

AGENDA

LEBANON

MUSIC

Khaled al-Abdallah

Masrah al-Madina, Hamra
September 10, 9:30 p.m.
+961 1 753 010

The Al-Madina Theater Association for Arts and Culture presents a Ramadan concert from Abdallah, a popular Lebanese singer.

FILM

Eugenie Joo

Beirut Art Center,
Jisr al-Wati
September 9, 8:30 p.m.
+961 1 397 018

The New York-based curator, who served as commissioner for the Korean Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale, talks about her work and presents a series of related short films.

PERFORMANCE

'Mitlha Mitlak'

Roof 68, Achrafieh
September 10, 8:30 p.m.
+961 3 466 764
Lucien Bourjeily's hugely successful improvised show plays every Thursday at art space Roof 68. In Arabic.

PHOTOGRAPHY

'No They Can't'

Zico House, Sanayeh
Opening September 10, 7 p.m.
+961 1 746 769
Photographer Ralph Nashawaty presents a series of 16 photographs dealing with visual memory and the effect of media imagery on our conceptions of everyday life.

Rule of Three

The Running Horse Art Space, Karantina
Until September 19
+961 3 710 225
Ziad Nawfal curates a show from photographer Youmna Habbouch, a dynamic series of triptychs drawing intriguing parallels between familiar scenes.

ART

'Fresh Juice'

Art Lounge, Karantina
September 8, 8 p.m.
+961 3 997 676
A cocktail of freshly-squeezed talent from a variety of artistic fields, this exhibition is curated by Jo Baaklini and Cynthia Merhej and features the work of Ayla Hibri, Ghadi Ghosn and David Habchy, among others.

'Madness of Colors'

Galerie d'Art Surface Libre
Opening September 9, 6 p.m.
+961 4 716 600
Abdallah Dadour's mixed media painting are the result of years of work into the relationships between pigments, oils, diluents and colors.

'Patterns and Light'

Espace Kettaneh-Kunigk, Gefinor Center
Until September 19
+961 1 738 706/708
An series of canvases from Leila Beydoun Chahabi feature explosive configurations of color and shade based on the iridescent patterns of butterfly wings.

Just a thought

A lot of pop music is about stealing pocket money from children.

Ian Anderson
(1947 -)
British musician,
front man of Jethro Tull

INTERVIEW

Plugging into the pop-culture collective unconscious

RAED YASSIN DISCUSSES HIS FASCINATION WITH THE WORLD OF TRASH CULTURE

Jim Quilty

Daily Star staff

BEIRUT: "It's not intentional. I don't do stuff to make people confused," Raed Yassin insists. "Maybe the artistic scene in Lebanon is not so interested in Egyptian cinema history. Maybe it's considered low art or whatever."

"I'm really interested in the development of the cinematic image in the Arab world. 'Arab world' means Egypt, because there's an industry there. A film industry means schools. And trash. And there're types of cinema that make radical changes in relation to the politics and society and economics."

Yassin is one of Lebanon's jack-of-all-arts. His most-recent foray into the limelight was as music impresario, bringing Syrian wedding singer-cum-world music sensation Omar Souleyman for his first Beirut concert. For some years Yassin has been a stalwart of the free-improv music scene clustered around the Irtijal festival (playing contrabass, ventilators and other gadgets). He's also made several video works – "Beirut," for instance, which contemplates the peripheral city through the insights of some of its peripheral residents.

Earlier this year, his installation "The Best of Sammy Clark," a tribute to the artist's fictive mentor, the eponymous Lebanese pop culture icon, was one of seven pieces selected for the Beirut Art Center's "Exposure 2009" exhibition. It won the \$5,000 Fidus Award.

Yassin's interest in Egyptian cinema history, its media and means of transmission, splices the genes of documentation and artistic practice. This work is thus not unlike the art being made by some of his older Lebanese contemporaries.

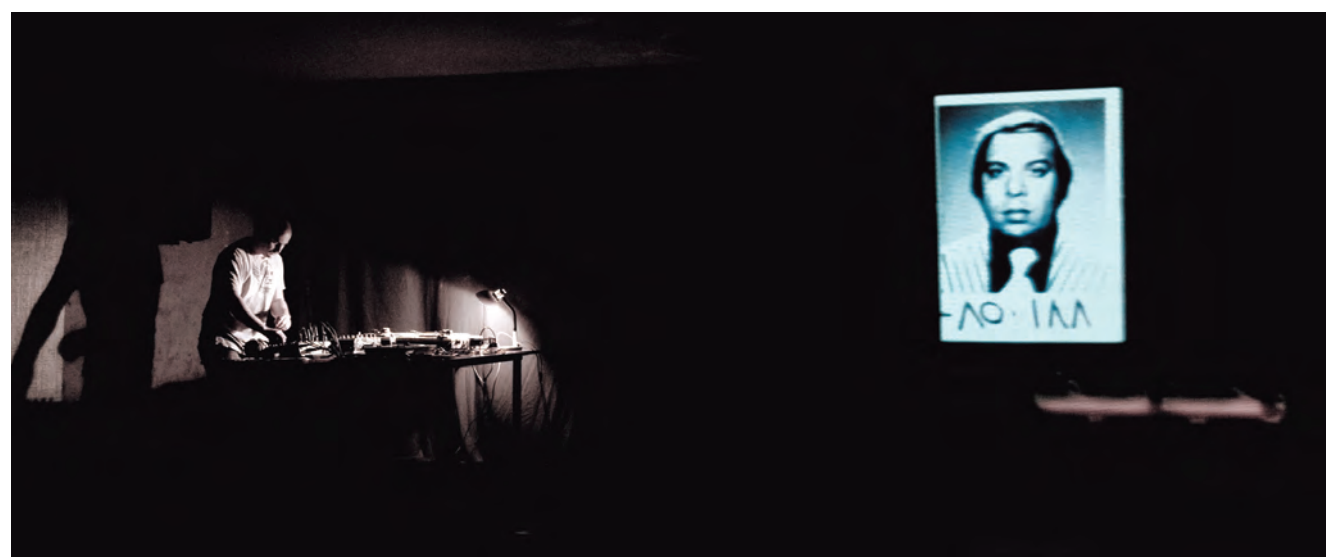
"I love so-called trash films," he smiles, "because loss of quality made a new language in Egyptian cinema. They didn't care in the 1980s."

He says one of his new projects is based on a 1980s Egyptian cinema experience. "I'm in the middle of a movie and ... the quality suddenly becomes completely different. For 10 minutes the film has French subtitles and, at this moment, the actors begin to speak directly to the audience.

"When I saw this I thought, 'This is a really an avant-garde piece of art.' But I knew the guy who did it. He was the distribu-



Yassin during a performance of "Horror is Universal (The End)" during Irtijal 2009.



Photos by Tanya Tabbouh

tor, nothing to do with art. One of the reels of the film was missing and it had to be replaced with something, so they inserted a reel from another movie. Meanwhile you're thinking, 'Oh. Now there is an emphasis on the

Loss of quality made a new language in Egyptian cinema'

relation with the audience and the whole cinematic image."

Yassin has so far explored his fascination with Egypt's trash cinema patrimony through a pair of video-performance pieces. The first was 2007's "Meet the President," a video collage accompanied by

PRaed, his free improv duet with Swiss bassist-clarinetist Paed Conca.

"Meet the President" focuses on VHS culture," Yassin says. "Most of the footage was taken from 1980s VHS tapes. I used footage to make a kind of mocking overview of manhood and violence in Egyptian cinema."

"I edited on two VHS tapes ... I opened the VCR and manipulated the tape itself. I wanted a very direct violent physical relationship to the medium, to show some issues related to violence in cinema, manhood and machismo."

The second installment in the Egyptian trash cinema series is "Horror is Universal (The End)," which has twice been performed in Beirut – this spring at Irtijal, then last month

at the BAC.

Unlike "Meet the President," the electronic score accompanying the newer video collage is composed, being performed by Yassin during screenings. The solo performance of a composed work makes "Horror is Universal" more compact and controlled than the 2007 work.

The collage is comprised of excerpts from Egyptian films and film trailers. It samples a few visual tropes repeatedly employed in Egypt's pop cinema – cameras chasing people down maze-like streets, for instance, and angry men lashing out at the camera lens as it photographs them from ground level.

"I chose Egyptian films on VCD [Video Compact Disk] format," Yassin says. "I wanted

to show stereotypes of horror in Egyptian film. There is no horror genre in Egyptian cinema, the culture kind of doesn't exist, so I wanted to create a video that approximates horror using scenes from action films and so on.

"Most of the material I used is from the 1980s, [when] Egyptian cinema was declining and they were looking for new influences. So you find films about drugs, women in prison, murder. You start to see a lot of blood.

"They started to make new techniques, using special lenses to show situations of horror. I collected all this material and tried to create ... not a fiction but an image of what was in peoples' minds about horror in Egyptian films."

"I wanted to make a direct

connection with people's collective memory," he says, "their collective unconscious, if you like, about what they think about the development of pop culture in cinema ... How do our families talk about sex, for instance."

One element of "Horror is Universal" that makes it unlike "Meet the President" is the comic tone beneath the sampling. "I didn't want to make real horror but a horror that's funny," he says. "It's really ridiculous how [these filmmakers] dealt with horror. For someone who hasn't grown up watching these films, they're really comic because nothing is convincing. This is the 1980s, when nothing was convincing.

"But the zaar scenes [depicting Youssra undergoing a ritual exorcism], or scenes of devilish Adel Imam flying, surrounded by fire – are really terrifying, in some peoples' minds. It was really terrifying for us when we were around 10 years old, when we first saw such things."

The score sets out to plug into the audience's pop cultural collective memory as much

'I didn't want to make real horror but horror that's funny'

as the film sequences that the work samples.

"I decided to make the music parallel to the film while having no direct connection with it. It's from material I found in Egypt on vinyl, 7-inch mostly, from the same period as the films – the 1970s mostly, because by the 1980s LPs are starting to disappear. I took Egyptian songs that some people know but completely distorted or re-manipulated and deconstructed them," says Yassin.

"I took Egyptian pop songs, then I recomposed them to accompany the images. I also used some political speeches from [revolutionary Egyptian President Gamal] Abdel Nasser, because he had a big influence in Egyptian cinema in the 1950s. In the late 1960s and 1970s, a lot of Egyptian actors and producers and directors came to Lebanon to flee Egyptian Arab socialism.

"Experimental music is so radical, especially for this type of audience. I really wanted to drag the audience into my content. More than just 'involving' them," Yassin smiles again. "I want to implicate them, to make them partners in the crime."

Forward Music Ziyad Sahhab wraps up end-of-summer event



Photo by Sam Tarling

BEIRUT: Forward Music's end-of-summer concert series at Masrah al-Madina was brought to a glorious close by Ziyad Sahhab on Monday. Backed by an ensemble comprising a qanoun, keyboard, violin, electric bass and percussion, Sahhab enthralled a full house with his jazz-infused Arabic songs. Sahhab's simple-yet-firm baritone melodies were joined at times by the dusky tones of a black-clad female vocalist, who shone when Sahhab left her to take the stage accompanied only by a haunting keyboard line. The individual talents of Sahhab's band emerged throughout the evening, with erudite solos from the keyboard, violin, qanoun and bass interspersed between Sahhab's own virtuosic performances on the oud. Sahhab's well-received set included tracks from his new album, soon to be released through Beirut-based independent record label Forward Music. For further information, visit www.forwardmusic.net

Oliver Stone film sets out to humanize Chavez

Gina Doggett

Agence France Presse

VENICE: Oliver Stone seeks to demolish US demonization of leftist Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in his hard-hitting "South of the Border," which screened Sunday at the Venice film festival.

Through a series of interviews interlaced with footage from US media and official statements, Stone is out to show that Chavez is not "public enemy number one" as so often depicted on such US media outlets as Fox News.

He tells the story of Venezuela's "peaceful revolution" since Chavez came to power in 1998, and how Venezuela's transformation has had knock-on effects in the rest of the continent.

For his admirers, Chavez, who grew up in a peasant family, is an emblematic figure of bottom-up change, says Stone, who directed the 2003 film

"Comandante" about Cuba's Fidel Castro and the eponymous "Salvador" in 1986.

"It is the first time in history that the leaders of so many countries look like the people they govern," said Argentine President Cristina Kirchner in the film.

She points to Bolivia's first indigenous head of state Evo Morales, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, a former metalworker, Paraguayan leader Fernando Lugo, a former priest, and Chavez himself, all of whom came from the bottom rungs of society.

Each is interviewed by Stone, 62, who has Oscars for "Platoon" (1986), "Born on the 4th of July" (1989) and the screenplay of "Midnight Express" (1978).

"For many years we had elites that were servile to the United States," says Lula in the documentary, which was shown in a screening for the press.

Reports say Chavez may come to Venice for Monday's

official screening of "South of the Border."

The appearance of a foreign head of state would be a rarity in the long history of the world's oldest film festival.

Currently on a world tour that has taken him to Asia, Africa and Europe, Chavez does not give details of his private visits for security reasons.

"Yes, it is possible to change the course of history," says Chavez, adding: "I hope [US President Barack] Obama will become a new Roosevelt."

In his appreciation for Franklin Roosevelt, Chavez has something in common with US documentary maker Michael Moore, whose "Capitalism: A Love Story" was premiering Sunday at the Mostra film festival.

In the film, Moore recalls Roosevelt's never realized proposal for an "economic bill of rights" that would guarantee a living wage, freedom from unfair competition, a home, medical care and education.

HOROSCOPE

Aries (Mar. 21 – April 19)	Taurus (April 20 – May 20)	Gemini (May 21 – June 21)
Your charming side is out in force today, so make the most of it. You should find a few opportunities to impress romantic partners or business associates, and it's easier than ever to step up to the mark.	See if you can get your loved ones to waste some time with you as you wander and ponder – you've got a lot going on. It's a good day to look for new options, rather than settle.	Listen to your friends today, even those you don't know all that well. They may have some tips you haven't heard yet, and you could stand to benefit socially. Even strangers will seem helpful today.
Cancer (June 22 – July 22)	Leo (July 23 – Aug. 22)	Virgo (Aug. 23 – Sept. 22)
You're having a hard time dealing with authority figures today – they're driving you absolutely insane. It's a good day for you to keep to yourself and keep the mouth shut most of the time.	Your sense of fun is primed and ready to go, so see if you can round up the gang and go do something fun. It's one of those days when you can easily pick up the rules.	Use that intense energy to get something big done. You can certainly push ahead by hook or by crook. Your morale is high, so it's likely that you can get through all sorts of new business.
Libra (Sept. 23 – Oct. 22)	Scorpio (Oct. 23 – Nov. 21)	Sagittarius (Nov. 22 – Dec. 21)
Try not to focus all your energy on friends and family, important as they may be. You've got the right mindset to deal with work or career issues that have been on your mind for a while.	Now is a really great time to take care of your health. Get organized, track information and walk up an extra flight of stairs. You have what it takes to make things work better for you.	If you have kids, you are almost certainly on the same wavelength. If you don't, now is a good time for you to spend time with the kids in your life. Babysit, tutor or just hang out – you're sure to be inspired.
Capricorn (Dec. 22 – Jan. 19)	Aquarius (Jan. 20 – Feb. 18)	Pisces (Feb. 19 – Mar. 20)
Something in your life has to end today – but it's almost certainly positive. Whatever you walk away from is sure to be long forgotten in a short time. Let go and grab the next big thing.	Keep tossing out ideas today – you need to stay at the front of the pack, and you should be able to impress all the key players with your brainstorming and inspirations.	Communication is a bit more difficult than usual right now, but you can expect more clarity soon. If you ask for more time, it's a safe bet that you'll get it. Don't make any firm decisions.