

AGENDA

LEBANON

MUSIC

‘Nostalgiat’
Metro al-Madina, Saroulla Building, -2, Hamra Street
Oct. 16, 10 p.m.
<http://metromadina.com>
This evening of live music from Tania Saleh will feature the singer’s travel back through her past, as she performs well-known English and Arabic songs she grew up listening to, encompassing jazz, bossa nova, rock, pop, tarab, dabke and mawwal. Saleh’s fourth album “Shwayit Souwar” is due for release later this year.

ART

‘Carte Blanche’
Metropolitan Art Society, Trabaud Street, Ashrafieh
Through Nov. 30
70-366-969
This exhibition featuring the works of Daniel Buren, Mohamed Bourouissa, Marie Bovo, Latifa Echakhch, David Hominal, Alicia Kwade and Claude Leveque is curated by Paris-based gallerist Kamel Mennour.

‘LOL’
Ayyam Gallery Beirut, Beirut Tower, Ground Floor, Zeitouneh Street
Through Oct. 24
01-374-450
Thematically speaking, the new paintings of Syrian artist Khaled Takreti seek to employ a postmodern aesthetic to evoke today’s desensitized, image-saturated age. LOL also marks the Beirut launch of a bilingual monograph surveying of the artist’s work since 2002.

‘Breath Is a Sculpture’
Beirut Art Center, Jisr al-Wati
Through Nov. 29
01-397-018
This exhibition of works by Arte Povera artist Giuseppe Penone mingles installations, performances and their photographic documentation. These works make the body (the artist’s and the spectator’s) at once the theme and subject of the work and a tool for measuring and investigating the world.

‘Terra Mare’
Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Karantina
Through Nov. 1
01-566-660
This solo exhibition of work by Scottish poet, writer, artist and gardener Ian Hamilton Finlay is curated by longtime associate Pia Simig. The artist’s first exhibition in the Middle East, it includes tapestries, neon installations, engraved poems on glass, sculptures and printed works from the 1960s to 2006, the year of his death.

‘An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar’
Galerie Tanit – Beirut, Armenia Street, Mar Mikhael
Oct. 8 until Nov. 28
76-557-662
Taryn Simon compiles an inventory of what lies hidden within U.S. borders, examining its culture through documentation of science, government, medicine, entertainment, nature, security and religion. Simon’s collection reveals and reflects upon that which is integral to America’s foundation, mythology and daily functioning.

JUST A THOUGHT

The definition of marriage cannot be disputed. It’s right there in black and white and it’s been the same since the start of Wikipedia.

Jesse Tyler Ferguson (1975-)
American actor

INTERVIEW

A Swiss-Lebanese fusion of language, art

‘Helvetic Zebra’ is a mini festival featuring performances, talks and workshops

By India Stoughton
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: The Helvetic Republic, aka Switzerland, is historically a zebra-less zone. This month, however, the striped African equid and the Swiss Republic are coming together at Jisr al-Wati’s STATION.

“Helvetic Zebra,” a monthlong exhibition accompanied by a week of performances, workshops and talks, aims to seek common ground between the contemporary art scenes in Switzerland and Lebanon.

Curated by Donatella Bernardi, a Swiss artist and digital media professor at Stockholm’s Royal Institute of Art, the project stemmed from STATION co-founder Nabil Canaan’s desire to explore his Swiss-Lebanese background.

An old friend of Bernardi’s, Canaan had been following her work for several years when he decided to approach her about organizing a Swiss-themed exhibition featuring work by international as well as local Lebanese artists.

“I was interested in showing the artistic side of Switzerland,” he says, “so I don’t have to keep explaining to people that it’s not just about cuckoo clocks and cows and chocolate and stuff ... We’ve taken a certain angle, which Donatella has curated. There’s a lot of constructivist, optical art and design elements.

“When we started discussing it we quickly steered away from the whole cliché of Lebanon as the Switzerland of the Middle East,” he adds, “and decided to look more at particularities that potentially bring the two countries together.

“One thing that stuck Donatella was the multilingual side of Lebanon [and] Switzerland. Based on that, she developed a whole discourse about artistic languages, whether visual, textual or sound.

“I mentioned to Donatella that Beirut was known as the publishing capital of the Middle East and from there she linked to the Most Beautiful Swiss Books project, and then typography, calligraphy and then she started building from there.”

She has assembled a “mini festival,” as she calls it, including work by sound, video and plastic artists, musicians, typographers and calligraphers. Stemming from a broad



The “mini festival” brings together the work of sound, video and plastic artists, musicians, typographers and calligraphers.

range of backgrounds, their work is united by a focus on language, whether visual, textual or oral.

“You can consider language as a medium,” Bernardi says, “like English or Arabic or French. You know some of them and you don’t know some others.

“Then a language is a formal game, and you can be seduced by the way it looks even if you don’t get the content ... There’s a gap between what you want to say and how you say it and I think that art has a capability ... to interpret something that is in between these two forms.”

One facet of the show is literary. The annual Most Beautiful Swiss Books competition, now in its 70th year, aims to highlight and reward innovations in typography and design. The 22 books awarded in 2014 will be on show as part of the exhibition, along with the 2013 catalog, which was designed by Maximage, a duo consisting of graphic designers David Keshavjee and Julien Tavelli.

Six artists, including Bernardi, will also be exhibiting work. The Lebanese scene is being represented by painter Oussama Baalbaki,

whose work Bernardi discovered while enjoying a drink at Abou Elie, a communist bar in Caracas.

Intrigued by the blend of realism with subtle surreal elements in the artist’s self-portraits, she says, she contacted him and determined he’d be a good fit for the show.

Also exhibiting is Swiss artist Philippe Decrauzat, known for his black-and-white wall paintings, optical illusions that play with retinal afterimages.

Decrauzat’s framed screen prints will be offset by Bernardi’s own contribution, two wall paintings inspired by British artist Bridget Riley.

“Basically I’m copying one of her pieces,” she says. “It’s called ‘Fete’ [party] and it’s not one of her most known pieces, in black-and-white. There is color and there is black-and-white that might be a zebra – it’s not.”

Bernardi, has delegated the realization of the work to a Syrian laborer, with whom she says she struggled to communicate, who hand mixed the colors to the nearest approximation. “He’ll be interpreting Bridget Riley’s work without even knowing about this woman,” she notes. “There’s a kind of margin

where something gets lost or translated and that’s very interesting.”

Paris-based Moroccan artist Mounir Fatmi’s video work “Technologia” will be tying together the focuses on op art and language. The work revisits 25 of Marcel Duchamp’s rotoreliefs in Arabic calligraphy.

Dunja Herzog will display site-specific sculptures and installations fabricated using found objects scavenged from Beirut streets. Turkish video artist Ali Kazma’s video art piece documents the practice of an Arabic calligrapher.

The artists will make several appearances during the opening week of the exhibition.

Maximage will be joining forces with Manuel Krebs, co-founder of book and typeface publisher NORM, to give a typography workshop, followed by a talk on type and design, during which they’ll be joined by local typographer Pascal Zoghbi and Yara Khoury, founder of Al Mohtaraf design house.

Bernardi will moderate a talk by Baalbaki and Herzog. Audiences can also attend a workshop on radio art with Laurent Schmid and Jonathan Frigeri of the LapTopRa-

dio collective.

The workshop will be followed by a performance of “The Submarine Report,” a live radio act combining experimental electronic music, spoken text and video projections.

Famed Swiss musician Franz Treichler will be creating live soundscapes to accompany a selection of 20th-century avant-garde films spanning the Dada movement.

The final day of live events will feature a music workshop led by Treichler, followed by a jam session. The exhibition will remain on show until Nov. 9.

Bernardi explains that the breadth of the project reflects an attempt to engage the widest possible audience. “The main problem in contemporary art is the audience ... There’s no point in doing a show if nobody’s coming to see it,” she shrugs. “My concern is to get a discussion started. I am not really interested in producing a show that remains in the specialized field.”

“**Helvetic Zebra**” runs at STATION until Nov. 9. For more information and to register for workshops please call 71-684-218 or visit www.stationbeirut.com.

REVIEW

Notes on uprooting dissent in Syria

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: “Daaesh.” Yassin Haj Saleh pauses as if the word, the Arabic acronym for ISIS, were a question in need of an answer.

“It’s a fitting name,” he answers himself, “for a monster.”

Haj Saleh is sitting in Douma, in the eastern Ghouta, some 10 kilometers from central Damascus. Several weeks later, he and Syrian filmmaker Ziad Homsy have made the journey from Douma to Raqqa.

“Daaesh,” Haj Saleh says, three months and several hundred kilometers beyond Raqqa, is “... the cancerous growth of our revolution.”

These remarks are recorded in “Our Terrible Country,” a documentary co-directed by Homsy and his countryman Mohammed Ali Atassi. The film had its world premiere this summer at the FIDMarseille International Film Festival, where it took the Competition Grand Prize.

This emotionally wrenching work will have its Beirut debut Tuesday evening at Metropolis Cinema-Sofil.

Haj Saleh is a Syrian intellectual and veteran dissident. He was first detained by the regime of Hafez Assad in 1980, at the age of 20, and wasn’t released until 1996. He is said to have been among the few intellectuals to have been involved in his country’s revolution since it began in 2011.

Some 28 years younger than Haj Saleh, the 20-something Homsy has also been involved in the Syrian revolution since it began life as a peaceful protest movement. The opening moments of “Country” – comprised of a report on a successful Free Syrian Army operation against a state-held position – features an interview with Homsy, then an FSA fighter.

By mid-2013, when the principal shooting of “Country” begins, Homsy has abandoned his Kalashnikov in favor of a camera.

“Country” is a road movie chart-



Yassin Haj Saleh, sitting, and Ziad Homsy, in a scene from “Our Terrible Country.”

ing the final arduous legs of Haj Saleh’s journey from rooted activist intellectual to deracinated political refugee. As it opens, he has already fled Damascus with his wife to join several other secular dissidents in Douma, which had been wrested from regime forces.

Douma isn’t safe, so he decides to travel north to his home town of Raqqa. By this point Homsy, who’s been asked to profile the intellectual on film, decides to tag along.

During the 19-day passage to Raqqa, they learn that the town is now under the control of Daaesh, which has kidnapped Haj Saleh’s brother Firas and cousin Ahmad.

After they arrive in Raqqa, and the house of Haj Saleh’s sister, Atassi joins the pair and the film becomes more obviously a study of Homsy and Haj Saleh’s relationship.

Like Atassi’s earlier work – the shorts “Ibn al-Am” (2001) and “Ibn al-Am Online” (2012), about Syrian dissident Riyad al-Turk, and his feature-length “Waiting for Abu Zayd” (2010), about Egyptian thinker Nasr

Hamed Abu Zayd – “Country” offers a portrait of an intellectual in the midst of political crisis.

It is somewhat more complex than these earlier efforts though, insofar as there are two filmmakers engaging with the central figure rather than Atassi alone. The film also bristles with urgency – a quality less evident in his first two works but obvious in “Ibn al-Am Online.”

Yet the sentiments driving all Atassi’s films are comparable. Like them, “Country” is less interested in documenting the ideas of the public intellectual – as he says: “Anyone can find your thoughts in your books.” – than he is in pushing the intellectual’s humanity into sharp relief.

Grim circumstance facilitates Atassi’s goal.

The journey to Raqqa is necessary but the road is deemed too dangerous for Haj Saleh’s wife, Samira Khalil, who remains in Douma. Though safer for the dissidents than regime-held territory, it’s evident that local residents haven’t welcomed Khalil and her like-minded friends and col-

leagues, like human rights lawyer Razan Zeitouneh, with open arms.

Showing Khalil and Zeitouneh pitching in on volunteer street-cleaning detail in Douma, Homsy asks an Islamist gentleman whether he’s told the Damascene women to wear hijab.

“That’s what people do in Douma,” the man replies. “They should be like us.”

“Do you like these people?” Homsy asks.

“Only God grants liking and disliking,” he replies.

“But they’re helping you,” Homsy persists. “Do you like them?”

“God protect our honor,” the man says.

These words, and the uncertainty surrounding the security of Samira Khalil and Razan Zeitouneh, reverberate through the rest of the film.

“We used to think we have one enemy,” Haj Saleh says, “the Nizam [state]. Now we have 1,000, not including the one inside us.”

“**Our Terrible Country**” screens at Metropolis Cinema-Sofil Tuesday at 8:15 p.m.

Nobel Literature Prize to be announced Thursday

STOCKHOLM: The winner of the Nobel Literature Prize will be announced Thursday, Oct. 9, the Swedish Academy said Monday.

Its permanent secretary Peter Englund will make the much-awaited announcement in Stockholm at 2 p.m. Beirut time.

The date for the literature prize is revealed only a few days in advance but is generally the first Thursday of Nobel week, while the dates for the other prizes are known several months ahead of time.

In line with tradition, the Swedish academy gave no indication of its choice for the literature prize.

It never reveals the names it is considering, and its deliberations are sealed for 50 years.

Critics suggested it was time for the academy to award an African writer

This year’s favorites include often touted Japanese author Haruki Murakami and Belarussian writer Svetlana Alexievich, another regular favorite among Nobel pundits.

Stockholm-based literary critics also suggested it was time for the academy to award an African writer such as Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong’o or the Somali author Nuruddin Farah.

Among the frequently mentioned candidates who are still waiting are: Czech author Milan Kundera, Albanian writer Ismail Kadare, Algerian novelist Assia Djebar and South Korean poet Ko Un. Swedish literature critics have also suggested Israeli writers Amos Oz and David Grossman, as well as Americans Richard Ford and Philip Roth.

On Saturday, Murakami was the favorite to win at betting firm Lad-brokes, followed by Djebar, Kadare and Syrian-born poet Adonis, pen name for Ali Ahmed Said. – *Agencies*