



Lebanon's visual culture in focus September 04, 2013 12:08 AM By Chirine Lahoud  
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"Master Minds" by Diana Mehrez, Lebanon.

BEIRUT: There will be some competition among arts fairs this month. Scheduled for Sept. 18-24, the Beirut Art Fair promises to promote the accessibility of art at BIEL, the Beirut International Exhibition and Leisure Center. Now in its second season, the Beirut Photo Fair is set to run at the same time, with the mission of showcasing both Beirut as a cultural hub and the importance of visual culture in Lebanon.

After the success of the inaugural edition in 2012, this year's BPF promises to be even more attractive to art and photography aficionados. Staged at Artheum in Karantina, fair organizers say they aim "to spot new talent and give attention to photography, a crucial yet often overlooked form of art and visual medium."

Last year's photo fair attracted more than 1,500 visitors, organizers say, from more than 12 countries. The tense situation in the region nowadays did make it a bit more difficult to organize the 2013 edition.

"We are facing reluctance from exhibitors from outside Lebanon," acknowledged BPF founder and curator Nino Azzi.

This is reflected in the contributors.

Renowned Iranian film director and photographer Abbas Kiarostami was scheduled to take part in the fair with a selection of recent works, but his participation was postponed, Azzi said, in order that the public may "appreciate it better during more stable times."

The 2012 fair featured works by 60 local and international artists; this year's event features 20 photographers. Most of these are Lebanese, but there will also be work from Syria, Serbia, Belgium, Saudi Arabia and France.

Artheum hosts several platforms for cultural production in addition to the Photo Fair – including a Furniture Design Expo, Jewelry Design Week and Beirut Fashion Expo. A new event is to be added to this roster, Azzi said, scheduled for this coming October.

"We will be launching in collaboration with Kozah [a Damascus culture organization] the first-ever Syria Contemporary Art Fair."

Unique to this year's BPF will be an exhibition of works from The Fouad Debbas Collection, a world-renowned archive of century-old photographs from Beirut and Syria.

As the story goes, Debbas started this collection of photographs while wandering about Paris, where he discovered an album of 19th-century photos from Lebanon. The BPF represents a rare public display of this treasure trove.

The exhibition will include stereoscopic images, in order to give onlookers an opportunity to see "19th-century photography in 3-D," Azzi explained. "It's absolutely magnificent."

Among Artheum's missions is to focus on the accessibility of photography and to showcase the work of emerging talents.

"We are certainly interested in pushing the boundaries of quality," Azzi said, "and practices as a whole."

The Beirut Photo Fair is more than an exhibition of photographs. It also sets out to be a platform for the art of photography. In this regard, BPF has scheduled a series of workshops and presentations geared to disclosing what lies behind the photographer's lens.

A debate on the pros and cons of digital versus analogue photography will be held. The Fouad Debbas Collection team has also organized a presentation on photography preservation.

“The arts and visual culture in Lebanon is more developed than ever,” Azzi said, “and we are almost on the same pedestal as many developed countries. Beirut will still be the regional platform for art and culture, despite the existence of financial powerhouses in the gulf region.”

The 2013 Beirut Photo Fair will take place from Sept. 18-25 at Karantina’s Artheum. For more information, visit [www.artheum.com](http://www.artheum.com) or [www.beirutphotofair.com](http://www.beirutphotofair.com)

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