

AGENDA

LEBANON

THEATER

‘Miss Tarjle’
Theatre Gemmayzeh
Through Dec. 30, 8:30 p.m.
76-409-109
This family comedy presents two girls juggling two personas, many lies and three engagements! In order to save her friend from an unwanted engagement, Dal’ouna turns into a boy, Jaafar.

ART

‘Watercolors’
Espace 9, Verdun
Through Dec. 24, 12-6 p.m.
01-810-877
Mazen Rifai’s watercolor series is focussed on depicting Lebanese architecture and nature.

‘Freestanding’
Artspace, Hamra
Through Jan. 5, 11 a.m. until 6 p.m.
01-736-516
This collective exhibition of sculpture includes the works of nine Lebanese artists.

‘Fruit of Sleep’
Sursock Museum
Through Dec. 31, 10 a.m. until 7 p.m.
01-202-001
Curated by Reem Fadda, this exhibition looks at the relationship of art, dreams and the subconscious.

‘Shifting Lights’ Guided Tour
Beit Beirut, Independence Street
Dec 28, 6 p.m.
01-369-242
This hour-long tour of the collaborative exhibition explores the intricate relationship between painter Afaf Zurayk and photographer Noel Nasr, as expressed through the vision of architect Rami Saab. (In English)

MUSIC

‘Holy Night’
St. Georges Church, Aamaret Chalhoub
Dec. 27, 8 p.m.
03-170-939
This Christmas concert led by Nadine Nassif will be performed by the students of the Voice Academy.

‘Zajal Evening’
Hammana Artist House
Dec. 27, 7 p.m.
05-532-544
As part of White Nights in Hammana festival, a short presentation will be given about the tradition of Zajal by musician, researcher and co-founder of Me’zaf Ghasan Sahhab. Three musicians will accompany poet Ous-sama al-Samra as he performs. (Free entrance)

‘Maksim Dark’
B018, Karantina
Dec. 31, 9 p.m.
03-810-618
To celebrate New Year’s Eve, Russian electro-pop artist Maksim Dark will be stopping off from his world tour, supported by Sophie Sapuna.

‘United Strings of Europe Orchestra’
St. Maroun Church, Gemmayzeh
Dec. 23, 8 p.m.
Beirut Chants continues with a recital by the Antonine University Choir, featuring work by Vivaldi and Handel. (Free entrance)

JUST A THOUGHT

One must do the same subject over again ten times, a hundred times. In art nothing must resemble an accident, not even movement.

Edgar Degas
(1834-1917)
French painter, sculptor, print-maker, sketch artist

REVIEW

From document to accident to art

Lamia Joreige reinvents the aesthetics of Ouzai and Jisr al-Wati

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: “I remember seeing people making drawings of the area with such precision that they looked like Google Earth images,” recalled Ouzai resident Salah Nasser. “We were kids. ... To us, they were artists, and looked like tourists with their camera. After they finished their drawings, they totally vanished. We never saw them again. Then the Israeli bombardment began.”

Nasser’s remarks are from his recollections of the work of Palestinian militants in his seaside community in 1973. His anecdotes are among those Lamia Joreige includes in her pamphlet “A Brief History of Ouzai,” launched a few days ago at “Under-Writing Beirut,” her exhibition at Marfa’.

This “Brief History” is also laid out as a wall installation in Joreige’s show, 15 A4 sheets hung adjacent to the 2017 series “Ouzai: Cartography of a Transformation.” According to Marfa’s exhibition guide, the series’ four landscape-shaped images have been derived from six maps of the territory – five from the Lebanese military, dating 1956-95, and a 2017 image from Zoom Earth.

The proximity of the history and the cartography in the Marfa’ show makes Nasser’s recollections of mapmaking – evoking sketches precise enough to resemble mechanical imaging a la Google Earth – thud solidly against the back of the head. “It proposes a subjective and



“1962-1995,” from the series “Ouzai, Cartography of a Transformation, 1,2,3,4,” 2017, inkjet print, 93x210 cm.

poetic visual interpretation of the transformation of Ouzai over the years,” the guide says of the prints, “from a sandy coastal mostly uninhabited area to a densely built and populated one.”

Gazing at Joreige’s cartographic series, the first impression isn’t one of simple reproduction but of precisely the sort of photo-realism Nasser describes.

The Marfa’ show doesn’t exhibit “Under-Writing Beirut” in its entirety but samples work from the second and third chapters of Joreige’s project, “The River” and “Ouzai.”

“Mathaf,” 2013, this project’s first chapter, seeks to situate Lebanon’s National Museum within the social history of the Hurj (Pine Forest), the region of southern Beirut where the museum was embedded, and its ensuing years of civil conflict, population movement and property development.

The work in “The River” and “Ouzai” follows the same research-based practice driving “Mathaf” – mingling documentary photos and data with original pieces the research inspired.

“In a research-based project like ‘Under-Writing Beirut,’ the research

lasts for a certain time and I don’t know if I’m gonna do a sculpture or drawings or aerial views or digital images,” Joreige mused in a recent interview. “The form doesn’t precede the research, but [there is an ongoing] debate about what kind of relationship I want with the real, with capturing the real.

“Of course I don’t want to have a basic documentary relationship. At some point I wanted to do less painting because I felt that my painting ... was evolving from something between figurative and abstract art to something more abstract.

“I could no longer confront myself with the context I’m living in,” she continued. “I was no longer able, through my painting, to be grounded in the realities that I was trying to criticize or to question. It was very different to do it with time-based [electronic] media.”

The audiovisual work, Joreige said, “even as some of them border fiction, still has a very strong connection with the context and the real that I felt was very important.”

The regions inspiring these three chapters of “Under-Writing Beirut” – Mathaf, Jisr al-Wati and Ouzai – are located on the southern, north-

eastern and southwestern extremes of greater Beirut.

Both “The River” and “Ouzai” are based on research-based narratives – stacked near the door, “A Brief History of Ouzai” is the first piece you see upon entering Marfa’, the 20-minute 2016 video “After the River” is the last.

Erected to complement Joreige’s work, these loose collections of anecdote echo cognate tales of marginal, sparsely populated areas being settled and integrated into the city and efforts (successful or not) to gentrify them.

Anyone who understands gentrification as “restoring” or “overhauling” – rather than conscience-free property speculation – might see the artist’s approach to “Under-Writing Beirut” to be itself a sort of aesthetic gentrification.

The sculpture “Ouzai,” 2017, for instance, reiterates the lines of topography and transportation arteries you’d find on a map of the region in metallic terms. Glancing at the work hanging from the gallery wall of Marfa’, it evokes “map” or “aerial photo” less than the assault rifle of a gunman with a weakness for bling.

Most of the works here are more delicate. The series “The River,” 2015-17, takes the form of 11 portrait-shaped paper works that aestheticize the course of the Beirut River. “Coastline 1,2,3,4,” 2017, deploy the same media to the mutable landscape-shaped images that inform the photo-realist “Ouzai: Cartography.”

“I integrate my painting practice within the research-based project, departing from a document,” Joreige said. “I [took] the maps collected for ‘The River’ and ‘Ouzai’ and [with transparency paper] used the topographies as points of departure.

“This is where my cooking comes ... ironing wax with some kind of loose pigment, graphite pencil, pastels, etc. This is where it evolves into something. Part of it is very controlled and part of it leaves room for accident, which has always been an integral part of my painting and drawing practice.

“When I iron some pigment into wax it may spread in various directions, but after doing this for a while you can begin to control the way the accident takes place.”

“Under-Writing Beirut” is up at Marfa’ through Dec. 29.

Iranian director facing jail for film attacking corruption

By Laure Fillon
Agence France Presse

PARIS: It is not easy to lead a good and virtuous life, if Iranian filmmaker Mohammad Rasoulof’s latest film, “A Man of Integrity,” is anything to go by.

Its downtrodden hero struggles to make an honest riyal from his goldfish farm, caught in a nightmarish, distorting fish bowl of corruption at every turn.

The winner of Cannes’ prestigious “Un Certain Regard” prize in May, Rasoulof’s film is a damning indictment of how the “daily reality of graft” is sapping the Islamic Republic. “Corruption has penetrated every layer of society,” Rasoulof told AFP by Skype from his Tehran home, where he is effectively under house arrest since his passport was confiscated when he returned from the Telluride film festival in September.

The dark thriller tells the story of Reza, who refuses to pay a bribe for a loan that would save his business, and finds himself confronting an array of rotten officials and businessmen who run a small town in the north of the country.

“Corruption goes from the bottom of the social ladder right to the top of the pyramid of power,” said Rasoulof, whose acclaimed titles “Manuscripts Don’t Burn” and “Iron Island” have been banned in Iran. “A Man of Integrity” is unlikely to see the light of day there either despite being praised by Variety and the Hollywood Reporter as a “compelling ... tense, enraging drama.”

Rasoulof, 34, already has a suspended 12-month prison sentence hanging over his head after he was arrested on set in 2010 with his friend, the “Taxi” director Jafar Panahi, who was subsequently banned from making any films for 20 years.

Initially jailed for six years, Rasoulof’s jail sentence was reduced on appeal. This time he faces similar charges of “propaganda against the regime” and “endangering national security.”

The threat of prison did not stop Rasoulof squaring up to the uncomfortable truth he insists is undermining the country from within. Iranians are exhausted by graft, he said. “They want to leave it behind but they cannot, because corruption has become a system.

“This system forces you to be both corrupted, and a corrupter

yourself. Even my friends are repulsed by it but cannot get away from it,” the writer-director added. “People become oppressed and oppressors at the same time.”

In the film, no one gets a free pass. Reza’s long-suffering wife Hadis, the head of a secondary school, does nothing to stop a girl being excluded because she comes from a religious minority.

Nor is the fact that Reza is a goldfish farmer without significance. Iranians traditionally display goldfish in their tables for Persian New Year, Norouz, to symbolize renewal and perpetual life, and release them into ponds and rivers afterward, where they inevitably perish.

President Hassan Rouhani tried to suggest a more humane alternative last year by putting an orange in his fish bowl.

For the moment, Rasoulof’s own fate is not unlike that of his character’s goldfish.

“I am completely in the dark,” he told AFP. “I do not know what is going to happen, but I will not allow myself to be beaten by it. I cannot see my film being shown in Iran while I am waiting to be tried.”

He further lamented how the country’s “intellectuals had either left, were in prison, or had been reduced to silence.”

His French production company ARP has launched a petition on Change.org demanding that he be allowed to work and travel freely.

“If people were not supporting me outside Iran ... my situation would be a lot worse,” Rasoulof added. “What keeps me going is that people do not forget me, and that my film will be seen.”

REVIEW

Children’s book ‘Ferdinand’ jumps to screen nicely

By Mark Kennedy
Associated Press

NEW YORK: This holiday season, there’s all manner of conflict at your local movie theater – Jedis battling in the stars, Winston Churchill warring in Europe and Olympic athletes dueling on ice. Then there’s that 2,000-pound bull that refuses to fight.

“Ferdinand” is a first-rate animated tale adapted from the beloved 1936 children’s book about a pacifist Spanish bull who just loves to sit around and sniff flowers.

It’s often dark, sometimes whacky, but true to the heart of the book and beautifully brought to life in modern Spain.

Carlos Saldanha and screenwriters Robert L. Baird, Tim Federle and Brad Copeland faced a daunting task turning Munro Leaf and Robert Lawson’s spare 66-page book into more than 100 minutes of film.

They’ve largely succeeded, while adding more serious issues along the way – animal rights, rigged economic systems, nature versus nurture, cowardice, and the importance of looking out for each other. It plunges another sword in the sword of bull fighting.

Not bad for a kid’s flick. At its core, “Ferdinand” is an anti-bullying statement. In a neat twist, that bull who refuses to fight is voiced by professional wrestler John Cena.

Ferdinand is bred to fight but refuses. His dad and peers at a bull-fighting ranch all want to go into the ring and take on a matador. “Is it okay if it’s not my dream?” the young Ferdinand asks. No, he’s told,



Ferdinand (John Cena) in a china sop, in a scene from “Ferdinand.”

After his father disappears, Ferdinand manages to escape and ends up in a peaceful flower farm, taken care of by a young girl.

Enter a cavalcade of strange and bewildering creatures – three crafty hedgehogs, three condescending Lipizzaner horses and an unhinged goat called Lupe. Kate McKinnon delivers Robin Williams-quality work voicing the goat and a darkish film suddenly receives an infusion of silly comic genius.

We’re led on a few detours – including a brilliant dance competition between break-dancing bulls and the prancing horses; an unorthodox running of the bulls (this time with bad guys chasing the animals through the streets on Seg-

ways) and a wonderful interpretation of a bull in a china shop.

Ferdinand is the only bull to realize that the entire bullfighting game is fixed and tries to convince his peers to flee (The voice cast includes a very good Peyton Manning as a bull prone to vomiting, and a hysterical David Tennant as a hairy Scottish bull.)

Ferdinand rescues some of his pals from the “chop shop” (seeing this film with your kids may become uncomfortable if you promised burgers afterward) then sacrifices himself for the good of the group and ends up facing Spain’s meanest matador in the ring.

Will he finally fight? Will he die for his convictions?

There are a few weird notes.

It’s a little strange to hear the Ferdinand we grew up with under a Spanish cork tree now have a SoCal surfer slur, saying he’s “stoked,” “hold that thought” and “this is some next-level stuff.” He also does that thing where he talks to fellow animals but is mute when it comes to communicating with humans.

The scoring choices too are a little odd.

Nick Jonas offers the new soaring ballad “Home” and the Colombian artist Juanes delivers with “Lay Your Head On Me,” but the unearthed 20-year-old “Macarena” seems unnecessary. Pitbull’s overexposed “Freedom” also makes little sense here, unless it’s because of the

pun on his name. It would have been nice to have a more Spanish-sounding soundtrack.

For all its problems, this is a film with world-class animation, revealing everything from astonishingly rich crowd scenes to rusty details on an old pail. The animators have managed to make wet fur feel tactile and show the headlights of cars bouncing off other cars.

So for the overall message of the film – “Live your own life” – plus the rich animation and the completely looney McKinnon, we have one word.

Ole!

“Ferdinand” is screening in Beirut-area cinemas.