

AGENDA

LEBANON

MUSIC

'Al-Wilada 88'

Metro al-Madina, Hamra
Jan. 3, doors open 9 p.m.
76-309-363

Vocalist Sandy Chamoun and her crew – Tarek Khuluki (guitar and synths), Khaled Omran (bass), Dani Shukri (skins) and Samah Abi El Mona (squeeze-box and keys) – promise to make the room explode with Arabic hits from the '80s and '90s.

ART

'Beyrouth, Le Monde'

Art Space Hamra, Costa Cafe Building, 6th floor
Through Jan. 7

In this series, artist Claude Moufarege depicts the rooftops and abstract topography of Beirut, a city which represents both her sense of belonging and exile. Having spent much of her early life in Beirut, leaving and returning multiple times, Moufarege renders the city through a cool architectural lens and a cartographic distance that give her urban scenes a quiet and contemplative aspect.

'Al-Zohra Was Not Born in a Day'

Galerie Tanit, Armenia Street, Mar Mikhael
Through Jan. 7

A collaboration with Riccardo Clementi and Eric Deniaud, Randa Mirza's exhibition consists of dioramas and sculptures, based on tales from Al-Jahiliyya.

'Salon d'Automne'

Sursock Museum, Rmeil
Through Feb. 27

This 32nd exhibition of emerging and established artists includes work by 52 artists working in all media, from painting and installation to video, all competing for Emerging Artist and Audience Choice prizes.

'Metabolism'

Beirut Art Center, Jisr al-Wati
Through Jan. 15

The eighth edition of Exposure – BAC's annual young and emerging artists' exhibition – transposes a notion attributed to the body into the realm of art. To think of art as metabolization is to think of one's practice as a series of voluntary transformations that produces unpredictable results.

PHOTOGRAPHY

'The Human Scale'

Level 1, Sursock Museum, Rmeil

Through Jan. 30
This exhibition from The Fouad Debbas Collection explores photographs of archaeological sites taken from the air, and the unique aesthetic these functional forms engendered.

DESIGN

'Artifacts'

Caruvan Gallery, D Beirut Building – First Floor, Seaside Road, Burj Hammoud

Through Jan. 15
01-368-6089

With "Artifacts," 200 Grs. (aka Rana Haddad and Pascal Hachem) reinvent Atibia's latest vintage with unique wooden creations, intimate objects to be shared, treasured and enjoyed.

JUST A THOUGHT

Liberty is a word which, according as it is used, comprehends the most good and the most evil of any in the world.

Oliver Ellsworth
(1745-1807)
American lawyer and politician

INTERVIEW

Reflecting on the Nile's surrealists

Sam Bardaouil discusses why we ought to look at surrealism differently

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: For some years, Sam Bardaouil has been uncomfortable with Egypt's surrealists – specifically with how they have been remembered.

The curator and art historian's interest in this strain of Nilotic modernism was given more focus in the late 1990s and early 2000s, prompted by Samir Gharib's study of poet Georges Henein and the visual artists and writers who'd clustered around him in the 1930s and '40s.

"I felt that Gharib's book was very important in the sense that it was the first to attempt to retrace the story of this incredible group, but for me it seemed there must be more to this story."

To flesh out the tale, Bardaouil and Till Fellrath – who together form the curatorial team Art Reoriented – devoted over five years to researching the work of Egypt's surrealists.

The movement was embodied in Cairo's Art and Liberty group, which thrived in the complex of late imperialism and nationalism that characterized the period around World War II.

Egypt's surrealist moment was brief. Henein had corresponded with Andre Breton since the 1930s but a decade later Art and Liberty and Breton's surrealists had grown apart. Henein declared his withdrawal from the surrealist movement in a sober letter to Breton, penned in 1948.

Bardaouil recounts how his cura-

torial work on Egypt's modernists inspired dozens of hours of conversation with colleagues and descendants of Art and Liberty's artists.

Hours more were devoted to combing through private archives and forgotten boxes in family attics. In Bardaouil's words, Art and Liberty advocated "a complex social project" whose central tenets were "unmistakably artistic, yet equally political."

The creation of art didn't reflect a position of privilege, but rather a sense of responsibility.

Rejecting what they saw to be an imported academicism endorsed by the colonial state, Art and Liberty's artists broke from both colonial Britain and the Egyptian bourgeoisie's conservative morality.

"Art et Liberte rejected the conflation of art and national sentiment," Bardaouil noted in his talk.

"They also rejected the notion of 'art for art's sake,' whereby pictures had become a platform for the recycling of the same visual allegories and literary metaphors."

While Art and Liberty's artists were a cosmopolitan mix of Egyptians and non-Egyptians, Bardaouil credits Kamel el-Telmisany, Ramses Younane and Fouad Kamel with instilling within Egyptian surrealism "the rootedness it needed to take wing within its local cultural milieu."

Bardaouil's discovery of unfamiliar works by artists in these years and previously undocumented correspondence among group members and figures in European surrealism led him to question the prevailing narrative of how the movement evolved.

In that narrative, modernism in its various forms (surrealism included) arose in "the West" and was eventually emulated by non-Western artists.

His own findings suggested that Art and Liberty's artists themselves

contributed to the evolution of the form. These findings have recently borne fruit in "Art and Liberty: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938-1948)," an exhibition now up at Paris' Centre Pompidou, and in Bardaouil's monograph "Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group."

Bardaouil was back in Beirut recently, where he presented the keynote address at "The Avant-Garde and its Networks," a scholarly workshop on surrealism in Paris, North Africa and the Middle East, staged by the Orient-Institut Beirut.

He argued that academics have tended to be innocent of the organic relationship that existed between European surrealism and the Art and Liberty group.

"None of the scholarly works that I [knew] at the time were even aware of that fact that there was such a [connection], until a few anthologies of world surrealisms appeared in the 2000s.

"Art and Liberty ... were never into regionalism," he says.

"They were always [part of an international surrealist] network. Yet you find anthologies that place them within surrealism in North Africa or surrealism in the Arabic-speaking world."

Bardaouil argues that scholarship must broaden and enrich the surrealist canon.

"We make the same inferences and interpretations [about the canon] because the materials we're using to provide context – whether it's an artwork or a document – have been in circulation for the past 50-70 years."

The context of the canon must be expanded, Bardaouil says, but it's too simplistic to graft "things from the so-called periphery [onto the existing] canon.

"We try to make sense of [surre-



Ramses Younane. "Untitled," 1939. Oil on canvas.

alism] in terms of a tradition that doesn't recognize that there are other points of reference. What we're trying to do with [our Pompidou] exhibition, and through the theoretical paradigms that I'm constructing, is to suggest that maybe [we should imagine] a completely different canon that doesn't operate along this 'center' and 'periphery' binary.

"The idea is to allow for the existence of different points of reference – in terms of the visual art and documentation, the personal narratives and the development of the movement. What we learn from Art et Liberte [is that] centers are constantly in a state of ebb and flow. Paris was a center at one time but the people who made it a center were from all over the place."

'We have failed. We need to find a new language'

While generational conflict played a role in how Art et Liberte situated itself vis-a-vis Egypt's artistic mainstream – a conflict evident in the art in many parts of the world at the time – Bardaouil is more interested in locating and defining "a new type of avant-garde."

"For us the avant-garde was cubism, surrealism and futurism – art movements that broke off with all the traditions from the Enlightenment and the Renaissance, saying, 'We have failed. We need to find a new language.'

"We inherited this narrative. We don't think of a realist painting from the '30s as avant-garde. Now there's

a new movement suggesting that these were the exceptions that proved the rule. Most painters, the ones leading the show, were working in a realist or neorealist style.

"A lot of artists – George Sabagh, for instance – [formed] a misplaced or discarded generation that was seen as [out of sync] with the avant-garde.

"Our understanding of the avant-garde [sanctions our] discarding mainstream artists' innovations.

"There are revisionist approaches today that consider the avant-garde not only from the vantage of the contemporary moment but from its context at the time.

"In a sense, the tension we're talking about today is something we could be projecting because we have seen the avant-garde and the traditionalists as two opposing schools," he said, adding that "perhaps that tension was less significant for those leading the show than for those in the avant-garde, who were trying to instigate change."

Bardaouil acknowledges that Art and Liberty's dissident position appealed to younger generations.

"This was happening in Egypt, in Italy, in France, Germany, Mexico," he says. "Let's reject nationalism but try to find a local language that makes use of our own heritage."

"Then, this localist position was adopted by mouthpieces for a later form of nationalism – as happened under Abdel-Nasser."

"Art and Liberty: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938-1948)" is up at Centre Pompidou through Jan. 16, 2017. "Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group" is published by IB Taurus.



Georges Henein. "Surrealist Portrait of Gulperie Efflatoun," 1945. Gelatin silver print.

Houston 'Cistern' reborn as public space, art canvas

By Juan A. Lozano
Associated Press

HOUSTON: The city's first underground drinking water reservoir – a decades-old collection of more than 200 concrete columns inside a cavernous space near downtown – had been unused for years.

It was set for demolition when a nonprofit group reimagined it as something new: a public space.

Reminiscent of ancient European water reservoirs, and dubbed the "Cistern," the 8,129-square-meter space opened its doors to visitors in May. Earlier this month, the structure's darkened pillars and walls became the canvas for a piece of modern art.

"Repurposing it for a contemporary audience is the perfect solution," said Judy Nyquist, a board member with the Buffalo Bayou Partnership, which incorporated the reservoir as part of a \$58 million park renovation project.

It's the latest example of efforts by U.S. cities – including Atlanta, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Washington, D.C. and Buffalo, New York – to repurpose abandoned and dilapidated pieces of infrastructure as public spaces.

Urban planners see the preservation of historic buildings and other structures as essential in creating the kinds of communities people want to live in, said Stephanie Meeks, president and CEO of the Washing-

ton, D.C.-based National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Probably the best-known project is New York City's High Line – an abandoned elevated railroad section converted into a park in 2009.

It's shown cities that such pieces of infrastructure can be diamonds in the rough, said Robert Steuterville, with the Congress for the New Urbanism, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that promotes sustainable communities. "That's why other cities are saying, 'Aha. We have this thing. What can we do with it?'" he said. "Very

often you can do something with it that actually generates value."

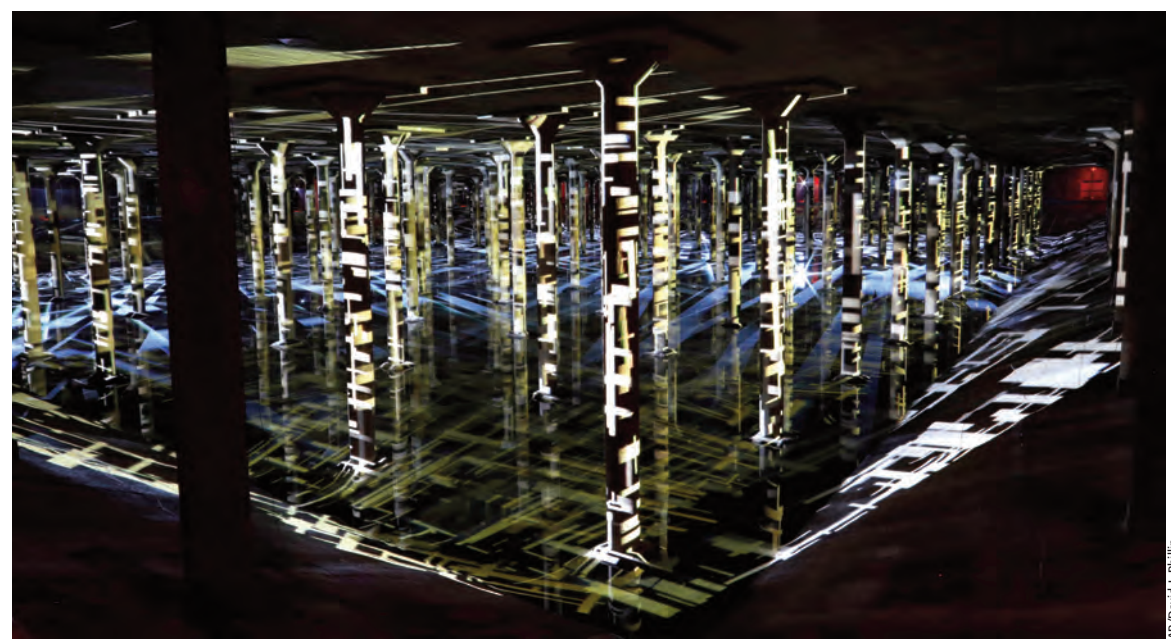
The Cistern was first built in 1926 and decommissioned in 2007.

In Houston, the Buffalo Bayou Partnership saw its preservation as a way to save a piece of history and educate visitors about Houston's relationship with its bayous, which have provided both drinking water and drainage. The group also saw the Cistern as a good fit for its plans to display art throughout the renovated Buffalo Bayou Park – the 65-hectare space the reservoir sits next to.

The first exhibition is an abstract video installation called "Rain" by Venezuelan artist Magdalena Fernandez. The nearly two-minute video is meant to evoke the atmosphere of a stormy night.

Accompanied by a soundtrack of snapping fingers and stomping heels that mimic falling rain, the work projects a series of white geometric shapes onto the darkened concrete columns and the shallow pool of water on the Cistern floor.

In San Francisco, officials and community leaders are working to



The first exhibition is an abstract video installation called "Rain" by Venezuelan artist Magdalena Fernandez.

make a park from a reservoir shuttered in 1940. In October, officials in Philadelphia broke ground on a project to transform an abandoned rail line into a public park similar to the High Line.

In Buffalo, a collection of concrete grain elevators that are remnants of the city's heyday as a shipping hub are being reused as locations for restaurants, outdoor concerts and as the projection screen for a nightly light show.

In Washington, D.C., a cultural organization is transforming an abandoned trolley station underneath the Dupont Circle neighborhood into a place for exhibitions and artistic expression.

Atlanta is in the midst of a project to transform 35 kilometers of a mostly abandoned railroad corridor that encircles the city into a network of trails, parks, affordable homes and rail transit that will connect 45 neighborhoods. The project is set to be completed in 2030.

"This really is a legacy project that goes out 20 years, 30 years, 50 years," said Kevin Burke, senior landscape architect for the project.

"We really have to have that long view as to what we are doing and the impact that we will have, not only on the current generations of Atlanta residents and visitors but those yet to come for decades."

"Rain: Magdalena Fernandez at the Houston Cistern" can be seen through June 2017 via scheduled tours.