

AGENDA

LEBANON

DANCE

'Utopia'
Beiteddine Palace, Beiteddine
July 26, 9 p.m.
01-999-666 / 01-373-430
This flamenco ballet, featuring outstanding Spanish dancer Maria Pages, takes its inspiration from the writings of Charles Baudelaire and Cervantes, as well as the architecture of Oscar Niemeyer.

ART

'East of Eden'
Metropolitan Art Society,
Butros Palace, Ashrafieh
Until Sept. 10
70-366-969
Housed in a 19th-century landmark, MAS's opening exhibition features works by such acclaimed international artists as John Armleder, Christian Holstad and Thomas Houseago.

'Jean-Luc Moulene'
Beirut Art Center, off Corniche
al-Nahr, Jisr al-Wati
Until Oct. 12
01-397-018
Beirut's first solo exhibition of works by Jean-Luc Moulene dwells on the role of image, and the relationship between photography, the subject and the viewer.

'Things are Still the Same'
Galerie Taniit, east of EDL,
Mar Mikhael
July 17 to Sept. 9
76-557-662
This exhibition features the pastiche-style work of Heba Alakkad dwelling on her vision of what is happening in Syria.

'Sea n' Art'
Beirut Souks, Downtown
Until end of August
01-989-040
Fifty artists and inventors promise to present their takes on Lebanon's dorade fish, with a focal point provided by one main fish sculpture by artist Colette Tabet.

'Pulse'
Mark Hachem Gallery,
Salloum Street, BCD
Until July 27
01-999-313
The sculptures of French artist Anne De Villemejeane dwell upon the inspirations that have accompanied the artist's professional journey.

MUSIC

'Millesimes'
Zouk Mikael Amphitheater
July 23, 9 p.m.
01-999-666
The Zouk Mikael International Festival opens with a performance by renowned French vocalist Pascal Obispo, now on his "Millesimes" tour.

'Crazy Opera'
Byblos waterfront, Jbeil
July 24, 9:30 p.m.
01-999-666
The Byblos International Festival continues with this show by vocalist Samar Salame. Under the direction of Toufic Maa-touk, Salame will be accompanied by a choir, dancers, vocalist Tony Abou Jaoudeh and oud player Ziyad Sahhab.

Nancy Ajram
Beirut Souks, BCD
Aug. 9, 9 p.m.
01-999-666
The Beirut Holidays lineup will start with Lebanese pop singer Nancy Ajram, who has won many musical prizes and sold over 10 million albums.

JUST A THOUGHT

If an actor knows how to milk a cow, I always know it will not be difficult to be in business with him.

Werner Herzog
(1942-)
German film and opera director,
producer, screenwriter and actor

INTERVIEW

Dancing with a lone cow in a field

Matthias Lilienthal
unpacks Ashkal
Alwan's Home
Workspace open studio

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Jessika Khazrik sits in a chair that has a back but no legs. On the wall behind her is a video projection screen, whose images she manipulates via a hand-held tablet.

On her lap alongside is a stack of tablet-sized, paperclip-bound bits of paper. She consults these as she addresses her audience about "The Influence of Prostitution on Tourism."

The subject of Khazrik's ambling 40-minute performance is Georgette Karam – the pretty (and frequently photographed) young woman whose family album-style snaps are the piece's major visual reference.

In Khazrik's (perhaps fictive) biographical account, Karam is the performer's mother and the author of an MA thesis submitted in 1979, written when she was a student at the Lebanese Institute of Tourism, called "The Influence of Prostitution on Tourism."

A quasi-autobiographical striptease that toys with the video archiving-interrogation of 20th-century Lebanon, the work bristles with possibilities. It alights upon several themes – time-tested (Did Karam interview any prostitutes when assembling this data, or simply transcribe her fantasies?), media-critical (Why was Karam so obsessive about having her photograph taken everywhere she went?), and playful (maybe Karam's thesis was autobiographical?).

"The Influence of Prostitution on Tourism" is so laden with potential, in fact, it feels at once raw and bloated. Appropriate for a work in progress. Khazrik's piece was performed three times over this past weekend at Ashkal Alwan's Home Workspace, one of 14 works by as many artists, presented in a casual open studio show to mark the end of ten months of feverish interdisciplinary mentoring, research and project-development among this year's crop of young international artists.

The RP ("resident producer," née "resident professor") for the 2012-13 Home Workspace program has been Matthias Lilienthal, the German dramaturge credited with redefining the very nature of theater. Lilienthal's last gig before coming to Ashkal Alwan was his stint as artistic director at Berlin's HAU (Hebbel am Ufer), where he oversaw about 1,000 productions over less than a decade.

A determination to liberate theater from theaters saw Lilienthal develop "X-Apartments," in which artists stage works in private homes. "X-Apartments" was the successful opening gesture of this year's Home Works Forum, with performance-installations staged in offices and flats in Burj Hamoud and Khandaq al-Ghamiq.

"In performances and theater," Lilienthal smiles, "I don't want to go on a field where 50 cows are already standing. I prefer much more to be a lone cow on a field."

"At the HAU I called myself a 'booker.' Here I rejected the expression



Khazrik's "The Influence of Prostitution on Tourism," 40 minutes, 2013.

'professor.' By talking with the students and working with them, I had much more the impression of producing work and seeing my own [role] as being between producing and mentoring."

"Anyway I don't believe in the concept of 'teaching.' ... I learnt all my things by doing practical work and doing projects. That's what I wanted to do here ... Yes, I am a facilitator but sometimes in an agent provocateur kind of way."

Khazrik's piece was not the sole performance work at this year's open studio. Alex Baczynski-Jenkins plans a performance called "A Promenade of the Hearts" – readings from an anthology devoted to intimate practices, compiled by Ahmad al-Tifashi (1148-1253) performed in inline skates.

The object of Romain Hamard's "JUDITH versions" is a Beirut restaging of the 1954-1960 LA film project "The Savage Eye." At Ashkal Alwan, the work played out as a 30-40-minute dialogue – separately shot (and simultaneously projected) amid the space's multiply reflecting surfaces with a pair of hand-held cameras.

In this audiovisual game of light, shadow and reflection, the film's original dialogue is the weakest element, leaving you wondering whether this performance may not be more interesting than the film project that inspired it.

"The whole scene of Beirut is very aesthetic," Lilienthal notes. "I'm coming much more from the basic proletarian Berlin, with a clear Leftist opinion ... I think [Beirut] could be more open to other forms of artistic work. I sometimes have the feeling of a slightly limited view."

"If you compare Beirut with Berlin – which is not really appropriate – but of course the first thing you have in Berlin [is] 50-80 scenes and nobody has an overview and nobody knows where it goes to. In Berlin it's much

more possible that people from different genres are talking to each other. And nobody can be secure about their own position."

Lilienthal says he'd like to see more politically and socially engaged art on the Beirut scene. "It's so much discredited by the Civil War ... there's such a distance to ideologies that [a social-political approach] is sometimes difficult."

"I think the scene here developed in the last 10-15 years in an amazing way. Unlike 10 years ago, you have cultural institutions, you have funds, you have artists who can partly or can live by their work and in the moment I would hope for more discussions between human beings and institutions," he adds.

"If I were to stay longer here, my next project [would be] the foundation of a party," he laughs again. "You know the creation of a party is so discredited here ... that a party as an artistic project would interest me in this part of the world."

Also performance-based, Monira al-Qadiri's music video "Abu Athiyya" (Father of Pain) may be the most accomplished finished piece in this open studio. In the exhibition notes, the artist describes the work as an eulogy to the aesthetic of sadness that was once a prominent part of the culture of southern Iraq.

The tune at the center of the video is a mawwal by Iraqi vocalist Yas Khodhor. The choreography, performed by the artist herself, attempts to reproduce the knife dance of the iconic Iraqi dancer Malayeen. Qadiri dresses up as the corpse of a man (complete with white body paint redolent of butoh) who literally rises from the dead to sing and dance.

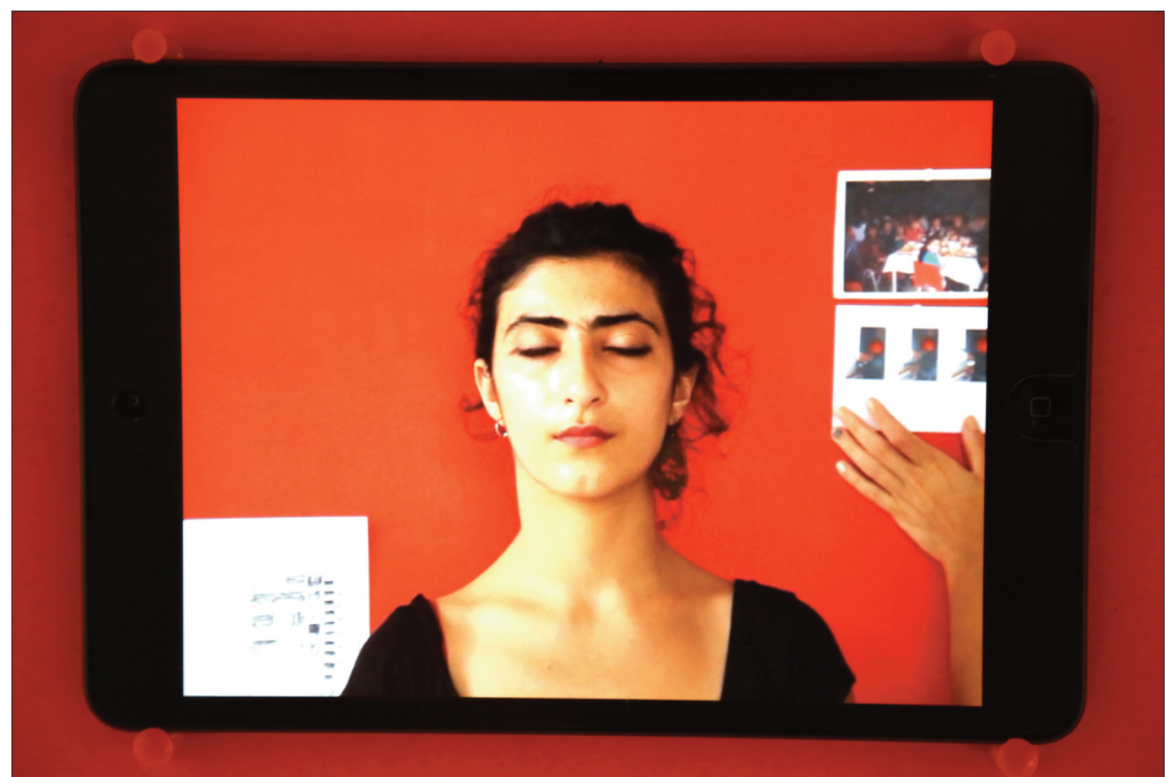
In its execution, Qadiri's video is a hilarious piece of comic incongruity, the cheesy video effects providing a perfect complement to the dance that resembles an energetic, but ineffectual, effort to commit suicide with a couple of daggers.

Maxime Hourani's work-in-progress "Revolving Geographies: Raouche" presents itself as a nascent film project, one that conflates the story of a B-movie director's tour of pre-Civil War Lebanon with two structures – one in Raouche, the other near Martyrs Square – built by a common architect. Another project that bursts with thematic potential, Hourani's film remains a tantalizing possibility.

"I loved this moment when [English artist and Turner prize nominee] Phil Collins gave a workshop [at Ashkal Alwan]. He worked with everybody on a choreography. Everybody had to dance. After one hour [Cairo-based painter] Sara Hamdy is laughing, saying, 'This is the first time in my life that I am dancing.'"



Hourani's "Revolving Geographies: Raouche," 2013.



Urok Shirhan's "performing memory / taking history / as a stage," mixed media, 2013.

A pub crawl across the Muslim world



The Wet and the Dry
A Drinker's Journey

LAWRENCE OSBORNE

By Jerry Harkavy
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine: Looking to deal with a serious drinking problem, British novelist and travel writer Lawrence Osborne decides to traverse the Muslim world to gain a different perspective on alcohol.

Out of this quixotic adventure comes a book that examines the role and history of strong drink, its impact on the author's life and the availability of beer, wine and distilled spirits in Islamic countries from Egypt to Indonesia. The colorful characters and fascinating situations Osborne encounters during his travels provide much of the book's allure.

Osborne has surely faced his share of deadlines during his writing career, but perhaps none as strange and pressing as his attempt to score a bottle of champagne in the sultanate of Oman on the Arabian Peninsula as the clock winds down to midnight on New Year's Eve. The suspense builds as we wonder whether he fulfills his promise of bubbly to his Italian girlfriend or must make do with fruit juice for their celebratory toast.

In Lebanon, Osborne checks out the bar scene in Beirut, visits a vineyard in the Bekaa Valley and meets with Druze zaim Walid Jumblatt in the Chouf Mountains for a lunch that includes arak – the potent anise-flavored tipple that is Lebanon's national drink. The Druze, he is told, are permitted to drink but are not allowed to eat watercress.

Osborne's travels, interspersed with the occasional hangover, take him to

Pakistan's only brewery, whose owner tries to keep a low profile amid the virulent hostility to alcohol in his country. He then heads east to the Thai border region with Malaysia, beset by a stubborn insurrection, where a slew of seedy bars attract Malay men bent on heavy drinking and, um, fraternizing.

The author paints a bleak picture for the future of alcohol in the Muslim world. In "Westernized" Turkey, the only Muslim country where adherents of the faith can legally drink and where Osborne has acquired a small house, the governing party is placing heavy taxes and restrictions on alcohol. Moving on to Cairo, he revisits his favorite bar during riots in Tahrir Square and opines that it may be living on borrowed time amid the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Osborne set out on his journey to observe and perhaps learn from a culture of abstinence, whose believers regard drinking as "a sickness of the soul." Along the way, he weaves in memories of his alcohol-besotted past and examines Islamic history and the teachings of the Quran for clues to the restrictions on booze.

Two years of drinking in Muslim countries that reject "the corrosive pleasures of alcohol" leave Osborne sympathetic to the validity of their reasoning, but in the end it seems clear that he's not about to forgo the cocktail hour.

"The reasons for hating it are all valid. But by the same token they are not really reasons at all," he writes. "For in the end alcohol is merely us, a materialization of our own nature."

Osborne's "The Wet and the Dry: A Drinker's Journey" is published by Crown.