

ART IN REVIEW

## Thin Skin: 'Six Artists from Beirut'

By Holland Cotter

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Since opening last year, Taymour Grahne Gallery has been a boon to New York, which has few other outlets for contemporary art from the Middle East. Its current show offers an instant education in new painting from, or about, Beirut, the cosmopolitan but perennially embattled capital of Lebanon.

The six artists brought together by Saleh Barakat, the founder of Agial Art Gallery in Beirut, know about battles: All were born in the 1970s, just before or during the Lebanese civil war, a time of religious strife, outside invasion, internal splintering and devastating violence. And in addition to sharing a generation, four of the painters are family: Ayman and Mohamad-Said Baalbaki are brothers, and Oussama Baalbaki is their cousin. Tagreed Darghouth is married to Ayman Baalbaki.

Their work, along with that of two colleagues, adds up to an ensemble portrait of a country under duress. Bunkerlike buildings in Omar Fakhoury's "Self-Defense" series carry the emblem of the Lebanese national flag: a cedar tree floating between red stripes. Small photo-realist images of surveillance devices by Ms. Darghouth hang high on a gallery wall. Mohamad-Said Baalbaki's pictures of piled-up luggage and clothing suggest possessions abandoned by refugees and ready to be burned to rubble.

The sense of menace builds in an image of a bombed-out bus by Oussama Baalbaki, and another of a grounded and charred plane by Ayman Baalbaki, who also paints a flag-wrapped missile poised for takeoff. The one figurative piece, by Nadia Safieddine, who was born in Senegal to a Lebanese family, is both the most abstract thing here and the most gruesome: Its turgidly brushed, blood-and-mud-colored nude bodies seem to be composed entirely of decaying and boneless flesh. Titled "Bourbier" — "quagmire" — the picture is, in this context anyway, like an unshakable postwar dream of trauma.

*Taymour Grahne Gallery*

*157 Hudson Street, near Laight Street, TriBeCa*

*Through Monday*

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