

'Rebirth' Exhibition Commentary

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Having recently arrived in Beirut, one of the first things on my mind was to visit the 'Rebirth' exhibition that is currently showing at the Beirut Exhibition Center. I had heard great things about the event so far, and was fortunate enough to make it to Beirut in time before the end of the exhibition. More than 1000 people had attended the exhibition opening, a large number for any opening in Beirut. It is a positive sign that art events are generating more and more interest in the city.

'Rebirth: Lebanon 21st Century Contemporary Art' is an exhibition of works

by 49 contemporary Lebanese artists, on the theme of rebirth. Rebirth is a significant recurring theme in Lebanese history. Whether it has been man made disasters such as war, genocide, and conflict, or natural disasters including earthquakes and fires, Lebanon has always managed to rise again. With all the troubles surrounding Lebanon at these times, and the future of the country looking uncertain, it is important that these works remind the Lebanese public that Lebanon will rise again no matter what the circumstances. The artists chosen for this event represent some of the best Lebanese artists residing both in the country and abroad. The artists represented are of many different generations and backgrounds, some more established, others up-and-coming.



I drove through the beautifully renovated and ever-changing streets of

downtown Beirut, and saw from a distance a shiny metallic building I had never noticed before. This is the new Beirut Exhibition Center, built for the sole purpose of hosting some of the country's most important exhibitions. I parked the car opposite the building and upon walking up the center's steps was pleasantly surprised by the colorful sandbags placed just outside the doors. This work, by Randa Ali Ahmad, is very representative of Beirut. Throughout the Lebanese Civil War, and even in recent times, sandbags were very commonly seen throughout the city. This colorful twist on this typical Beirut landmark, added some life and color to this otherwise stark reminder of darker times.

Randa Ali Ahmad's 'Peaceful Shield', Acrylic on jute bags filled with red sand, 160 x 250 x 70 cm:



I walked through the glass doors and noticed the first painting on display. It's a work by Zad Moulataka. The remarkable blue color gives the painting a strong presence. The paint was thrown onto this canvas, which is reminiscent of how Jackson Pollock used to create his masterpieces.

Zad Moulataka's 'Sans Titre-Bleu', Acrylic, ink, and die on cardboard, 196 x 280 cm:



As I walked through the rest of the exhibition, there were several pieces that caught my eye. One of them was by young Palestinian artist Abdul Rahman Katanani, whose works have made their way to many great art fairs including Art Dubai. Born into a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, his work is created from materials he has gathered from the camps. Despite the

hardships of life in the camps, his work is always very positive; in this case a metallic sculpture of children playing and enjoying themselves.

Abdulrahman Katanani's 'Rebirth', mixed media wall sculpture, 260 x 300 cm:



Another great piece is a photo-collage by the young artist Christina Anid. This collage depicts the old movie theater in Downtown Beirut. It has obviously withstood a great deal over the years, which is evident from the overgrown shrubs and trees within the complex. It is also demonstrated to be a symbol of Lebanon, with cedar tree roots holding it down to the earth, as it floats in the sky. There are scattered cedar trees around the structure, and a Lebanese flag hanging on top, torn in half. It is perhaps a symbol that this damaged

building is a symbol of Lebanon and its roots, and what this nation has been through.

Christina Anid's 'She Will Win in the End', photo-collage, 140 x 180 cm:



I also enjoyed Zena Assi's 'Ya Beirut Ya Set Eldouniah.' In this mixed media and collage, Zena portrays Beirut as trying to give birth to its identity; trying to give life to its unborn children. According to Zena, "She (Beirut) is known in the flimsy and delicate state of pregnancy, almost bent in two but still standing on her feet, clinging to life and hope." Huguette Caland's tapestry-like piece of Beirut shows the many details of what the city used to look like in the early 20th century, including its elegant ottoman-style mansions and lush gardens, its sea, its mountains, and its trees. This piece is a mixture of

different patterns and shapes, an allude to the cosmopolitan nature of the city with its many religious communities living amongst each other.

Zena Assi's 'Ya Beirut Ya Set Eldouniah, Mixed Media and collage on canvas, 220 x 180 cm:



Huguette Caland's 'Beirut', Mixed Media on canvas, 159 x 435 cm:



Mouna Sehnaoui's beautiful piece 'Rebirth' reminds us of our ancestors and their intricate histories. Mouna's work deals with the many mythological characters that hailed from our region including Gilgamesh, Isis, Osiris, Adonis and Astarte. According to Mouna, "My work integrates, through the strata of time, the myths, legends and histories that deal with rebirth and the quest for resurrection and eternal life...Let History repeat itself and may we always rise up from our ashes like the legendary phoenix."

Mouna Sehnaoui's 'Rebirth', Mixed media on linen, 160 x 220 cm:



I really enjoyed the quality and variety of the work shown at this exhibition. I am also very happy that this exhibition took place in Beirut, to highlight both the country's vibrant art scene, as well as its capability to host large exhibitions in the future. The Beirut Exhibition Center has demonstrated to be an excellent space for the placement of future exhibitions. With the construction of Biel and the Art Center, the city has demonstrated that it has both the capacity and the means to host many large international art fairs. The 'Rebirth' exhibition was important to showcase Lebanese talent, as well as remind us of our nation's great ability to rise again. Having survived many earthquakes, wars, floods, famine, tsunamis, and more, it is testament to the Lebanese people's efforts to rebuild and revive, that there still is a Lebanon to speak of today. Make sure you stop by to check out this great exhibition before it ends on the 31st of July.

Here are some other works that I liked:

Theo Mansour's 'Mort et Transfiguration No. 3', Acrylic on Canvas, 140 x 180 cm:



Tanbak's 'Les Signes d'une Renaissance,' Mixed Media on Wood, 3 x (122 x 60 cm):



Jean-Marc Nahas' 'Renouvellement,' Mixed technique with ink, acrylic and black pen on wall, 200 x 240 cm:



Hannibal Srouji's 'Rebirth- Terror- Met,' Acrylic and fire on canvas, 232 x 142 cm:



*Rached Bohsali's 'Rebirth, Renewal and the Package that Comes with it...'
Acrylic on handmade paper on canvas, 210 x 165 cm:*

