

# Lebanese exhibit plunges viewers into a world of emotions

Inspired by music and poetry, Zurayk in her artwork highlights the influences and themes that gave shape to a lifetime of painting.

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Face to face with art. Visitors look at paintings by Lebanese-American artist Afaf Zurayk at Saleh Barakat Gallery in Beirut. (Saleh Barakat Gall

BEIRUT - Black and white, shades of charcoal grey and strong emotions swaying between sadness, fear, longing and homesickness dominated "Return Journeys," a



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**Samar Kadi**  
**(/samar-kadi)**



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**AW** Artist and poet Afaf Zurayk's artistic journey spanning more than three decades.

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Curated by Sylvia Agemian, the show at Sareh Barakat Gallery in Beirut plunges viewers into the very heart of the artist's emotions, unveiling through a variety of media, cycles, stages and themes, works that are meditative and spiritual while also delicate and powerful.

"Here the viewer comes face to face with an autobiographical art marked by events that shaped the painter's sensibility," Agemian said.

"Afaf Zurayk has translated into forms her aspirations, her impulses, her suffering and her fears, her dreams and her nightmares and, on the threshold of danger, her anxiety about the fate of man."

Inspired by music and poetry, Zurayk in her artwork highlights the influences and themes that gave shape to a lifetime of painting.

"The Places I Have Been" is a series of 12 portraits that expresses an emotional state represented by different faces and people.

"I painted the portraits separately, then I placed them altogether to show the different emotions I have experienced throughout a year," Zurayk said of a piece done in Beirut in 2012 in charcoal mixed with turpentine. "You see sad faces, pensive faces, all sorts of faces but unfortunately we don't see very happy faces."

The paintings are titled

“Life is a Continuous Horror Story.” “It is a dichotomy between the darkness and then love, beauty and tenderness,” Zurayk said. “It was a bad time, we were hearing a lot about war and murder and I was extremely agitated and troubled. It is normal being in this part of the world.”

The “Fear Triptych” painting hanging next to an excerpt from Zurayk’s poem is another expression of the artist’s sentiments of chaotic and troubled fear. Emotional outpouring and tremendous energy emanate from the pieces. “The more you look at them you get to see much more details like bodies and heads. You have to allow yourself to go into the piece, not the piece coming into you,” Zurayk explained.

“Ombres” (French for “Shadows”) is a series of 52 small paintings in charcoal and pastel belonging to the permanent collection of the Palais Sursock Museum. The works depicting abstract faces and shoulders are installed in a Plexiglas structure.

“I made these as a sort of exercise for myself when I was in Washington, basically painting on a specific size, specific topic, which is the head and the shoulders, specific medium, which is ink and water and some pastels,” Zurayk said.

“I wanted to see how many variations I could do with such limitations. It was also my emotional state over a whole year again. If you play around with the Plexi structure you have the light playing with these portraits and they become

viewer. They are interactive. The viewer can interact with them."

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A quadriptych that changes from being more concrete to total abstraction summarises relationships. "It starts with the body and a strong feeling of the physical, moves into the psychological as well as the physical, then it shifts completely into the emotional and then finally to the transcendental, spiritual. That's how relationships usually flow," Zurayk said.

"I called it 'Of Milk and Merging Mirrors' because we are each other's mirrors and when we have a relationship I see myself in the other person and the other person sees himself in me."

Pieces from the "Washington Spring" series that were showcased in the artist's first exhibition in Washington depict feelings of nature in a foreign place.

"You need to feel at home in nature so that you can feel at home in a new place," Zurayk said of the 1991 paintings.

"The spring in Washington bursts in colours and I was trying to make myself at home by bringing images from my life in Washington and images from my life in Beirut putting them together in one. It was a kind of a dream."

The most recent work, "Quietude," sees the artist settling in her emotions.

"After all these strong feelings, I took the pencil and the brush. It was just a matter of describing absolute space and serenity," she said.

**AW** The Arab Weekly  
Samar Kadi (/samar-kadi) Beirut with a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts in 1970 and pursued graduate studies at Harvard University, obtaining a master's degree in Fine Arts in 1972.

She has had many solo exhibitions, both in Beirut and Washington. She has participated in a number of group shows, notably "Forces of Change" in 1994 at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington.



Written By

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