

AGENDA

LEBANON

PERFORMANCE

Cabaret for a New Year
Metro al-Madina, Saroulla Building -2, Hamra Street
Dec. 31, doors open 8:30 p.m.
76-309-363

For a mere \$200, enjoy the Metro's New Year's Eve cabaret, lubricated by an open premium bar, three-course meal and party favors.

DESIGN

'Now/Here'
Beirut Art Center, Jisr al-Wati
Through Feb. 7
01-397-018

This exhibition features work by Milia Maroun, the designer behind popular brand Milia B.

'Love Life to Death'
WonderEight, Jisr al-Basha
Through Dec. 24
01-494-331

This exhibition is the first solo show by graphic artist Nisrine Sarkis, who manually and digitally works with lettering to produce new styles of typography in Arabic, English and French.

LECTURE

'The Political Sociology of a Louvre in Abu Dhabi'
Ashkal Alwan Home Workspace, Jisr al-Wati
Jan. 6, 2015, 8-10 p.m.
01-423-879; <http://ashkalalwan.org/events>

French political scientist Alexandre Kazerouni discusses the evolution of the Gulf region's museum culture. Presented as part of the workshop series "The loudest muttering is over," led by resident professor Walid Raad.

ART

'Just About Touching the Structure'
Agial Art Gallery, Abdel-Aziz Street, Hamra
Through Jan. 3, 2015
01-345-213

Lebanese artist Souheil Sleiman's solo show features a selection of his sculptures in wood, wax, clay and paper.

'Taysir Batniji' 'Anna Boghiguan'
Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Tannous Building, Karantina
Through March 7, 2015
01-566-550

This double-bill of solo shows features new and recent work by painter and illustrator Anna Boghiguan, who is based between Egypt, India and Europe, and Gaza-born multimedia artist Taysir Batniji.

'Exposure'
Beirut Art Center, Jisr al-Wati
Through Feb. 12, 2015
01-397-018

The sixth edition of this annual group exhibition features work by nine emerging artists resident in Lebanon on the theme "Under Construction."

MUSIC

'After All We're Not Complete Strangers'
Metro al-Madina, Saroulla Building -2, Hamra Street
Jan. 6, 9:30 p.m.
76-309-363

After a year's absence, working separately, in Beirut and abroad, Incompetents return to the Metro.

JUST A THOUGHT

All architecture is great architecture after sunset; perhaps architecture is really a nocturnal art, like the art of fireworks.

G.K. Chesterton
(1874-1936)
English writer, poet,
philosopher, dramatist,
journalist, critic, etc.

REVIEW

Derelict modernism, in your salon

200 Grs. puts on some weight for its latest show at the relocated Carwan Gallery

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Few traces of modernist architecture survive in contemporary Beirut. It's as if the postwar cosmetic surgery upon the urban landscape were as concerned with erasing memory as with replacing smashed buildings.

That said, afterimages of the city's modernist heritage materialize in surprising places. "0.91 Cubic Meter," the exhibition now up at the recently relocated Carwan gallery, suggests that the transmigration of architectural forms has little to do with artist intention.

"0.91 Cubic Metre" is the most recent show of work by 200 Grs. — the metric nomenclature Rana Haddad and Pascal Hachem chose for their collaboration. The weight isn't random: 200 grams is the international equivalent of "weqieh." This local unit of weight, Hachem says,

recalls Souq Louqiyya, a now-extinct market in pre-civil war Beirut.

The 200 Grs. project is premised on a desire to make unique, handmade, functional pieces from left-over bits of wood. The objects reflect Haddad and Hachem's concern with matters of scale, authenticity, and the combination of the manual and the mechanical.

The project taps into discourses of material reuse and re-appropriation, as the artists put it, the importance of the human personal element in design, and the personal relationship that each piece develops once it reaches its end user.

Launched last December at an 18-piece show at Plan B, 200 Grs' original concept was to create unique functionally flexible pieces. Each piece is about 200g in weight; each is named after its precise weight, emblazoned on it.

The artists stress that 200 Grs. fits within the larger discourse of their previous work, showcasing "functional, sober architectural items that address concepts of materiality, elasticity, tension and balance."

200 Grs' work is meant to stand in a dialogue between its creators and users, who are encouraged to "appropriate" the objects and use



A gallery view of '0.91 Cubic Meter.'

them as they see fit.

The handmade objects in "0.91 Cubic Metre" are part of a limited-edition (10+2) series created according to aesthetic and functional criteria. The pieces include small objects that fall into the 200-gram weight restriction — including a tape dispenser, a pencil case and a box containing a pen and a roll of note paper.

The Carwan show is dominated by much larger items — a response, said gallerist and architect Pascale Wakim, to a challenge to work in micro-architecture.

"When you increase the scale," Hachem said, "you simply move from grams to kilograms."

Handmade from French oak or walnut with brass elements, these kilogram-weighted objects include coffee table-sized surfaces, bedside tables and a number of wall-hung objects that can be used as desks or shelving units.

"0.91 Cubic Metre" is pure design — especially in its present configuration, mingling 200 Grs.'s work with the elaborate metal-cast lighting fixtures and Italian leather armchairs of Vincenzo De Cotiis, among other leavings from Carwan's previous exhibitions.

Yet some of these forms provoke the sort of response you might associate with contemporary art. It's not such a stretch, since Haddad and Hachem are both students of architecture who have evolved into multidisciplinary artists.

A graduate of the Architectural Association in London, Haddad runs her own practice while teaching at AUB's Department of Architecture

and Graphic Design. She has created several public art interventions around Beirut.

Hachem also teaches design at AUB, while working as creative director at Pslab — a design and manufacturing company specializing in luxury lighting. Shown in several group and solo exhibitions in Lebanon and abroad, Hachem's highly sculptural art has often incorporated elements of industrial design and his mechanized art is redolent of that of Rebecca Horn.

"There is no connection between this work and architecture," Hachem avers. "Technically I don't mix my design and art practice."

"The criteria for making these objects is not only aesthetic, but functional. Each of wall-hung objects has a metal frame designed to hold it stable against the wall."

"The shape of the low [brass-and-wood] tables always includes an angled form, like a crocodile's mouth. These angles help to counterbalance the weight of the brass without comprising the integrity of the wood."

"Another element that's common to all the pieces is a multiple-use cavity, whose function can be determined by the user. Each form is defined by its application."

The artist admits there is a strong architectural presence in these works, but he insists that he and Haddad didn't set out to emulate any existing structures with these designs.

One of the features of Hachem's art is its site-specificity.

In 2008, for instance, the artist participated in a two-day-long emerging artist exhibition called

"Hopes and Doubts." It was staged in the ruins of the City Centre cinema, an iconic form on Downtown Beirut's postwar landscape that's been awaiting the developers' wrecking ball for years.

Usually referred to as "The Bubble" or "The Dome," The City Centre is a final residue of modernist architecture in reconstructed Downtown Beirut. Rather than enclosing it within layers of subterranean concrete, the designers elevated the corn kernel-shaped concrete husk of the projection hall on a dais — like a sculpture on a plinth.

Since the redevelopment of Beirut's City Centre began in the early 1990s several ambitious visual and performing arts events have been staged in the derelict theater. Most have proven less intriguing than the venue itself, and been overwhelmed by it.

"I'll race you," Hachem's contribution to "Hopes and Doubts," is comprised of a row of six hammers. Each is affixed to an electric motor, which draws the hammers back, one by one, to strike the pock-marked concrete wall.

Hachem's work forecasts the imminent demolition of the exhibition space, and so reflects upon the city managers' attitudes toward memory, history and public space.

Gazing into the multiple-use cavities of the pieces on show in "0.91 Cubic Metre," it's difficult to not see the maw of the City Centre, subversively reproduced.

"0.91 Cubic Metre" is up at Carwan Gallery until Jan. 10. For more, see <http://carwanguallery.com/shows>.



The object of 200 Grs. is to create a dialogue between designers and users.

How do you play a master painter? First, learn to paint

By Jocelyn Noveck
Associated Press

NEW YORK: Talk about suffering for your art.

Achieving his acclaimed performance as the masterful British landscape painter J.M.W. Turner in "Mr. Turner" took so much out of Timothy Spall, the veteran actor found himself kneeling down at the artist's tomb in St. Paul's Cathedral when it was all over — crying.

"I just knelt down, had a bit of a weep, and wiped it off on my elbow," the 57-year-old actor says. "It was quite a journey, you know."

Working with the famously exacting director Mike Leigh, as he has a number of times, Spall was tasked with what he calls detective work, delving deep into Turner's art to ferret out Turner the man.

The artist died in 1851 — "pre-psychoanalysis," Spall notes. "And he never really explained himself. He didn't want anybody to really know what he was up to."

This meant that Spall, aside from reading everything that he could get his hands on, had to learn to paint himself.

"Mike said, 'Are you up for it? And I said, 'All right, if this is what it's gonna take,' Spall recalls. "We just went and looked at these paintings, and I kept saying, 'What IS that?' And I realized my job was to look at this massive explosion of genius and implode it all back in, right back to where it started."

So Spall studied — still life, real life, drawing in all its forms, even Greek and Roman architecture. "I even started reading about Goethe's theory of light," he says.

"Mr. Turner" is unlike those films that have portrayed famous artists as rarified geniuses. The movie, which has earned raves for both Leigh and Spall, depicts an unassuming son of a barber who simply worked and worked, all the time.

Turner produced a staggering 20,000 works on paper, and more than 300 oil paintings.

"How did he do that? Well, he just never stopped," Leigh says. "He was just at it all the time. I mean it's a phenomenal amount of stuff. This is a guy who just does it, and what he does is extraordinary. And HOW he does it remains a mystery."

The film was somewhat of a departure for Leigh, one of Britain's most admired directors, who is known mostly for gritty contemporary films about working-class characters.

He says that once he made the 1999 "Topsy-Turvy" about Gilbert and Sullivan, he realized he was "over the idea that I was only ever

going to make contemporary films."

"I started to look into Turner having known the paintings," the director says, "and once I started to investigate Turner the character, I thought, this world is absolutely meant to be dramatized."

Turner was a man, for example, who had himself tied to the mast of a ship during a huge storm, in order to better understand the force of nature at sea — a scene recreated in "Mr. Turner."

Spall and Leigh formulated the character over two years of study and six months of rehearsal. Spall also made three trips to Turner's grave.

"First, when Mike asked me [to do the film], I went down there and pre-

tended to tie my shoes, knelt by his grave and just had a quick word," Spall recalls. "I said, 'Look, for what I'm about to do, please forgive me! And help me if you can.'"

A second trip came halfway through filming. "I went back and said, 'Look, I don't know if this is going the way you'd like!' Again pretending to tie my shoes."

The third trip came when he'd finished the film.

This was when he wept. "This time," he says, "I didn't even bother to pretend to tie my shoes."

The film made a splash at Cannes last May, where Spall was named best actor. Then on Dec. 1, Spall was named best actor by the New York

Film Critics Circle.

"I'm ... I'm just flabbergasted," he said, having got the news moments before this interview. "My gash is absolutely flabbered! I suppose what's lovely about it is that I've been around a bit, and you get plenty of kicks up the arse, you know? So it's nice to get flowers every now and again."

Spall is considered an outside contender for an Oscar nomination. He's just happy that all the recognition means more people are seeing the film — and Turner's paintings, too, currently on display in an exhibition at London's Tate Gallery.

"It seems," he says, "that Turner's working his magic at the moment."



Timothy Spall in a scene from Mike Leigh's award-winning "Mr. Turner."