

Forestation meets art in Beirut

Romanos Ilya's tree-shaped sculptures join installations dotting capital

By Maghie Ghali
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: With Beirut Art Week opening around town Tuesday, many art installations already dot the city's sidewalks and galleries.

One eye-catching set of sculptures now sitting in Beirut Souks (through Sept. 24) has been crafted by Lebanese artist and architect Nayla Romanos Iliya. The three steel, tree-shaped sculptures are part of her "Flower Power" series, which uses themes of nature and life juxtaposed with destruction and ruin.

"I think most of us never really overcame or accept the Lebanese Civil War and its consequences," Romanos Iliya told The Daily Star. "I don't think we learned much from it and I noticed a lot of people try to live and act like it never happened."

"The starting point of every sculpture is an existing object, a remnant of war – a shell, shell casing or piece of shrapnel," she added. "The piece's inspiration depends on the shape of the object, and I would add forms and shapes to it that have a positive connotation, to counteract the negative image associated with weapons."

Each "tree" grows out of a Civil War-era missile casing, alluding to new life after destruction.

"Many of my sculptures use the positive symbol of the tree of life, or are inspired by a piece of poetry," Romanos Iliya said. "Some have peace symbols in the canopy or four leaf clovers as a symbol of hope."



Romanos Iliya hopes her work will help people "question this voluntary amnesia about the civil war that we have."

"There is also a big dichotomy between the materials used, such as the rough stainless steel and brass, or wires in smaller sculptures, and a poetic aspect from the idea," she added. "The trees almost look like lace. Flowers, birds and nests are other common details in the series."

"I used laser cutting and hand-make the smaller ones with wire," Romanos Iliya continued. "It's a very therapeutic process, be it in the tiny details made with a laser cutter or the manual work with the other ones."

Romanos Iliya has been working on this 18-sculpture series for the past two years.

A larger exhibition of her work will be staged at Burj Hammoud's

Abroyan Factory until Sept. 24, as part of another BAW exhibition.

She also wishes to use her work to draw attention to Lebanon's sustainability and environmental

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issues, with hopes that artists will consider the environmental impact their work can have.

"I'm trying to have the least impact when I make these – I used recyclable metal for the smaller piece," Romanos Iliya said. "Unfor-

tunately the larger sculptures have to be done without [recycled metal] but it's still a cleaner process than going through the traditional producing of sculptures, such as bronze and metal foundry, which especially in Lebanon can be a very polluting process."

"I hope that the series will touch people and make them question this voluntary amnesia about the civil war that we have," she added.

"We should learn our lessons and use this experience to better the country and to raise awareness about sustainability."

Beirut Art Week continues until Sept. 24 at various locations. beirut-art-fair.com