



User Name Password

Log in

Help

Remember Me?

What's New?

Forum

New Posts

FAQ

Calendar

Community

Forum Actions

Quick Links

Advanced Search

Forum 2013 December 2013

Art: A roadmap for Arab modernism: Paul Guiragossian Exhibition

If this is your first visit, be sure to check out the **FAQ** by clicking the link above. You may have to **register** before you can post: click the register link above to proceed. To start viewing messages, select the forum that you want to visit from the selection below.

Results 1 to 1 of 1

### Thread: Art: A roadmap for Arab modernism: Paul Guiragossian Exhibition

Thread Tools

Display

12-01-2013, 07:02 PM

#1

Kalantarian Kevo

Guest

#### Art: A roadmap for Arab modernism: Paul Guiragossian Exhibition

The Daily Star (Lebanon)  
November 29, 2013 Friday

A roadmap for Arab modernism

Jim Quilty

Paul Guiragossian made several journeys. You could argue his life was a series of migrations.

BEIRUT: Paul Guiragossian made several journeys. You could argue his life was a series of migrations. The son of Armenian genocide survivors that had resettled in Jerusalem, he moved to Beirut in late 1947, fleeing the instability that marked the late Mandate period. The artist's studies took him to Italy, then to France, and from 1989 to 1991 he lived in Paris. He then returned to Lebanon, where he died two years later.

Guiragossian's circuitous passage from Jerusalem to Beirut was mirrored by his artistic transhumance from figuration to abstraction - from portraiture and ensemble depictions of discernibly human figures, to forms whose emotive power rests in their want of individual features.

It is the shared view of Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath that this negotiation between abstraction and figuration lays at the heart of his work.

Fellrath and Bardaouil are co-curators of "Paul Guiragossian, The Human Condition," the retrospective exhibition now up at the Beirut Exhibition Center. It is comprised of over 100 paintings and works on paper, many of them never before exhibited. Sampling works from five decades of production, it is the most comprehensive Guiragossian retrospective to date.

Timed to mark the 20th anniversary of the artist's death, "Condition" has been staged in collaboration with the Paul Guiragossian Foundation - the source of some 80 percent of the works on display - and is a prelude to a comprehensive monograph on Guiragossian's life and work, expected in 2014.

Though retrospectives are inherently historical, Bardaouil and Fellrath have sidestepped chronology as an organizing principle.

"We thought it reflects his approach to linearity much better if we were to use a thematic approach," Bardaouil says. "He used to say there is no before; there is no tomorrow. Art from the Lascaux cave is as contemporary as art done by an artist living today."

The curators have chosen to subdivide "Condition" into eight thematic

sections - Self, Family, Woman, Theater, Faces, Despair, Faith and Life. Each is hung in its own gallery, a contextual ecosystem for this facet of Guiragossian's work, anchored by one or two recognized master works. Thoughtful quotations from the artist festoon the gallery walls, suggesting something of the humane intellect behind the paintings and sketches.

"We feel that curating an exhibition is very much like composing a painting," Bardaouil says.

"We try to create a fluid semiotics that allows the viewer to subconsciously go with what you are trying to say, without being too didactic.

"We wanted to create this juxtaposition, between what you first see when you walk here -" he gestures to one of the figurative canvasses in the "Family" section, " - and what you see here with this [abstract] piece in the back. Automatically your eye picks up on the three vertical figures. It's a similar palette and you don't need too much explanation to understand that this abstraction is taking the human figure to a new place."

In thematic and spatial terms, this modular approach to the BEC's otherwise warehouse-like space is a curatorial tour de force. Clustering Guiragossian's works within more intimate spaces makes their digestion a more pleasant and informative experience.

Discrete art historical interventions, in the form of a handful of works by Guiragossian's modernist contemporaries - Khalil Saleeby, Saliba Douaihy, Mustapha Farroukh and Cesar Gemmayel - provide further context.

"This is something that connects to our practice," Bardaouil says, "to

use this retrospective as an introduction to the study of modernity in the Arab world.

"Most times you see artists in complete isolation ... You don't get a glimpse of how they sat within a tradition of art-making that is relevant to this particular part of the world. That's something we wanted to avoid.

"The other thing is that most of the time comparisons [between the exhibiting artist and his contemporaries] are either too simplistic or too West-East. It was important for us to use this exhibition as a little opening into a complex and diverse art history that was sometimes in conflict with other art histories, sometimes in dialogue."

Art Reoriented - as Bardaouil and Fellrath's multidisciplinary curatorial project is called - are habitués of the MENA's contemporary art scene. This helps explain the echoes of contemporary art practice that are audible in this modernist retrospective.

Bardaouil and Fellrath's recent projects include Akram Zaatari's "Letter to a Refusing Pilot," the video installation at the heart of the Lebanese pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennial.

At Doha's Mathaf in 2012, the team curated "Tea with Nefertiti," a critical engagement with the narratives surrounding Egyptian art.

In this respect, "Condition" could be seen as a way of taking some contemporary art talking points and pursuing them within a modernist context.

"Whenever you talk about contemporary art - when it comes to places considered peripheral to the centers of artistic production - there's this underlying assumption that it's something that doesn't

have a background," Bardaouil says. "It's as if there was this gap between what we consider classical Islamic art and contemporary art.

"But there's an entire century in the middle that is a total limbo. It's not only something that people overseas assume about the region. Unfortunately, it's something many people from this region believe as well."

The curators view "Condition" as an opportunity to reintroduce the artist's work to the Lebanese public, and so have drawn upon PGF resources to devote a gallery to a Mac-driven biographical and archival annex, to complement and contextualize the works.

It could be a pragmatic response to the pathology about the dearth of archives and its impact upon the Lebanese condition, a motif in the practices of reconstruction-era Lebanese artists.

Rupture is a term commonly associated with the contemporary art of the '90s generation. Critically informed and cosmopolitan, favoring performance, video and photography, it apparently reflected the psychic and aesthetic disjuncture of the war years more than any dialogue with the country's modernists.

Some of these artists did gesture to the rupture. The thoughtfully image-critical works of Walid Sadek provide a case in point. "Love Is Blind" (2006), for instance, consists of exhibition tags that nod poetically (with irony or reverence) to the landscapes of Mustafa Farroukh, without pictorial references.

Art Reoriented has hung "Antiques," the central frame of a Guiragossian triptych that served as a backdrop for Ussama al-Arif's 1970 play "Idrab al-Haramiyya." The two other parts of the

trptych  
were lost in the Civil War.

"Till and I were thinking we want to emphasize that moment of rupture," Bardaouil says. "We wanted to emphasize the absence of these narratives."

The lone panel to survive the Civil War, "Antiques" hangs from the ceiling, flanked by a pair of empty frames - a conceptual rupture made literal.

"Paul Guiragossian, The Human Condition" is up at the Beirut Exhibition Center until Jan. 6. For more information see <http://beirutexhibitioncenter.com/exhibitions/showing-now>.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Article.aspx?id=239295#axzz2mAHzG4Jd>

**Similar Threads:**

**'Soviet Modernism 1955-1991: Unknown Stories' Exhibition, Vienna**

**Paul Guiragossian's Painting To Be Auctioned At Matthew's Galleries**

**Paul Guiragossian's Painting Sold For \$242,500 At Dubai's Christie's**

**Paul J. Sullivan: The importance of Turkey to the Arab world**

**Exhibition of Jean Paul Guiragossian in Abu Dhabi**

[Reply With Quote](#)

Quick Navigation

[December 2013](#)

[Top](#)

[« Previous Thread](#) | [Next Thread »](#)

**Posting Permissions**



You may not post new threads

**BB code** is On

**Smilies** are Off

You may not post replies

**[IMG]** code is Off

You may not post

**[VIDEO]** code is