



Pavilion of Lebanon

52nd Venice Biennale

Press Release

Exhibition Title: **Foreword**

Artists: **Fouad Elkoury, Lamia Joreige, Walid Sadek, Mounira Al Solh, Akram Zaatari**

Commissioners: **Saleh Barakat, Sandra Dagher, Vittorio Urbani**

Curators: **Saleh Barakat, Sandra Dagher**

Management in Venice by: **Nuova Icona associazione culturale per le arti, Venice**

Place: **Former Birreria Deher, Giudecca Island.**

Date: **June 8 – September 30, 2007 (Opening June 7th, 2007)**

The Venice Biennale is unreservedly one of the most prestigious and renowned international events in contemporary art. This year is the 52nd edition of the international art exhibition, directed by American curator Robert Storr.

For the first time, Lebanon will be officially present with its own pavilion, a 300 m² space located in the former Birreria Deher in Giudecca Island.

The exhibition "Foreword" gathers five artists, whose work covers a number of artistic practices: personal narratives, acts of bearing witness, collecting testimonies, and cutting through the skin of political turmoil and historical events to hit the bone of intimate expression.

The artists commissioned for the Lebanese pavilion come from different backgrounds, work in different media, and are at varying stages of their respective careers. More than that, however, they are all, each in their own fashion, questioning the formation and experience of self, individualism, and citizenship in ways that are illuminating well beyond Lebanon's borders.

This exhibition in the first-ever Pavilion of Lebanon presents five distinct yet related bodies of work that mark different attempts to answer a similar set of questions – all of which revolve around a more general query, where to begin?

Parallel to the exhibition are projections on the mezzanine level, which pull together a collection of works in video that have been created in Lebanon. These videos themselves bear witness to the cultural vitality that remains at play in Lebanon despite prevailing conditions that would seem to suggest otherwise.

Lebanon's induction to the Venice Biennale was conceived by the symbiotic work between a group of passionate people dedicated to the promotion of contemporary art from Lebanon and Nuova Icona, an Italian NGO based in Venice, interested in shedding light on artistic practices "beyond the pale".

This exhibition has been made possible, with the official support of the Lebanese Ministry of Culture and the financial support through private donations from members of the Lebanese community itself. The patron of the event is Miss Noor Issam Fares. The main donors are: Mr. Marwan T. Assaf, Fondation JA.NA.SA (Jacques and Naïla Saadé), Fondation Charles Kettaneh, Lebanese Canadian Bank, Banque Libano-Française, and Sukkar Art Foundation.

For more information please visit our website : www.lebanonvenicebiennale.com,
or email us at contact@lebanonvenicebiennale.com

ARTISTS BIOS

FOUAD ELKOURY

Born in 1952 in Paris of Lebanese parents, Fouad Elkoury lives between Paris, Beirut and Istanbul. He began his artistic career by photographing Beirut during the civil war, exploring issues of survival in a war-torn city. Far from being a report of everyday life, his pictures bear the necessity of withstanding time, as underlined in his publication *Beyrouth Aller-Retour* (1984), to be followed by a post-war work, *Beirut City Centre* (1992), which was widely exhibited and published in a book that became a landmark in the history of photography. Accounting for how to live in war zones while at the same time keeping a distance from everyday life marks his art, as can be seen in *Palestine, l'envers du miroir* (1996), *Liban Provisoire* (1998), or in his fictional narrative *Suite Egyptienne* (1999). After co-founding the Arab Image Foundation in Beirut, collecting and studying historical pictures of the region, Elkoury questioned the purpose of single photographic images, away from aestheticism. His later works elaborate composite visuals (diptychs, triptychs...) to create new meanings, combining still photography, text and video. His Paris exhibition *Sombres* at the Maison Européenne de la Photo, with its filmed counterpart *Letters to Francine* (2002), revolves around wounds; *Civilisation, fake = real?* ponders the phenomenon of representation and replication; *On war and love* (2006) reflects on the dimension of intimacy in wartime.

LAMIA JOREIGE

Born in Lebanon in 1972, Lamia Joreige is a painter and video artist who lives and works in Beirut. She uses archival documents and elements of fiction to reflect on History and its possible narration, and on the relation between individual stories and collective histories, underlining the process of memory and the impossibility of accessing a complete narrative. Lamia Joreige explores the possibilities of representing the Lebanese wars and their aftermath, and Beirut, the city at the center of her imagery. She assembles personal stories and uses linear narratives in works such as *A Journey* (2006), a documentary based on her family story, questioning identity and loss, and *Objects of War 1, 2, 3, 4* (1999 to 2006), a series of testimonies on the civil war. The documentary *Here and Perhaps Elsewhere* (2003) and the short written fiction *Ici et peut-être ailleurs* (2003) both address the subject of the wartime disappeared and the idea of relative truth. In other works she uses non-linear narrative forms in which the story is "exploded," such as in *Je d'histoires* (2006), an interactive installation exploring narrative possibilities through videos, music and letters written during war; *Time and the Other*, a fiction on love and separation, melting texts, images and videos (published in 2004); *Replay (bis)*, (2002) and *Replay* (2000), reflecting on the mechanism of memory through reminiscences and the reenactment of a dramatic event; and *Le déplacement* (1998-2000), a visual narrative on Beirut, mixing urban landscape and intimate scenes. Lamia Joreige's work essentially centers on Time: the recording of time, of its trace and its effects on us.

WALID SADEK

Born in 1966, Walid Sadek is an artist and writer living in Beirut. His early work investigates the violent legacies of the Lebanese civil war as partially and inadequately seen and experienced by a young Christian-born Lebanese: *I Once Dreamt I was a Phoenix* (1995); *Half-a-Man* (1995); *Home Play* (1996); *The Last Days of Summer* (1997). He later began to posit, mostly in theoretical texts, ways of understanding the complexity of lingering civil strife in times of relative social and economic stability: *A Matter of Words* (2002); *From Excavation to Dispersion: Configurations of Installation Art in Post-War Lebanon* (2003); *The Acquisition of Death: the Ends of Art and Dwelling in Lebanon* (2004). His recent written work endeavors to structure a theory for a post-war society incapable of, or at least reluctant to, resume normative living: *From Image to Corpse* (2006); *Place at Last* (2007); *Seeing Rude and Erudite* (2007). Concomitantly, a few installations propose a poetics for a social experience governed by uneasy contiguity with the remnants and consequences of violence: *Love is Blind* (2006) and *Dear Stephen* (2006).

Walid Sadek is currently assistant professor at the Department of Architecture and Design at the American University of Beirut.

MOUNIRA AL SOLH

Born in Beirut in 1978, Mounira Al Solh works with video, painting and photography. She lives between Beirut and Amsterdam, where she is currently a resident artist at the Rijksakademie. Al Solh has been working on issues related to Lebanese immigrants' stories, as well as the Lebanese socio-political and religious conflicts. Her approach is not realistic but fictional, or even fantastic. While transforming dramatic situations into ironical ones, Al Solh links issues of identity with aesthetics. In the video installation *As if I don't fit there*, for example, she explores her fear of ceasing to be an artist, and her doubts about her place in the art world.

AKRAM ZAATARI

Born in Saida, Lebanon in 1966, Akram Zaatari is a video artist and curator who lives and works in Beirut. Author of more than 30 videos and video installations, Zaatari has been exploring issues pertinent to postwar Lebanon, particularly the mediation of territorial conflicts and wars through television, and the logic of religious and national resistance – such as in his documentary *All is Well on the Border* (1997) – and the circulation and production of images in the context of a geographical division of the Middle East, such as in his feature-length works *This Day* (2003) and *In This House* (2005). Zaatari has also been exploring representations of male sexuality, particularly in *crazy of you* (1997), and later in *How I love you* (2001). As co-founder of the Arab Image Foundation (Beirut), he based his work on collecting, studying and archiving the photographic history of the Middle East, notably studying the work of Lebanese photographer Hashem el Madani (1928-), as a register of social relationships and of photographic practices. His ongoing research has been the basis for a series of exhibitions and publications such as *Hashem El Madani: Studio Practices* (with Lisa Lefevre) and *Mapping Sitting* (collaboration with Walid Raad).

CURATORS BIOS

SALEH BARAKAT

Saleh Barakat is an art expert, based in Beirut, specialized in the contemporary art of the Arab world. He curated several pan-Arab exhibitions (Ateliers Arabes for the IX Francophonie Summit, Arabian Canvas for the World Bank Summit). He wrote many articles in his specialty in edited books as well as in learned journals, and coauthored a book on contemporary Lebanese art (commissioned by the Arab League Education, Culture and Sciences Committee). The projects he started for the preservation of XXth century art of the Arab world include the foundation of Agial (1991) and Maqam (2006), two specialized institutions in the beginning of images in the Levant area since 1870, in addition to being a founding member of Kinda Foundation (2000), specialized in the promotion of the contemporary Arab art in the world (with special focus on the 1950/1960 period) and the American University of Beirut Art Center (2001). He was nominated as Yale World Fellow 2006.

SANDRA DAGHER

For the past seven years curator and cultural organizer Sandra Dagher has played a leading role in developing the Lebanese artistic scene, uncovering local talent and promoting the Lebanese artist. In 2000 she opened the prominent artistic and cultural space Espace SD in the heart of Beirut to serve as a living, dynamic reflection of the Lebanese scene. Since that time Espace SD has succeeded in its aims by exhibiting local artists across multiple mediums including literature, the plastic arts, music, dance, audio-visual art, theatre, fashion and design.

During her years in charge of Espace SD Dagher curated over 100 exhibitions at the venue. She is currently involved in establishing a non-profit public space and platform in Beirut for contemporary art. At the same time she is planning several projects in and outside Lebanon to promote the country's cultural and artistic scene.