

# Art Radar

Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond

## Equal opportunity at Beirut Art Fair 2018 – round-up

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**The 9th edition of the Beirut Art Fair closes after extending opportunities to smaller struggling galleries.**

Before an audience of 34,000 visitors, the fair shed particular light on the work 18 emerging artists.



Manoug Alemian, 'Bacchus Temple at Night', 1963. Image courtesy the Photographic Collections of the Archives and Special Collections, AUB Libraries.

Frequenterers of any large commercial art fair are more than familiar with the pristine, elitist hullabaloo, where artistic integrity and income are far from mutually exclusive. But acting to counterbalance the over-saturation of commercial art fairs operating under banners of exclusivity is the **Beirut Art Fair**, opening their doors this past week to smaller galleries and emerging artists alike. It is rare that modern and contemporary art fairs offer a level playing field, principally known for highlighting the masters, the staples and the household names. However, the 2018 rendition of the Beirut Art Fair – having closed on 23 September 2018 – has found its success and notoriety through generosity and by renegotiating the terms of artistic liberality.



Julien Lescoeur, 'Sans Titre', 2013, photography, color print, diasec on aluminum, 80 x 80 x 4 cm, ed of 5 +2 AP. Image courtesy Wild Projects.

Now in its ninth year, the fair saw 53 exhibitors (mainly Lebanese and French galleries) and over 32,000 international visitors during its four consecutive days at Beirut's Seaside Arena. As an indicator of its ongoing success, alongside 33 returning galleries, the fair also welcomed 18 first time exhibitors with an increased space and revamped, but nevertheless selective, culling process. It was reported that the event cut a 'special offer' to help a few struggling Egyptian galleries present their artists' work and further invested USD100,000 in "outreach to encourage collectors from further afield".



Dia al-Azzawi, 'Good Morning Beirut'. Image courtesy Nabu Museum.

Off to a rapid start, **Beirut Art Fair 2018** housed a surprisingly varied collection of media ranging from video, print, sculpture, text and conceptual installation, though much of the hustle and bustle surrounded the more household names. Early sales included two editions of *Dust in the Wind* by the legendary Lebanese filmmakers and artists **Joana Hadjithomas** and **Khalil Joreige**, each selling for USD20,000, and a piece for USD9,000 by the Dubai-based Iranian artist **Rokni Haerizadeh**, the latter coming after the artist's recent acceptance of the OGR Prize at **Artissima** in 2017. All were sold by the Parisian gallery **in situ-fabienne leclerc**.

And as the fair coincided with Beirut Art Week (18 to 25 September 2018), a degree of curiosity came in the neighbouring **Beirut Design Fair**, where the Iraqi artist **Dia al-Azzawi** showed his brightly colourful furniture for the first time in a dedicated display with **Marc Hachem Gallery**, a couple of the larger works being reportedly valued at USD56,000.



Mahmoud Obaidi, 'Ford 71'. Image courtesy Nabu Museum.

### "Across Boundaries"

Visitors to the 2018 fair were given the opportunity to discover "just how far Lebanese photography has come over the past century" during their 'focus' exhibition, titled "Across Boundaries". Tarek Nahas, a passionate collector of photographs, meticulously researched, selected and archived a series of works from private and institutional Lebanese collections for the show, ably assisted by **Marine Bougaran**, the project's artistic director, and its artistic advisor, Laurence Nahas.

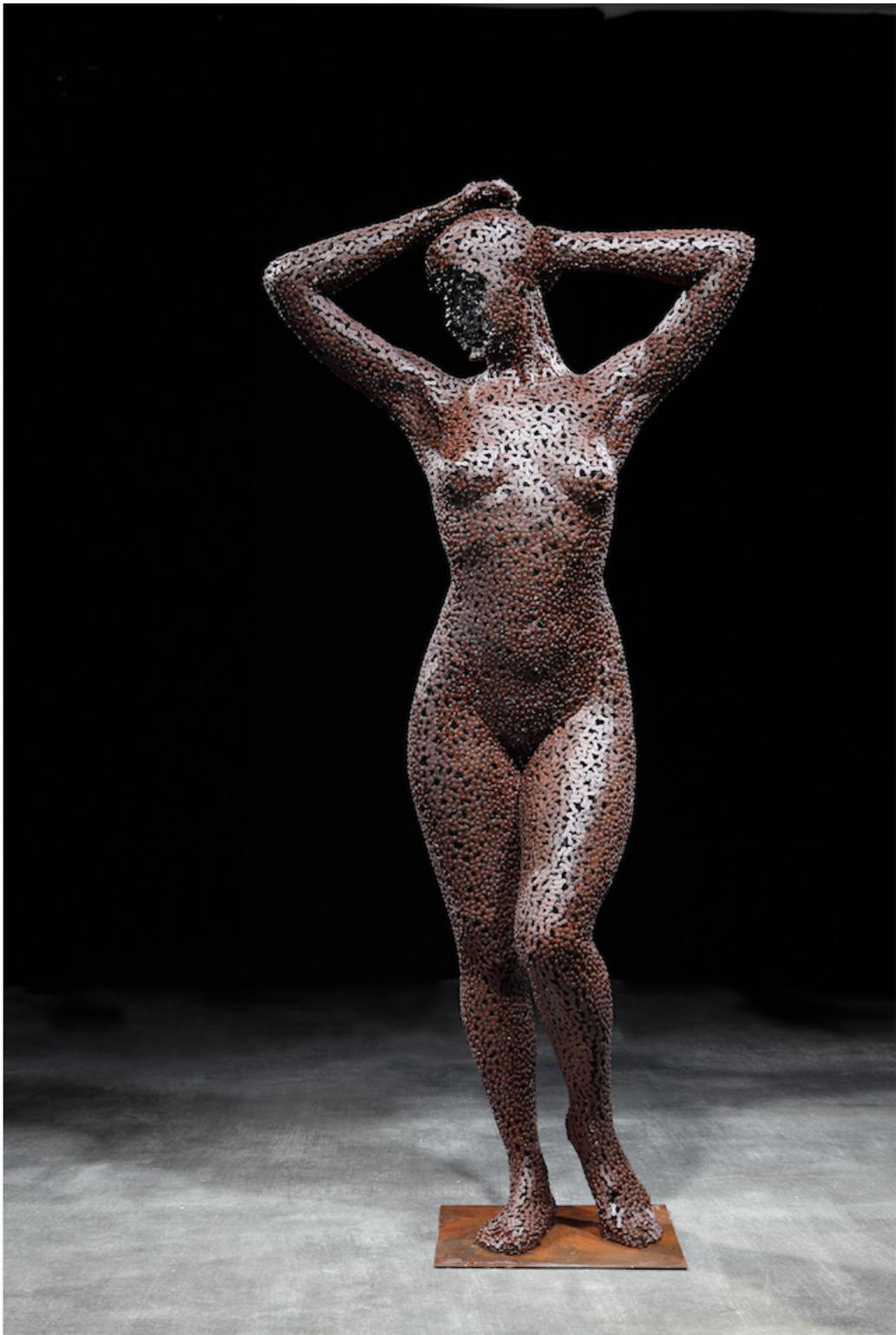
Following three themes, Territory, Document and Intimacy, "Across Boundaries" labelled itself as a hub of dialogue, aiming to encouraging conversation, discovery and inviting visitors to interact with decades of Lebanese photography.



#### **"Revealing" by SGBL**

One of the primary functions of the Beirut Art Fair, according to its board of organisers, is to shed light on young, emerging artists from Lebanon and beyond. The "Revealing" segment, presented by SGBL, selected 18 artists alongside their representative galleries, many of which saw an abundance of success by both local and international collectors.

With dealers keeping a wary eye on both the Lebanese economy and the "troubled art markets in the Gulf", the fair spent a significant amount of time, energy and money this year on a collector outreach effort to encourage those from other regions to "come and buy in Beirut" based on a wealth of emerging faces in the contemporary art scene and an expanded programme of events to support them.



Young-Deok Seo, 'Nirvana #290', 2016, iron chain (rust), 180 x 43 x 80 cm. Image courtesy Opera Gallery.

#### **Byblos Bank Award**

The **Byblos Bank Award** ceremony has been a staple of the Beirut Art Fair for the last seven years and is, perhaps, the most prestigious photography award available in Lebanon. Betty Ketchedjian was announced winner of this year's award after a rigorous consideration of more than 150 artists and ten finalists.

Titled "Namesake", Betty Ketchedjian's winning series of photographs is an investigation into her grandmother, whom she was named after. By investigating her grandmother's surroundings and possessions, and by drawing parallels between her life and that of her grandmother, she attempts to understand the eponym of her own identity.



Saro, 'Untitled', circa 1960, colorized photography, 30 x 40 cm. Image courtesy Private Collection.

On the continued and diversified success of the success of the fair, Founder and Fair Director **Laure d'Hauteville** stated in the closing press release:

The 2018 edition of Beirut Art Fair reflects the rapidly changing times we are in. Lebanon never had the need to be confronted with art as much as it does today. Art allows us to maintain our hopes and strive for an ideal, initiates a dialogue between cultures and carries a message of peace.

**Megan Miller**

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