

AGENDA

LEBANON

READING

'Le Traquet Kurde'
Beirut Art Center, Jisr al-Wati
Feb. 21, 8 p.m.
Jean Rolin will give a reading from his book following the travels a Kurdish Wheatear bird, tying together vastly distant geographies and cultures.

FILM

'Red Carpet'
Brazil-Lebanon Cultural Center, Ashrafieh
Feb. 21, 7:30 p.m.
01-322-905
Luiz Alberto Pereira's comedy recounts the story of a boy whose father wants to take him to see a movie starring famous Brazilian actor Amaçio Mazzaropi. The family hits the road in the hopes of finding a theater that has one.

TALK

'Artistic initiatives and the impact on a city'
Sursock Museum, Auditorium
Feb. 22, 7 p.m.
This Swiss Art Talk focuses on the impact that an artistic initiative can have on tourism and the economy. Laurent Wehrli gives the example of his town, famous for the Montreux Jazz Festival.

ART

'Haneen'
Beit Beirut, Sodoco
Opens Feb. 21, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
A collective work of Lebanese and Syrian artists interpreting the impact of war on childhood, from 39 poems and stories written by Syrian children living in camps in Lebanon.

'Transformation'
Mark Hachem Gallery, Mina al-Hosn
Until Feb. 22
Chaouki Chamoun proves that his surface is the carrier of all the aesthetic elements of his work and believes that no element has any independent value of its own, if it does not add value to the whole.

BOOK LAUNCH

'Female Singing Stars of the Lebanese '40s'
Dar El-Nimer, Clemenceau
Feb. 21, 6 p.m.
Mahmoud Zibawi and As'ad Makhoul book sheds the light on 12 singers from when Lebanese singing started emerging prior to the great musical and lyrical renaissance, through a detailed archive of posters, stories and magazines from that era.

MUSIC

'Missa in B Minor'
St. Joseph Church, Monnot
Feb. 21, 8:30 p.m.
Tickets: Librairie Antoine and festival box office
Al-Bustan festival continues with Bach's "Missa in B Minor," by the Corelli Baroque Orchestra and the Collegium Musicale Choir.

'Bohemian Rhapsody'
Brazil-Lebanon Cultural Center, Ashrafieh
Feb. 23, 7 p.m.
01-322-905
Modern cello-piano duo Daniel Sorour and Clemens Kroger will give a concert featuring works by Schubert, The Beatles, Queen and more.

JUST A THOUGHT

I did a shoot for "Sports Illustrated," and my grandpa called me and asked when my issue of "Playboy" was coming out. It was hilarious as well as embarrassing.

Jasmine Tookes
(1991-)
Model

REVIEW



"The Pimp," 2017, mixed media sculpture and sound, left; from the series "Playmate of the Month," 2018, inkjet print on archival paper.

Art between porn and modernism

Marfa' gallery's 'Yassin Haute Couture' smirks ironic through the pathos

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Sometime in the first decade of this century, city residents were treated to a series of street-level interventions upon some G-rated billboard ads.

The raised arms and décolletage of a smiling female model were poised above some commodity or other (fruit juice? underarm deodorant?) while a long-forgotten real coaxed passers-by to remember the brand name paying for the ad.

Evidently uncomfortable with the figure's exposed flesh, anonymous vigilantes set out to "cover" her by lobbing black paint-filled balloons at select parts of the model's oversized photo reproduction. The grass-roots moralists might have been assaulting the essential amorality of photography.

Raed Yassin recalls this spate of vandalism, noting the pitchmen eventually absorbed the vandals' moral qualms and started self-censoring.

This shard of recent local history came up while the artist was chatting with The Daily Star about "Yassin Haute Couture," nowadays up at Marfa' gallery. Yassin's second Beirut solo comprises seven works and series – photos, mixed media work, video and neon signage – all from 2017-18.

In addition, Marfa' has stocked copies of "The S. Model Collection," a limited-edition artist book of manipulated photos that reverberate through this show and the semiotic narrative that irrigates it.

That narrative springs from a few facts the artist knew about his father, who was murdered during Lebanon's Civil War. The elder Yassin had been a tailor and clothing designer who'd worked in the Gulf.

"For a long time I've been trying to make a portrait of him [in my work], based on the myth and gossip I've heard," Yassin said.

"Each time he appeared, he became a different character."

In the installation series "The Best of Sammy Clark," the artist's father is said to have taken him to singing lessons with the eponymous performer. He's mentioned in the video work "Disco," as "Mahmoud Yassin." Here he's called Samir.

While trash culture interests vigilantes, his practice is festooned with detritus from pop culture history – he says recomposing his family history, and examining its points of intersection with popular culture, is an obsession.

The fictive family history tricking beneath "Yassin Haute Couture" and two of its works – the video "I Hate Theatre, I Love Pornography" and the audio-sculpture "The Pimp" – first surfaced during Yassin's solo "The Future is Nostalgic," held this time last year at Athens' Kafayan Gallery. It sketches the careers of clothes designer Samir Yassin and his brother Fayeze, who worked in the entertainment sector. After erecting successful careers in the Gulf, as the story goes, both brothers found

themselves entangled in their clients' family conflicts and thought it wise to leave the region. The pieces up at Marfa' pick up the brothers' stories back in Lebanon.

At the back of the first of Marfa's two galleries, the 2018 neon sculpture "Azya' Yassin," mimics the size and style of a commercial clothier's sign of a bygone era.

As the gallery's other two walls are hung with color photos of women (apparently modeling clothing designs), the signage sets the aesthetic tone of the exhibition.

The show's main body of work is a photo series that adorns the interior wall of each exhibition hall. The 18-piece "Playmate of the Month" is one of two series of photo-based, multimedia palimpsests.

The artist has photographed the portrait-shaped centerfolds – a feature shared by all print-media porn but, in this case, taken from issues of Playboy magazine from the 1960s through the 1990s.

At first blush, the viewer may not realize he or she is gazing at a photo of a photo of a nude model because Yassin has "dressed" each, painting elaborate outfits over their suggestively posed forms.

"Playmate of the Month" is driven by a witty conceit. On one hand it elevates smut to the status of contemporary art. On the other hand, it does so by means that, by doctoring pornographic images, make them acceptable to a moralizing sensibility that's as far-removed from that of contemporary art as porn.

If viewers follow the "Playmate of the Month" series to the end, a formally similar multimedia series hangs on the facing wall. "Proposal"

is a series of 11 team photo-style snaps of three to seven people in smart casual dress, each focusing on a young couple. The figures' affable poses lack the photo-shoot salaciousness (or deer-in-the-headlights discomfort) that snaps for eroticism in a porn spread.

The title signals that the occasion for the photos was the young couples' engagement. The figures' outfits suggest the snaps were taken sometime in the last quarter of the 20th century. (The groom-to-be sports the sort of tailed, black bow tie once fashionable among antebellum southern gentlemen – and, as fast food survivors may recall, a restaurateur-cum-brand called "Colonel Sanders.")

In each photo, silk embroidery has been worked over the central female figure (the betrothed), changing her attire to something more ornate and three-dimensional.

On the face of it, the conceit powering "Proposal" is more or less that of "Playmate." Both purport to be residues of Samir Yassin's compulsion to design women's clothing after it was no longer possible to do so publicly.

In both, the artist redresses female figures in found prints. Both series even share an intimation of sex – though the coitus in "Proposal" is formally sanctioned. In these cannibalized and manipulated family photos, polite conventionality displaces the winking brashness of the "Playmate" series.

In past conversations, Yassin has elaborated upon his fascination with the trash culture of the 1980s and the tropes of Egyptian cinema and pop music from that era have

informed a great swath of his art – music, video and installation work.

Another, more intimate, facet of Yassin's production hinges on personal history, not least his machine-worked tapestries that reproduce and fictionalize family photos – the focus of 2013's "Dancing, Smoking, Kissing," his first Beirut solo at the (now defunct) Running Horse Gallery.

With pieces titled "Playmate of the Month," and "I Hate Theatre I Love Pornography" – and given the semiotic narratives of the brothers running beneath – "Yassin Haute Couture" might be read as an effort to reconcile the artist's interest in trash culture and his creative mining of his family history. For the artist, there's nothing to reconcile. "I don't think Playboy is trash culture, honestly," he said. "Maybe Penthouse and Hustler are more so."

The Playboy shoots, Yassin observes, carefully deployed their nudes among tropes of the bourgeois "good life" – sumptuous, well-appointed rooms, elaborate swimming pools – and were nestled among ads for luxury goods like cigars, high-fi systems, overpriced whiskey. It's the stuff he imagines would have littered the life of Samir Yassin, fashion designer.

Situated within the tale of a father's forlorn exile from career success and material comfort – reduced to crafting clothing designs on photos of beautiful women (innocent-looking or not) – the smirking irony of Yassin's works is wed to a peculiar pathos.

"Yassin Haute Couture" is up at Marfa' through April 7. For more, see marfa-projects.com.

Norway attack film shifts focus to young victims

By Deborah Cole
Agence France Presse

BERLIN: A wrenching drama recounting Anders Behring Breivik's 2011 massacre in Norway in real time seeks to put the focus back on the young victims and away from the neo-Nazi mass murderer.

Tracing the horror of that summer day at a Norwegian Labour Party Youth League camp on the island of Utoya, "U – 22 July" premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival Monday, just days after one of the worst school shootings in U.S. history, killing 17 in Florida.

Filmed in a chilling single take, the film traces all 72 minutes of the teenagers' struggle for survival as Breivik picked them off one by one until police finally arrived.

Norwegian director Erik Poppe said that in the seven years since the tragedy, Breivik had repeatedly stolen the spotlight with extravagant court appearances and blanket media coverage, eclipsing the memory of the nation's dead children.

"As we went on month-by-month, year-by-year, we saw the memory of what took place out on that island faded more and more," Poppe, a former war photographer, told reporters after a press preview.

"I was meeting survivors from that island. They shared that feeling ... and this was worrying them."

Disguised as a police officer, Breivik tracked and gunned down 69 people, most of them teenagers,



"U – 22 July" seeks to counteract the blanket media coverage of the massacre's perpetrator.

on Utoya, shortly after killing eight people in a bombing outside a government building in Oslo.

He has never expressed remorse for committing the worst atrocity in Norway's postwar history. He said he killed his victims because they embraced multiculturalism.

The film's production team took the testimony of several survivors to create a fictionalized but painfully realistic account, with a cast of mainly nonprofessional actors.

The movie focuses on a handful of teen protagonists, in particular the sisters Kaja and Emilie, who get separated as the first gunshots ring out.

While most of the youth desperately search for hiding spots on the small island as the death toll mounts, 19-year-old Kaja repeatedly runs toward the danger to try to find her younger sibling.

Mobile phones set on silent vibrate throughout the woods as terrified parents, receiving the news at

home, try to contact their children.

The camera stays close with the young, ethnically diverse group of campers, with Breivik appearing only a few times as a black-clad shadowy figure in the distance. His name is never mentioned.

Poppe's keenly awaited film is one of 19 pictures vying for the Golden Bear top prize at the Berlin film festival, to be awarded Saturday.

British director Paul Greengrass, who won the Golden Bear in 2002

for "Bloody Sunday," is reportedly making his own film about the massacre for Netflix, titled "Norway."

Andrea Berntzen, who plays Kaja, said she was just 12 at the time of the attack and had few specific memories of that day apart from "being scared."

"Hearing about this movie, at first I was very critical because I thought it was too early, like many in Norway," she said, "but reading the script and learning that the focus would be on the youth on the island rather than the man behind this was really important to me."

Some survivors in Norway nevertheless strongly criticized the decision to make the film.

"Erik Poppe took the worst nightmare of my life and turned it into entertainment," said Kent Rune Pedersen, who escaped Utoya, adding he was still haunted by "flashbacks, dreams, cries and images."

"It is out of the question that I would go to the cinema to watch such a film."

Poppe said showing a highly emotional dramatization of events was intended to have a "healing" effect for survivors, victims' families and a traumatized country.

He said his motivation to shoot the almost unbearable scenes of youth being cut down in their prime was also political.

"Looking around Europe, neofascism is rising day by day," he said.

"We need to remember what happened out on that island, what neofascism can look like."