

AGENDA

LEBANON

MUSIC

**'Le Fantome de Rebecca Griffiths'**  
*St. Joseph Church, Ashrafieh*  
**Jan. 18, 8:30 p.m.**  
 Under the baton of Wojciech Czepiel, the Lebanese Philharmonic Orchestra will perform the Lebanon premiere of this work by Anglo-Lebanese composer Bushra El-Turk.

PHOTOGRAPHY

**'On Fleeting Grounds'**  
*Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Majdalani Building, Raouche*  
**Until Jan. 30**  
 01-868-290  
 These photographs – by Rima Maroun, Lara Tabet and Elsie Haddad, among others – investigate the architectural transformation of Beirut.

**'Tout ce qui n'est pas Moi'**  
*Galerie Tanit-Beyrouth, Just beyond EDL, Mar Mikhael*  
**Jan. 10 until March 30**  
 03-257-805 / 70-910-523  
 Japanese-French artist Kimiko Yoshida's photographs play with notions of light, identity and disappearance.

PERFORMANCE

**'Good Bye Schlondorff'**  
*Metro al-Madina, Hamra Street*  
**Jan. 17, 9 p.m.**  
 01-753-021  
 Lebanese rapper Rayess Bek combines intimate letters discovered on audio tapes and acidic melodies with short sequences from Schlondorff's film "Circle of Deceit" and its "Making of" documentary. The show promises to take the viewer on a journey through the universe of '80s-era Lebanon.

ART

**'Failles'**  
*French Institute, Damascus Road, Sodoco, Ashrafieh*  
**Jan. 15 until Feb. 2**  
 01-420-200  
 This exhibition of the works by Lebanese artist Tamara Haddad deals with the transformations of the ground and its consequences on landscapes.

**'Shades'**  
*Galerie Surface Libre, Jardin Dadour, Jal al-Dib*  
**Until Jan. 26**  
 04-715-500  
 The sculptures of Rodolphe Chamoun question the relationships between space and form, object and atmosphere.

**'Depths'**  
*Ayyam Gallery, Zeitoune Street, BCD*  
**Until Feb. 15**  
 01-374-450  
 The works of Lara Zankoul are contemporary fairy tales, which explore the charm and mystery of the human psyche. Whimsical and playful, they represent an attempt to invent new worlds, to push against the boundaries of our reality.

**Huguette Caland**  
*Beirut Exhibition Center, Beirut Waterfront*  
**Jan. 17 until Feb. 24**  
 01-962-000 ext. 2883  
 This retrospective displays the paintings of Lebanese artist Huguette Caland from 1964 until today.

**'Paper Works'**  
*ArtLab, Rmeil 1804, Gouraud Street, Gemmayzeh*  
**Until Jan. 19**  
 01-324-577  
 This exhibition features paper artworks of resident artists from Lebanon, Syria and Iran.

JUST A THOUGHT

Juvenile delinquency would disappear if kids followed their parent's advice, instead of their example.

Anonymous

OBITUARY

# At once professional and prescient

Tributes pour in for revolutionary Syrian television producer Adib Khair

By Marlin Dick  
 The Daily Star

**B**EIRUT: The late Adib Khair was an innovative Syrian television producer, perhaps best known for igniting the Turkish soap opera craze across the Arab Middle East. He was eulogized Sunday as a pioneer, dedicated to bringing professional standards to his country's industry.

The 48-year-old Khair succumbed to a heart attack Saturday during a visit to Beirut and died at Hotel Dieu hospital. His funeral took place the following day in Damascus.

Television stars from Syria, Lebanon and elsewhere expressed their shock and sorrow upon hearing the news of his untimely passing.

Writing on his Facebook page, veteran director Haitham Hakki paid tribute to his late colleague's efforts to ensure that the emerging Syrian television production sector would not rest on its laurels, but instead move in new directions.

"He injected new blood and a new mentality into our work," Hakki said, "based on logic, and engaging in dialogue, even if we disagreed with him."

Khair headed the production company Sama. His most notable contribution to the television industry came several years ago, when he decided to purchase and market Turkish soap operas and dub them into Syrian colloquial, rather than formal Arabic or the Egyptian dialect.

Beyond the wave of commercially successful Turkish series, Khair's company also branched into several television genres, leaving a distinctive



Khair, center, with scriptwriter Claudia Marchalian, right, at a news conference for "Ruby" at MBC4 studios, last February.

mark each time.

Purely romantic tales were featured in the series "Ahl al-Gharam" (People in Love), which was picked up by regional satellite giant MBC. The show featured the self-contained episode format, which Khair was determined to promote in order to inject a new element into the 30-episode structure of most drama and comedy series.

"He was responsible for the most technically sophisticated and innovative Arab television drama going," said Christa Salamandra, an American academic who has written extensively on Syria's television industry.

"He was a great businessman in the

Damascene tradition," she continued, "but drama was never just a business for him; he loved it with a passion."

Each episode of "Ahl al-Gharam" features a love story that is doomed to fail, but as Salamandra noted, instead of sappiness, the show was a forum for "daring social critique," as it tackled problematic issues such as Muslim-Christian relationships.

In the early years of Bashar Assad's presidency, Khair produced a five-minute sketch program, "Amal Ma Fi" (There's No Hope), which was also very popular with critics and audiences. It featured two down-and-out characters, sitting in a small hut, who would discuss current events in a tone that veered from

playful to extremely caustic.

The program's format, in the words of Salamandra, "uncannily presages the dissident cultural production of the current uprising."

Indeed, it has since been copied by anti-regime activists who produce YouTube material that mocks the Syrian regime today.

In the realm of comedy, Khair produced two seasons of the hit series "Lost Village" (Day'a Da'iya), set in a fictional sleepy hamlet on Syria's northern border with Turkey. The characters speak a tangy coastal accent so thick that subtitles were used to explain some of the local turns of speech.

Lebanese audiences might recog-

nize Khair's impact on the sector from the recent, long-running romantic drama series "Ruby," which starred Syria's Maxim Khalil, Lebanon's Cyrine Abdel-Nour and Egypt's Amir Karara.

Khair was famous for trying to enhance the standards of Syria's national television industry and focused especially on developing television "shows" whose individual episodes could be enjoyed by a viewer without them having to watch the entire 30 days of programming.

Najib Nseir, a Syrian scriptwriter who worked with Khair on several productions, described him as a U.S.-educated businessman who sought to apply a professional approach to television production, particularly when it came to relying on qualified consultants in the script development process.

During the second edition of "Ahl al-Gharam," Khair hosted several sessions of screenings of individual episodes at a restaurant in Damascus. He brought together members of the cast and crew, critics and friends of the industry in order to generate suggestions for improving the show in question, or future efforts.

"He was interested in developing the concept of the 'television show,'" Nseir said, "which is where he stood out from others who focused on merely reproducing the standard 30-days-in-a-row musalsal (series) format."

Khair passed away while in the midst of preparations for his latest project, Nseir said.

He had been visiting Beirut to lay the groundwork for a show that would have explored the conditions of Syrians in Lebanon who have been displaced by their country's bloody 22-month uprising.

It was a daring choice, and a response to the sudden reversal of fortune for colleagues and friends who had suddenly found themselves without work due to the drop-off in production.

"His sole concern," Nseir said, "was to help these people out."

INTERVIEW

## Atfal Ahdath: Three juvenile delinquents come home

By Jim Quilty  
 The Daily Star

**B**EIRUT: Atfal Ahdath appreciate the double meaning embedded in their moniker. One translation is "Juvenile Delinquents." Another is "Children of Events" – "events" being a euphemism for Lebanon's 15-year-long Civil War, and for the periodic spasms of civil delinquency that have erupted since 1990.

The three members of Atfal Ahdath are already recognized for the wide range of solo work they've devised over the years.

Though he's known for his contributions to local group exhibitions – his photo series "Interrupted Landscapes" at the Beirut Art Center's 2010 "Exposure" show, for instance – Hatem Imam also quietly works with Maya Moumne on the Cinema House Furniture project – a funky urban design outfit specializing in reconditioning late-20th-century furniture.

Vartan Avakian – who contributed to "Exposure" an amusing exercise in extreme close-up photography-cum-guessing game – is among the cluster of international artists now creating work for the 2013 Abraaj Capital Art Prize, one of the lucrative side events of ArtDubai.

Raed Yassin is known for his work as an improv musician, Lebanon's trash culture ambassador and as an alumnus of the 2012 Abraaj Prize – for which he produced a series of China pots, each representing a pivotal battle from Lebanon's Civil War, all of them depicted in the manner of Persian miniatures.

Atfal Ahdath gathered for a rare group interview to discuss their debut Beirut exhibition, "Take me to this place, I want to do the memories," which opens Wednesday at the Running Horse Contemporary Art Space.

"It's part of an ongoing project," says Yassin. "It started at the Sharjah Biennial two years ago. Then it developed and was shown again in the Sultan gallery in Kuwait ... Lately it was in Tokyo's Mori Art Museum ... It wasn't easy coming back home. You have to go all around the world first."

"We wanted to show at the Running Horse because it's at once a fine art space and a commercial space ... We're not just targeting one audience."

"There's no conflict in the topic itself with production and consumption," Avakian says. "We're not designing works that can sell but what we're working on are things very much available in the market anyway."

The work on show is the fruit of Atfal Ahdath's ongoing research on contemporary studio photography practices in the Arab world. Studio practices have been taken up by other Lebanese artists – notably Akram Zaatar, who as founder of the Arab Image Foundation, has explored past studio practices in this region.

Atfal Ahdath's work is something else again.

"These practices are very different from past studio practices," Yassin observes. "Now the relationship to the image is different. First because it's



In Atfal Ahdath's early work, self-representation and landscape were central.

the digital age ... and also [because of] the accumulation of political and economic and social changes."

The work draws on a bank of images derived from the artists visiting photography studios around the region and having their pictures taken individually or together.

"When you get your photo taken, a backdrop is added via Photoshop," Imam explains. "The relationship between us and the backdrop is our area of interest. Why are we being placed in this particular landscape? What does that mean? Who do we want to be? What does this say, not only about us but about the practice itself, about the photographer?"

"It's no surprise," he adds, "that these images are, to a very great degree, similar."

"The aesthetics, they differ," Avakian rejoins, "but the scenarios they stage go in one direction."

"This Place," the book that emerged from the trio's Sharjah debut, is comprised of a single composite photograph that's been folded to form 16 leaves. The artists are multiply represented against a range of landscapes, holding poses that some might regard as "cheesy."

"It's one massive landscape," Imam says, "one place that's made of many different places. The implication of the book is that all this fantastical world that we want to belong to is practically one place. It's the place where we

will go to fabricate our memories.

"We're also looking at the whole practice of landscape [representation], whether it be painting or photography. If you have a figure standing in front of this landscape, what does it mean in terms of power, in terms of ownership?"

"The nice thing about this world," Avakian says, "is that it is one world, but it is artificially connected. It's quite obvious."

Self-representation has been one of the abiding features of Atfal Ahdath's early work.

"By placing ourselves in the practice, we want to show that we're not only looking at it from a distance. This distance – which you find when you look at works about studio practices – is always the aesthetic of a different age, of a different society, of a different face. It was important for us to put ourselves in the work because we don't feel much estranged from this practice or aesthetic."

"Or even class," Yassin adds.

"This is the aesthetics of the working class," Avakian continues. "We were all brought up in working class families. These kind of aspirations and secretions we've lived physically."

"This work can have a kitsch effect on some people. 'Kitsch' is a distance that happens between a certain person and the work. There are no kitsch aesthetics. There is an aesthetic that you look at and, by deeming it kitsch, you are creating the necessary distance

between you and this type of aesthetic.

"I don't feel class distance between this practice and myself. I don't want to be outside the picture and showing you the practice of this other class, this other community, this other society someplace else. That's why we have to be in the work."

Atfal Ahdath's work is constantly evolving and the newer works in the Running Horse show move into a different direction.

"What you will see at the Running Horse is the evolution of the idea Something different from Sharjah and the Mori," Yassin says.

"We're adding a new series that doesn't have us in it. We took the templates of these couples' bodies and we made some ornamental patterns of them, because ornamentation somehow has to do with peoples' ideal way with expressing the wedding."

"What also fascinates us about the work that's being done in the studios," Avakian says, "is that they are clearly looking at photography in a different way. Generally you would think of a photo as a document of the past. Even if you take the picture now, it's a record of the now that just past."

"In this work it's scenarios of the future. This is why the working title of this new series is 'Memories of the Future,' because nothing in them is happening now."

"That's why it's called, 'Take me to

this place, I want to do the memories,'" Yassin says. "There's the class issue. There are those who can't really afford to have memories. They go and fabricate the memories. Doing the memories is part of their postponed life, let's say."

"So they go stage this, and they can even go in the imagination to the most-fancy places they want to be. They can go take these photos with backgrounds that they can be anywhere. Some people were even put on the background of the moon."

"The question is what is the limit of your aspirations. What's so interesting was their imagination and how big it is."

"What's funny," Imam says, "is that there are limits. The moon example is an exception. Most of them have the cars and the houses and so on but even those, they're sometimes like a Saab from 2001. It's not that extravagant."

"Apparently," Avakian says, "there's this practice of people wanting to have a wedding picture. And they don't even have the means to make a wedding or even rent a dress. So there are templates of couples that are bride and groom ... This isn't based on what the photographer represented. People came and asked for this. It's based on a market need."

"Take me to this place, I want to do the memories," a solo exhibition by Atfal Ahdath, is up at the Running Horse Art Space from Jan. 16 to Feb. 2.