie Blanc

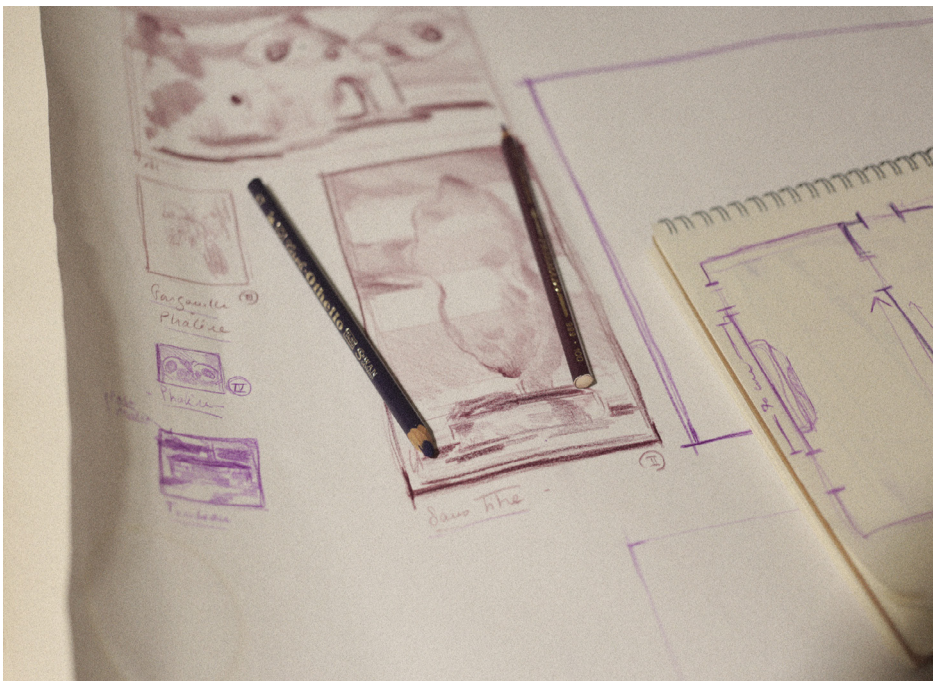
ries to evoke our contemporary night. In this way, a double movement emerges in his works, interweaving fantastic grammar and scientific observations. Moreover, instead of evoking the dark night based on sombre tones, the nights in his paintings are pale, as if on the edge between day and night. For this work, he continues his practice of applying glazed oil paint to which he adds pastel. It is the coexistence of the oil paint and the powderiness of the pastel that gives this evanescent dimension, between appearance and disappearance.



Étude de phalène, oil and pastel on canvas, 2024  
© Djabril Boukhenaiissi

The engravings, which are openly fantastic, are done in black and white, playing on the contrast between the tones of the ink and the white of the paper, with the exception of one composition done in colour, based on four-colour printing, a real technical challenge.

The compositions are populated by moths, fireworks as simulacra of stars and full of fantastic characters buried under halos of light. The night is never explicitly shown, but only suggested, through a series of images using different registers, foremost among which are the fantastic, the grotesque and perhaps the ironic.



Atelier MA of Lee Ufan Arles © Amélie Blanc

## ...AND RESONANCE

For eight weeks Djabril Boukhenaiissi made the large space dedicated to him just opposite Lee Ufan Arles his own. The size of the studio allowed him to cover the walls with drawings, sketches, engravings and essays. The residency (from 10 January to 29 February 2024) was also an opportunity for Boukhenaiissi to study the Korean artist's work at close quarters.

In addition to Lee Ufan, Odilon Redon and Caspar David Friedrich are two other sources of inspiration. The former for his uninhi-

**“The residency was an opportunity for me to go where I hadn't expected. I told the jury up front that I had no strict ideas about what the exhibition would look like, or what I'd be doing in the space. I was following a research intuition that I wanted to explore during this residency. To my great surprise, they trusted me.”**

DJABRIL BOUKHENAÏSSI

bited, almost abstract, use of pastels, which he also mixed with paint; the latter for his use of the horizontal mode of representation that art historian Werner Hofmann emphasises, and which, according to him, allows the painting to be apprehended at a single glance. In engraving, the young artist studied the work of Charles Meryon, an artist who produced a large number of etchings whose main subject was historic Paris threatened by the Haussmann transformations. Here again, we can read a correspondence between the two engravers trying to crystallise, in the fibre of the paper, a state in the process of being eroded. After working on the sketches during the residency, Boukhenaïssi began by painting large formats on canvas before turning to printmaking.

**“It's a great opportunity to show printmaking in a place like Lee Ufan Arles. Printmaking is relatively shunned in France, so it's important to present it in relation to paintings.”**

DJABRIL BOUKHENAÏSSI



Atelier MA of Lee Ufan Arles © Amélie Blanc

The announcement of the Prize's winner had an instant impact, provoking multiple reverberations. Overnight, Boukhenaïssi received a great deal of exposure, and several institutions have already offered to show his work at their institutions in 2025. Enthusiastic about the project, the young artist found it a pretext to immerse himself in the residency as if entering a special space in time.

Boukhenaïssi's expectations have already been exceeded, finding a welcoming team, unexpected spin-offs, a field of study to explore for years to come and decisive meetings. These included the cultural players he was able to meet in the workshop, such as publishers, curators, gallery owners, critics, journalists and the general public. Several visits open to the public were organised, including printmaking workshops for young people.

**“For us as well, it was very important to strike a balance between the demands made on us and the time we had to work with Djabril. The Art & Environment Prize residency is a subtle balance between dedicated, even devoted, support, the openness we promise by promoting the artist's work, and the precious time for artistic reflection that we need to secure.”**

ANN CAROLINE PRAZAN, DIRECTOR OF ART, CULTURE & HERITAGE AT GUERLAIN

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Two artworks by the artist related to the theme of the disappearance of the night, created during his residency at Lee Ufan Arles, will be featured in the group exhibition "Van Gogh et les étoiles" presented by the Vincent Van Gogh Foundation, curated by Jean de Loisy and Bice Curiger, from 1st June to 8 September, 2024.

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## GUERLAIN AND LEE UFAN ARLES, A SHARED COMMITMENT

Lee Ufan Arles and Maison Guerlain share a sensitivity to artistic support and transmission, as well as a commitment to art and the environment. They encourage artistic productions that are resolutely altruistic and responsible, opening up new dialogues with nature.

### MAISON GUERLAIN

Guerlain, a long-standing patron of contemporary art, has from the outset collaborated with numerous craftspeople, masters of art and artists of its time, constantly renewing its support for creation. Master glassmakers and perfumers, gilders, jewellers, interior designers, couturiers, as well as sculptors, draughtsmen and photographers, have all taken part in this great creative dialogue since the House was founded in 1828. For many years now, Guerlain has entrusted its cases and bottles to contemporary artists to design unique collections in limited editions.

**“Maison Guerlain is committed to presenting and supporting young artists from the emerging scene.”**

ANN CAROLINE PRAZAN, DIRECTOR OF ART, CULTURE & HERITAGE, GUERLAIN

The exhibitions organised at 68, Champs-Élysées have also highlighted the work of many emerging and established artists supported by Guerlain. It was on this initiative that the House decided to create 'Women for Art', a label that has since enabled it to crystallise its patronage initiatives and its inclusive vision through numerous partnerships. After the 'Femmes en regard' exhibition in 2021, Guerlain presented the work of Charlotte Abramov with 'Piquées' in 2022. To celebrate the 170th anniversary of the Flacon aux abeilles in 2023, Guerlain gave eleven women artists carte blanche to reinterpret it. In 2023, Guerlain continued its artistic metamorphosis by entrusting the famous bee bottle to Maison Matisse<sup>3</sup> for the creation of exceptional pieces.

Guerlain is also building lasting links with nature by multiplying its partnerships and meaningful initiatives, brought together in the 'Guerlain for Bees Conservation Programme'. Guerlain has had a strong bond with bees since the creation of the Flacon aux abeilles in 1853.

A symbol of Guerlain's commitment for over ten years, the company has made the protection of this natural wonder one of its major priorities. As part of its ongoing commitment to preserving biodiversity, Guerlain has for several years been strengthening its commitment to ethical and sustainable sourcing by becoming a member of the Union For Ethical Bioproducts (UEBT) association. Guerlain aims to have all fifty of its natural ingredients certified to the UEBT standard by 2026.

<sup>3</sup> Founded by Jean-Mathieu Matisse, one of the painter's great-grandsons, to continue promoting the painter's legacy.

Lee Ufan's work is intended to be a bridge at the crossroads of cultures. The universal notion of encounter and dialogue is central to the work of this versatile artist, who is also a painter, sculptor, poet and philosopher. From early on, Lee Ufan challenged the alienation and asphyxiation of contemporary art, which is essentially self-centred and dominated by the artist's ego. In contrast to a practice based on the desire to leave a trace or impose a vision<sup>4</sup>, and an aesthetic that takes no account of the environment, Lee Ufan strives to restore the importance of the outside world and place this notion at the heart of his artistic research. Lee Ufan's works abolish the notions of inside and outside and set themselves up against division by building spaces of openness, bridges towards a nature that is respected, not possessed, or, as the artist puts it, 'not acted upon'<sup>5</sup>. In this way, they re-establish a dialogue between the artist, the viewer and the world around them, by taking their place in a space that they welcome as much as it welcomes them, and by making it vibrate with this shared energy, which can then resonate. The dynamic relationships and interactions at play in Lee Ufan's work help to reconnect us with nature and create a poetic and transcendental 'space of resonance'<sup>6</sup>.

By creating a 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> space dedicated to his work in the heart of Arles, with which the artist has had a special relationship for a decade, Lee Ufan is creating a resonant area dedicated to creation, meditation and dialogue. Lee Ufan Arles is a time-space for reconnecting with both the outside world (environment) and the inside world (imagination). Created with a view to openness and encounters, Lee Ufan Arles strengthens Arles' cultural offering, contributes to the region's dynamism and is both an exhibition centre and a place to live, supporting a range of artistic and cultural activities.

4 « I'm not trying to verbalise the world, to make it my own, but to be connected to it, to perceive it. » Lee Ufan in *Un art de la rencontre*, Actes Sud, 2019, p.32

**“It's a marvellous way of bringing an artist's place to life when it's in dialogue with other creators.”**

JULIETTE VIGNON, GENERAL COORDINATOR OF LEE UFAN ARLES

5 Lee Ufan, *Op.cit.*, p.17

6 Lee Ufan, *Op.cit.*, p.17



Each year, the Art & Environment Prize rewards a work of universal scope whose philosophical depth echoes that of Lee Ufan and whose link to the environment resonates with the values upheld by Maison Guerlain. For Lee Ufan Arles and Guerlain, the aim is not so much to create a school as to develop a creative space that builds conceptual, semantic and aesthetic bridges between the work of young designers and that of Lee Ufan. The Prize is therefore sensitive to strong conceptual projects that offer a new vision of our relationship with modernity, as well as works with long timeframes and a connection to nature, the environment and materials.

After winning the prize, the winner receives a six-to eight-week support programme with Lee Ufan Arles, as well as a unique production space in the centre of Arles. This 'time-space' allows the winner to undertake his or her artistic project, and also to meet the people and institutions involved in its implementation, be they artists, professionals from the art world and local players, as well as the general public. Guerlain and Lee Ufan Arles support the winner in his or her approach by increasing the number of meetings with international and local artists, curators and players.

The residency is followed by an exhibition of the artist's work over the summer in one of Lee Ufan Arles' spaces. This event is an opportunity for the winner to present his or her project to a local and international audience, raising their profile while being a springboard for their career.

## Entry conditions

The Art and Environment Prize is open to all artists, whatever their artistic practice, regardless of age or qualifications, and from all over the world.

## The Jury

The jury for the Prize will be chaired by Lee Ufan and made up of members of the two entities as well as guest personalities, both sponsors of the event.

## Guerlain:

- Gabrielle Saint-Genis, President and CEO
- Ann Caroline Prazan, Director of Art, Culture and Heritage
- Clément Renaudet, Climate and Biodiversity Manager

## Lee Ufan Arles:

- Esra Joo, Vice-President
- Juliette Vignon, General Coordinator

## Sponsors of the 2024 edition:

- Laurent Le Bon, President of the Centre Pompidou
- Wim Wenders, Director
- Djabril Boukhenaiissi, Winner of the Art & Environment Prize 2023

Visit the Prize application page:

[www.leeufan-arles.org/art-environment-prize](http://www.leeufan-arles.org/art-environment-prize)

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## Prize calendar

**30 April** — Launch of the second Art & Environment Prize and call for entries

**30 July** — Closing date for applications

**Mid-September** — Selection of finalists

**Early October** — Interviews with the finalists

**Week of 14 October** — Announcement of the winner of the Art & Environment Prize during Paris +

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Hôtel Vernon, Arles © Lee Ufan Arles

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Opening on 3 July 2024  
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 13200 Arles, France  
 Everyday from 10am to 7pm

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**LEE UFAN**  
ARLES

**GUERLAIN**  
PARIS

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