

13 Lebanese artists at Singapore Art Fair © 2019 - Art Radar

Lebanese contemporary artists are in the spotlight at the inaugural Singapore Art Fair.

As the inaugural edition of the Singapore Art Fair opens on 27 November 2014, the Lebanese Pavilion introduces 12 among the country's exciting contemporary artists working today, while the Video Projects sector premieres the work of a top Lebanese photographer.

Alfred Tarazi, 'A Nation's Inflation' series, Giclee print mounted on aluminium, 100 x 100 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Singapore Art Fair.

The [Singapore Art Fair](#), from 27 to 30 November 2014, brings to the city-state the best of contemporary art from the ME.NA.SA. region, reinforcing the cultural ties among the Middle East, North Africa and South and Southeast Asia. Hailing from Beirut, where it was founded in 2010 and runs every year as the [Beirut Art Fair](#), the event presents a national pavilion dedicated to a particular country's art. While this year's Beirut edition presented an India Pavilion, the Singapore one features a Lebanon

Pavilion, curated by [Janine Maamari](#), veteran collector of Lebanese art and founder of NGO [Liban Art](#). Themed “[Contemporary Lebanon: Art Beyond Violence](#)” (PDF download), the Pavilion spotlights twelve contemporary Lebanese artists represented by Lebanese and international galleries.

Roger Moukarzel, 'So Far, So Close', 2014, video. Image courtesy the artis and Singapore Art Fair.

In the press release for the Pavilion, Maamari explains:

This Pavilion will allow the audience to discover artists who are inspired by their heritage and the history of turmoil in their country, and have created works that are untainted by the currents of globalisation and defy all trends of popular culture. A common thread between the works of these artists – both new and experienced – is the expression of a deep concern for the present and a strong sentiment of attachment to their country and the future.

The artists on show express their concerns about the turmoil in the Middle

East and their life experiences in Lebanon, with works ranging from installation to photography, and painting to sculpture. Additionally, the fair's Journey into Video Art section features the world premiere of internationally renowned Lebanese photographer Roger Moukarzel's *So Far, So Close*.

Art Radar profiles the twelve artists participating in the Lebanese Pavilion and introduces the work of Roger Moukarzel.

Roger Moukarzel, 'So Far, So Close', 2014, video. Image courtesy the artist and Singapore Art Fair.

Roger Moukarzel

Born in Beirut, [Roger Moukarzel](#) developed a passion for photography at age fifteen. In his early work, he was devoted to the documentation of the struggles during the civil war. As a photojournalist, he witnessed the violence, pain and suffering of the people. His direction has since changed, and he now creates work that celebrates life and beauty.

So Far, So Close documents Moukarzel's journey across the world during which he captured more than 50,000 images. By cross-fading the superimposed individual images, Moukarzel has created poetic works that bear witness to the richly intertwined cultures across the world.



Laudi Abilama, 'A Study of Lee Kwan Yew', 2014, pigment and mother of pearl on paper, 140 x 120 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Singapore Art Fair.

Laudi Abilama

Born in 1981, [Laudi Abilama](#) received an MA in Arts and Media from Farnham's University College for the Creative Arts, United Kingdom. She spent most of her life in the United Kingdom, where her early paintings were influenced by her father's practice. Several years ago, Abilama moved to Lebanon, as in England she felt isolated from her cultural background. The artist, who describes her work as "Arabian Pop", [says about her move](#):

Living in the West tends to strip you of your cultural identity and being an artist, this began to make me feel as if I was becoming part of the system, as a digit, rather than an individual.

Orientalism and Arab culture are great sources of inspiration for the artist, who often focuses on stereotypes within Arab society, and critiques them in subtle ways. Her work *A Study of Lee Kwan Yew* (2014) draws a parallel between Singapore and Lebanon, and is a portrait of a "dedicated leader, as a symbol of political modernism and democracy."

Said Baalbaki, 'Belt', 2010-2011, oil on canvas, 200 x 160 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Singapore Art Fair.

Mohamad Said Baalbaki

Born in 1974, Berlin-based painter and interdisciplinary artist [Mohamad Said Baalbaki](#) engages with issues of historical accuracy, institutional power and social memory. His early work drew on his childhood experiences during the Lebanese Civil War and Israeli occupation. His paintings are often devoid of people and depict piles of items – suitcases, shoes, clothing and other belongings – as symbols of the lost, unrecorded and forgotten stories of history.

Recently, Baalbaki has started working with installation, such as *Al Buraq* (2010-ongoing), which explores the ways in which histories are written and presented to the public within the context of the museum, and questions its institutional authority and its reception by society.

Tagreed Darghout, 'Nuclear Craters' series (left and right), 2013, acrylic on paper, four paintings, each 76 x 54 cm; 'Brighter than a Thousand Suns', (centre), 2013, acrylic on paper, 76 x 54 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Singapore Art Fair.

Tagreed Darghout

Born in 1979 in Saida, Lebanon, [Tagreed Darghout](#) tackles themes of universal significance related to the human condition. She received a BA in Painting and Sculpture from the Lebanese Institute of Fine Arts, Beirut, in 2000, and studied Space Art at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. Darghout studied under prominent German-Syrian artist Marwan Kassab Bashi at the Ayloul Summer Academy, at Darat Al Funoun, Amman, Jordan in 2000-2001.

In 2011, Beirut's Agial Art Gallery held a solo exhibition of Darghout's

work, entitled [“Canticles of Death”](#), featuring works that addressed issues around the British and American nuclear arsenals since WWII. She engaged with themes of death and questioned the reasons for naming bombs after human beings, animals and other things. In her *Brighter than a Thousand Suns* (2013) and *Nuclear Craters* (2014) series, Darghout depicts nuclear mushrooms and the craters left by nuclear destruction. She quotes Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, to support her work’s concept: “[...] I am an icy scientist, for me their war is a laboratory experiment.”

[Click here to watch ‘The Wind Portal’ by Najla El Zein Studio at the V&A Museum on Vimeo](#)

Najla El Zein

Born in 1983, Parisian-Lebanese artist and designer [Najla El Zein](#) received a BA in Product Design and an MA in Interior Architecture from Ecole

Camondo in Paris. In 2011, she founded Najla El Zein Design Studio in Beirut. Much of her work explores the ways in which we experience our surroundings through our senses. In 2013, she presented a work for the [London Design Festival](#) at the V&A entitled *The Wind Portal*, an eight-metre high gateway of 5,000 handmade paper windmills turning in the breeze. The installation was meant to make people feel their transitioning between two spaces.

To Pet or Not To Pet (2014) is a collection of apparently furry beasts, made of thousands of prickly toothpicks. At first appearing irresistibly soft and furry, upon closer inspection, the creatures reveal their true menacing nature:

[The work] challenge[s] our perception of reality and the limit of appearances, pushing us to sharpen our senses, question our feelings and go beyond the obvious.

Omar Fakhoury, 'War Pattern', 2006, serigraphy installation, 170 x 95 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Singapore Art Fair.

Omar Fakhoury

Born in 1979 in Beit Chabab, Lebanon, [Omar Fakhoury](#) received a BA and an MA in Fine Arts from La Sorbonne in Paris. His work addresses the multiple aspects of war and its effects on the country and its population. His solo exhibition [“Vivarium”](#) (2012) at Agial Art Gallery explored the shelters and habitats of Beirut’s sentries: the army, construction sites and car parking security guards. Fakhoury portrayed these simple, ghostly structures, half-erased by the city’s fast urbanisation and vertical high-rise development, yet more permanent than its residential homes constantly destroyed to make way for new buildings.

Fakhoury’s work was recently part of [“Thin Skin: Six Artists from Lebanon”](#) (2014) at Taymour Grahne in New York, with his *Self-Defense* series of paintings of bunker-like buildings carrying the emblem of the Lebanese national flag: a cedar tree floating between red stripes.

War Pattern (2006) is an installation derived from more than 3000 bands of breaking news taken from various local, Pan-Arab and international TV channels, and presents a 33-day account of the Israeli war on Lebanon in July 2006. *July Dream* (2006-2008) is a video animation that attempts to rebuild a dream the artist had one night in July 2006.

Bassam Geitani, 'War Victims', 2013, wall installation, Super mirror, stainless steel, 145 x 155 x 24 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Singapore Art Fair.

Bassam Geitani

[Bassam Geitani](#) was born in 1962 and received a BA and an MA in Fine arts from La Sorbonne in Paris. He works in diverse media, including painting, performance and installation. As a painter, Geitani questions the very nature of art: he explores the potentiality of materials to tell stories about an artwork, by manipulating the canvas, such as burning, and layering paint with other materials like rusted nails and glitter. His installation work often incorporates optical illusions through mirrors.

The wall installation *War Victims* (2013) investigates the relationship between the static image and its “referent” on a three-dimensional form. Geitani questions the ‘physical reality’ of today’s images, most of which are produced as millions of bits of electronic mathematical data termed pixels.

[Click here to watch ‘Sky Under Surveillance’ by Dima Hajjar on youtube.com](#)

Dima Hajjar

Born in 1968 in Beirut, [Dima Hajjar](#) graduated from the Lebanese American University. Her work is deeply rooted in autobiography and everyday life experiences, encompassing both urban and personal memories, and blurs the boundaries between reality and illusion, truth and fiction, recorded and invented histories. [Hajjar says about her work:](#)

I get my ideas usually from urban and personal life. Observations, photographs, memories, drawings, and perhaps pieces of unresolved works start confronting each other on a canvas. Exploring the possibilities of signs and the space animated by them, I start to live my work along with my daily life as a series of events.

The site-specific installation *Sky Under Surveillance* (2011) at Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut, merged inside and outside, the transparent photographic prints installed on the skylight's windows projecting their images in the gallery space with each passing hour of sunlight, and creating an optical illusion or a phantom urban presence in a play of light and shadow. *The Gadget Monument* (2014) is a celebration of “the triumph of corruption, that of repression and failed dreams,” as well as “the triumph of watching and being watched”.



Marwan Sahmarani, 'Crime and Punishment', 2013-2014, oil on canvas, 250 x 400 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Singapore Art Fair.

Marwan Sahmarani

Born in 1970 in Lebanon and educated in Paris, [Marwan Sahmarani](#) is primarily a painter, but also works with ceramics, sculpture and performance. His work relates to recurrent themes in art history, as well as contemporary life and personal experiences. Sahmarani draws from both western and oriental influences, merging Islamic and Mesopotamian art and iconography with that of ancient Greece, Rome and the great masters of the Western Renaissance.

Crime and Punishment (2013-2014) captures “the everyday madness of the dehumanizing war”: a gang breaks into a house, attacking and abusing a family. Sahmarani plays with the concepts surrounding the cyclical nature of human life – martyrdom, damnation, war – and the repetition of history, exploring issues of politics, sociology, war and sexuality.

Nadia Safieddine, 'Vincent', 2014, oil on canvas, 225 x 196 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Singapore Art Fair.

Nadia Safieddine

Berlin- and Beirut-based [Nadia Safieddine](#) was born in 1973 in Dakar, Senegal and received a Diploma in Painting from Beirut's University of Fine Arts in 1997. Working in painting and sculpture, Safieddine is also an accomplished pianist. Music is one of the main sources of inspiration for her artistic practice, which is a personal pursuit of self-discovery and self-actualisation.

Her paintings are expressions of the complexity of being and of existence, visible in her use of the impasto technique. Thickly textured layers of paints take on an almost relief-like quality, making her subjects gain a three-dimensional appearance. The expressionist visuality of her paintings, as in *Vincent* (2014), lends itself for the portrayal of loss, suffering and violence of war, as well as for the ambiguity of an uncertain future.

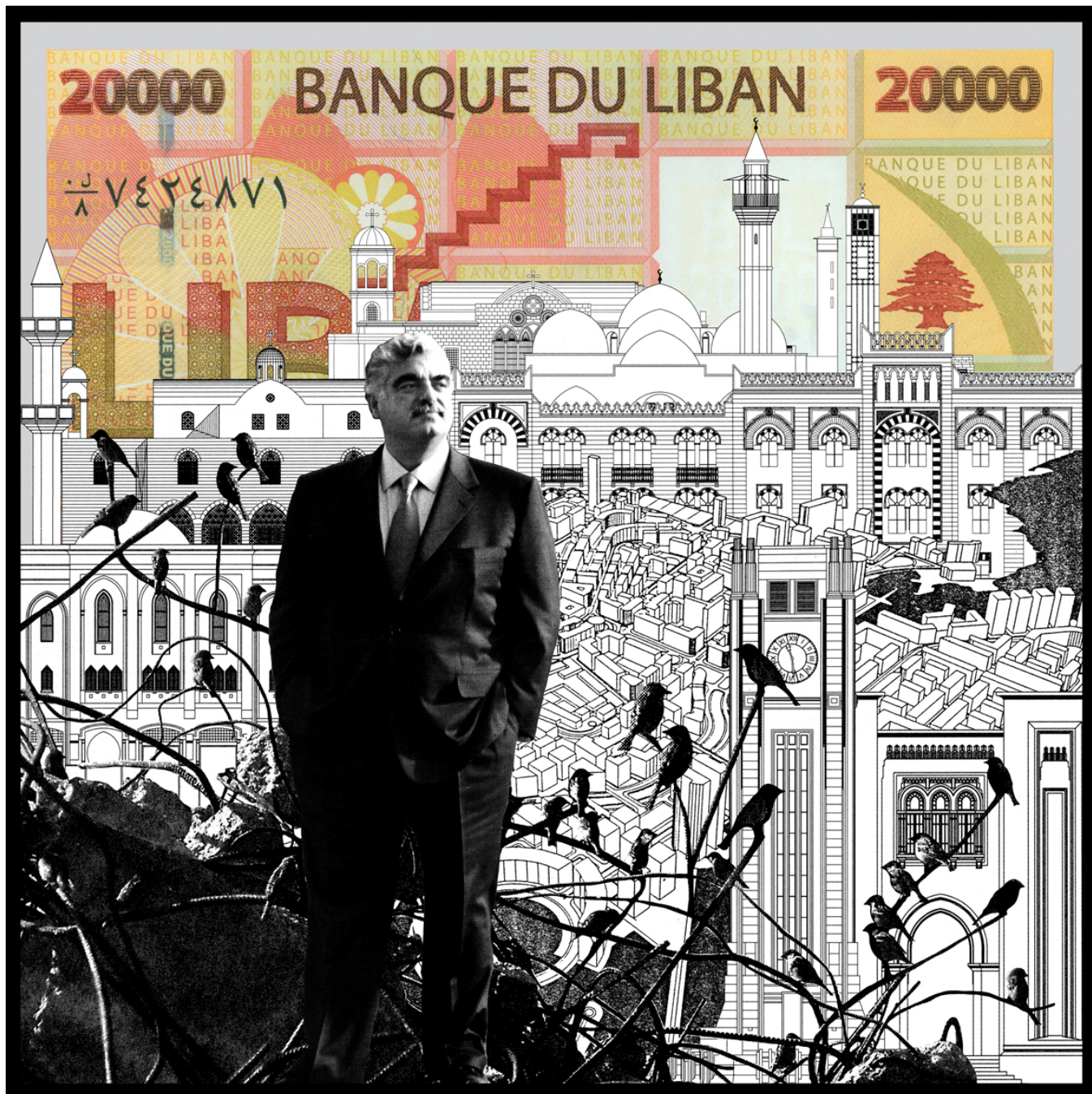


Hiba Kalache, 'Historic Dialogue', 2014, archival acrylic and permanent inks, aquarelle, gouache and glitter on paper, 2 drawings, each 30 x 130 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Singapore Art Fair.

Hiba Kalache

Interdisciplinary artist [Hiba Kalache](#) was born in Beirut and received her MFA from the California College of the Arts in San Francisco. She has lived for most of her life, only recently relocating to Beirut. Kalache analyses the various and complex influences of the private sphere and personal definitions of “home”.

Her first solo exhibiton [“Alternate Worlds”](#) (2010) at The Running Horse, Beirut, featured her intricate drawings addressing the rapid socio-political transformations taking place in the Arab region. Kalache’s latest project “The Impermanence of States” relates to the history of the ongoing disruptions and tragedies around the subject of assassinations, suicide and car bombs, a “regular feature” of Beirut’s political scene, and the enigma surrounding these events. Consequently, the series, which includes *Historic Dialogues* (2014), examines adopted physical and street security measures “as a major re-structuring force of Beirut’s cityscape and everyday life.”



Alfred Tarazi, 'A Nation's Inflation' series, Giclee print mounted on aluminium, 100 x 100 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Singapore Art Fair.

Alfred Tarazi

Born in 1980 in Beirut, [Alfred Tarazi](#) graduated in Graphic Design from the American University of Beirut in 2004. His work engages with memories of the civil war, wherein he positions himself as the “instigator” trying to understand and reconnect with a time of conflict that tore his country apart. Working with a variety of media, including photography, sculpture, digital collage and mixed media installation, Tarazi constructs altered

perceptions of the political, geographical and social landscapes in post-war Lebanon.

Tarazi's digital collages, for instance, superimpose pre- and post-war images, re-enacting past events and situations, and revealing uncanny circumstances. He combines scattered fragments of collective and personal memories in an attempt to rearrange the chaos and to make sense of senseless acts of violence.

His "A Nation's Inflation" series (2010-2011) addresses Lebanon's contemporary history of prolonged periods of civil unrest, war and violence and questions the 'cost' of war and terror in monetary terms. The Lebanese *lira* bills become the canvas onto which Tarazi narrates the country's history, from its creation to its gradual slip into chaos.

Christine Kettaneh, 'Soap Coins', 2014, laser-engraving on soap recto-verso, six coins, 6.5 cm diameter each, edition 4/4. Image courtesy the artist and Singapore Art Fair.

Christine Kettaneh

[Christine Kettaneh](#) received a BFA from the Lebanese American University (2007) and an MFA from Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design (2013). Previously, she was educated in Economics both in Beirut and at the London School of Economics. Kettaneh says about her practice:

The visual, the research and the writing in my practice inform each other. The verb 'to essay' means, "to attempt at;" I like to consider my art, like the essay, as attempts at understanding.

Going back to reconsider her original education in economics, *Soap Coins* (2014) simultaneously represents a “conceptual and sculptural analytics of the vocabulary of economics”. Soap coins bear laser-engraved terms such as “equilibrium”, “volatility”, “maximizing”, “invisible hand”, “liquidity” and “elasticity”. Kettaneh explores the ways in which the meaning of histories and concepts can change:

[Kettaneh] articulates the need to transgress the limits set up by the grammar of conflict and emerge with new points of departure and destination, challenging the normative view of history as the mere product of linguistic frames, trajectories and contingencies.

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