

AGENDA

LEBANON

ART

'Rising: the Only Way is Up'
Art on 56th, Youssef Hayek Street, Gemmayzeh
Until Jan. 11
01-570-331

This exhibition features the colorful abstract paintings of Randa Ali Ahmad, in which the artist dwells on the consequences of the Arab Spring.

'La Volonte de n'Etre'
Cynthia Nouhra Art Gallery, Elias Hrawi Street, Furn al-Shubbak
Until Feb. 19
01-281-755

Gallerist and artist Cynthia Nouhra' works dwell on the notions of motion, existence and identity.

'This Day @ Ten'
Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Tannous Building, Karantina
Until March 22
01-566-550

This solo exhibition features work by photographer and artist Akram Zaatar, showcasing three of his video works, "This Day" (2003), "In This House" (2004-2012) and "Letter to a Refusing Pilot" (2013).

'Relatively Speaking'
Agial Art Gallery, Abdul Aziz Street, Hamra
Until Dec. 28
01-345-213

This solo show features the work of artist and award winning filmmaker Mahmoud Hojeij, who is engaged in questioning the veracity of ideas presented as incontrovertible.

'Rising: the Only Way is Up'
Art on 56th, Youssef Hayek Street, Gemmayzeh
Dec. 19 until Jan. 11
01-570-331

This exhibition features the abstract and colorful paintings of Randa Ali Ahmad.

'I, the Syrian'
Ayyam Gallery, across from Beirut Marina, Downtown
Until Jan. 30
01-374-450

This solo exhibition showcases digital artwork and prints by Dubai-based Syrian artist Tamam Azzam, reflecting on the human cost of the ongoing war in Syria.

'Squat Beirut'
Metropolitan Art Society, Traoud Street, Ashrafieh
Until Jan. 31
70-366-969

This group exhibition showcases a mixture of furniture signed by master artists and works of contemporary art, contrasting rare tapestries and historic design pieces selected by Nilufar gallery in Milan and artwork selected by Daniele Balice of Balice Hertling gallery in Paris.

THEATER

'High Heels'
Theatre Monnot, Ashrafieh
Thursdays through Sundays until Jan. 19
01-999-666

This Arabic adaptation of U.S. playwright Theresa Rebeck's "Spike Heels" is a modern-day Pygmalion. A comedy of manners, it explores the relationships between four central characters – an Arabic literature professor, a lawyer, an aristocratic beauty and a sexy young woman – and tackles issues such as sexual harassment and misplaced love.

REVIEW



Abou Shaqra, "I Think the World of It," 2013, HD mixed-technique video and sound installation.

Still lives in a raucous world

Glimmers of the sublime flash from Exposure, the BAC's emerging artist show

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: A couple of years back, a young activist posted an image of herself on a social networking site, breasts exposed, as an expression of protest. A short time later, F, as she is named here, found that someone had hacked her website and electronically scoured her nipples from the image.

Perturbed, she posted a notice decrying this vandalism against the Web representation of her body. "Lost: My nipples have disappeared from the internet! I don't know how this happened! ... Please help me find them."

Looking into this incident, Wael Kodeih (aka Lebanese rapper Rayess Bek) learned that the lords of the online marches (Facebook, et al.) had developed an algorithm to purge potentially offensive body parts from the pale.

Software glitches made it necessary to have actual humans perform random checks on risky sites, a labor outsourced to Safe Public Media, a Casablanca-based concern. It appears SPM employs a fellow named Youssef Darkawi to ensure that no online nipples go unflensed.

Naturally, Washington's National Security Agency also enters into this story, and the SPM and NSA intrigue around F's vandalized baps provides the narrative core of Kodeih's 2013 work "Lost and Found."

The piece is comprised of two components. The first is a stack of small fliers bearing F's original bare-breasted photo (nipples expurgated) and the activist's pleas for help. The second is a late-model Macintosh computer that the viewer can use to find further evidence of SPM malfeasance.

The tale of F's disappearing nipples, and how it ramifies in the shared condition of 21st-century humanity, is appealing for its dual nature.

On one hand, it emerges from the world of postpartisan political activism that has mirrored real-world dissident movements like Occupy Wall Street and the pre-militant stages of the "Arab Spring."

On the other hand, "Lost and Found" is a thing of cyberspace, entangling "fact" and "fiction" with a narrative elasticity redolent of the oeuvre of Walid Raad.

Kodeih is one of 15 artists whose work is now on display in Exposure, the Beirut Art Center's yearly exhibition-competition for emerging artists with some connection to this city.

On the rain-sodden afternoon that The Daily Star visited Exposure, a piece of A4 paper covered the computer screen of "Lost and Found" with the message "Temporarily Out of Order."

It would be satisfying to imagine that an act of SPM subversion had snuffed the BAC's Mac. The busted computer could also be an integral part of Kodeih's piece. Either story would be less annoying than a mundane technical problem.

Chosen by a selection committee comprised of filmmaker-artist Rania Stefan, curator Tarek Abou El Fetouh, art historian and artist Gregory Buchakjian and philosopher Fares Chalabi, Exposure's works range over a wide landscape of practices.

These include photo series, painting, sculptural and handicraft works, the most-accomplished of which stand as concise evocations of raucous imagined worlds beyond the gallery. They also serve to provide intriguing foils to Exposure's multimedia and video installations.

One of these, Maxime Hourani's sprawling exploration of the performance and representation of dissent, emerges from an engagement with politics not unlike Kodeih's.

One of its two principal components is "Space for Protest." Located behind a display of progressive politi-



Eid-Sabbagh and Quéré's "Possible and Imaginary Lives," 2012, is a fictive rewriting of four Palestinian sisters' lives.

cal literature from the 20th-century Middle East, it's comprised of a facsimile of a green-screen studio, where collaborators can be photographed holding placards.

On the other side of the hall, Hourani's "Disembodied Places: The Withdrawal from Geography" is a screen saver-style panoramic shot of the Bekaa Valley, festooned with green-screen images of local cultural laborers holding placard-borne aphorisms – "Make Me a Mother," one declaims, "Same Shit, Different Saddam," intones another.

Exposure's installations include some of its best-realized work.

Take "Behind the Sun," a gripping video installation by Beirut-based Kuwaiti artist Monira al-Qadiri. The work conflates found audio and video elements to form a uniquely personal vision of recent regional history.

The audio is a nearly 10-minute piece of VHS footage that records the oil fields of Kuwait in 1992, spewing flame and black smoke after the retreating forces of Saddam Hussein set them alight. Accompanying this apocalyptic vista is a piece of unnamed Arabic poetry, the recitation of non-Quranic verse apparently being a staple of the religious television programming of the day.

Evoking one of her country's more photogenic episodes, "Behind the Sun" is reminiscent of "Lessons in Darkness" (1992). Werner Herzog's filmic response to Kuwait's oil fires was to combine helicopter-borne shots of the smoke and flame with the German writer-director's musing voiceover. The combination, Herzog said, aspired to the quality of science fiction.

Qadiri's deployment of Arabic verse will remind some of Wael Shawky's video work "Cave" (2006), in which the Egyptian artist was filmed walking up and down the aisles of a well-lit supermarket while reciting the eponymous Quranic sura.

If "Behind the Sun" finds some inspiration from these earlier works, it is unique for the manner and substance of its departure from them. The VHS camera's on-the-ground visual language gives the piece an aesthetic that is at once improvised, personal and, perversely, nostalgic.

"And the stars / as they illuminate the walker's path," intones a baritone voice in Arabic, "Oh how many galaxies and nebulae / fly in the universe of space / like sunken atoms."

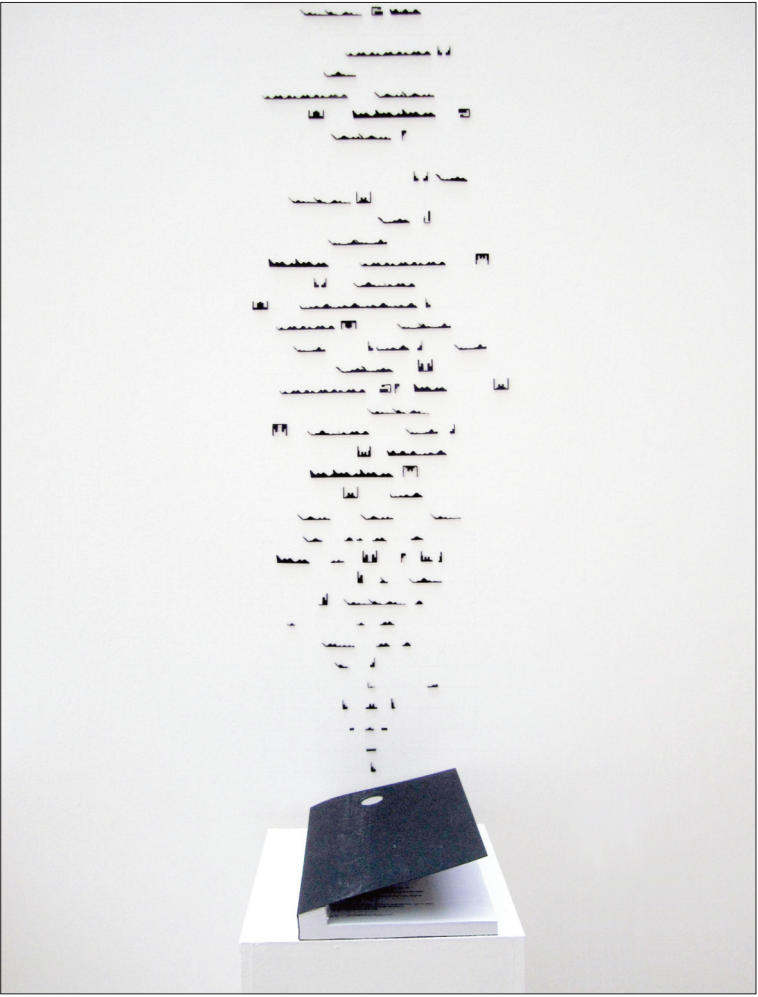
Recited in counterpoint to the VHS images, the poetry evokes the cosmic in an altogether different dialect than "Lessons." Indeed, Qadiri's juxtaposition of verse and image makes Herzog's fumbling toward the sublime seem forced by comparison.

An equally immersive, if more for-

mally variegated, work is the multimedia installation "Possible and Imaginary Lives" (2012). A collaboration between Beirut-based Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh and Brussels-based Rozenn Quéré, the work springs from a project produced by Switzerland's Festival Images, Vevey, where it won the event's International Photo Award.

This accomplished piece takes its departure from the stories of four strong-willed Palestinian sisters who grew up in Lebanon but were ultimately separated by migration. The oldest sister, Jocelyne, went to Cairo. Frieda, the youngest, moved to Paris. Stella left Lebanon for New York while her twin Graziella remained in Beirut.

Though the installation assembles (and occasionally doctors) photos of the four sisters and draws upon (sometimes fictionalized) interviews with three of them, "Lives" is a fictive recreation of the four women's collective biography.



Christine Kettaneh, "Time cutting time," 2013, laser-cut acrylic and artist book.

Shooting stars Labaki, Keitel wrap shoot of a segment from 'Rio I love You'



RIO DE JANEIRO: Harvey Keitel, center right, and Nadine Labaki, center left, are shot in the midst of the shoot for a segment in the portmanteau film "Rio I Love You." Principal photography has now wrapped on the segment, which Labaki directed, co-wrote and in which she co-stars. One of the feature's 11 shorts, Labaki's segment follows a famous actor (Keitel) and her own character as they become enchanted with a little boy, left, who says he's waiting for a "very important phone call."

JUST A THOUGHT

Constant exposure to dangers will breed contempt for them.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca, The Younger (c.3 B.C.-A.D. 65)