

Lebanese artists add a special touch to Beirut Art Fair

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by Maysaa Ajjan | Source: Annahar | Date added: 23 September 2019 | Last update: 23 September 2019 | 13:13



This photo shows Fouad Elkoury's photograph of a Palestinian girl between 1982 and 1995. (Annahar Photo/Maysaa Ajjan)

BEIRUT: The cosmopolitan Lebanese capital that booms with ancient and contemporary art came alive this week with the Beirut Art Fair 2019, where more than 50 exhibitors and installations electrified the city by offering a journey of exclusive artistic experiences throughout its different areas.

Perhaps among the most prominent works that shone through the entire collection were the works of Lebanese artists themselves, from the younger and older generation. From photography exhibitions to painting installations, these works proved that Lebanese art is timeless in its vivid imagery and lavish approach.

One multidisciplinary exhibition that was open to the public was Sursock Museum's "Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity," which narrates the story of Baalbek with time and includes photographs, paintings, live documentaries, stone ruins, and old posters that reveal the city's long 10,000-year history "I've worked really extensively on getting over 350 objects in this exhibition to create an encyclopedic wide-angled view on Baalbek," curator of the exhibition Vaili Mahlouj told Annahar.

"The idea was to cover the span of history around Baalbek, from its small-settlement beginnings to the Heliopolis area of sacred sites to the advent of Christianity," Mahlouj added.



This photo shows a Roman statue at the Sursock Museum. (Annahar Photo/Maysaa Ajjan)

Another exhibit on was "10 Stories from the Sursock Museum Collection," which reveals glimpses into certain movements that dominated the Lebanese artistic heritage through the collective works of prominent Lebanese artists, such as Shafic Abboud, Saloua Choucair, Laure Ghrayeb, and George Corm. The exhibition, which is divided into 10 sections, hence 10 stories; has been on display for almost a year and will be replaced in November.

One photographer that seemed determined to bring back the Beirut that was once known as the "Switzerland of the East" is Tony Mhanna, who visited the once astonishingly beautiful houses now destroyed by the civil war and who's determined to revive the energy from their golden days.

"I roamed over the whole country for around a year and then chose the most beautiful architectures to take pictures of, like a hotel in Aley and a Turkish bath in Tripoli," he said.

Mhanna, who had his photographs installed in Le Gray hotel, told Annahar: "I aim to revive the energy in them and show people the artistic richness that Lebanon has to offer. I hope the Ministry of Culture preserves these places and helps prevent destroying them for other interests."

Another photographer that seemed determined to capture a special era in Beirut, the era of the Palestinian "departure" between 1982 and 1995, was Lebanese-French photographer Fouad Elkoury, who holds an audiovisual installation at Dar El-Nimer. While he claims in previous interviews that his exhibition "does not claim to narrate nor represent the story of a people," he nevertheless captures the end of the Beirut era for Palestinians: the departure of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to Tunisia in 1982 on the board of The Atlantis, on which Elkoury captured some of Yasser Arafat's most iconic pictures, and the return to Palestine under the Gaza/Jericho First agreement in 1994.



This photo shows visitors looking at Fouad Elkoury's work. (Annahar Photo/Maysaa Ajjan)

When asked to evaluate Lebanese talent in comparison with international talent, artistic director of the Beirut Art Fair Joanna Abou Sleiman Chevalier said that "it's not a question of Lebanese talent or international talent. When an artist is talented he or she doesn't have an identity."

"Lebanese artists have a fluid identity because they don't follow a particular way or method of painting," she continued.

Out of the 37 galleries that were on display in seaside arena, 12 were Lebanese or exhibited the works of Lebanese artists alongside international artists. Among these 12 galleries was Art on 56th gallery; which, aside from displaying the works of senior artists such as Rafik Majzoub, Georges Bassil, Edgard Mazigi, and Zeina Badran; showcased younger artists, such as Louna Maalouf.

"I wanted to represent young artists and take care of them; but at the same time, we must have big names to attract the art industry," art director for Art on 56th gallery Noha Moharram told Annahar. "I wanted to show the young generation that they should be exposed to art and they should change whatever preconceptions they have in mind and be educated," she added.