

150 sqm luxury apartments in Adma Ghazir starting at \$225,000

CLICK HERE sayfco.com/Admir

Mobile | About us | Photos | Videos | Subscriptions | RSS Feeds | Today's Paper | Classifieds | Contact Us

Search The Daily Star... Advanced Search

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

FRIDAY, 19 JUL 2013
13:33 Beirut time

WEATHER
Beirut
29°C

BLOM INDEX
BLOM
1,137.15 ▲

- News
- Business
- Opinion
- Sports
- Culture
- Technology
- Entertainment
- Lifestyle
- Performance
- Art
- Film
- Books
- Music
- Travel & Tourism

Art

FOLLOW PRINT E-MAIL RSS e PAPER SHARE THIS

Of modernists and elephants in the room

July 18, 2013 12:52 AM
By **Jim Quilty**
The Daily Star



Daniele Genadry's 'Untitled' (pink mountain), 2013, 'Afterglow (the mountain), 2013, and Resistant Luminescence (Kartaba), 2013. (The Daily Star/Mahmoud Khair)



A+ A-

BEIRUT: The "Self-Portrait" of Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928) hangs alone upon one wall. Lore has it that as the noted modernist neared completion of the oil painting, he and his wife were murdered in Beirut, apparently over a water-rights dispute in Batloun, his family village. The story of his death is a macabre caveat to Saleeby's career.

On the floor beneath Saleeby's portrait, propped-up against the wall, are several variations on a theme. Though clearly modeled on the original, none would be mistaken for it. One version resembles the portrait of an evil uncle you might find in a Tim Burton movie. The vivid, loosely figurative splotches of another approximate how the Syrian-German artist Marwan might reinterpret the Saleeby.

These reproductions are the labor of three much younger Lebanese artists – Nour Osseiran, Christopher Rizkallah and Raed Motar. Anyone visiting the Beirut Exhibition Center after 5 p.m. Friday or Saturday this month will find the three at their easels, commencing, elaborating and completing further versions of the Saleeby.

STORY SUMMARY

The "Self-Portrait" of Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928) hangs alone upon one wall.

Co-curated by Janine Maamari and Marie Tomb, this show challenged 20 artists to sublimate the country's modernist art into 20 new – or newly configured recent – works.

The curators define Lebanon's Modernists as any artist born before 1930.

This large self-portrait in

RELATED ARTICLES

A tuneless symphony of Syrian art

Peeping Tom's panning shot of Beirut

Singapore's chance at artistic revenge

Venice Biennale celebrates the outsider

Octavian Esanu on Skill, Deskill, Reskill

Show More

More from

JIM QUILTY

An angel, murderous and miraculous

MOST POPULAR

VIEWED SEARCHED E-MAILED

1. Family dispute behind Jemo's killing
2. U.S. delivers 71 Humvees to Lebanese Army
3. Kurdish-Islamist fighting spreads to Syrian oil fields
4. Syria's Assad may cling on, Britain will not arm rebels: sources
5. Lebanon to ask EU to keep Hezbollah off terror list
6. France ready to send helicopter rockets to Lebanon Army

Advertisement

Visa HotelClub Deals

VisaceMEA.com/HotelClub
Up to an additional 15% off all HotelClub deals when you use Visa!

What Will You Curate?

CurateAward.org
The Global Curate Award. Win your concept into reality. Free entry.

MIND Lebanon & MiddleEast

www.mindclinics.org
Psychiatry & Psychology Clinics
Children, Adult, Geriatric Services

STAY CONNECTED



MULTIMEDIA

IMAGES

Pictures of the day

This is the substance of Raed Yassin's "My Last Self-Portrait," the sole performance work in BEC's "Journeys through our Heritage: Revisiting Modern Lebanese Artists." Co-curated by Janine Maamari and Marie Tomb, this show challenged 20 artists to sublimate the country's modernist art into 20 new – or newly configured recent – works.

As an intellectual conceit, "My Last Self-Portrait" toys with Saleeby's pose, gazing over his shoulder into the future. More interesting is Yassin's decision to craft the piece as a performance.

Insofar as creative labor is still romanticized as a solitary activity, public staging demystifies it. The multiple versions of Saleeby that accumulate in the coming days, meanwhile, interrogate the aesthetic weight of the art object.

"Journeys" is bounded by frankly generational criteria. The curators define Lebanon's Modernists as any artist born before 1930. The contributors have precious little in common, apart from their all having been born since 1975.

There is little mimicry here. The contributors generally work within their respective practices and media – painting, sculpture, photography, film, video and installation. Yassin's piece isn't a departure either, falling well within the artist's joyous embrace of performance and collaborative de-skilling.

Most compliant to the show's regimen is Chafa Ghaddar's "Untitled," which adorns the cover of the exhibition catalogue. This large self-portrait in fresco depicts the subject with closed eyes – echoing "Rupture," her 2010 portrait series. The lines accompanying the work putatively lament the rupture between the country's contemporary artists and their modernist forebears.

Exhibiting artists reference individual modernists – or facets of modernism – but whatever aesthetic reconciliation there is takes place less in the works than the accompanying exhibit plaques.

Occasionally – as with Zena Assi's "Colophon" and the excerpts from Mohamad Said Baalbaki's "One Hand Alone Cannot Clap" project – the pieces are visibly inseparable from the artists' previous work.

Other times, the work is interesting even if its engagement with modernism is facile.

The three pieces comprising Charbel-Joseph Hage Boutros' "Sun Works" elaborate upon his inspired ruminations upon light. Like "Open Your Eyes, Go Out and Stare at the Sun," 2012, 75 x 55 cm – shown this past spring in "We Hesitated Between Arrangements, Modulations and Manoeuvres" – the works are made on Lebanese newsprint carefully discolored by the sun.

The exhibit tag accompanying the work makes passing reference to Saliba Douaihy's landscapes and abstractions – as remarked upon in Marie Tomb's curatorial essay.

With "Free Poetry," 2013, Stéphanie Saadé's engagement with Saloua Raouda Choucair's work seems more thoughtful. The piece takes its departure from Choucair's "Poems" – sculptures comprised of series of individually shaped forms that, stacked in ensemble, evince a cumulative meaning.

Intrigued by the modal quality of Choucair's work, Saadé has constructed her piece from six (interlocking but independent) sliding glass panels. Upon these have been affixed 12 photos of bodies of water, which have had strips cut from them.

Mingling formal imagination with household design, "Free Poetry" lacks the weight of Choucair's "Poems." That may be the point. With observers invited to fiddle with the glass panels to configure the work (and the shadows it casts) as they like, it has an oddly self-effacing quality.

The elephant in the BEC these days are the excluded artists.

The tale of how Lebanon's contemporary art scene came to enter the

A story of men, women and land

All the sad-eyed Russian gangsters

Rousing tradition with the air of experiment

'Suzanne': life devoid of mythology or moralizing



A selection of images from around the world- Thursday July 18, 2013

View all →

ENTITIES

- Countries
- People
- Artifacts
- Locations & natural formations

Advertisement

AdChoices ▶
VISA HotelClub Deals
VisaceMEA.com/Visa_Hotel_Deals
 Up to an additional 15% off all HotelClub deals when you use Visa!

What Will You Curate?
CurateAward.org
 The Global Curate Award. Win your concept into reality. Free entry.

Advertisement

VISA HotelClub Deals
VisaceMEA.com/Visa_Hotel_Deals
 Up to an additional 15% off all HotelClub deals when you use Visa!

What Will You Curate?
CurateAward.org
 The Global Curate Award. Win your concept into reality. Free entry.

MIND Lebanon & MiddleEast
www.mindclinics.org
 Psychiatry & Psychology Clinics Children, Adult, Geriatric Services

Baldwin School - Lebanon
www.baldwinschool.com
 Modern school in Shouf District, مدرسة خاصة في قضاء الشوف

STAR'S COLUMNISTS

- RAMI G. KHOURI**
Jordan reflects a wider Arab dilemma
- MICHAEL YOUNG**
Is Iran altering Syria's sectarian map?
- DAVID IGNATIUS**
Syrians learn to trust the U.S. at own peril

View all →

Real estate
FOR RENT THE DAILY STAR Classifieds FOR SALE

Advertisement

THE DAILY STAR
 LEBANON
 Download now on the App Store FREE

EDITORIAL CARTOONS

international imagination has been well rehearsed by now.

As "Journeys" attests, individual modernists did attain a level of recognition among the international cognoscenti. In the last quarter of the 20th century, however, international consumers were more likely to be transfixed by foreign news tableaux of Lebanon's 15-year Civil War than the work of Lebanese artists.

The art world, meanwhile, was changing, as art fair entrepreneurs re-imagined the auctioneers' art-as-commodity practice as an itinerant global shopping mall for gallerists and collectors.

This radical redefinition of "the public" provided one context for the work of Catherine David, the insightful and enterprising French curator generally credited with introducing "Arab art" to the world.

David abetted the exposure of a handful of artists who had all grown up during Lebanon's long Civil War. Though their practices are distinct, they echoed both a common obsession with (and distrust of) images and the thoughtful distance each placed between their work and the making of objects.

Their work bore no obvious relationship to that of Lebanon's modernists, a disjuncture sometimes refracted through their practices. Walid Sadek's "Love is Blind" (2006), for instance, reproduced the paintings of Moustafa Farroukh (1901-1957) as empty frames accompanied by poetically poignant exhibit tags.

Walid Raad, who took up the history of modern Arab art as the theme of his first solo show in the Middle East, borrowed Sadek's piece – reproducing it, as he said at the time, as a "trompe l'oeil" that effectively eradicated the texts that had given the blank canvasses meaning.

It is true that the myopia of the international art market, curators and journalists have tended to fixate on these artists at the expense of other voices and practices. In this, Maamari and Tomb's show provides a valuable service.

Yet there is something pedagogical in taking the legacy of artists born no later than one decade after the French assembled "Greater Lebanon" and thrusting it against the work of artists born during Greater Lebanon's 1975-1990 Civil War.

Indeed, alongside Raad's and Sadek's gestures to Lebanese modernism, the curatorial concept of "Journeys" looks a little like an end-of-term art school project.

Of the artists in "Journeys," the two contributions of illustrator and musician Mazen Kerbaj – both referencing Espérance Ghorayeb (1923-2008), a little-known Lebanese modernist painter and sculptor – represent the greatest departure.

"The Remains of Espérance Ghorayeb" (2013) is an installation comprised of the work tools of the eponymous artist and a catalogue. At the centre of "The Sacred and the Profane" (2013) are Kerbaj's metal reproductions of one of Ghorayeb's wooden sculptures of Christian religious figures.

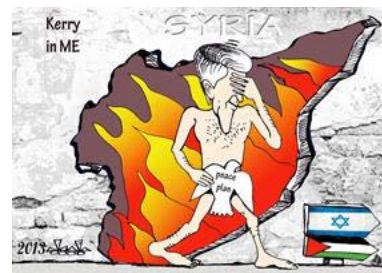
Complete with convenience store packaging and advertising, "Sacred" represents a scalding, yet amusing, send-up of contemporary art's commercial aesthetics.

"Journeys through our Heritage: Revisiting Modern Lebanese Artists" is up at Beirut Exhibition Center until Aug. 4. Raed Yassin's "My Last Self-Portrait" will be staged every Friday and Saturday, 5-8 p.m., throughout July.

A version of this article appeared in the print edition of The Daily Star on July 18, 2013, on page 16.

Tweet 7
Recommend 13

Home Art



TODAY'S PAPER



Get epaper delivered to your Inbox Now
Start Home Delivery Today

BECOME A STAR FAN

The Daily Star
Like
31,232 people like The Daily Star.
Facebook social plugin

Advertisement

VISA HotelClub Deals
 Up to an additional 15% off all HotelClub deals when you use Visa!
VisaceMEA.com/Visa_Hotel_Deals

Around the Web



Will The New Audi A7 Be The Best Car Ever?



Footballers – When They Were Kids



Fantastic Rolls-Royce Concept Car



Incredible Photoshop Effects That Will Make You Speechless!



7 Coolest Cell Phones Ever!



Realistic Photo Manipulations



Top 5 Poisonous Foods We Love To Eat



Porsche's Extraordinary Car Will Rule The World!

Comments

Your feedback is important to us!

We invite all our readers to share with us their views and comments about this article.

Disclaimer: Comments submitted by third parties on this site are the sole responsibility of the individual(s) whose content is submitted. The Daily Star accepts no responsibility for the content of comment(s), including, without limitation, any error, omission or inaccuracy therein. Please note that your email address will NOT appear on the site.

ALSO ON THE DAILY STAR

Hezbollah apprehends Syrian suspect in ... 29 comments

Pro-regime Syrian politician shot dead in ... 73 comments

Is Iran altering Syria's sectarian map? ... 26 comments

U.S. delivers 71 Humvees to Lebanese Army ... 32 comments

AROUND THE WEB

What's this?

How to Switch Phones on AT&T eHow

What the Bible Says About Money (Shocking) Moneynews

How to Know When it's Time to Switch Jobs Citi Women & Co.

Morning Swim: Heidi Klum's unfortunate ... Sports Illustrated

0 comments

★ 0



Leave a message...

Newest ▾

Share ↗ * ▾

No one has commented yet.

Comment feed

Subscribe via email

FOLLOW THIS ARTICLE

Interested in knowing more about this story?

[Click here](#)

News	Business	Opinion	Sports	Culture	Technology	Entertainment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politics Local News Middle East International Health Analysis Science Environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lebanon Middle East International Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Editorial Columnist Commentary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basketball Football Athletics Tennis Motor Sports Boxing MMA Golf Sports Rugby 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lifestyle Performance Art Film Books Music Travel & Tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Regional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebrities Movies Sudoku Str8ts

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Anti-Spamming Policy](#) | [Disclaimer](#) | [Copyright Notice](#)
 © 2013 The Daily Star - All Rights Reserved - Designed and Developed By IDS