

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Print

Destruction, progress, hand in hand



Aug. 10, 2018 | 12:06 AM

Maghie Ghali | The Daily Star

BEIRUT: The country's contemporary art scene will enjoy a change of location next month, thanks to "Cycles of Collapsing Progress."

A collaboration between the curatorial platform STUDIOCUR/ART and the Beirut Museum of Art (BeMA), this monthlong Tripoli exhibition draws inspiration from the cyclical nature of time, creation and destruction.

Curated by STUDIOCUR/ART founder Karina El Helou, the show stems from an arts residency exchange between Lebanon and Mexico. The exhibition will show works by 18 artists, 11 of them newly commissioned pieces by artists from both countries.

"The purpose of this exhibition is to reflect on where humanity stands today," Helou said at a news conference at Saint Joseph University, "after years of progressive illusions that could lead to a future collapse if the pace of overproductivity remains unchanged."

The show, Helou said, has been 18 months in the making.

"Two artistic residencies in Beirut and Mexico have been organized in collaboration with the Anissa Touati Corporation," she said, "giving selected artists from these two countries the opportunity to reflect on the exhibition subject and exchange their different perspectives."

Located in two of the city's sites – the Rashid Karami International Fair and Tripoli's Crusader Citadel – the show intends to create a dialogue between the contemporary art and the sites that are hosting them, as well as between the sites themselves.

Known as Qalaat Sanjil, Tripoli's castle was erected by Raymond de Saint-Gilles, Count of Toulouse, early in the 12th century.

Designed by renowned Brazilian modernist Oscar Niemeyer, the International Fair was partially completed in 1974 but left unfinished thanks to Lebanon's Civil War. Mute

totems to the promise of modernism, these 14 neglected concrete structures will serve as a poignant backdrop to the show's theme.

"When the Lebanese chose Niemeyer to build the dream center in Tripoli, they waited, and in waiting the reality changed," BeMA's Sandra Abou Nader said at the news conference. "This unfinished structure reminds us of our ability to dream, showing the importance of how waiting is a test for hope and it becoming the source of a new collective dream.

"'Cycles of Collapsing Progress' aims not only to revive the purpose of an architectural project that has long been a utopian symbol of a new Lebanon," she added, "but also to reiterate the social dimension of art and its vital role in being a meeting space that connects individuals, communities and cultures, transforming ideas into socially engaging realities."

Among the new commissions at the Niemeyer site is Zad Moultaqa's vocal arrangement of a text derived from the Aztec Legend of the Fifth Sun, which refers to the collapse of civilization and the belief that the world had already been destroyed and reborn four times.

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige will show "Space Museum," the latest work to be inspired by their research on The Lebanese Rocket Society, which has already produced a film, photo series and objects.

The work reflects "on the idea of incomplete progress in Lebanese history," Helou said.

"Mexican artist Gabriel Rico will transform [Niemeyer's] 'Pyramid' into a map of the sky and [explore] our ties with the animal world. Stephanie Saade will also work on ties between the biological cycle and the lunar cycle.

"Jorge Mendez Blake imagines a fictional correspondence with the author of 'Utopia,' Thomas Moore," Helou added.

"In the citadel, a work by Rayyane Tabet, 'Colossus with Clay Feet,' reflects upon the links between the past and present and is in dialogue with other works presented."

A parallel program of talks will be held both in Beirut's Sursock Museum and Tripoli's Azm University.

At Sursock, Fares El-Dahdah, a member of the Oscar Niemeyer Foundation board, will discuss the possible future of the fair, while architect Bernard Khoury will talk about a project and student workshop he conducted there. A curator's talk will follow. At the Azm University, architect Juan Palomar will deliver a lecture on the works of Mexican architect Luis Barragan.

"Cycles of Collapsing Progress" can be seen at the Rashid Karami International Fair and Tripoli's Citadel from Sept. 22 to Oct. 23. For more information, visit studiocurart.com and bema.museum.