

ARTS & CULTURE

AGENDA

LEBANON

MUSIC

Rene McLean
Blue Note Cafe, Makhoul Street, Hamra, Beirut
May 13 & May 15-20, 9:30 p.m.
+961 1 743 857
New York jazz saxophonist Rene McLean takes up temporary residence in the Blue Note, with Fouad Afra on drums and Elie Afif on acoustic bass.

ART

"Des Arbes, Des Fleurs"
Terbol Ecomuseum, Terbol, Bekaa
May 13-June 10
+961 5 455 104
This photography exhibition features the work of Franck Christen and Hoda Kassali, inaugurating the summer season at one of Lebanon's coolest museums and best-kept secrets.

U.K.

ART

"Out of Beirut"
Modern Art Oxford, Pembroke Street, Oxford
May 13-July 16
+44 1865 722 733
This exhibition takes an in-depth view of the critical art practices that have been developing in Beirut since the early 1990s, featuring work by the usual suspects - Walid Raad, Akram Zaatari, Walid Sadek, Jalal Toufic, Lamia Joreige and Tony Chakar - along with up-and-comers Ali Cherri and the anonymous collective Heartland. The exhibition also features performances, symposiums, artists' talks, video screenings and more.

U.S.

FILM

"The Road to Damascus: Discovering Syrian Cinema"
Walter Reade Theater, Lincoln Center, West 65th Street, New York
Until May 18
+1 212 875 5600
Part of Arte East's "Lens on Syria," this retrospective for arguably the richest period in Syrian film (from the 1970s on) is making its debut before touring North America.



Left: Khalil Joreige, actor Ziad Saad and Joana Hadjithomas on the set of "A Perfect Day" with the newspapers that provide a key plot twist. Right: Joreige and Hadjithomas in Paris

INTERVIEW

Film-goers, choose your own meanings

Makers of 'A Perfect Day' want viewers to make up their minds for themselves

Kaelen Wilson-Goldie
Daily Star staff

BEIRUT: "Why does Zeina leave Malek?" Joana Hadjithomas asks with a smile and a sidelong glance.

"Why all the cigarettes? Why the gun?" Khalil Joreige asks with something closer to a grimace.

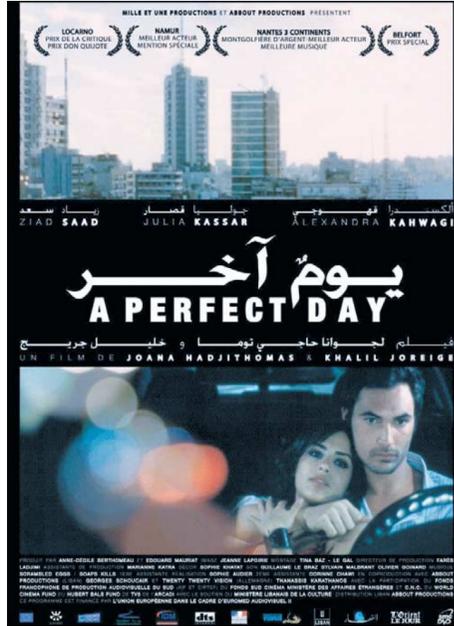
Hadjithomas and Joreige are recounting the most common questions they've been asked during a year-long, worldwide tour with "A Perfect Day," their second feature film, which finally opened locally on Thursday. Sitting in an old-school coffee house in Beirut, Hadjithomas and Joreige are back in town for advance screenings of the film. The surrounding noise is a few notches too high. Next to a half-drained glass of *jellab*, there are at least twice as many mobile phones on the table as would be expected between two people.

As is probably always the case with film premieres, there are problems, ranging from minor and logistical to major and distressing. Hadjithomas and Joreige periodically clutch ringing phones, utter a few terse words and then palm the phones off to one another.

These last-minute details are only compounding the fact that the filmmakers are exhausted, having taken the film to more than 30 festivals in more than 20 cities so far, and having done countless interviews about the story, which stems from the sensitivity of personal experience (Joreige's uncle was one of the 17,000 people who disappeared during Lebanon's most recent Civil War, an absence that occupies the core of the film).

"They're not really questions," says Joreige, returning to the list of regular inquiries.

"It's more that people would like to have the keys to open up different dimensions of the film," he explains.



Although at this point it is probably annoying to the directors, "A Perfect Day" is particularly well suited to such requests. The film is intensely atmospheric, deliberately slow-paced and leaves numerous gaps in the narrative for viewers to fill in for themselves. "You have to choose the meanings," says Joreige. "They are floating."

"A Perfect Day" tells the spare story of a day in the lives of Claudia, a woman who is wrestling with the decision to have her husband declared legally dead (some 15 years after his disappearance), and Malek, her listless and lackadaisical son who is suffering from a sleep disorder and struggling to get back together with his ex-girlfriend, Zeina.

As such a portrait of a place and time (and an attempt to capture its lurching pace) as it is a story about an ensemble of characters, the film is spiked throughout with symbolic details, formal innovations and intentional red herrings.

It is in no way arbitrary, for example, that Malek works as a contractor who spends his days visiting various construction projects throughout Beirut (at one point a body is discovered on a work site in Chiyya, which ruffles Malek's nerves until he learns that the corpse dates back to before the Civil War).

"He's not an architect," Joreige says of Malek. "He's not even an engineer."

"This was important to put in," adds Hadjithomas. "There is so much construction in Beirut, yet the evidence doesn't come up, even though 17,000 people have disappeared."

Because Hadjithomas and Joreige work together as artists and filmmakers, "A Perfect Day" also smudges the fine line between the two disciplines. A number of scenes are purely vi-

suall - birds above the Corniche at dawn, the lights of Beirut abstracted as Malek tries to literally see through Zeina's eyes by wearing her contact lenses while driving, a move that makes it seem as if the film itself were tearing up, just as it injects terror into the plot, as Malek, bleary-eyed, nearly wrecks his car.

And then there are the false turns. After Malek takes Claudia to see a lawyer to process his father's papers, he goes to his old office to find evidence of the disappearance among a pile of old newspaper clippings and discovers, among his father's effects, a revolver.

From that point on, the film is heavy with premonitions of danger. What will Malek do with the gun? What will his mother do if she finds it in a not-so-great hiding place in his bedroom? What will happen if Zeina keeps rejecting him and he ends up a sulky, depressed young man - with a frustrating job and an overbearing mom in a hysterical city - who just happens to have a gun in his hands? The whole thing is a well-executed diversion on the part of the filmmakers, leading the plot one way as the film's more aesthetic and philosophical concerns lead another.

Making "A Perfect Day" was a long process, says Hadjithomas, even though the filming took place in Beirut over the course of just 30 days.

'I'm not just a person digging into ideas that hurt and must come out'

"There were lots of scripts," she recalls. "We were searching for something closer to atmosphere. We wanted to film bodies. Cinema is about images and sound. It's not just about the story or about people talking. It was important for us to film a wall, the skin of someone."

"And latency is very important in the film," she adds, reviving a theme that runs throughout many of the installations and video works the pair have produced. "In the form of the film, the structure, the surface of the picture, even the way the actors are playing, there is always something missing."

"This is the most interesting part for us," Joreige interjects. "to find a way to dialogue between our artwork and our cinematic work."

"I'm not just a person who is digging into ideas and concepts that hurt and that must come out," explains Hadjithomas. "This is a very personal film that deals with our personal story. It's not only about the pressures of being the son, it's about [the pressures of being] the child. How can you get out of your family life and be an adult and make your own choices when you're always a disappointment? In a way it's a very traditional evolution but it is also always very cruel."

"This heaviness in not only on Malek," says Joreige. "It's also on Claudia. She's always trying to please her son, even when he's sleeping."

Which leads to Malek's narcolepsy. "We liked [this disorder] because it's not psychological at all. It's very common. And it's really linked to the problem of rhythm, agitation," says Joreige.

"We wanted to do something on sleeping, because this country is sleeping. When will it wake up?" asks Hadjithomas. "And we liked the idea of someone sleeping where he's not supposed to, on the Corniche, in his car. It's a cinematic question, too. Today films have to be fast."

"A Perfect Day," by contrast, moves slowly. It lingers on moments and details, sometimes to the point of utter exasperation.

"A lot of films are made so you don't feel time," Joreige says. "We wanted to figure out how to make films so you don't lose time but so you feel it and are disturbed by it. In the narration, you don't know what will happen. There is this tension. You are surprised. We take our time."

So what will they do now that the film has opened in Beirut? Hadjithomas and Joreige begin shooting their third feature in June. But until then, says Hadjithomas, plucking a phone off the table and dropping it into her bag. "We are going to finish this and rest."

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's "A Perfect Day" is playing in theaters throughout greater Beirut.

STAR SCENE



Mohammad Baalbaki, Ghazi Aridi and Georges al-Hage



Doha and Khalil al-Khoury



Fadwa and Yasser Nehme



Raghida Tarraf and Selia Mroue

Banking syndicate marks Labor Day

BEIRUT: To mark the annual Labor Day holiday and honor the journalists who have been killed in Lebanon, the Syndicate of Banking Employees held a dinner at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Hamra earlier this month.

Just a thought

The victorious write history and the defeated stories.

Elia Khoury (1948 -), Lebanese novelist

HOROSCOPE

- Aries (Mar. 21 - April 19)**
Think positively, even when you appear to have very little control over important events. So long as you're careful about who you trust, your options will be more numerous than you think.
- Taurus (April 20 - May 20)**
Children could cost you more than you can afford today. Be sure to question details that may put you in a precarious position later. Get involved in groups that will help you meet famous people.
- Gemini (May 21 - June 21)**
Don't push your mate away. You may find out that someone has not been completely honest with you. You can work with those in the know in order to get to the bottom of any pending issue.
- Cancer (June 22 - July 22)**
You can expect to have problems with your partner today. As the saying goes, don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today. Live by it, Cancer, and everything will be alright.
- Leo (July 23 - Aug. 22)**
Your family may be feeling neglected and unloved just now. You will be emotional when dealing with coworkers or employers. All of which adds up to a very trying day indeed. Survive it.
- Virgo (Aug. 23 - Sept. 22)**
Try to take care of the needs of those you love. Your partner may be somewhat irritable today. Too much talk about irrelevant nonsense will only lead to heated disputes.
- Libra (Sept. 23 - Oct. 22)**
Try to include your loved ones in your plans today. Physical work or exercise should definitely be a part of your schedule, otherwise you are going to be irritable and gloomy and no fun.
- Scorpio (Oct. 23 - Nov. 21)**
You're about to hit a high cycle, which means you will shine at work, your personal life will be full of passion and projects you've been toying with are finally going to happen. Enjoy.
- Sagittarius (Nov. 22 - Dec. 21)**
This will not be the best day to shake up your domestic routine. The home front will be hectic for awhile. However, the time is right to socialize with the upper echelons of your profession.
- Capricorn (Dec. 22 - Jan. 19)**
If you are suffering from too much work, get some help to finish off an imminent project. You need more space for the whole family. Use some diplomacy to get your point across.
- Aquarius (Jan. 20 - Feb. 18)**
Today is a great day to try new things. Sign up for some classes or take an interest in new hobbies. Long and difficult discussions may only lead to friction with friends or family.
- Pisces (Feb. 19 - Mar. 20)**
Love will be all around you today. New romantic relationships will develop through group activities and sporting events. Finish those changes you've been talking about making at home.

Discover your child's inner business talents at the Junior Business Fair



Your child will learn how to get started in the challenging but rewarding business world at the 11th Annual **Junior Business Fair**. If your child is 8 to 15 years old, wants to learn how to set up a business, sell his products, run his own business for 3 days and earn some money, join us at Rainbow Island to be part of the Junior Business Fair, a great experience.
Date: **Saturday 13** and **Sunday 14 May**.

Places are limited, please call for reservations: 05-956 444/5 or 05-957 444

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Email: iao@terra.net.lb Website: www.rainbowislandjunior.com Fax: 05-956 446



su|do|ku

Sudoku is neither a mathematical nor arithmetical puzzle. It is a logic puzzle. Each sudoku puzzle consists of a 9 x 9 grid that has been subdivided into 9 smaller grids of 3 x 3 squares. To solve the puzzle, fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3 x 3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9. In each row, column and box the numbers 1-9 can only appear once. To make a start, look at each of the boxes and see which squares are empty, at the same time checking that square's column and row for a missing number. Every sudoku has a logical and unique solution.

		4	1	7		3		8
7				9			5	
		5					7	
	2	8						6
			4		6			
4						5	1	
	6					8		
	3			8				7
8	7		3	1	9			

22

21

6	5	2	8	1	3	7	4	9
1	4	7	5	2	9	6	8	3
8	3	9	6	7	4	5	2	1
7	8	4	2	9	6	3	1	5
3	9	6	4	5	1	8	7	2
5	2	1	7	3	8	4	9	6
2	7	8	1	6	5	9	3	4
4	6	3	9	8	2	1	5	7
9	1	5	3	4	7	2	6	8

Solution to Saturday's puzzle