

Beirut Photo Fair, a treasure trove in the arts scene September 21, 2013 12:41 AM

By Chirine Lahoud
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: If we had to define photography, we might say that it is an art accessible to everyone.

Mobile devices have made it easier than ever before to capture a unique moment in just one click. Before digital cameras became widespread it was much more difficult and expensive to publish photographs. But nowadays easy access to photography may be the best way to let the artist's vision and talent grow.

It is Lebanon's contemporary talents that are displayed at the second edition of the Beirut Photo Fair, which kicked off at Artheum in Karantina Sept. 18.

After the huge success of last year's fair, the event is starting to become a fixture on the list of the country's promising artistic programs. BPF 2013 displays works by 21 photographers, along with an outstanding series from the Fouad Debbas Collection.

A wide selection of shots of Buddhist monks, natural landscapes, daily life in Lebanon and skyscrapers – to name a few of the most popular subjects – adorn the walls of the art space, providing a panorama of the role and importance played by photography.

Some photos represent the artist's genuine passion for the medium; others embody photographers' visions of Beirut or opinions on mankind.

Sayde Jabra's photograph of a shepherd is touching in a way that it showcases a view of the country that is rarely glimpsed these days. Although it is a common enough scene, it conveys a wealth of emotion. It brings back memories and emphasizes that in spite of the greediness of society some simple pleasures cannot be taken away.

Some other photographs may literally hypnotize you. Eliane Touma's black-and-white shot of a little girl sitting on a flight of stairs immediately captures the attention of the viewer. Looking off to her right, the chubby toddler is gazing at something or someone excluded from the shot. Touma has captured the light in such a way that it forms an aura around the infant.

George Zouein's two photographs are disturbing but arresting. At first, when passing by the works, some viewers may see only blackness.

But the more you scrutinize his works, the more you start noticing human shapes, rocks and a seashore. One of his photographs captures a nude woman lying on the sand at night in subtle shades of deep blue and inky black.

Zouein has already proved his tour de force in photography. His first solo exhibition, held at Art Lounge in 2012 and entitled "Triad," was also a marked success.

The self-taught Zouein has a unique way of photographing, which is barely seen elsewhere.

Born in 1930, Fouad Debbas has a passion for old postcards and photographs of the Middle East and Lebanon. It is his prestigious collection that viewers will be able to peruse in the small room devoted to Debbas' series. Here, postcards and photographs of the campus of the Syrian Protestant College (1895) and of 19th-century Beirut with its merchant sellers and musicians, as well as sheikhs and peasants, form a rare microcosm of our common cultural heritage.

On a table in the center of the room stand glass plates dating from 1900, for "stereoscopy and projection," as the captions explain. Other interesting items are a photo album made for "cabinet cards" (or business cards, as we know them today) from 1895, along with an exceptional photograph of the 1921 Beirut Fair. This rare photographic treasure is a must see.

Founder of the BPF and Art Lounge owner Nino Azzi, in a previous interview with The Daily Star, expressed his wish to make photography accessible to everyone in order to showcase the talents of emerging photographers.

Photography aficionados will be surprised by the quantity and quality of the works on show at this edition of the BPF. From abstract to realism, local to foreign, photography may be the best art to represent society, with all its advantages and its obstacles.

The 2013 Beirut Photo Fair is now on show at Karantina's Artheum until Sept. 25. For information, please call 71-781-783.

Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Art/2013/Sep-21/232068-beirut-photo-fair-a-treasure-trove-in-the-arts-scene.ashx#ixzz2fXELj3Eu>

(The Daily Star :: Lebanon News :: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb>)