

# THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Print

## Three brave new exhibitions of art

🕒 Jan. 17, 1998 | 12:00 AM

Three exhibitions this week, ranging from the figurative to the abstract and showing in three distinctively different galleries, serves as an introduction to Lebanon's growing art scene.

Galerie d'Art Bekhazi, long-established as a purveyor of pseudo-classical art, complements its exhibition offerings with a serious line of art-related services. If you're looking for an antique frame to dignify that portrait of your grandfather, if your painting has suffered the damages of time and needs restoration or if you want to unload an object d'art that no longer appeals to you, try Bekhazi.

In its function as a showplace and forum of art, the Bekhazi gallery energetically promotes Culture with a capital C. It not only puts up exhibits of painting and sculpture but also offers a programme of poetry, musical recitals, discussions and book signings.

The art it shows is conservative-modern, its clientele equally reserved in taste. This week it opened a memorial exhibit of the work of Ibrahim Marzouk, an artist whose life was cut short by a bomb in 1975 while he was waiting to buy bread for his family.

Marzouk was what I would call a people's painter. In charcoal or watercolour sketches and in oils on canvas, he rendered the scenes of everyday life around him with ardent empathy a bustling marketplace, narghili-smoking men relaxing in a cafe, autumn hills and portraits of his artists and friends.

Painted with a loose brush in a post-impressionist style, the work is reminiscent of Matisse. But unlike the bright, joyous tonalities of Matisse, Marzouk's colours are subdued, their mood sombre, introspective and drenched in pervasive streams of sadness.

Galerie Epreuve d'Artiste, now in a new and much more commodious space just down the street from its old locale, is one of the most popular galleries in town.

Amal Traboulsi, director and owner of the gallery, is a woman with a talented eye for turning art into ambiance. Witness her innovative staging of paintings, sculpture and ceramics on display in the two showrooms adjoining the gallery's main exhibition space.

Traboulsi is eclectic in choosing the artists she exhibits, showing total abstractions one week and straight-from-nature figurations the next. She has more artists knocking on her door than she can handle and is booked solid well into 1999. Epreuve d'Artiste shows are short-lived, 11 or 12 days at the most.

Exhibiting this week is Vera Mokbel, a painter of romantic spirit. The first piece, a gouache hanging next to the entrance, said it all. Circling a composition of paint tubes and brushes, music bars and flowers, floated the words Music, Love, Colour, Dream.

Mokbel's favoured theme is flowers, especially red ones, spilling out of bowls or stretched across fields. In most of her oils, the flowers are poised, intent on affirming their beauty. Two large landscapes in gouache are more authentic in feeling. In these, Mokbel's hand is relaxed; the brush strokes flow in abandon across the fields, sparkling and fresh in colour.

Galerie Janine Rubeiz, directed and owned by Nadine Begdache, is well on its way to proving itself as the elite in professionalism among galleries. It chooses its artists with careful consideration and presents their work with attention to all the details involved in

producing a well-organised exhibition.

Invitations are always sent out in good time; informative press kits and photographs on the artist are always distributed to the media. In displaying the art, the gallery space is always adapted (sometimes with moveable walls) to show the work at its best.

In scheduling exhibitions, Nadine takes it slow and easy. Shows usually run for a month, giving the public ample time to see them. Which also creates a long waiting list for artists wanting to exhibit there like apply now and think two years.

A gallery's prestige and character is built on the art it shows. At Galerie Janine Rubeiz, the preference tends to veer towards the avant-garde. Nadine will pick top-of-the-line established artists, but also likes taking chances on the unusual or the unknown.

This month's exhibition is made up of a selection of works by four prominent Lebanese names, all mature in the experience of producing art. One is semi-figurative, two are abstract expressionists and the fourth is into assemblage installations.

Said Akl, who in the past several years has been plagued with illness, has collaged into provocative compositions all the small notations in colour and form that his debilitated physical condition was able to produce. Abstractions of Arabic calligraphy combine with human figurations in compositions of assertive substance and studied design.

Yvette Ashkar shows two canvases. One is typical Ashkar abstract projectiles of slashed colour soaring through space. The second piece introduces a new concept. The object-in-space image is gone and we descend into an earthbound world of dense, textured walls, geometrically ordered and static in movement. Does this foretell a new direction in her work? Only time will tell.

Shafic Abboud, dean of Lebanon's abstract expressionists is represented by two large oils and several small egg temperas. Abboud is a tender colourist; even his blacks hold the quality of soft, layered flesh. And his expressionism, though seemingly abstract, is always rooted in realities of experience.

Huguette Caland, another expatriate Lebanese who is living in California, continues with coloured ink drawings on wood. The entire gallery wall becomes her canvas; the thin, vertical strips of wood, laced in abstract whisperings of subtle colour, hang in groupings of two, three, five or six, standing tall and still like sentinels of ordered thought.

*Marzouk at Galerie d'Art Bekhazi, until January 24. Mokbel at Galerie Epreuve d'Artiste until January 24. Akl, Ashkar, Abboud and Caland at Galerie Janine Rubeiz, until January 31.*

---

Copyrights 2017, The Daily Star - All Rights Reserved  
17/01/1998