

AGENDA

LEBANON

MUSIC

'Forest Frequencies'
Chabtoul Camping, near Ghazir
Through Aug. 23
 70-240-924
 This open-air electronic music festival features an eclectic lineup of local and international musical acts that cater to a variety of genres within the spectrum of electronic music. The festival also offers a medley of other outdoor activities, holistic practices and workshops for goers to partake in.

Anna Netrebko
Beiteddine Art Festival, Beiteddine Palace
Aug. 27, 8:30 p.m.
 01-373-440
 Singing with guest tenor Yusuf Eyvazov – and accompanied by the Filarmonica Gioachino Rossini Orchestra, under the baton of Marco Boemi – famed Russian soprano Anna Netrebko promises to escort her audience through a program of 19th-century operatic standards, penned by such iconic composers as Puccini, Verdi, the Strausses and Dvorak.

Issa Ghandour
The Blue Note Cafe, Makhoul Street, Ras Beirut
Aug. 22, 10 p.m.
 Issa Ghandour will perform an evening of oriental music.

PERFORMANCE

'Bar Farouq'
Beiteddine Art Festival, Beiteddine Palace
Through Aug. 22, 8:30 p.m.
 01-373-440
 In Hisham Jaber's new cabaret show, 14 musicians, singers, actors and dancers revisit Beirut's pre-Civil War music scene, sampling popular theater, cabaret music and dance from the '30s to the '70s, through the works of performers and composers like Shoushou, Sabah, Ferial Karim and Omar Zeenni.

ART

'Raid of the Furthest Horizons'
Beirut Exhibition Center, Beirut Waterfront
Through Aug. 31
 01-962-000, ext. 2883
 This exhibition presents a retrospective of the Lebanese painter and calligrapher Wajih Nahle.

'Elegy'
Agial Art Gallery, Abdel-Aziz Street, Hamra
Through Aug. 22
 01-345-213
 Nadia Safieddine presents a series of paintings which blend abstraction and figuration and are imbued with undercurrents of melancholy and violence.

'Gibran Khalil Gibran'
Beiteddine Palace, Beiteddine, Chouf
Through Aug. 27
 05-500-077
 Running as part of the 2015 Beiteddine Art Festival, this show presents the original paintings and manuscripts of Khalil Gibran.

JUST A THOUGHT

Most people in archaeology find their specialties in strange and unique ways. I always wanted to do archaeology, and then the time came for me to actually be in the field, and it was excruciatingly boring. Excavation is really, really boring.

Gail Carriger (aka Tofa Borregaard) (1976-)
 Archaeologist and steampunk author

INTERVIEW

The art of ruins falling into ruin

Ali Cherri's work explores the meaning and worth of heritage conservation

By Jim Quilty
 The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Like many Lebanese artists, Ali Cherri's work is rarely shown in Lebanon. Video has been his medium of choice – whether staged in installations or as freestanding projections – though his work also includes sketches, still photography and objects.

A sample of Cherri's most recent work was on show in "Deserts," an exhibition at Paris' Galerie Imane Farès that placed his videos and stills alongside those of Basma Alsharif.

In this country Cherri's labor was most recently visible during the opening show of the 2015 Baalbeck International Festival, "Illik ya Baalbak!" – having worked on the video backdrop for the concert, a montage of Lebanese performers projected against the ruins of the so-called Bacchus temple.

The Baalbeck job is quite divorced from Cherri's real practice, of course. His most recent "Lebanese" work, "The Disquiet," a short he premiered at the Toronto film festival in 2013, is a poetic perambulation around the geological fault lines running beneath this country, and the catastrophes they portend.

Cherri's interests have recently migrated to archaeology. His latest projects steer clear of Baalbek's Roman-era ruins, but he has taken up some of the modernist constructs that informed how the old stones of Heliopolis were restored and hitched to the wagon of the tourism industry.

Still in post-production when this conversation took place, Cherri's "The Digger" takes up a story from the prehistory of the United Arab Emirates, specifically the conservation of a 5,000-year-old necropolis in the desert of Sharjah.

"The site itself is nothing spectacular," Cherri says. "It's mainly excavated tombs. What're left are empty holes in the ground. Two Pakistani guards live there throughout the year, guarding these empty holes in the ground."

"Sultan Zeib Khan, one of the guards, has been living there for 20 years. He's taken part in archaeological missions in Sharjah whenever foreign missions come into the country."

"The film follows him in his dai-



"The Digger" follows the work of a Pakistani security guard minding a 5,000-year-old necropolis.

ly routine, roaming in the desert, preserving these ruins from falling into ruin – a surreal concept.

"That's what modernity tells us we should do: Preserve the ruins in their state of ruin. And it should be a specific form of ruin – something that looks enough like a ruin to be interesting for tourists and all the industry that happens around archaeology."

"So there's this bunch of rocks on the ground that Sultan Zeib Khan has to make sure are still in place, that no animals came at night to disturb them."

"There are high-profile archaeological digs in all the Gulf countries now. I started looking into this archaeological project, trying to understand why they're digging."

"Of course they all have museums they need to fill. They're young nations writing their histories. They need these archaeological objects as proof that, 'Hey, we've been here since a very long time. We have a long history.'"

"We're not just nomads who found oil and settled and built cities. We come from very far back. There was a city next to this 5,000 year-old necropolis and the residents had civilization, commerce."

"There's also a sense that 'Our civilization was built around the city, just like everywhere else.'"

"So my project is now also looking at this nationalist way of using archaeology. Meanwhile much of the

rest of the world has moved beyond this way of working with archaeology, [now it's] more about tourism."

Cherri explains that his interest in archaeology follows logically from "The Disquiet."

"It stems from the question of what can survive a catastrophe," he says. "An archaeological site is where things survive the catastrophe of time ... A desert archaeological site is a perfect post-apocalyptic landscape."

Based on the rough cut available during this interview, "The Digger" is a great looking piece of work. Shot to cinematic standards by Lebanese cinematographer Bassem Fayad, it plays upon several features of the desert landscape – the quiet, the relentless daytime scale of the place and the utter darkness of night.

Cherri's archaeological work is in the process of shifting locations. While "The Digger" was funded by the Sharjah Art Foundation, the artist is about to embark upon a residency with France's INRAP (the National Institute for Preventive Archaeological Research) that will see him join a German Archaeological Institute (DAI) expedition in South Sudan.

"The institute is interested in fostering collaborations among artists and archaeologists," he says, "in work that doesn't simply use archaeology as a metaphor."

"It's very interesting. [The DAI] is questioning their way of working,

especially in the countries of this region, while also thinking about new approaches. It's very interesting to work with European institutions digging overseas, who are aware of the problematics of the collaboration."

Imane Farès' "Deserts" show sampled some of Cherri's recent archaeologically-themed work – photos and videos of his "Wildlife" series as well as an installation of "archaeological objects." He expects these themes will be better developed in a group show being staged in February at Paris' CENTQUATRE, where he'll have a residency.

"I'm trying to focus the [CENTQUATRE] project around the archaeological object," he says, "and the place of the object in historical narrative."

Cherri says he wants to interrogate the cycle of the object.

It's a wide-ranging project that includes examining the historical and legal origins of heritage conservation and "the historic monument."

"This notion that we all took for granted – that all sites should be preserved, that objects should be venerated, put in a museum display, labeled behind glass boxes – it's being brought back to the table."

"I'm also visiting a lot of auction houses where archaeological objects have a market value ... I'm trying to document what are the objects of interest, because you always get the object's estimated market value. I'm

trying to record this information, especially for objects coming from this region.

"I want to follow the life of this object from the moment it's dug out of the earth until it arrives at the museum ... where it becomes an object with a market value."

"I bought these eight statue heads, supposedly Greek from the third millennium. I got them for 180 euros. After talking with an archaeologist I found out they were fake," he laughs, "although I have a certificate from Drouot auction house."

"One of the problems in the Gulf, in the desert in general, is that objects disappear under the sand [making it] very hard to find them. That's why most of the findings are necropoleis and tombs – because they used to bury their dead at the base of mountains, where the earth is more solid. It makes it easier to find things there. Most of the things located in the desert have disappeared."

"How can you write history without the object as evidence? This is the question I'm asking ... in order to question the whole museum narrative ... and to find new ways of preservation – whether 3D scanning of sites or computer renderings or just documentation – where the copy or the archive is going to be replacing the site itself."

"Maybe we should stop lamenting the loss of the object and try to find a replacement for it."

Banksy's show is an 'escape from mindless escapism'



A model of a pensioner is engulfed in seagulls, referring to a media panic about how aggressive birds were this summer.



Journalists photograph Cinderella's crashed coach, where visitors can have a souvenir photo taken.

By Paul Sandle
 Reuters

WESTON-SUPER-MARE, U.K.: Britain's newest theme park, "Dismaland," opened Friday with a decrepit castle, a merry-go-round horse set to be cooked and model boats on a pool full of refugees, all courtesy of British street artist Banksy.

The "Bemusement Park" in Weston-super-Mare, a seaside town near Banksy's home city of Bristol, is tagged as "The UK's most disappointing new visitor attraction!" and features work by other artists including Damien Hirst.

Famed for his ironic murals in unexpected places, the secretive Banksy said the show was something different as his street art had become "just as reassuringly white, middle class and lacking in women as any other art movement."

Visitors to the event, staged in a disused swimming pool, can have a souvenir photo taken in Cinderella's Castle against a backdrop of a dead princess in a coach crash, while surly stewards carry bunches of balloons labeled "I'm an imbecile."

Banksy, whose identity has never been revealed, described it as "a festival of art, amusements and entry-level anarchism."

"It's not a swipe at Disney," he said in a press release. "I banned any imagery of Mickey Mouse from the site. It's a showcase for the best lineup of artists I could imagine, apart from the two who turned me down."

The site – whose signage bears more than a passing resemblance to Disneyland – is full of the artist's subversive statements and epigrams on Western culture, the media, capitalism and vast disparities of wealth.

A model of a pensioner is engulfed in seagulls, a reference to a media panic about how aggressive birds had become this summer. A merry-go-round horse, destined to become lasagne, harks back to a food scandal sparked by the presence of horsemeat in supermarket ready meals.

Banksy's works, which have been stenciled on locations ranging from

London and New York to the West Bank and Gaza, have become highly sought-after in the art world that he satirizes.

Collectors, who include pop star Christina Aguilera and actor Brad Pitt, have paid as much as \$500,000 for pieces of his work.

Local authorities, which routinely painted over his graffiti a decade ago, sometimes now recognize the value.

The local North Somerset Council said it was right behind "Dismaland," mindful of a show in nearby Bristol that attracted more than 300,000 fans from around the world in 2009.

"We were absolutely delighted to have the biggest drawing name in art here," council leader Nigel Ashton told Reuters at a press preview.

Ashton, who is a member of Britain's ruling Conservatives, was not put off by any anti-authority theme. "There's nothing wrong with asking provocative questions," he said.

Banksy, who reportedly grew up in Bristol and started daubing buildings in the early '90s, could not be obviously spotted at the press launch.

"I guess it's a theme park," he said in a statement, "whose big theme is – theme parks should have bigger themes."

The stewards, wearing a combination of Mickey Mouse-style ears, high-visibility jackets and bored expressions, were tight lipped about the mystery man.

"Welcome to Dismaland" and "Enjoy" was all they would utter, competing with each other in levels of insincerity.

While not quite "The happiest place on earth," "Dismaland" is generating a buzz in the resort and a lot of excitement from locals and Banksy fans worldwide.

"I've been curious all week," said Dana Winestone, 21, who works in a cafe on the seaford. "I'm just excited. It will be the best exhibition out there."

"Dismaland" is open through Sept. 27. The official website, <http://www.dismaland.co.uk/>, was dysfunctional as this story went to press