

AGENDA

LEBANON

MUSIC

'Piano Concert'

Assembly Hall, AUB, Bliss Street
Jan. 29, 8 p.m.
01-340-460
On the occasion of the bicentennial of Verdi and Wagner, the Italian Cultural Center presents this piano concert of Orazio Sciortino, who will play some of the composers' masterpieces.

'Beautiful Harmony Concert for Peace and Love'

Assembly Hall, AUB, Bliss Street
Jan. 30, 9 p.m.
05-953-167/9
The Embassy of Korea presents this performance by Korea's Beautiful Mind Charity Ensemble and a program of works by Brahms, Tarrega, Beethoven and Kyeong Min Kim, to name a few.

FILM

'On Connait la Chanson'

Metropolis Cinema Sofil, Ashrafieh
Jan. 28, 8 p.m.
01-204-080
Alain Resnais' award-winning 1997 film "The Same Old Song" is a self-conscious take on romantic comedy's tired conventions. He concocts an elaborate love tangle involving Simon, who loves Camille, who falls for an estate agent, Simon's boss, who's trying to sell a flat to Camille's sister, Odile, who wants a flat to spite her husband, Claude. And so forth.

THEATER

'Tango Palace'

Dawar al-SHAMS, Tayyouneh Roundabout
Jan. 31 until Feb. 3, 8:30 p.m.
01-381-290
Joseph Zaitouny directs this Lebanese adaptation of the black comedy by a Cuban-American avant-garde playwright and director Maria Irene Fornes.

ART

'The Balustrades of Beirut'

Art Factum Gallery, Rehban Street, Medawar District, Karantina
Jan. 30 until Feb. 23
01-443-263
The work of architect Mazen Haidar shows glimpses of the city's architectural heritage.

'Take Me to this Place, I want to do the Memories'

The Running Horse, Medawar District, Karantina
Until Feb. 2
01-562-778

The collaborative photographic works of Aftal Ahdath (aka Vartan Avakian, Hatem Imam and Raed Yassin) are concerned with contemporary practice of working-class photography studios around the Middle East, and what they suggest about how aspirations and fantasy are refracted through pop culture convention.

'Looking for the Next Sophia'

Joanna Seikaly Gallery, Gouraud Street, Gemmayzeh
Until Feb. 15
70-776-711
The works of photographer Nijad Abdul Massih explore feminine beauty and women's approaches to breast cancer. All the proceeds will go to the Maya Jallad Foundation.

JUST A THOUGHT

To establish oneself in the world, one does all one can to seem established there already.

François Duc De La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680)
French memoirist and writer of maxims

REVIEW

The impossible and the saleable

Raed Yassin's latest finds five curators fabricate works that cannot be staged

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: In an interview some years back, Beirut-based curator Rasha Salti explained the historical origin of the word "curator." It referred, she said with a sly grin, to "someone employed to care for infants and the mentally and emotionally ... challenged."

More conventionally, art curators are seen to occupy the space between the artist and the public, who purportedly appreciate the stuff, or at least purchase it.

Salti never remarked on which side of the equation "infant" and "mentally and emotionally challenged" referred to—the artist, or the public. As she participated in "The Impossible Works of Raed Yassin," you couldn't help but wonder whether Salti recalled the linguistic history of her job title.

Devised by the eponymous Lebanese artist, this performance was staged at Beirut Art Center, its walls freshly scrubbed of its most recent exhibition.

"Impossible Works" was hitched to the labor of not one but five curators. Joining Salti in the white cube were countryman Amanda Abi Khalil, Holland's Nat Muller and Eline van der Vlist and Briton Kyla McDonald, all of whom have somehow been implicated in the Beirut art scene.

The premise of "Impossible Works" is simple. Yassin had each of the five confabulate a work, each attributed to him, which is impossible to stage.

The performance saw the five take up positions at discrete locations around the gallery, alongside exhibit titles stenciled on the wall. There they explained their respective works to "the public," wave after wave of them.

"Impossible Works" is premised on an amusing reversal of roles. Though



Salti's "Blowback" posits a restaging of the 9/11 attacks.



Muller: "The ultimate event that we want to own, we cannot own."

they can attain minor-key fame, art curators by definition play second fiddle to the artists whose work they stage, explain and conspire to create.

The curators' performances weren't far removed from what they do in their day jobs, but since the five impossible works were nowhere to be seen, their labor was itself the "art."

Yassin was present for the event, his role that of contented emcee. He ushered bemused and bewildered audience members from one exhibit to the other. If you happened along while the curators were busy or wetting their parched throats, he helpfully suggested you repair to the upstairs bar, to do the same.

Presented by Abi Khalil, "A Higher Square" proposed a vast, invisible public space that hovers over Downtown Beirut. The work "blurs the line between utopia and dystopia," Abi Khalil suggested, "contradicting the nature of public space because it can only be accessed individually."

She equated the work to "a Foucauldian heterotopia ... a space at once symbolical physical, and emotional."

Salti's "Blowback" posits a restaging of the 9/11 attacks. The performance won't be located in New York, but Dubai, and won't reproduce the twin towers but Bourj Khalifa.

"The idea for this project," Salti



Abi Khalil proposed an invisible public space that hovers over Downtown.

reassured her listeners, "comes mostly from Damien Hirst, who described the Sept. 11 attacks as the most spectacular of performances. This idea of terrorism as performance was something we wanted to explore."

What followed was a stimulating discussion, ranging from political economy to commemorative Pepsi cans, one citing such thinkers as Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Zizek and Mike Davis.

McDonald's "Monument for the Chameleonic Society" took up the

challenge facing artists in designing site-specific works, whose audience is more diverse than the stuff bought and sold in galleries.

Because of how and why these works are commissioned, they cannot embrace the whole of society. "When you look at it," McDonald noted. "Raed's sculpture will be whatever you desire. If you want to see your dear leader, you'll find him. If you want an abstract sculpture, you'll see that."

Yassin's one-minute-long "The

Opera of Whispers" is to be hummed simultaneously by every person on the planet. "You could say this is an opera for the masses and by the masses," Muller suggested. "It's a quintessential event because everyone is participating, but also the quintessential non-event because there is no singularity."

As she wended forward Muller would hum the tune of the opera, as though ruminating between thoughts.

"At once colossal and a nonevent, its commodification is impossible," she continued. "The ultimate event that we want to own, we cannot own."

Van der Vlist's "Album from Another Planet" tells a story of a surreal 78 RPM recording of five tracks. Yassin's collaborators included luminaries like Um Kulthum, and saw him somehow participating in a conference on aesthetics staged in Cairo in 1948.

While impossible to stage, none of these five works is alien to Yassin's varied practice, which ranges from improvised musical performance to photography and installation.

The ramifications of "Impossible Works" could be heard rattling through the creaky structure of contemporary art practice. Yet its greatest accomplishment may be that — with Yassin acting as usher to five absent works — the artist's name filled the gallery.

Noujaim's The Square wins Sundance Award

By Sandy Cohen
Associated Press

PARK CITY, Utah: Egyptian-American filmmaker Jehane Noujaim took the Audience Award for her work "The Square" over the weekend. It screened in the Sundance Film Festival's World Cinema Documentary section.

Noujaim has described her film as asking what it means to risk your life for your ideals, and how far will five revolutionaries go to defend their beliefs in fighting for their country.

Elsewhere, the U.S. films "Fruitvale" and "Blood Brother" won over audiences and Sundance judges, winning audience awards and grand jury prizes in the dramatic film and documentary sections, respectively.

"Fruitvale" is based on the true story of Oscar Grant, who was 22 years old when he was shot and killed in a public transit station in Oakland, California. First-time filmmaker Ryan Coogler wrote and directed the dramatic narrative.

"This project was about humanity,"

the 26-year-old said as he accepted the final prize of the night, "about human beings and how we treat each other, how we treat the people that we love the most, and how we treat the people that we don't know."

Fox Searchlight founder and Sundance juror Tom Rothman said "Fruitvale" was recognized for "its skillful realization, its devastating emotional impact and its moral and social urgency — and for anyone out there who thinks for one second that movies don't matter and can't make a difference in the world."

"This," he added, "will not be the last time you guys walk to a podium."

Coogler said he felt personally connected to the story because he's from Oakland and was born the same year as the subject of his film.

The U.S. documentary winner, "Blood Brother" follows a young American, Rocky Braat, who moved to India to work with orphans infected with HIV.

"This means so much to so many kids," director Steve Hoover said as he accepted the award.

Other dramatic winners at the cere-



Egyptian actor Khaled Abdulla, left, in a scene from Noujaim's "The Square."

mony hosted by actor-director Joseph Gordon-Levitt included Lake Bell, who accepted the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award for her directorial debut, "In A World," and Jill Soloway, who won the directing award for her feature debut, "Afternoon Delight."

Soloway thanked Bell and the other "lady directors" making their debuts at the festival. "I feel like we all

crossed the street together holding hands," she said. "We're all out there together exposing ourselves and I love being here with you guys."

Cinematographer Bradford Young was recognized for his work in two dramatic films, "Ain't Them Bodies Saints" and "Mother of George." Documentary winners included Zachary Heinzerling for directing "Cutie and

the Boxer" and Matthew Hamachek for editing "Gideon's Army."

The Cambodian film "A River Changes Course" won the grand jury prize for international documentary, and a narrative film from South Korea, "Jiseul," claimed the grand jury prize for dramatic world cinema.

Having a film at Sundance, Coogler said, serves as a stamp of approval.

First Steve Jobs film is well received at Sundance premiere

By Piya Sinha-Roy
Reuters

PARK CITY, Utah: Just 15 months after Steve Jobs' death, the first biopic about Apple's legendary co-founder had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival. It got a warm reception.

"JOBS" chronicles 30 defining years of the late Apple chairman, from an experimental youth to the man in charge of one of the world's most recognized brands. It is the first of two U.S. feature films about Jobs, who died in 2011 at age 56.

"Everybody has their own opinion about Steve Jobs," director Josh Stern told Reuters ahead of the screening, "and they have something invested in a different part of his story. So the challenge is to decide what part of his story to tell, and not disenfranchise anybody."

"Hazarding a guess and venturing into too much speculation is always dangerous, especially with a character who is so well-known."

The film begins with Jobs the dreamer, the poet and the occasional drug user in college, and his initial ideas for Apple Computers, before his vision took on a life of its own.

Much of the drama is based around the early 1980s, and Jobs' ideas for the Apple Lisa and Macintosh computers, which ended up performing poorly for the company and led to Jobs being fired.

The film stars Ashton Kutcher as the tech and computer entrepreneur who revolutionized the way people listen to music and built Apple Inc. into an international powerhouse, and

stars Josh Gad and Dermot Mulroney.

Kutcher's Jobs is seen as the rock star of the tech world, admired but misunderstood in his early days as he constantly tried to think outside of the box and bring a notion of "cool" to his brand.

In a question-and-answer session after the premiere screening, Kutcher spoke about his preparations of mastering Jobs' posture, hand gestures and eccentricities, saying his "painstaking

research" included watching more than 100 hours of Jobs footage.

Notably missing from the film are details about Jobs' personal life — his court settlement with the mother of his first child features only in the backdrop of the 1980s, a time when he struggled to gain support from the Apple board for his visions.

Stern told the audience that he deliberately steered clear of the CEO's

personal life, saying the film was "not about getting mired in some of the soap opera" of Jobs' life.

On the red carpet before the screening, Kutcher said he was honored to play Jobs but also terrified because of the former Apple chairman's iconic status.

"To be playing a guy who so freshly is in people's minds," Kutcher told Reuters, "where everywhere you go you can run into people who met him

or knew him or had seen a video of him ... that's terrifying because everyone is an appropriate critic."

Hours before the screening, Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak said the movie appeared to misrepresent aspects of both his own and Jobs' personalities and their early vision for the company.

Wozniak was commenting after seeing a brief clip of an early scene that was released online Thursday.

"Totally wrong ..." Wozniak, who co-founded Apple with Jobs and Ronald Wayne in a California garage in 1976, told technology blog Gizmodo.com in a series of emails.

"The ideas of computers affecting society did not come from Jobs. The lofty talk came much further down the line."

Gad, who plays Wozniak, told Reuters Friday that the filmmakers had tried to "reach out" to him to get his input on "JOBS," but that Wozniak was "participating in another project about Steve Jobs."

Wozniak is tied to a movie based on Walter Isaacson's official biography "Steve Jobs," being developed by screen writer Aaron Sorkin of "The Social Network" fame. No release date or casting has been announced.

Kutcher said he hoped Wozniak would look more kindly on the movie when he had seen the whole two hours. "I hope that when he sees the film, he feels that he was portrayed accurately, that the film accurately represents who he was and how he was," he said, "and more importantly, inspires people to go and build things."



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