

AGENDA

LEBANON

FILM

'La Chine est Encore Loin'

Main Campus, University of Balamand, Koura, North Lebanon

March 29, 6 p.m.
06-930-250

Playing on the Prophet Mohammad's advice that folks should seek knowledge, even as far as China, Malek Bensmail's documentary looks into education in his native Algeria, specifically the village where two French teachers and an Algerian were victims of a deadly attack in 1954. In Algerian Arabic with French subtitles.

'Ecrans du Reel'

Metropolis Cinema Sofit, Ashrafieh

March 26 until April 1
01-204-080

As usual, the eighth edition of the Ecrans du Reel film festival promises to project documentary films from Lebanon and around the world. Entrance fee of LL5,000.

ART

'Homage to Mahmoud Darwish'

Art Circle, Antoine Gemayel Street, Hamra

March 29 until April 28
03-027-776

Mona Saudi provides her tribute to great poet Mahmoud Darwish through her sculptures and drawings.

'Works 1980-2012: Hassan Sharif'

Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Tannous Building, Karantina

March 29 until July 21
01-566-550

This massive solo show features paintings, sculptures, drawings and writings by Emirati artist Hassan Sharif.

'Introspection: the Universal in the Personal'

Cynthia Nouhra Art Gallery, Elias al-Hrawi Avenue, Furn al-Shubbak

Until April 5
01-281-755

This show features the disturbing works by Chawky Frenn, playing with the innocence of the doll.

'Revolution vs. Revolution'

Beirut Art Center, Jisr al-Wati

Until March 30
01-397-018

The Beirut Art Center's latest themed group show features works by Steven Cohen, William Kentridge, Alfredo Jaar and many more.

MUSIC

5 SeKonds Late

Marqueez, Bachir Daouk Building, Ardati Street, Manara

March 24, 9 p.m.
01-752-150

Lebanese band 5 SeKonds Late will perform a selection of their personal compositions which blend together jazz, blues and groove.

'Jenterejian Duet & Isabelle Kayayan'

Hariri Auditorium, University of Balamand, Koura, North Lebanon

March 24, 7 p.m.
06-930-250

Armenian violinists Armen and Ashod Jenterejian and pianist Isabelle Kayayan will transport their audience into the wonderful musical worlds of Corelli, Haydn, Schubert and many more composers.

JUST A THOUGHT

I must study politics and war, that my sons may have the liberty to study mathematics and philosophy, natural history and naval architecture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, tapestry and porcelain.

John Adams
(1735-1826)

American politician

INTERVIEW

Reducing civil war to porcelain

'China,' the collaborative work of Lebanon's Raed Yassin, is a throw-away aesthetic gesture

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

DUBAI: Lebanese artists and galleries have been prominent at the sixth edition of ArtDubai, the emirate's yearly art fair. No place are they more conspicuous than in "Spectral Imprints," a five-artist exhibition unveiled Tuesday at the Madina Jumeira fair site.

The first objects you encounter upon entering "Spectral Imprints" are "China," an array of seven blue-and-white porcelain pots of Chinese design, all of varying style and dimensions.

Aficionados of Chinese porcelain production might be surprised to find that, rather than landscapes rendered in styles characteristic of that tradition, these works depict 20th-century battles, depicting figures from late-20th-century history.

The artist responsible for this mischievous work is 33-year-old Raed Yassin. He is likely best-known as a free-improv musician – he's one of the founding members of Beirut's Irtijal festival. In the last few years however, Yassin's other art has exploded onto the international scene, revealing his imagination to be too restless to be restricted to a single medium, let alone one project at a time.

Yassin says he'd been thinking about "China" for some years now, though he suspected that it would be expensive to realize.

"I decided to select key battles from the Lebanese Civil War – the Battle of the Hotels, Tel al-Zaatar, the Harb al-Mukhayaamaat, the [82] Israeli invasion. I decided to depict seven battles; it might have made more but that's all a matter of interpretation. These battles all made a political and demographical change on the whole face of Lebanon.

"The War of the Hotels really moved Christians from the Downtown area, for instance," he adds. "The Israeli invasion removed the Palestinians. The Mountain War removed Christians from the Chouf."

Yassin says that because of the paucity of historical documentation of the Civil War years, "China" began as a research project, compiling stories collected from books and some interviews with people who'd experienced the events depicted. He credits Ramzi Haidar with giving him access to his private photo collection.

"The work is mostly about myth," Yassin says, "how do fighters who've been in those traumatic events talk about it. I didn't care about if it's all true or not."

In line with the Yassin's indifference to documentary accuracy, the battles are depicted using motifs that casual onlookers might recognize



Raed Yassin's "China" (2012), 7 porcelain vases.

from Persian miniatures.

"All the drawings are inspired by Safadi Islamic miniatures because that was the most-advanced painting style in the Arab world. It was perfected in Persia, yes, but it was also found in Turkey and Afghanistan and a little bit in the Arab world.

"Fire is drawn like this," he gestures. "Clouds like this and the sea like this. There was some interpretation necessary for buildings because they didn't exist in the originals. There were drawings of the Kaaba, for example, and some Islamic cities, so we copied these.

"China" echoes Yassin's sound art, inasmuch as it is intensely collaborative. After the research, he commissioned Beirut artist and cartoonist Omar Khoury to work on depicting the battle scenes.

To make the pots, Yassin traveled to Jingdezhen, a city in Jiangxi province called China's porcelain-production capital. There he commissioned five masters of porcelain painting to realize the work. The name of each battle is written on each vase in Chinese, along with the name of the master and his stamp.

"They're all handmade," Yassin says. "But in China 'handmade' implies mass-production in a way because there's millions of people working at it.

"For me this is a project with many layers," he continues. "First we decided to make the work on vases ... a purely decorative item, because I felt that somehow I wanted to take my own history -- that has been used and used and used and reused in all topics, whether it be art and whatever -- and remake it as a decorative piece.

"I wanted to keep it away from me," he puts down the whiskey glass and pushes the air before him, "to have it just as an aesthetic piece that you

might find in any Lebanese house.

"It's a Chinese vase because I wanted [to] reference a mass-produced item ... Of course ... historically the Greeks, the Persians and the Ottomans documented battles and glorious moments in pottery. But it didn't really flourish as much as such as calligraphic and floral designs.

"What also made this process so interesting is that this medium is extremely fragile. You could make a vase, paint it, put it in the kiln and when it opens, it's broken.

"Another layer of the project was that I didn't want to do it myself. I wanted to commission [craftsmen] to do it, to work with masters of different cultures to see how they perceived an idea that they have nothing to do with, a war that's not theirs, a country that they really don't know."

He smiles. "In China no one knows where Lebanon is. They couldn't understand Middle East so much either but they could understand "Arabo," the Arab peoples ... In the mentality of the Arab world, China was as far away as you could go. So the project is called "China."

"Spectral Imprints" is something of a first for ArtDubai. The show is comprised of the five works to arise from the 2012 edition of the Abraaj Capital

Art Prize. Now in its fourth year, ACAP accepts project applications from artists from the Middle East North Africa and South Asia (MENASA) region.

ACAP is a serious affair, with total monies of \$1 million divided to provide each artist \$120,000 to develop their projects. The five winning artists are announced six months before ArtDubai, from which point they toil to realize their work.

In addition to Yassin, the 2012 winners include Gaza-born Taysir Batniji, Lebanese artists-filmmaking team Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Alexandria-born Wael Shawky and Pakistani artist Risham Syed. Since 2011, Abraaj has selected a single curator to work with the five artists and this year the duties have been shouldered by Rotterdam-based independent

curator and critic Nat Muller, a veteran of the Middle East art scene. It has been Muller's ambition to transform the five, sometimes disparate, works emerging from ACAP into a coherent exhibition. In "Spectral Imprints" she has been notably successful, in part because of unexpected commonalities among these artists' otherwise diffuse practices, in part out of sheer determination. "China" is a thoughtfully decorative work. Because of its episodic nature, history has come to be expressed in chronological terms, and so seen to be better suited to narrative forms – whether formal history, popular history and hagiography, fictive prose and poetry or, later on, documentary and feature film. Yassin's approach to representation aestheticizes the events in a medium that – because it doesn't lend itself to chronological developments – was long ago discarded as a means of representing history. There are those who would criticize his goal of transforming events from political history into aesthetic objects. To transform something so ugly into something beautiful, it could be argued, is questionable because it trivializes the sufferings of the events' victims, turning them into objects. "I'm more nasty than that," Yassin says. "I'm not only making it a beautiful object. I'm making it a decorative item that you can buy anywhere in any store. We might in this way overcome this trauma. In a way it's not even making a beautiful object but making it an item ... that may not be recognized as a piece of art because it's not unique. I wish the budget could allow me to make hundreds of these vases."

For more information, please see <http://www.artdubai.ae>.

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REVIEW

Didier L'Honorey's naive-looking fascination with the floral

By Chirine Lahoud
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Remember when we were children, how we used to spend hours drawing and coloring sheets of paper? From animals to family members to flowers, we let our imaginations guide our hands in sketching whatever came to mind. "Houses" were reduced to squares, topped by a triangle to represent the roof. "Flowers" were made of a central circle with overlapping circles for petals, straight lines for stems and squares for pots.

French artist Didier L'Honorey has adopted this sort of art naïf for the works in his "Surveiller l'Ombre du Hasard" (Keep an Eye on the Shadow of Chance), an exhibition of 23 acrylics on printed fabrics, nowadays up at Ashrafieh's Alice Mogabgab Gallery.

Meandering through the gallery's generous space, viewers are led on a journey through the basic techniques of drawing.

In his 105.5x89 cm work "Chaque Fleur Trouve Pot à sa Queue" (Each Flower finds a Pot to its Stem), onlookers are faced with a textile printed in a pattern of blue, green and black flowers – which it turns out the artist has himself sketched.

L'Honorey's secondary addition to the medium is comprised of nine painted flowers – six red, one yellow and two black. The flowers and their stems appear to hover above nine pots, roughly rendered in white. L'Honorey appears to be inviting his viewers to follow the instructions of the work's title.

Some people may characterize L'Honorey's works as childish indulgences. Yet it is their simplicity that makes the works so attractive. "It is a poetic simplicity," opined gallerist Alice Mogabgab. "The artist juxtaposes a theme onto another."

Indeed, though the themes are reiterative (if the technique and style are not), the saturation isn't aggressive to the eye.

In some other works, the artist toys with perspective.

In his 96.5 x 78 cm "Composition Décomposée, Simple Six Deux fois Trois" (Decomposed Composition, Simple Six Two times Three),



"Chaque fleur trouve pot à sa queue" (2007), acrylique sur toile, 105,5x89.

L'Honorey foregrounds three low pots, from which stems delicately project. In the background, three more tall pots are put populated with flowers.

The pots are so lightly painted that the red, brown and blue flowers on the printed fabric are clearly visible, creating the impression that the vessels are fading and that the flowers are projecting from the more stylised background. The effect is accentuated by the bright oranges and yellows L'Honorey uses to render the petals, giving them an aspect of three-dimensionality.

L'Honorey's thrill in playing with perspective is suggested again in "Coucou" (Pickaboo, 172 x 104.5 cm). Here two floral fabrics are vertically joined – the upper one of brighter shades, the bottom one more subdued.

On the bottom textile, a pale-blue pot is painted on the right while an upside-down flower is rendered on the left. Here, the artist plays "Peekaboo" with onlookers. It appears the upper fabric is hiding something. As for the flower, its transparent white color and texture gives the impression of it being



"Composition décomposée Simple six deux fois trois" (2010), acrylique sur toile 96,5x78cm.

absorbed by the fabric.

The titles of L'Honorey's works are key. In one of his acrylics, "17 Coups de Rouleaux, 3 Coups de Pinceaux" (17 Roll-On Stripes, 3 Brushstrokes), viewers are invited to count the brushstrokes used by the artist.

And we do so. There are exactly 17 yellow and red roll-on stripes and three black brushstrokes to represent the flowers stems.

The brightness of the three flowers offsets the oppressive regimentation of the printed fabrics.

The red stripes could be seen as bars that prevent the fabric flowers from escaping – though they are ineffectual as obstacles to the colorfully painted blossoms with their curvy stems, they seem to be growing directly from the bottom edge of the work. Though it depicts flowers, this work creates an odd impression of movement.

Didier L'Honorey's "Surveiller l'Ombre du Hasard" is up at Ashrafieh's Alice Mogabgab Gallery until March 30. For more information please call 03-210-424.