

AGENDA

LEBANON

DANCE

'Shringara and Tawle'
Crypt of Saint Joseph Church,
next to Theater Monnot
June 12, 8:30 p.m.
01-741-270
Martina Meenakshi Argada will perform an Indian classical dance piece followed by a conceptual piece with deaf dancer Pierre Geagea, integrating contemporary dance with sign language.

PHOTOGRAPHY

'Selfie'
Artspace Hamra, Costa Building, Hamra Street
Through June 30
01-736-516
This photography show uses the language of the "selfie" to trace personal stories disrupted by conflict. The photos of Sarah Niroobaksh present traditional domestic scenes disturbed by brutality, while Mohammed al-Shammarey's illustrate sectarian divisions.

'Consumption'
Beirut Exhibition Center, BIEL
Through July 12
01-962-000, ext. 2883

This show assembles the work of 11 photographers that were shortlisted for the fifth cycle of the Prix Pictet award.

FILM

'Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas'
The Garten, BIEL
June 13, 8:30 p.m.
01-332-661
Metropolis Cinema's outdoor screening cycle continues with Terry Gilliam's 1998 screen adaptation of Hunter S. Thompson's drug-addled nonfiction book recounting the adventures of an LA entertainment journalist and his attorney at the epicenter of the American Dream.

MUSIC

The Script
UNESCO Square, Jbeil
July 14, 8:30 p.m.
09-542-020
This chart-topping Irish pop/rock band will debut tunes from their latest album.

'The Shoreline Sessions'
Colonel Beer, next to Aqua Land, Batroun
June 13, 6 p.m.
This music series will take place every second Saturday of the month through September. Artists Aziza, Maurice Louca and Acid Arab will kick off the first session.

EXHIBITION

'Revisiting Dalieh'
AltCity Media, Carre Building, Hamra
Through June 12
01-742-582
This open-ideas competition exhibits proposals from various multidisciplinary professionals on safeguarding Dalieh as a unique natural site and shared open space.

ART

'The Merriment of Debris'
STATION, Jisr al-Wati, facing Beirut Art Center
June 13, 5 p.m.
71-684-218
This event will consist of music, poetry and visual art.

JUST A THOUGHT

Old age and treachery will always beat youth and exuberance.

David Mamet
(1947-)
U.S. playwright, essayist,
screenwriter-director

REVIEW



"Jerusalem Pink," 2015, 30 mins, Maeve Brennan.

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: "Are you comfortable?" a voice says from off frame. The man shrugs at the camera and casts his eyes around the room. "It doesn't matter whether I'm comfortable or not," he says eventually.

The off-frame voice asks him to tell his story from the beginning. "But you already know the whole story," he says, face taut with irritation.

The 20-minute video "12," 2015, by Mohamed Berro recounts a little-known tale from Lebanon's recent history. On Sept. 12, 1993, emergency services were called to a residence in the suburb of Ghobeiri. They found 11 bodies, the remains of what is said to be the country's only recorded case of mass suicide.

Berro's video mingles archival footage of the event as it reverberated through Lebanese and German newspapers and fictional interviews with Ahmad and Ziad.

It was these two men who devised the means to administer poisonous gas to 11 people who were willing to die—even happy to die, as Ahmad recalls—because he'd told them that this is what the Mehdi wanted.

In those days, Ahmad says, the Mehdi—a messiah-like figure whose return is prophesied in some Muslim practice—had been visiting him in his dreams. The Mehdi told him it was time for a number of true believers to demonstrate their faith by taking their own lives.

Complementing these testimonials of Ahmad and Ziad (Ghassan Maasri and Abdel Halim Berro) are a series of fixed shots of objects—represented as though being photographed as evidence in a police procedural.

A plastic bag (placed over the heads of the 11 victims) is shot alongside the hose that fed gas into the bag. More allusively, passport-style pics of Ziad's two kids are photographed, as are his masbaha and several other seemingly "innocent" objects.

Combining a compelling, emotionally fraught tale with a formal approach that's fittingly restrained—in both emotional terms and duration—"12" is a successful work for Berro (b. 1989).

One of nine short- to medium-length works newly commissioned by Ashkal Alwan, the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, "12" screened in its yearly Video Works program, projected over three nights at Metropolis Cinema Sofil.

Berro is the youngest of Video Works' stable of 2015 contributors but none of these 10 artists is exact-

ly geriatric. This may be one reason for the youthful energy coursing through a program that includes several accomplished works.

Though some of these works have a fleeting aestheticism about them, all nine can be said to have scooped up handfuls of this place's contemporary realities and sieved them through one formal discourse or another.

The visual language of each piece varies as widely as its subject matter—from documentary to video art to fiction film.

Several of these pieces reflect upon what may be called the contemporary Beirut condition.

May Kassem's 40-minute "96.2.2" is a portrait of Radio Liban producer Wafa Khochen, a soft-spoken but charismatic aficionado of the rock'n'roll of the 1960s and '70s.

Maxime Hourani's sombre "Becoming Wreckage" is a grimly lyrical contemplation of Lebanon's contemporary landscape, as seen from the perspective of an architect.

Another architect who works with moving images, Stéphanie Ghazal has also crafted a lyrical piece in the 15-minute "Notes on the Present."

"It's The War in Syria That Killed Her," the 45-minute work by film collaborators Nadim Tabet and Karine Wehbé begins as a conversation between two friends speculating about what's become of their friend and her boyfriend, both of whom have dropped off the map.

Regrettably technical difficulties on Video Works' opening night made it impossible to see where the filmmakers take this promising premise.

Among the most impressive pieces here, for its stylish combination of the thoughtful and the critical is Haig Aivazian's 35-minute

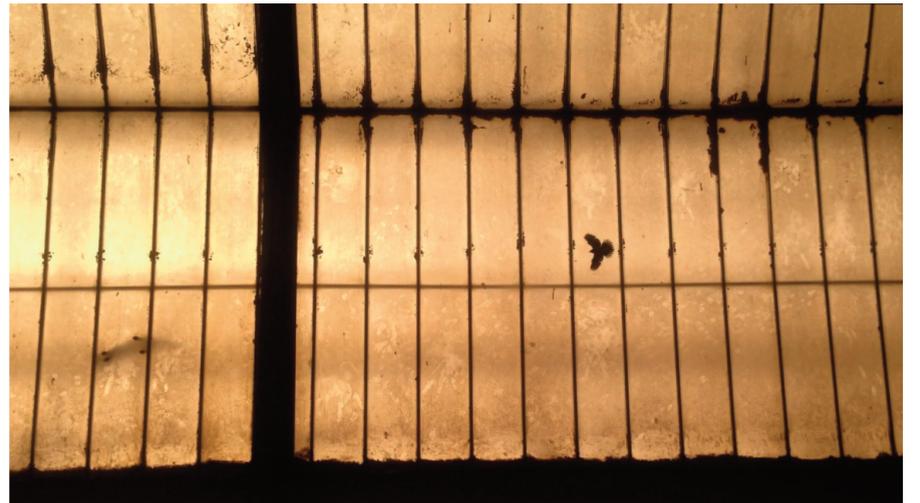


"Karaoke," 2015, 22mins, Raed Yassin.



"12," 2015, 20 mins, Mohamed Berro.

Video Works: from the twin towers to Al-Aqsa



"The Video Story," 2015, 15 mins, Vartan Avakian.

documentary-based narrative "This Lightness, I Have Lost It Forever."

The tale at the center of the work is the abrupt fall from grace of the then-head of the International Monetary Fund in the spring of 2011. His precipitous tumble from the Olympian heights of diplomatic immunity was precipitated by accusations that he'd sexually assaulted a member of the housekeeping staff of Manhattan's Sofitel hotel.

In revisiting the grimy details of the scandal, Aivazian wields a range of audiovisual records surrounding the event of May 14, 2011—from tapes of 911 dispatch exchanges and CCTV camera footage to news coverage in the days that followed the IMF chief's arrest. He augments this doc-style material with an artfully

shot montage of scenes shot in and around the Sofitel itself.

More important to making "This Lightness" something more than a he said/she said muck-raking exercise is the artist's voiceover—electronically modulated to sound suitably American.

This voiceover narrative sets the May 2011 incident in the context of a couple of catastrophic events that had rocked New York about a decade before—the Sept. 11 attacks on the financial district's World Trade Center and the collapse of the "dot-com bubble."

When that bubble burst, the city's restless speculators bent their fiendish brains to the U.S. housing market—fomenting the apocalyptic financial crash of 2008, for which those who aren't "too big to fail" will be paying for the rest of their days.

This reminder of the evils of unfettered capitalism provides the globalized context (the "lightness" as Aivazian puts it) of both the human beings at the center of the Sofitel drama—the master-of-the-universe economist-politician from France and the Guinean hotel employee. It also suggests how a poor person's dodgy emigration history can compel the U.S. justice system to deem her an untrustworthy witness against an IMF head.

The artist names neither this figure nor the woman he was accused of having assaulted but a quick Google search will recall the sordid tale.

Video Works also includes two intimate and amusing autobiographical works by a pair of artists who are much in demand nowadays.

Vartan Avakian's 15-minute "The Video Story" recounts how the artist's father and mother introduced him to the moving image via a succession of VHS and video cameras they brought into the household—each of which made reality, and fantasy, look different.

Raed Yassin's 22-minute "Karaoke" recalls how an, in retrospect comic, incident from the artist's childhood—involving child prodigy Marwan al-Shami—later came to compel him to shoot his mother's final days on 8mm film.

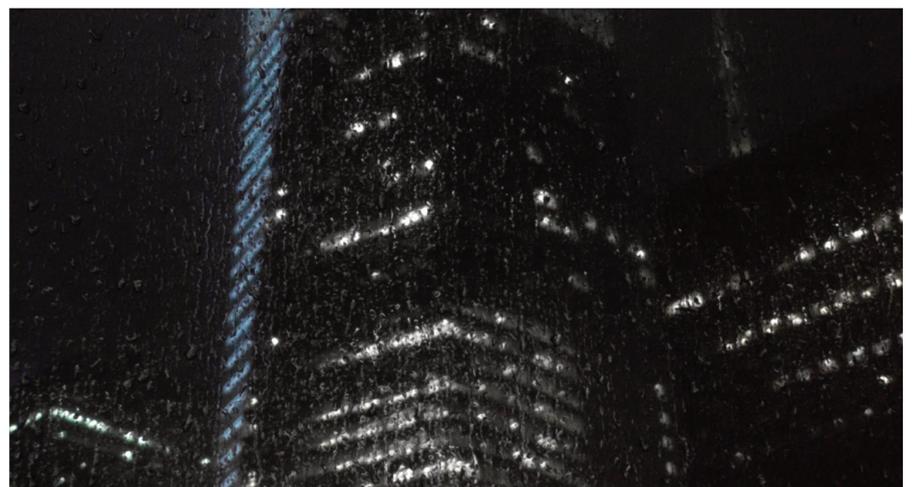
Though they probably weren't devised as such, Avakian and Yassin's vids might easily be viewed as a complementary works, "portraits of the artists as young men."

One work that has no relation to Lebanon as such is Maeve Brennan's 30-minute "Jerusalem Pink." Unapologetically documentary, the work tells a fascinating story of the living structure that is Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque.

To make the doc the artist consulted a number of historical texts and conducted fieldwork in the region around Jerusalem with several Palestinian conservation experts.

Like many of the works in this program, this homage to one of the world's great structures has an autobiographical core. The basic source of her film, a 1917 architectural evaluation of the state of the structure, was composed by Ernest Richmond, Brennan's grandfather.

For more information on Video Works, see: <http://ashkalalwan.org/events/video-works-2015/>.



"This Lightness, I Have Lost It Forever," 2015, 35mins, Haig Aivazian.