

BeMA unveils educational, art projects

Artists in Residency program at schools, restoration going on behind the scenes

By Maghie Ghali
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: The Beirut Museum of Art showcased two of its major ongoing projects during its first participation at the Beirut Art Fair last week.

The Restoration Lab and the Artists in Residency Program in the Lebanese Public School System were publicly unveiled at the fair, drawing attention to the work BeMA has been quietly doing in the past few years.

Although not scheduled to open until 2023, BeMA has been engaging with audiences through outreach programs, including workshops, publications and creative initiatives.

“Rooted in the strong belief of the transformative power of the arts, and the right of all people to access culture and learn without barriers, BeMA’s outreach program represents one of the main channels through which the museum will strive to play this important role within the community, and contribute to the task of building a stronger civil society in Lebanon” executive president of BeMA’s board of trustees Joseph Sadi said of the unveiling. “We are thrilled to participate in the 10th edition of the BAF, and showcase the artistic output of the children in BeMA’s Artists in Residency Program in Lebanese public schools and to share information on the restoration work undergone to date.”

The residency program was initially implemented as a pilot in 2017. The program collaborates with artists to set up residencies at public schools around the country for a six to eight week period, seeking to provide children with unique artistic experiences by working with the artists directly.

From textile and silk printing to video art, animation, illustration, calligraphy and photography, students aged 7-10 had the opportuni-



Sixth-grade students at the Tyre Public School for Girls participate in a calligraphy class with artist Ghaleb Hawila.

ty to explore different mediums, learn multiple techniques and experience art making.

A collective exhibition featuring the works produced by the students was displayed at the BAF alongside plans for a fully fledged program for the next school year.

Held under the theme of “Shaping Common Spaces,” BeMA, in partnership with the Education Ministry, has completed its second year of the program in 10 public schools across the Lebanon, and is launching its third year in October

to cover a total of 13 schools.

“The impact of the residencies on the students, teaching staff and the schools has been incredible and invaluable,” Maya Hajj, curator and program coordinator, said in a statement. “The success rate can simply be assessed by the sparkles in the eyes of the students who are discovering through the art sessions their own abilities.”

The program will take place over 10 years and aims to reach 40 schools around the country.

The Restoration Lab was set up

in 2017 to begin the process of restoring over 2,000 artworks on loan from the Culture Ministry, with the support of the Cultural Preservation Program of the German Federal Foreign Office.

To date, 200 out of 500 paintings have been restored and conserved – mending canvas tears, fixing flaked paint – by conservator Kerstin Khalife and a small team of Lebanese trainees and German students. Some 1,800 artworks have been cleaned and revarnished. Among the collection are stunning compo-

sitions by Yvette Achkar, Rafic Charaf, Amine El Bacha, Adel El Saghir and Elie Kanaan, plus many other artists from the last 70 years.

The collection suffered during the Civil War due to poor storage, with many paintings left in uncontrolled conditions that can be detrimental to paint and canvas. The newly restored works are now being stored correctly, until the project is completed and they are able to be displayed at BeMA when it opens in three years.

For more info, visit bema.museum.