

AGENDA

LEBANON

MUSIC

'Hanine y son Cubano'
Platea Complex, Sahel Alma, Jounieh
Dec. 29, 9 p.m.
03-686-686
Accompanied by an ensemble of Cuban musicians, Lebanese vocalist, oud player and musical hybridizer Hanine promises to enchant her audience with her powerful voice and cosmopolitan sound.

ART

'Spanish Artists'
Tinta Negra, 120 Pharaoh Street, Mar Mikhael
Until Jan. 5
01-570-027
This library-gallery displays works by such Spanish artists as Miki Leal, Paco Aguilar, Luis Feito and Karina Beltran.

'Under a Beautiful Sky'
FFA Private Bank, Foch Street, Downtown
Until Jan. 10
01-985-195
The work of Hiba Kalache dwells on the notions of self and privacy.

'Ciel! Mon Pays ... Mon Paradis!'
Main Library, USEK, Kaslik
Until Jan. 25
09-600-071
Lebanese artist Pierre Mouhanna returns to USEK, this time with "Sky! My Country ... My Paradise!" – a show comprised of 18 watercolors-on-wood and paper.

'Vanishing Impressions'
Espace Kettaneh Kunigk, Gefinor Center, Bloc E, Clemenceau
Until Jan. 15
01-738-706
The paintings of Lebanese Rima Saab are replete with color.

'Whirling'
Cynthia Nohra Art Gallery, Elias El Hrawi Street, Furn al-Shubbak
Until Jan. 17
01-281-755
The paintings of poet, editor, An-Nahar literary critic and TV director Jana Eid arise in response to her question, "Who am I in all this?"

'Against the Wall'
Ayyam Gallery, Zeitoune Street, BCD
Until Dec. 31
01-374-450
The work of Syrian artist Abdul Karim al-Beik explores the untold stories to be found among the multitude of graffiti, etchings, marks and cracks of the walls of Damascus' Old City.

PHOTOGRAPHY

'7 Jours Parmi les Anges'
French Institute, Damascus Road, Sodeco
Until Jan. 5
01-420-200
The launch of David Hury's book on disabled children is staged within a photo exhibition on the subject of disability, featuring the work of ALBA students.

THEATER

'Reasons to Be Pretty'
Masrah al-Madina
Until Dec. 30, call for times
01-999-666
Jacque Maroun's Lebanese Arabic adaptation of Neil Labute's play takes up the importance of appearances in the relationships of two couples.

JUST A THOUGHT

If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair.

C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)
British novelist, poet, medievalist, literary critic, essayist

YEAR IN REVIEW

2012: A roller-coaster ride of a year



Walid Raad's "Views from Outer to Inner Compartments, Untitled II," 2011.

In a mostly lackluster year, highlights include work from Syria and select local artists

By Kaelen Wilson-Goldie
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: The past 12 months were nothing if not confusing for advocates of modern and contemporary art in the Lebanese capital.

On one hand, the year witnessed major exhibitions of historically significant work by Goya at Villa Audi, Gerhard Richter at the Beirut Art Center and Andy Warhol at Q Contemporary – an embarrassment of riches that should give a critic no cause for complaint.

On the other hand, upstart and established art spaces alike proved themselves for the most part incapable of generating anything close to serious curatorial thought this year, assembling shows according to the most superficial and lackluster of conceits. The support structures (and staff) of the art scene are essentially failing the artists who made it possible to speak of such things in the first place.

Somewhere in between, Beirut has become the bittersweet beneficiary of much Syrian art in exile. Last spring, Espace Kettaneh Kunigk's mounted an admirable show of solidarity featuring 16 artists, most of them still living in Damascus, whose works were smuggled into the country and put on view to give the public an unflinching understanding of both the violence in the country and the

resolve of the people who were, at the time, still protesting.

Since then, new and newish galleries from Mark Hachem and Ayyam to Art on 56th have been organizing a steady program of solo shows for Syrian painters such as Houmam Alsayed, Abdul Karim Majdal al-Beik and Edward Shahda. All of that work is at once haunting and illuminating. None of it bodes well for the situation to the north and east of here in the year to come.

Still, the Sursock Museum is closed. The National Museum is comatose. Beit Beirut is years away from completion. The Culture Ministry's project to build a kunsthalle-style art center in the middle of the downtown district with a \$20 million grant from the Sultanate of Oman has simply vanished.

All the more reason, then, to be grateful for the works, projects, artists and exhibitions that made such strong impression in the roller-coaster ride that was 2012.

Marwan Rechmaoui, "Landscapes," Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Nov. 26-March 17

In his first solo show in more than a decade, Marwan Rechmaoui confounded all expectations of what his work is like by showing none of the sculptural works for which he has become known. Instead, he showed a complex series of paintings, including portraits of cluster bombs and landscapes of refugee camps. Genius in its dissection of what cosmopolitanism has come to mean in a place like Beirut, Rechmaoui's exhibition was not universally loved, which means he was probably onto something good.



A still from Phil Collins' "Marxism Today (prologue)," 2010, HD video.



Tanya Traboulsi's "Untitled #1," 2012, from the series "Seules."

"Revolution vs. Revolution," Beirut Art Center, Feb. 2-April 13

This timely group show exploring the history – or several plausible histories – of art made in response to revolution was stacked with strong works by the likes of Abbas, Francis Alys, Tacita Dean, David Goldblatt, Alfredo Jaar, William Kentridge, Susan Meiselas and Boris Mikhailov. To mount such a show without making any real reference to the ongoing, ill-fated and seemingly never-ending Arab Spring was cheap – but all was forgiven by the inclusion of Phil Collins' terrific and heart-wrenching "marxism today (prologue)."

"Khalil Saleeby 1870-1928: A Founder of Modern Art in Lebanon," AUB Art Gallery, June 8-ongoing

Curated by Octavian Esanu, this tight, compact exhibition marked the inauguration of the American University of Beirut's first of several new spaces devoted to modern and contemporary art in Lebanon. Delving into the story of Khalil Saleeby through a sustained study of his portraits and nudes, the show set an important precedent for how art history as a discipline might be more seriously undertaken and engaged.

"Home Workspace Program 2011-2012: Open Studios," Ashkal Alwan, July 18-31

The first class of students in Ashkal Alwan's experimental, incubator-style art school mounted a somewhat clumsy end-of-year exhibition, but it was, like everything that happened in the 10 months before, totally educational. The projects that worked best were performative pieces by Joe Namy, Sarah Farahat and Raphael Fleuret, all of which shed light on what had transpired during year one of a program that a visiting artist and professor was not far off in describing as miraculous.

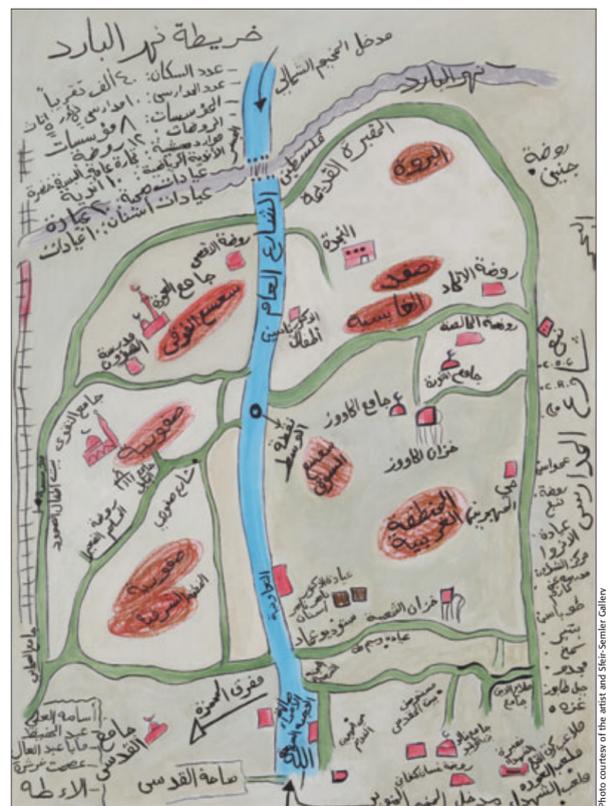
Tanya Traboulsi, "From a Distance," Art Factum Gallery, Sept. 12-Oct. 19

Over the past five years, Tanya Traboulsi has made a name for herself taking wonderful pictures of Beirut's alternative and underground musicians. For her first solo exhibition at Art Factum, however, she made a brave choice and showed seven very different bodies of work, all of which added great depth to her practice.

"A Territory of Resistance," Running Horse Contemporary Art



George Awde's "Untitled," 2012, from the series "Shifting Grounds."



Marwan Rechmaoui's "Nahr al-Bared 2," 2011, acrylic and oil pastel on wood.

Space, Oct. 1-Nov. 3

This concise selection of works by George Awde, Ali Cheri, Sirine Fatouh, Randa Mirza and Stephanie Saade established the Running Horse as a welcome platform for showing young and emerging artists, and testing out the ideas that might curiously tie their work together. The theme here was politics drawn on the body, which was subtle and delicate yet still somehow bold.

Setareh Shahbazi, "Spectral Days," Ashkal Alwan, Nov. 20

A beautiful and illuminating exhibition bound between the covers of a small artist's book, Setareh Shahbazi's

"Spectral Days" paired a vibrant series of manipulated family photographs – all swirls and washes of color approximating the movement of memory – with texts by Mirene Arsanian. The result? A collaboration that opened up both the words and the images and became a great pleasure to encounter.

Walid Sadek, "On the Labor of Missing," Galerie Tanit-Beyrouth, Nov. 27-Dec. 22

Walid Sadek's first outing at a commercial gallery played a fine conceptual game of hide and seek. To mark the inauguration of Naila Kettaneh Kunigk's vast new Beirut space, Sadek placed three almost incidental objects – a drawing, a wall tag and a bench – and called it a show. Clever.

Walid Raad, "Scratching on Things I Could Disavow," Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Nov. 29-March 23

At some point in between Walid Raad's first and second solo exhibitions at the Sfeir-Semler Gallery, his current project, "Scratching on Things I Could Disavow," shed some of its dryness and didacticism and became more playful and theatrical. The current show flirts with detective stories, mazes and mysteries, bringing to mind everything from Borges to Antonioni's "Blow Up" while glancing in on Israeli's militarized high-tech industry, face-recognition software, an improbable retirement fund, a murder in Dubai and, on course, the history of art in the Arab world.

Akram Zaatar, "On Photography, People, and Modern Times," Ashkal Alwan, Dec. 1

Slotted into a symposium organized by the Arab Image Foundation and the Centre Pompidou and screened without much further comment, Akram Zaatar's moving two-channel video reflects on the ethics of collecting, the obsessions of collectors and the history of what the AIF has done since its founding in 1997. There's an incredibly poignant and mournful turn, about two-thirds in. The artist sits down with the late, inimitable photographer Van Leo, who asks him plainly, if he is planning to take away his work forever, or will he one day bring it back.