

People and art mingle at Sanayeh garden Art in Motion brings 24 renowned artists to the public

[Olga Habre](#) October 18, 2016



As Rania Halawi takes me around Sanayeh Garden on a sunny afternoon, we see the usual sights: children clambering onto slides, older folks talking quietly on benches and friends strolling along the charming paths of one of the largest public spaces in Beirut. But this exceptionally warm month of October is witness to something unusual too. Mothers instruct their hyper children to stand still for a photo next to sculptures, groups of old ladies peer curiously at the new additions to their familiar territory and a middle-aged couple approaches us to inquire about the artworks. Halawi offers to take visitors on a private tour during the park's opening hours and gives a handful of cards to a nearby security guard who tells her he's been receiving a lot of such requests.



Iraq's Hanaa Malallah makes a statement against pollution coming from large corporation with her nylon "Biohazard" piece | Photo: Greg Demarque

Halawi is one of the founders of the nonprofit organization Art in Motion, along with Rania Tabbara and Raya Farhat, and this is their inaugural project: Resistance and Persistence. The public exhibition of 24 renowned Lebanese and international artists in Sanayeh, officially known as the Rene Mouawad Garden, is unfortunately a rare sight in Beirut.

Art often comes across as sophisticated and highbrow, and this is exactly what Art in Motion wants to contest. “Our aim is to make art public,” says Halawi, explaining that museums and galleries, even if they are free, often feel inaccessible to the general public. “We thought, ‘what about the rest of the people in Lebanon?’, so we are bringing art to them, to public spaces,” she says. They created three clever videos to advertise for the exhibition, [one portraying a taxi driver](#), [another two old men playing backgammon](#) and [the third a barber](#), who know their art and proclaim that “art is for everyone.”



UK artist Thomas Houseago's "Spoon" is part of Samir Abillama's private collection

Sanayeh garden's 22,000 square meters accommodated the exhibition perfectly. Built during the Ottoman period in 1907, "Sanayeh" stems from the word creation in Arabic – which befits an art exhibition – and in 1989 it was renamed after assassinated President Rene Mouawad. Not only is the green space one of the few public gardens in the city, they also found a connection between the exhibition's theme and the garden. "[Sanayeh]

witnessed a lot of misery during the Lebanese Civil War, and hosted lots of people. Every tree can tell you a thousand stories,” says Halawi, adding, “It’s truly the symbol of resistance and persistence. We as Lebanese are the symbol of resistance and persistence; we keep on moving, we never stop.”



The inviting, largely-metallic installation by Ada Yu from Kazakhstan welcomes the public to step inside a reflective space of bent metal sheets | Photo: Greg Demarque

Many of the 24 artists, nine of whom are from Europe and the others from Lebanon or elsewhere in the region, were commissioned for their work, and several were required to set up their installations live in the garden 10 days prior to the inauguration. During that time many children asked the artists if they could help and were allowed to contribute, according to Halawi. Adults and children alike asked a lot of questions when they saw the artists, prompting a lot of positive interaction.



Nabil Helou's "Bench Sculptures" is one of the only pieces in the garden that was made especially for people to sit on | Photo: Greg Demarque

Halawi says on the day of the inauguration two ladies praised the organizers for their work, saying they didn't know that such things existed. "We want [the public] to feel at ease in their own space, looking at art, asking about the art and not feeling shy and undereducated. We wanted them to start appreciating art. This way, slowly, they'll know more and more about art," Halawi explains.



A giant dome made of wood and covered with Lebanese newspapers was made on site by France's Yok Yok | Photo: Greg Demarque

She says Art in Motion aims to instigate a change and inspire people to look at positive, beautiful things in Lebanon. “In Lebanon things have been moving backwards for some time, but we have the capability to look at the bright side,” she says, adding, “These artists are still working and art is beautiful. We believe in this project and in slowly changing the way the country is moving. This is our way of making a change.”

In addition to the artworks set up live in the garden, several workshops and performances were also scheduled throughout the duration of the exhibition, including arabic calligraphy and recycled art workshops, as well a performance where artist Zeina Hamady crafted ceramic bowls while audience members told her their life stories, etching each piece with what inspired her about the story. She later baked *saj* bread and filled the bowls with the bread for viewers to take home.



Mustafa Ali of Syria made this sculpture from scrap metal from his war-torn country



Lebanese artist Chaouki Choukini's wooden sculpture incorporates Arabic poetry | Photo: Greg Demarque

The artists included in the exhibition: Mustafa Ali (Syria), Ziad Antar (Lebanon), Bokja Design (Lebanon), Chaouki Choukini (Lebanon), Karine Debouzie (France), Nancy Debs Hadad (Lebanon), Yazan Halwani (Lebanon), Zeina Hamady (Lebanon), Ghaleb Amin Hawila (Lebanon), Nabil Helou (Lebanon), Thomas Houseago (United Kingdom), Abdel Rahman Katanani (Palestine), Vika Kova (The Netherlands), Hanaa

Malallah (Iraq), Randa Nehme (Lebanon), Marwan Rechmaoui (Lebanon), Lufti Romhein (Syria), Houmam Al Sayed (Syria), Xander Spronken (The Netherlands), Xavier Veilhan (France), Atelier Yok Yok (France), Ada Yu (Kazakhstan), Cathy Weiders (Belgium), Ghassan Zard (Lebanon).



"Totem" by Lebanese sculptor and painter Ghassan Zard | Photo: Greg Demarque



Lebanese artist Marwan Rechmaoui purposely asked that his concrete and mixed-media "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom" be placed facing Sanayeh's permanent Ottoman monument | Photo: Greg Demarque



One of Syrian artist Houmam Al Sayed's "Citezenno zero" sculptures are crushed figures representing loss of hope, but the upturned face symbolizing new beginnings | Photo: Greg Demarque



Bokja Design's interactive swing is a popular piece among playful groups | Photo: Greg Demarque



Belgium's Cathy Weyders made "Rescue Igloo, Moving Worlds" with life-jackets on site in the garden | Photo: Greg Demarque

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