

AGENDA

LEBANON

PHOTOGRAPHY

'The Middle East in the '50s and '60s'

Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Tannous building, Karantina

Until July 16

01-566-550

This exhibition of vintage prints and photography by German photographer F.C. Gundlach includes work created during his trips to the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s.

'Group Photography'

Joanna Seikaly Art Gallery, 480 Gouraud Street, Gemmayzeh

June 30 to July 20

70-776-711

Lebanese photographers Raja Kanafani, Christopher and Oliver Aoun will exhibit some of their best works. The artists' photos will follow an urban architectural theme.

ART

'Rebirth: Lebanon 21st Century Contemporary Art'

Beirut Exhibition Center, Beirut New Waterfront

Until June 24

05-455-454

This exhibition of new work by 49 Lebanese contemporary artists is inspired by the theme of, you guessed it, rebirth.

'Daily Myths'

Ayyam Gallery, Beirut Tower, Zeitoune Street, Downtown

Until June 30

01-374-450 / 01-374-451

A solo exhibition from Syrian artist Nihad al-Turk deals with anthropomorphic representations of mankind's flaws.

'Belonging'

Zamaan Art Gallery, Sadat Street, Hamra

Until June 25

01-745-571

The work of Iraqi painter Ali Abbas explores surrealism and art naïf.

'Zinco, Barb wire and Freedom'

Agiat Art Gallery, 63 Abdel Aziz Street, Hamra

Until June 25

01-345-213

The mixed-media work of Sabra native Abdulrahman Katanani uses tin, a strong symbol of Palestinian refugee status in Lebanon, to represent playful images of childhood.

THEATER

'Tayet el Jagal So3beh'

Monnot Theater, USJ Street, Ashrafieh

June 25, 8:30 p.m.

01-202-422

Joe Kodeih will perform this one man show dealing with machismo in Lebanese society. In Arabic.

DANCE

'Le Temps l'Emportera & B Dream'

Monnot Theater, USJ Street, Ashrafieh

Until June 19, 8:30 p.m.

01-202-422

A play and a 15-minute dance solo will deal with the absence of the self and the confusion between reality and imagination.

MUSIC

'Mathias Atchugarry'

The Church of St. George (Mar Gerjes) Gardens, Amshit

June 18, 7:30 p.m.

09-944-343

On his first Lebanon tour, this young Uruguayan guitarist offers up a varied program ranging from classical to popular Latin American and Spanish tunes. Free admission.

JUST A THOUGHT

All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
1803-1882
American writer

REVIEW

Injecting a virus into the system

Praed's latest CD plays on audience's love of Egyptian cheese while subverting it

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: One of the difficulties folks have with serious art is its inaccessibility. "Serious art," if the term is used at all, is usually taken to refer to work that ignores popular tastes, and often works in media that are distasteful to the international art market.

Take sound art, specifically the free improvisation music generated by the dozens of Lebanese and international artists who cluster around Irtijal, Beirut's international festival of experimental music. This stuff can be (and has been) packaged for sale in CDs, but the work really lives in performance, since it's in the nature of the form that no two shows are ever the same.

And the shows are challenging. Habitues will testify that a standard free improv set – whether it involves Mazen Kerbaj playing his trumpet through a severed balloon with the aid of a set of pincers, or his hose-and-funnel apparatus, or Sharif Sehnaoui tapping on the strings of his guitar with chopsticks – simply doesn't speak to audiences in the same way as conventional music. Such work deconstructs the elements of conventional music, less likely to be soothing than aesthetically thought-provoking – just as intelligent conceptual art is more likely to make you say "Cool!" than "Lovely!"

Sound art betrayed its toe-tapping side at the Beirut Theater Thursday evening, when a handful of free improv musicians came together for a concert to launch "Made in Japan."

The latest CD by "Praed" – aka Lebanon's Raed Yassin and Paed Conca, a native of "the Lebanon of Mitteleurope" (Switzerland) – "Made in Japan" does somehow work better in concert than on CD, but the performance and the document of the performance both share a mischievous flirtation with contemporary pop music that's not unlike the scoop of ice cream parents use to conceal a foul-tasting pill.



Raed Yassin, one half of the Lebanese duo Praed, performs in Beirut.

Thursday's performance featured two acts. The second set featured a session with Scrambled Eggs and friends. In this case the post-punk trio of Tony Elieh, Charbel Haber and Malek Rizkallah were joined by Sehnaoui and Kerbaj. Though it had a rock-'n-roll edge, this second act was remarkably melodic – being held together, from beginning to end, by Elieh's unflappably mutable baseline.

The jewel of the evening, though, was the performance of some numbers from "Made in Japan." The set commenced more or less as local free improv initiates might expect, with Conca moving back and forth from clarinet to electric guitar (electronically enhanced or otherwise).

When he wasn't presiding over the clutch of film and music samples employed by the record, Yassin focused on a cheesy-sounding electronic keyboard, doodling out snippets of what sounded like versions of pop tunes.

Then, maybe 30 minutes in, something odd happened. As his bank of

machines began to sputter out an Egyptian pop tune (Mahmoud al-Housseini's "Cigara Bunni"), Yassin donned a pair of shades, bought a microphone to his face and joined the Egyptian in a mock duet, while Conca's clarinet improvisations moved the tune into completely different sphere.

In the best karaoke tradition, Yassin posed and preened, shimmied and jiggled in a piss-take of pop star performance convention that brought smiles to the faces of the entire audience – most of whom were also nodding their heads or otherwise keeping time with Housseini's pop tune.

"That's how it works. You have to put a virus in the system. You have to give your audience a hug," Yassin nodded after the concert, then laughed. "And then, when their defenses are down, you inject them with this virus that makes them hear things differently."

At first blush, the packaging for "Made in Japan" has a hand-made aspect that you might expect from locally produced CDs – it's on a

Lebanese label called Annihaya. You have to actually purchase it to find the added value – a reproduction of a watercolor painting by Omar Khoury featuring Conca and Yassin. It's a reinterpretation, it seems, of a scene from one of Egyptian comedian Adel Imam's seminal comedies, the stage play "The Witness who didn't see anything."

"Two of the tunes on the record – 'The Suspect' and 'Hamada and Tutu' – are reinterpretations of tunes from Adel Imam films," Yassin remarked. "Rocket," the tune that marked Yassin's Beirut singing debut, reinterprets a tune from the Egyptian film "The Wedding."

"We're stealing these songs, it's true. But this is what the Egyptians do all the time. The first tune on the record – 'PRAED Horror Theme' – is for a film that hasn't been made yet.

"You can call this a concept record if you like. All the stuff that's coming out on the Annihaya label will be like this." The three minds behind Annihaya are artist-cartoonist Hatem Imam, free improv guitarist Sharif Sehnaoui and

Yassin himself. When you suggest that "Made in Japan" is effectively self-published by vanity press, Yassin shrugs.

"Around here," he says, "if the artists don't do it themselves, it doesn't get done at all." The work on "Made in Japan" very much falls into a continuum with the thematic interests of Yassin's earlier work – the free-improv collaboration with Conca, of course, but also his interest in making new work from the detritus of 1980s pop culture.

This interest has been evident in Praed's use of video projections, borrowing from '70s- and '80s-era Egyptian B-movies during their performances. It was also the driving aesthetic of Yassin's award-winning 2008 installation "The Best of Sammy Clark."

"It is part of that," Yassin admits. "But it's more about our interest in images that don't exist. Usually Praed and I perform with projections but here the images we refer to are all absent. It's all cover versions and manipulations and collective memory.

"People came up to me after the show to ask, 'What was that tune you were playing ... ? I know it but I don't remember the title.' I love this," Yassin smiled. "They don't remember the song because it's not really the song. It's the tune that accompanied the scene from a film, an absent image."

One of the consequences of Yassin's approach to local pop culture – "trash culture" as he affectionately calls it – is that Praed's new work can be as appealing as it is challenging.

"Artists don't communicate at all," he sighs. "I'm interested in communicating with the audience because so much of my work comes from society – Arab society especially.

"It's consumerism that makes this kind of music possible. If Nasser were still ruling Egypt, [music like Mahmoud al-Housseini's] wouldn't exist. You need to have someone like Mubarak, who introduced capitalism to this socialist country [and] makes the crazy inequities even worse.

"I don't want to sound like I hate capitalism. There's some things about this new capitalism that I like. Like Facebook and YouTube. When you use them, Facebook and YouTube make money. But it's free."

Praed's "Made in Japan" is released by Annihaya and can be found online.

REVIEW

When nature invades the artistic space

By Chirine Lahoud
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Lebanon is the only country with a tree on its flag. The cedar, once used by the Romans as a symbol of immortality, is a figure of pride for many Lebanese. So when an exhibition takes trees and forests as its subject, it makes sense that the Lebanese would feel a sense of connection to it.

Running until July 29 at Alice Mogabgab Gallery, "De l'Arbre a la Foret" ("From Trees to Forests") displays 22 mixed-media paintings, sculptures and photographs by Lebanese and international artists. Each artist represents their own perception of nature.

As one would find different types of trees in a forest, visitors see a diverse representation of greenery, in terms of material and size, in the gallery.

Italian ironsmith Luciano Zaroni's tree sculpture "Vigna" (220 x 80 x 230 cm) is one impressive piece of art in the show. Imposing in size, when looked upon closely, it is filled with detail.

The visitor sees that the trees' grapes were created one by one, rather than molded from a single piece of metal. Zaroni has engraved the trunk to resemble bark. What is paradoxical about this piece is that the visitor feels the power and strength of the work produced by the artist, but at the same time, they can literally touch the delicateness of the leaves and the grape clusters.

Japanese painter Takayoshi Sakabe's oil on canvas "Branche II" (94x94 cm) gives the impression of an unfinished painting. In the exhibition's catalogue, Sakabe says that he "invented his colors

using natural pigments." That's what makes his painting intriguing. First, we wonder if the painting is actually finished. Second, the canvas has absorbed the natural materials, just like the roots of a tree would absorb water.

However, the more we look at Sakabe's canvas, we ask ourselves whether it is an erotic representation of nature and whether we are looking at nature's intimacy. The way the leaves are painted – in a triangular pattern – along with the play of light and shadow, gives the impression that the leaves are hiding anatomical parts, like Eve's womb hidden by grape leaves.

"Before," said gallerist Alice Mogabgab, "trees and forests were part of the background of paintings. But nowadays, they are the subjects, on the foreground."

Italian photographer Luigi Billi has his own way of picturing trees. He has developed a technique where he crumples his photographs and then hardens them, giving the impression that branches are coming out of the frame.

In Billi's mixed-media "Cielo di Bosco" ("The Sky of the Wood," 100x100 cm), the spectator faces an unusual piece of art. Because of the crumpled aspect of the photograph, light emphasizes the closeness of the branches to the spectator's eye.

One common point of all the exhibited artwork is the way the artists manipulate their primary sources – be they paints, iron or photographs – to render their personal vision of those perennial symbols that are trees.

"De l'Arbre a la Foret" will be displayed at Alice Mogabgab Gallery until July 29. For more information please call 03-210-424.



Luciano Zaroni, "Vigna," 2008, iron, 220x80x230 cm.

Music Day Nahas Project perform at Khan al-Ifranj in Sidon



SIDON: The Lebanese-French band Nahas project, including Julien Padovani on piano, play at Khan al-Ifranj Thursday in celebration of Music Day.

Basel's top art fair witnesses a return to pre-crisis purchasing

By Silke Koltrowitz and
Nathalie Olof-Ors
Reuters

BASEL: Collectors at Art Basel, the world's top fair for modern and contemporary art, had to dig deep into their pockets this week to get hold of high-quality works, amid signs the market was returning to pre-crisis peaks.

In times of low interest rates, many investors seek to diversify their portfolios, and masterpieces by 20th century artists like Picasso and Miro, or contemporary stars such as Anish Kapoor or Antony Gormley, are in high demand.

Almost 300 private jets landed at Basel airport during the first day of the fair to fly in VIPs like supermodels Naomi Campbell and Linda Evangelista, and the crowds were still large Wednesday and Thursday when Art Basel was open to the public.

Art lovers and dealers peered at the works on display, took pictures on the latest mobile telephones to send back to clients and slipped handwritten notes into expensive designer handbags.

"There were more people than last year at the opening. The market feels solid, not crazy, but very solid," said Sukanya Rajaratnam, director of New York art gallery L & M Arts.

She said the gallery had already sold

some of its best lots on display. An orange Mark Rothko was sold for a price "in the range of \$5 million," while a giant red tripod by Paul McCarthy changed hands for about \$2.5 million.

Philip Hoffman, chief executive of the Fine Art Fund Group which has assets under management of around \$100 million, said his fund had sold pieces for around \$8 million on the first day of the fair alone.

'Market for emerging artists is stronger than in recent years'

"With currency volatility, cash earning next to zero and inflation at 4.5 percent in London, a lot of people are looking at art right now as a safe haven for their money," he said.

The buoyant mood was in stark contrast to 2009, when the volumes of private sales and public auctions at Christie's, Sotheby's and their smaller rivals contracted dramatically.

Turnover bounced back sharply in 2010 – Christie's, the world's largest auctioneer, saw sales hit \$5 billion last year, up 53 percent from 2009, while Sotheby's posted revenues of \$4.3 billion excluding private deals versus \$2.3 billion in 2009.

The emergence of super-rich Chinese investors and collectors has been

a major factor behind the surge in prices for Chinese art as well as for "blue-chip" Western names like Picasso.

Some analysts warn, however, that the rate of increase in some sectors of the art market is unsustainable and a bubble could be developing.

Art Basel features about 300 galleries from around the globe, and more than 2,500 artists, including the latest generation of emerging stars, exhibit their paintings, sculptures, drawings, installations, photographs and videos.

The combined worth of works displayed at the 42nd edition of the Basel art show is around \$1.75 billion, according to specialist insurer Hiscox, up around 15 percent from 2010.

"In general, the mood is extremely positive. It feels a bit like 2007 again," said Jonathan Binstock, senior adviser at Citi Private Bank's Art Advisory Group. "The market for emerging artists is stronger than in recent years and this is a sign of renewed strength." He added that he was advising his clients to stretch their budgets as strong demand made it harder to obtain outstanding pieces.

At the Gagosian gallery, founded by influential U.S. art dealer Larry Gagosian, Jona Lueddeckens was also satisfied with the early part of the fair that ends Sunday.

While declining to give details of which works had been sold, he said "we had a very strong start."