

AGENDA

LEBANON

MUSIC

'Musical Reading'
Beirut Municipality, Bashoura
Dec. 2, 7 p.m.
01-667-701
Professor Elias Sahab will present a musical reading on Zaki Nassif's Fairuz compositions.

ART

'The Trees and I: A Personal Vision of Nature'
SV Gallery, Saifi Village
Dec. 5-28
05-455-454 ext. 403
This exhibition features Souad Saidi's childlike paintings.

'Santa Claus Returns to Town'
Artlab Gallery, Rmeil Street, off Gouraud Street, Gemmayzeh
Until Jan. 4
03-244-577
This exhibition features works by Thaar Maarouf, Vanessa Gemayel, Hasan Mousavi, Gylan Safadi, Safa Kasaei and Ayman Fidda, to name a few.

'Abdullah Murad'
Art on 56th, Youssef Hayek Street, Gemmayzeh
Until Dec. 16
01-570-331
This solo exhibition features paintings and drawings by Syrian artist Abdullah Murad. Born in Homs in 1944, he is considered a pioneer of Arab abstract expressionism.

PHOTOGRAPHY

'Natreen'
STATION, off Corniche al-Nahr, Jisr al-Wati
Nov. 29 until Dec. 1
71-794-300
This exhibition of photographs by Leila Alaoui is being held in collaboration with the Danish Refugee Council and features photographs of displaced Syrian families now living in Lebanon.

'Sabracosmopolite'
Main alley, French Cultural Institute, Damascus Road, Ashrafieh
Until Dec. 7
01-420-205
This exhibition displays Houa Kassarly's photographs of migrant workers in Lebanon.

'Sibylle Bergemann: Photographs'
Villa Audi, St. Nicolas Street, Ashrafieh
Until Dec. 13
01-446-092
Organized by the Goethe Institute, this solo exhibition features the photographs of German photographer and co-founder of the Ostkreuz photography agency Sibylle Bergemann.

FILM

'Edda Ciano & the Communist Man'
Metropolis Cinema Sofil, Ashrafieh
Nov. 29, 8 p.m.
01-204-080
The European Film Festival continues with Graziano Diana's feature on Mussolini's daughter who is exiled to Lipari. After falling sick, she gets help from the man in charge of the local Italian Communist Party. Their relationship grows. In Italian with English subtitles.

DANCE

'Sleeping Beauty'
Emile Bustani Auditorium, Al-Bustan Hotel, Beit Mery
Nov. 28-Dec. 1
04-972-980
The Russian State Ballet of Moscow will perform "Sleeping Beauty."

JUST A THOUGHT

I know how men in exile feed on dreams.
Aeschylus
(c. 525-456 B.C.)
Greek playwright

INTERVIEW

A roadmap for Arab modernism

BEC's Paul Guiragossian retrospective tracks his move from figuration to abstraction

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Paul Guiragossian made several journeys. You could argue his life was a series of migrations. The son of Armenian genocide survivors that had resettled in Jerusalem, he moved to Beirut in late 1947, fleeing the instability that marked the late Mandate period. The artist's studies took him to Italy, then to France, and from 1989 to 1991 he lived in Paris. He then returned to Lebanon, where he died two years later.

Guiragossian's circuitous passage from Jerusalem to Beirut was mirrored by his artistic transience from figuration to abstraction – from portraiture and ensemble depictions of discernible human figures, to forms whose emotive power rests in their want of individual features.

It is the shared view of Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath that this negotiation between abstraction and figuration lays at the heart of his work.

Fellrath and Bardaouil are co-curators of "Paul Guiragossian, The Human Condition," the retrospective exhibition now up at the Beirut Exhibition Center. It is comprised of over 100 paintings and works on paper, many of them never before exhibited. Sampling works from five decades of production, it is the most comprehensive Guiragossian retrospective to date.

Timed to mark the 20th anniversary of the artist's death, "Condition" has been staged in collaboration with the Paul Guiragossian Foundation – the source of some 80 percent of the works on display – and is a prelude to a comprehensive monograph on Guiragossian's life and work, expected in 2014.

Though retrospectives are inherently historical, Bardaouil and Fellrath have sidestepped chronology as an organizing principle.

"We thought it reflects his approach to linearity much better if we were to use a thematic approach," Bardaouil says. "He used to say there is no before; there is no tomorrow. Art from the Lascaux cave is as contemporary as art done by an artist living today."

The curators have chosen to subdivide "Condition" into eight thematic sections – Self, Family, Woman, Theater, Faces, Despair, Faith and Life. Each is hung in its own gallery, a contextual ecosystem for this facet of Guiragossian's work, anchored by one or two recognized master works. Thoughtful quotations from the artist festoon the gallery walls, suggesting something of the humane intellect behind the paintings and sketches.

"We feel that curating an exhibition



"Antiques," the central frame of a Guiragossian triptych used during Ussama al-Arif's 1970 play "Idrab al-Haramiyya."



"Composition" (1990-91), oil on canvas, 130 x 200 cm.

is very much like composing a painting," Bardaouil says.

"We try to create a fluid semiotics that allows the viewer to subconsciously go with what you are trying to say, without being too didactic.

"We wanted to create this juxtaposition, between what you first see when you walk here –" he gestures to one of the figurative canvasses in the "Family" section, "– and what you see here with this [abstract] piece in the back. Automatically your eye picks up on the three vertical figures. It's a similar palette and you don't need too much explanation to understand that this abstraction is taking the human figure to a new place."

In thematic and spatial terms, this

modular approach to the BEC's otherwise warehouse-like space is a curatorial tour de force. Clustering Guiragossian's works within more intimate spaces makes their digestion a more pleasant and informative experience.

Discrete art historical interventions, in the form of a handful of works by Guiragossian's modernist contemporaries – Khalil Saleeby, Saliba Douaihy, Mustapha Farroukh and Cesar Gemmayel – provide further context.

"This is something that connects to our practice," Bardaouil says, "to use this retrospective as an introduction to the study of modernity in the Arab world."

"Most times you see artists in complete isolation ... You don't get a glimpse of how they sat within a tra-

dition of art-making that is relevant to this particular part of the world. That's something we wanted to avoid.

"The other thing is that most of the time comparisons [between the exhibiting artist and his contemporaries] are either too simplistic or too West-East. It was important for us to use this exhibition as a little opening into a complex and diverse art history that was sometimes in conflict with other art histories, sometimes in dialogue."

Art Reoriented – as Bardaouil and Fellrath's multidisciplinary curatorial project is called – are habitués of the MENA's contemporary art scene. This helps explain the echoes of contemporary art practice that are audible in this modernist retrospective.

Bardaouil and Fellrath's recent projects include Akram Zaatar's "Letter to a Refusing Pilot," the video installation at the heart of the Lebanese pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennial.

At Doha's Mathaf in 2012, the team curated "Tea with Nefertiti," a critical engagement with the narratives surrounding Egyptian art.

In this respect, "Condition" could be seen as a way of taking some contemporary art talking points and pursuing them within a modernist context.

"Whenever you talk about contemporary art – when it comes to places considered peripheral to the centers of artistic production – there's this underlying assumption that it's something that doesn't have a background," Bardaouil says. "It's as if there was this gap between what we consider classical Islamic art and contemporary art."

"But there's an entire century in the middle that is a total limbo. It's not only something that people overseas assume about the region. Unfortunately, it's something many people from this region believe as well."

The curators view "Condition" as an opportunity to reintroduce the artist's work to the Lebanese public, and so have drawn upon PGF resources to devote a gallery to a Mac-driven biographical and archival annex, to complement and contextualize the works.

It could be a pragmatic response to the pathology about the dearth of archives and its impact upon the Lebanese condition, a motif in the practices of reconstruction-era Lebanese artists.

Rupture is a term commonly associated with the contemporary art of the '90s generation. Critically informed and cosmopolitan, favoring performance, video and photography, it apparently reflected the psychic and aesthetic disjuncture of the war years more than any dialogue with the country's modernists.

Some of these artists did gesture to the rupture. The thoughtfully image-critical works of Walid Sadek provide a case in point. "Love Is Blind" (2006), for instance, consists of exhibition tags that nod poetically (with irony or reverence) to the landscapes of Mustafa Farroukh, without pictorial references.

Art Reoriented has hung "Antiques," the central frame of a Guiragossian triptych that served as a backdrop for Ussama al-Arif's 1970 play "Idrab al-Haramiyya." The two other parts of the triptych were lost in the Civil War.

"Till and I were thinking we want to emphasize that moment of rupture," Bardaouil says. "We wanted to emphasize the absence of these narratives."

The lone panel to survive the Civil War, "Antiques" hangs from the ceiling, flanked by a pair of empty frames – a conceptual rupture made literal.

"Paul Guiragossian, The Human Condition" is up at the Beirut Exhibition Center until Jan. 6. For more information see <http://beirutexhibitioncenter.com/exhibitions/showing-now>.

INTERVIEW

Art meets activism: humanizing refugees with photos

By India Stoughton
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: We are saturated with information, whether via conventional or social media. It's a predicament that plagues NGOs and charity organizations which seek public attention for their projects.

In recent months, such agencies have turned to artists for help to raise awareness about the dire circumstances facing the millions of Syrian refugees.

The UNHCR recently collaborated with U.S. fine art photographer Elena Dorfman to produce two photo series on refugees living in rehabilitated houses or informal tent settlements across Lebanon, in Jordan's Zaatari camp and at the Domiz camp in Iraqi Kurdistan.

One series focuses on the living quarters of refugees forced to improvise housing for themselves. A second, entitled "Syria's Lost Generation," consists of portraits of teenagers, accompanied by short captions recounting their stories.

The Danish Refugee Council has turned to photography to raise awareness, commissioning French-Moroccan photographer Leila Alaoui to produce a series of portraits taken in refugee gatherings across Lebanon. Entitled "Natreen" (We Wait), the photographs – along with captions detailing the stories of the subjects – will be exhibited at STATION, near Jisr al-Watti, Friday through Sunday.

Although both photographers work primarily as artists, these images have an agenda: to draw attention to a humanitarian crisis and elicit empathy. Artistically shot, they are different from the thousands of shots photojournalists have taken of Syrian refugees, but the motive behind the work blurs the borders of art and activism.

"My hope in photographing Syrian teens was to connect on a personal level with this refugee population," Dorfman explains. "I believed that if I could make a connection, others outside of the conflict region could, too." Imad Aoun, the DRC communication manager who worked with Alaoui on her series, says the aim of the photographs is to forge a bond between the



Alaoui's photograph of a Syrian child in the Beddawi Palestinian refugee camp, Tripoli.

viewer and the photographed refugees.

"A lot of their stories are hidden behind the statistics and the numbers and the charts," he says, "so we thought this would be a good opportunity to shed light on them as humans. ... People are very visual. If you don't see something, it doesn't exist. So we decided that photography would be a great way to engage with people ... They're actually very similar to us."

Alaoui's series fits into her wider artistic practice. "I've been working on migration, refugees and cultural diversity for about six years now," she explains. "I worked a lot with the UNHCR in Morocco doing photo projects with kids. ... So when I moved, here obviously I wanted to continue on the same subject."

"I try to work with NGOs to get in the field with people who are experienced, to get a better idea of what's going on. I am more of an anthropologist than a journalist. I have to study and understand what's what before I take out a camera."

It usually takes her several months to get to know her subjects before she photographs them, Alaoui says, but for "Natreen," she traveled with a DRC social worker, who already had a relationship with the subjects, and was able to shoot the whole series in 10 days.

What the refugees she spoke to

across the country shared, she says, was a sense of their lives being on hold. "They want to go back but they're just waiting," Aoun says. "It's something that characterizes their life right now, because they're just in limbo. I think if you keep the title in mind and look at the photos you'll find that there's an element of waiting in each one of them."

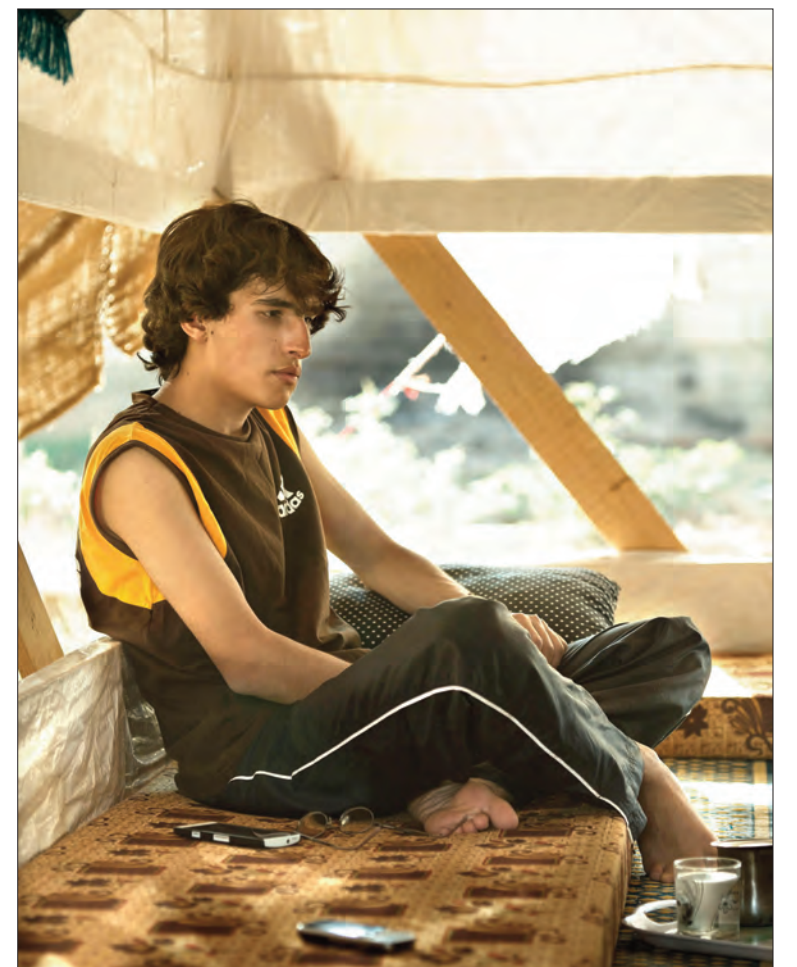
Most of Alaoui's photographs capture the subject looking at the camera, another factor that distinguishes her work from photojournalistic images, which tend to more voyeuristic, fostering less of a personal connection between viewer and subject.

"I don't want to show them vulnerable and miserable," she says. "When someone looks at you, you just see a person that is just human and real, strong, beautiful. I don't want to have a condescending approach."

Dorfman's photographs, by contrast, fall outside the scope of her personal practice, which often explores the interplay between reality and make believe.

"I suppose it would fall under activism," she says of her UNHCR work. "That said, I approached these kids in the exact same way I would any other portrait series: with deep respect and interest in who they are and in the spaces they both physically and emotionally inhabit."

"I chose to make a series of portraits



Dorfman photographed Hani, 19, who lives in Madjel Anjar, Lebanon.

about Syrian teens because [it] is often an age that falls between the cracks in times of distress," she elaborates. "Adults are able to make their needs known and children have a variety of services available to them. Teenagers are caught in the middle with their own very specific set of issues."

"They all wanted to be back on Syrian soil and back in school," she adds. "They all wanted to walk down the streets that were familiar to them and go home to see their families. As Hani, [a teenager] originally from Homs, put it, 'I miss drinking coffee with the birds. I miss seeing my brother's

smiles in the morning.'"

Both photographers have succeeded in creating a powerful documentary aesthetic with emotional resonance. As the war continues and the public becomes oversaturated with tales of hardship, the NGOs' efforts resort to photography may prove the old adage that a picture really is worth a thousand words.

Leila Alaoui's series "Natreen" opens at STATION, off Jisr al-Watti, Friday at 6 p.m. and will be on show until Dec. 1. For more information, please call 71-794-300. To see more of Elena Dorfman's work, visit www.elenadorfman.com.