

لوحاته المركبة بواسطة الكمبيوتر في غاليري "أجيال"

ليس هناك تناقض بين الفن الإلكتروني والرسم

اشعر اني اسيطر على تلك المساحة وتساعدني في الاكتشاف. الكمبيوتر رائع كأداة للعمل فقط مثله مثل الريشة لا يقوم بأفعال الا اذا امرته بفعلها. في هذا المعنى لا ارى تناقضا بين الفن الإلكتروني والرسم. الفن الإلكتروني هو تنمّة طبيعية لممارسة الرسم.

تعرض للمرة الاولى في بيروت. اين تضع هذا العمل في سيرتك الذاتية؟

ان اعرض في لبنان، امر في منتهى الامة في مسيرتي الفنية، رغم الانقطاع عن هذا البلد الرائع الذي لم افهمه ولم اتمكن من التعلق به الا حين تركته. واقع الهجرة علمني ان اقدر التقاليد الثقافية في لبنان. اشعر دائما انني لبناني ومن المحتمل ان احافظ على هذا الشعور دوما.

لاكتشاف العالم. لا اؤمن بالفكرة المعاصرة التي تقوم على التناقض بين العلم والفن. بل اعتقد ان الفن يظهر اسس الجمال والمعرفة في آن واحد. العالم غامض، ورغم معرفتنا العميقة به فان الغموض لا يتبدد، وهنا يكمن مصدر الجمال لا اطلب عن المكتسبات الفنية ولكن ارفض الجمود الاكاديمي المبني على المصطلح الجاهز.

الا تجد مفارقة بين الكمبيوتر كأداة معاصرة واساليب فنية تعود الى قرون ماضية؟

اعتقد ان اسلوب عصر النهضة وفن الكمبيوتر متلازمان ومتطابقان. لانهما يحاولان الجمع بين الفن والمعرفة. اعتمادا على اللوحات كأسلوب للتعبير، واستخدامها للاستفادة من امكانات مساحتها اللامتناهية.

اختبار الاحكام المسبقة، وتقبل الحسرة كهدية.

تعتمد في اعمالك على ارث فني النهضة وتدمجها بالواقعي المعاصر. لماذا؟

صوري تستنبت فضاءها من فني النهضة وعلميتهم المبرهنة لفن التصوير، وتستعيد رموز الميتولوجيا والحروفية العربية، في محاولة اعادة البحث في الهوية المكتسبة بالفطرة وتحليلها في علمية ظاهرة ببرودتها. هي مزيج من ديانات وفلسفات متعاقبة في هذا الشرق، بعضها مكبرة بواسطة المجهر واخرى تمر مثل شريط سريع يعلق في الذاكرة تاركها خلفه الظلال. اتبع اسلوب عصر النهضة لانني من اتباع دا فنتشي ونظريته التي تقول ان اللوحة الفنية مساحة

يراجع المرء سلوكه اللاإرادي الذي عادة لا يفكر فيه، مثل اسلوب المخاطبة الذي يختلف بتفاصيله بين بلد وآخر. كذلك من ايجابيات الهجرة المساعدة في قطع الدعم التقليدي في مجتمعاتنا الشرقية، المتمثل في العلاقة مع العائلة، الجيران، الاصدقاء... انه واقع جديد يعيد الوجود الى موضع الشك ويحدد هوية المهاجر في هوية التأقلم المستمر مع المكان. هذه الهوية تعطي ايجابيات النظر الى العالم الذي يدور من حولك في شكل دقيق ومركز، ويقدم لك خيارات المواجهة او الانغلاق والتقوقع في غيتو تحاول اعادة خلق خصوصياتها المريحة من وطنها السابق. ارفض هذا الخيار في صوري، معتبرا الهجرة فرصة مثالية لاعادة



رالف الحاج

ربيع شامي

تعرض في اعمالك تجربتك في الهجرة وازمة الهوية كيف تبرزها في صورك؟

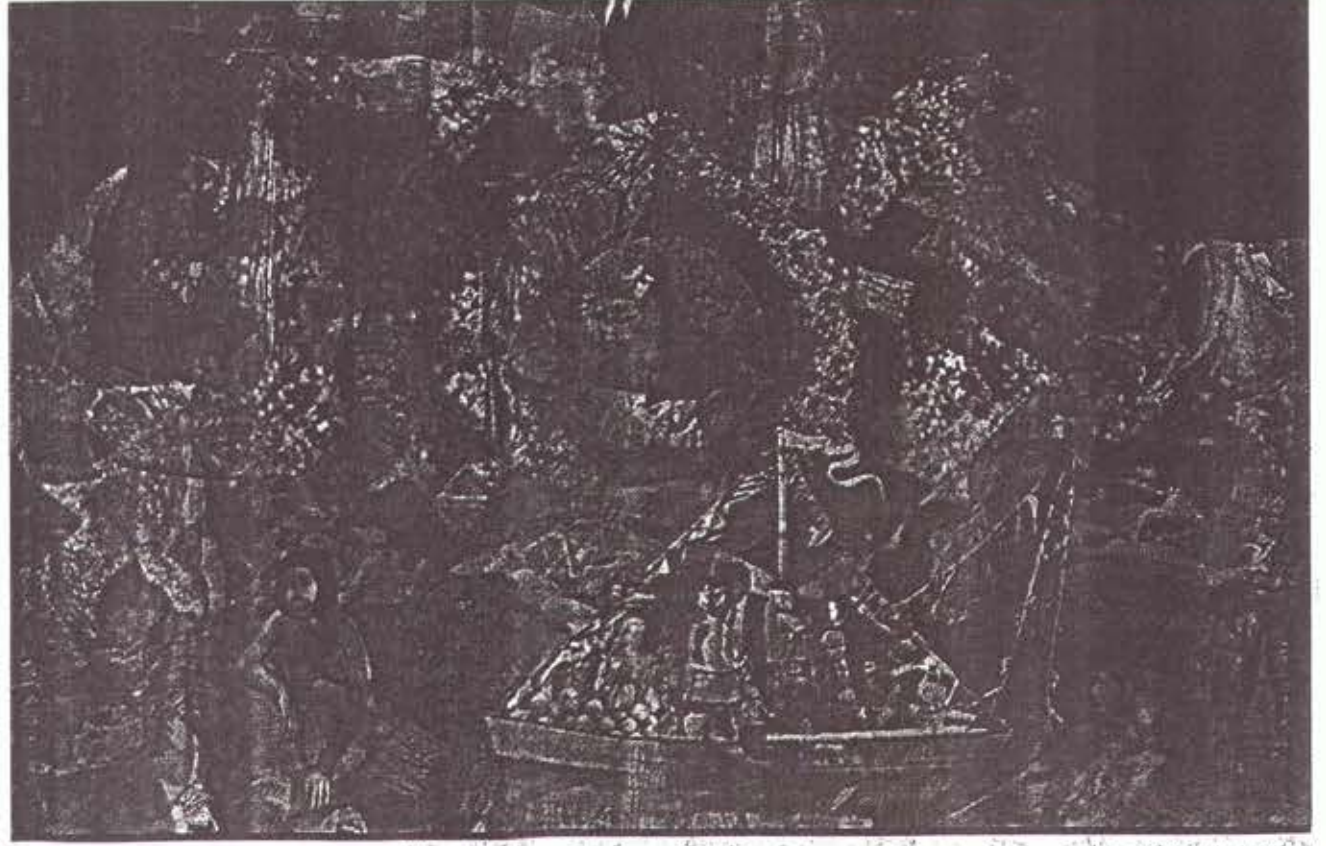
صور تحاكي تجربة الهجرة القاسية والمفيدة في الوقت نفسه، فيما

رالف الحاج:

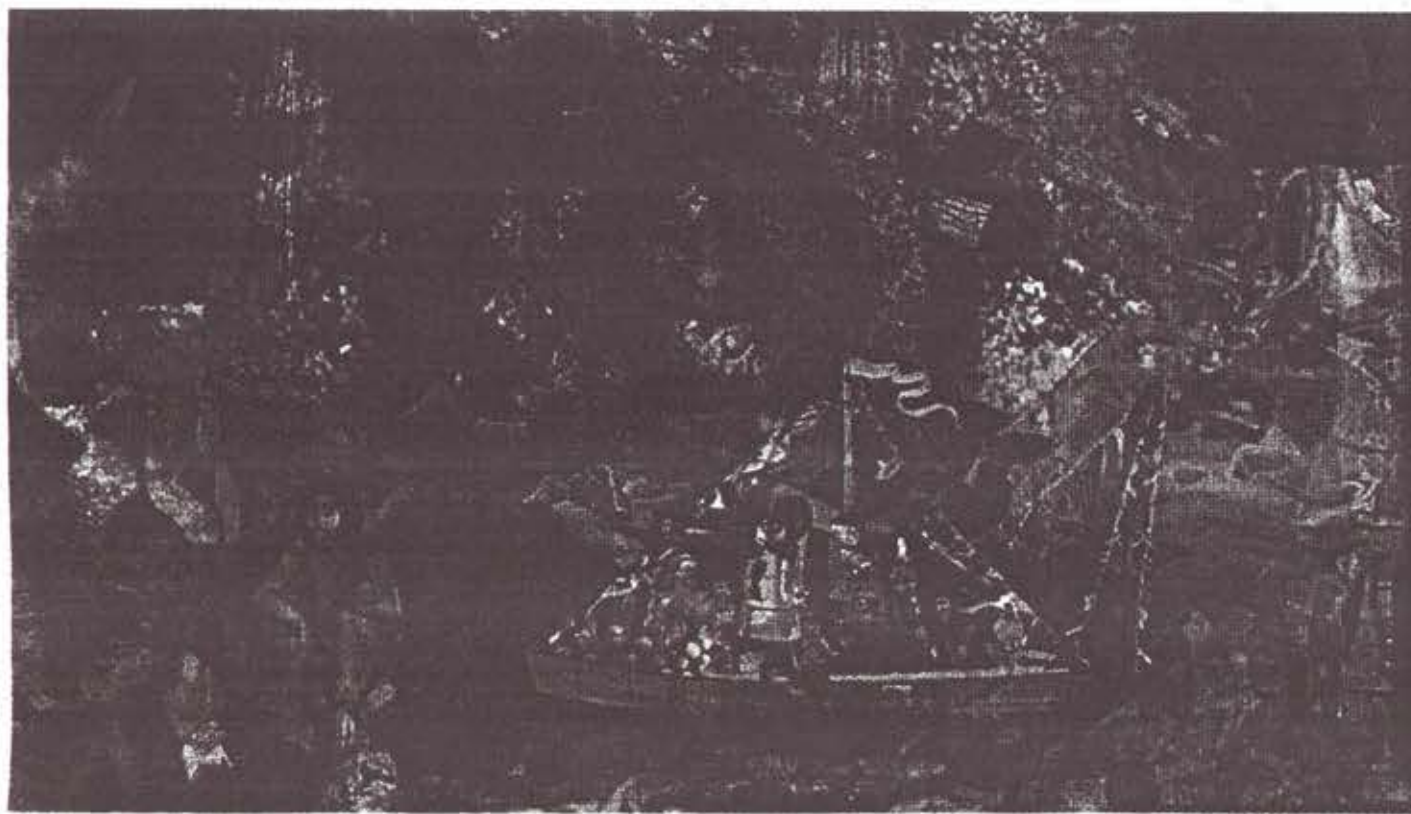
يبحث الفنان الشاب رالف الحاج عن معاني الحضارات المرتبطة بالانسان والملتبقة بهويته سواء كانت بالولادة والوراثة، او عبر الاكتساب الاختياري للانسان. تتكرر لوحاته المركبة بواسطة الكمبيوتر على جدران غاليري "أجيال" في بيروت، علما توضح الفكرة المكثفة والقراءة المنأنية لمعنى القرية والهوية والوطن البديل. عن معرضه هذا، الحوار الآتي



بورتريه "موت الهوية"



الحفاظ على الهوية (تفصيل)



Ralph Hajj's "Ship of Fools, Feeding and Maintenance of Identity" is a limited edition print from 2003 (122 by 155 centimeters, priced at \$2,500), on view at Agial

Free of physical constraints, art jumps from the digital ether to canvas

Cyber artist seeks Beirut gallery for serious exhibition

Kaelen Wilson-Goldie
Daily Star staff

BEIRUT: The latest exhibition on view at the Agial Art Gallery in Hamra is in many ways an emblem of the information age. Thanks to the speed and distance-eating convenience of electronic correspondence, the show merges the work of an artist based in Canada with the vision of a dealer based in Lebanon. In person, Ralph Hajj — a Lebanese artist and art historian who is presently finishing his doctoral dissertation in semiotics at the University of Quebec in Montreal — has never met Saleh Barakat — the owner and director of Agial, a stalwart Beirut gallery devoted to modern and contemporary art in the Arab world. But both men maintain highly functional and information heavy websites, and so they ultimately found each other online.

"We met on the internet actually," says Hajj, who is 35. "I was interested in doing a show and wanted to collaborate with a reputable organization. Saleh's gallery enjoys a very good reputation for professionalism and the quality of the work he shows." Barakat has built that reputation on his efforts to show different facets of modernity in Arab art, and he is always on the lookout for new talents and intriguing ideas. Hajj's art appealed to him in its complicated exploration of such issues as identity, emigration, and exile, all of which hold acute relevance to local audiences and art scenes in Lebanon.

After zapping many emails back and forth through the digital ether, Hajj and Barakat settled on the dates and specifications for an exhibition. From now through August 21, one can find 17 examples of Hajj's very

tactile paintings on view in Barakat's very concrete gallery space on Abdel Aziz Street.

And, in addition to these electronic machinations that helped facilitate the show, Hajj's exhibition marks a high-tech coup for Barakat in terms of content as well. As solid as Agial's prestige may be, the gallery is still traditional in that it typically shows paintings, drawings, and, on occasion, sculptures. Hajj's show marks a break into more contemporary and experimental material, as Hajj generates all of his artwork on his computer.

The tools that shape Hajj's compositions include photographs he takes and images he finds, along with paintings, drawings, and ongoing attempts to find visual embodiments for fragments of memory, distant recollections, and the germination of ideas. Hajj feeds all of

|| 'I am trying to find that balance between the dangers and necessity of identity'

this into his computer, manipulates the material into densely layered images, and then transfers those images onto a specific kind of canvas with the help of a professional printing press.

"I sometimes take pictures in order to include them in the artworks," he says. "Other times I look for pictures of events I went through — for instance, images of Beirut, Achrafieh, or Hamra. Other times I look for pictures reproducing a certain organization of reality in my mind. For instance, the image of a city taken from above or the image of a pine tree that is just so ... I think that these are fragments of memory I am trying to

reproduce in the artwork. Their place in the painting, the role they play in the narrative is never obvious to me when I am in the process of doing the work. It only becomes somewhat understandable — although far from obvious — when the artwork is over. Then a sort of narrative emerges."

It is significant that Hajj speaks of an artwork being "over" as opposed to an artwork being "finished." There is an interesting element in the process of digitally rendered imagery that is when to deem it complete. Using computer software, an artist can redo his or her compositions endlessly without having to deal with an unruly accumulation of paint, a dwindling chunk of clay, or paper disintegrating under the weight of smudged charcoal. But this makes "the end" of an artwork ever more subjective.

"My problem is two-fold," says Hajj. "Not only do I not know the answer to that question, I don't even know what 'finished' means to me. All I can say is that there comes a time when I say 'nothing more needs to be added,' that's it. I never know more than that."

Hajj was born in Beirut but has been studying in and around Montreal for more than a decade. He earned both a BA and an MA in art history from the University of Montreal. He has been awarded a number of travel and research grants, and has lectured extensively on such topics as the ethics of identity and the relationship between culture and collective violence. And he has written thick essays on Gauguin and the Parisian avant-garde for academic journals like *Third Text* and *Contagion*. Although he has had exhibitions throughout Canada, he showed his artwork

only once before in Lebanon, at the Surssock Museum in 1998.

Still, Hajj's artwork, for all its references to Nietzsche (as in the image "Ecce Homo: Auto-Portraits through the Death of Identity") and high-minded philosophical fare (as in the statement "I am exploring identity as a fundamental mechanism, the cosmological nature of its birth, the violence underlying its maintenance, and the properly apocalyptic dimension involved in its destruction"), is rooted here and in his relationship to the idea of here.

"In my lifetime," he says, "I have met two manifestations of identity. I met battling identity and I met embattled identity. Battling identity I met during the Lebanese civil war, where the confessional identity of each party was maintained by the violence it directed against its adversaries. During that period I saw the dangers and pervasions of identity in massacres such as Sabra and Shatila and that of Damour. When I left Lebanon I met embattled identity. That is identity in crisis, in danger of disappearing. In that period I saw the necessity of identity. I am still trying to find that balance between the dangers and necessity of identity. Identity is necessary but dangerous."

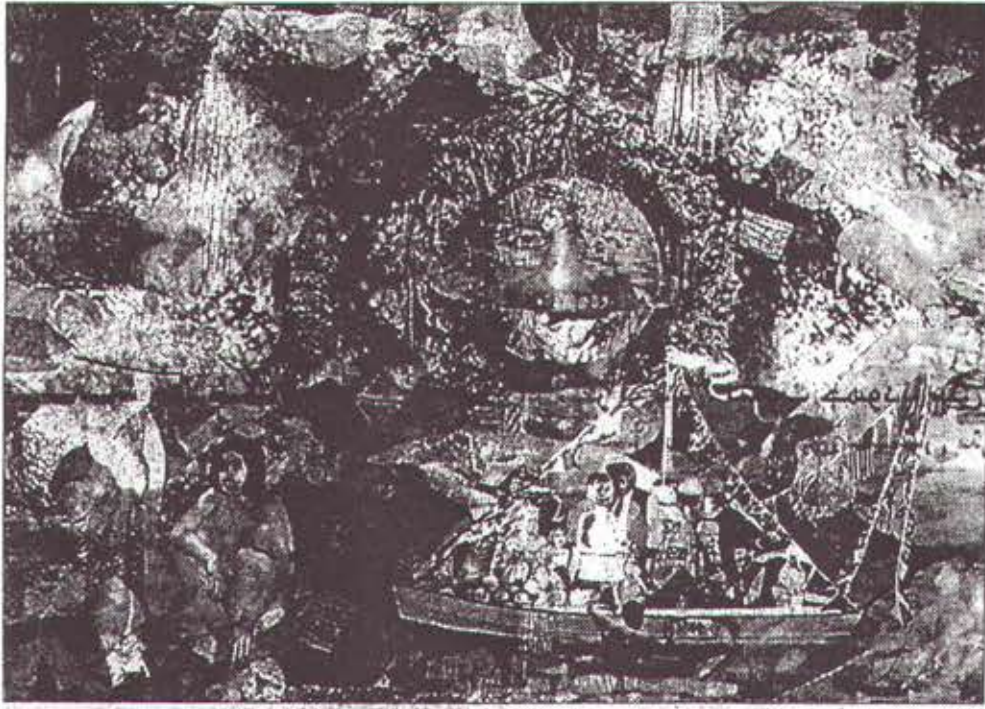
To view Hajj's artwork is to see that struggle for balance made visible. In trying to depict through art what is ultimately an invisible entanglement of forces — ideas, feelings, philosophical concepts — Hajj is not alone. To take just two examples, such well-known contemporary artists as Matthew Ritchie and Julie Mehretu — both abstract painters based in New York, the former British, the latter Ethiopian — endeavor to make visible those things in

the world that we know to exist but cannot see. For Ritchie, it's an almost scientific quest, dealing with entropy, the laws of physics, and quantum mechanics. For Mehretu, it's the energy and violence and rhythm of urban living, and re-vamping the ideas of an active, anarchic city put forth by the situationists. But the difference may be in the texture and zest of the final product. Paintings by Ritchie and Mehretu are gorgeous, demanding the back story — massive, demanding, and invigorating works that can take your breath away on the basis of aesthetics alone, and then keep you rooted in front of them; as you start tracing the narratives, uncovering the ideas, and digging into the content. Without Hajj's back story, his images can seem, and in fact are physically, quite flat. The visual framework here doesn't quite contain or enliven its intellectual content.

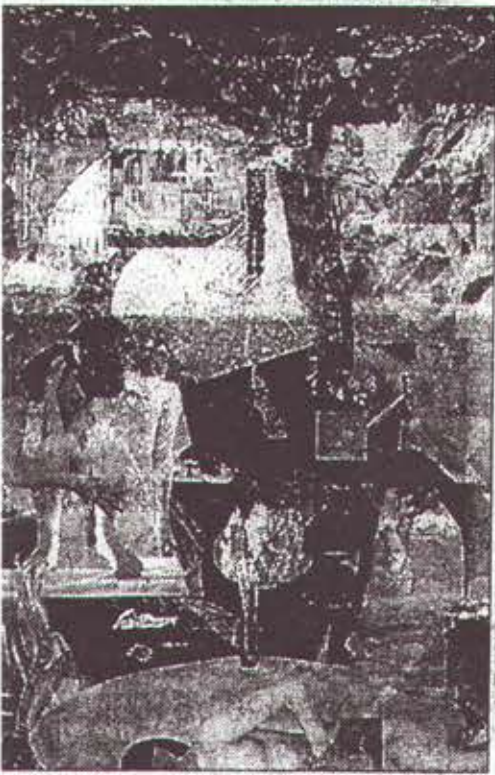
The image on the invitation card for Hajj's show is called "First Question: Should I Return?" It features a fragment of a photograph of a woman standing in front of a typical storefront in Hamra, juxtaposing the word "Orient," for the brand of watches, with Arabic script. A portrait of the artist lingers in the glass facade that the woman peers into. It is a hazy and shifting image, faintly pink, though its poignancy could very well be lost without the meaning that is embedded in the title. But it highlights the crux of the issues at stake in Hajj's artwork. Should the artist stay in Canada or return to Lebanon? Maybe posing the question is enough to start.

Ralph Hajj's exhibition is at the Agial Art Gallery in Abdel Aziz Street, Beirut until Aug. 21.

معرض رالف الحاج في غاليري "أجيال" وجوه تراقب العالم داخل عالمها الافتراضي



سفينة البلاء: الغذاء والاهتمام بالموية.



(مروان عساف)

عقد زواج.



محادثة متعددة الصوت.

لور غريب

يوحنا وقعا تحريفياً يراد منه الافادة البصرية من غير إثارة العواطف الدينية. كان الماضي بكل تعابيره ومكوناته ومبرراته يطل على الزمن الراهن ليقرع ناقوس الخطر. نحن ضحايا ما تحمله هويتنا منذ الوجود الاول.

يسير رالف الحاج بين التركيبات المدروسة، ويتصور مثلثا فيه ما يشبه حمولة سفينة من المأكول والملذات الممنوعة والشهود ذوي الوجوه الغرائبية التي تبدو في حركاتها ووضعياتها منافية للعقل. وتعتبر الاعمال كلها وجوه وقامات مختلفة الاجناس،

متوجهة نحو الاهداف الانية او الحدود البعيدة، فتجتو على الارض او تسجن نفسها داخل كرة افتراضية لتراقب ما يدور حولها. وهنا تبحر سفينة. ثمة فتى مهاجر لم يتجاوز سن المراهقة. جميع الكائنات معرضة للتحويلات وربما للزوال. تكبير ملامح من هنا وتهميش حضور من هناك. يبدو العالم مثل كومة من الحداثيات قد تمحى في لحظة او تشع لونا في لحظة اخرى. اختبار يستحق المشاهدة.

في غاليري "أجيال"، شارع عبد العزيز، معرض للصور المركبة للفنان الكندي من اصل لبناني رالف الحاج (الى 21 آب الجاري).

مسار الفنان الشاب (مواليد بيروت 1968) يتبع الابحاث البصرية المرتكزة على جزء كبير من الذاكرة الحية، البعيدة المدى من ناحية، والمتكونة من ناحية ثانية بفعل التجاذبات المتدفقة من تكامل الصور المتولدة مباشرة وتلقائياً من انبعاث التركيبات الافتراضية وفق التقنيات الحديثة.

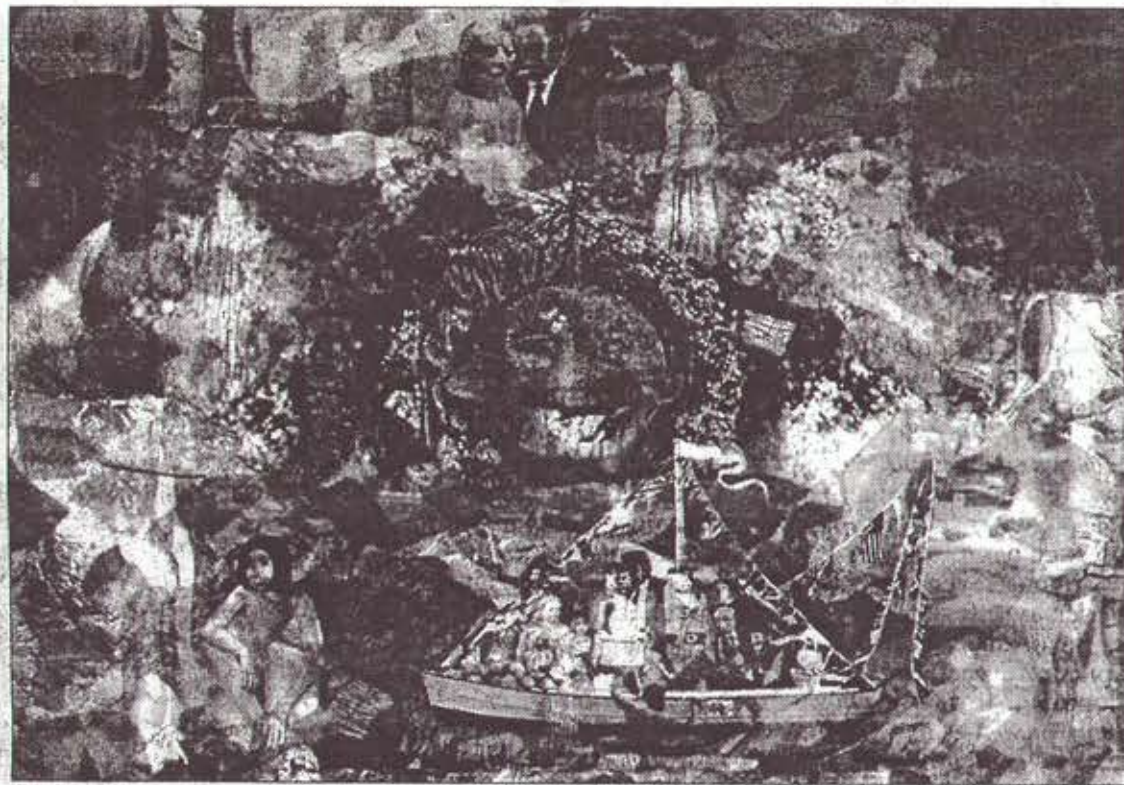
يبحث الفنان الشاب عن معاني الحضارات وتمازجها عبر الهوية اللصيقة بالانسان منذ الولادة.

تتدفق التصورات العبثية من ناحية والعنيفة السوربالية من ناحية ثانية، علما تجد مبررات للتأليف المزدهمة، المتراكمة، المنبثقة من قراءة شخصية للأخر وما فيه من تناقضات وتجاوزات تضعه في مواجهة الواقع لدى ذاك المولود في بقعة من الارض تنأى يوماً فأخر كي لا يبقى منها في البال سوى نثرات مبعثرة تحتاج الى روابط تعيد تركيبها وتمنحها مجدداً وحدتها.

صور تستدعي الاوهام المدونة على جدران غريبة حيث كتابات بالعربية تعلن عن حدث ما، في مكان ما، وفكرة فلسفية تمسح عملية الموت واشكاله القاسية ان الوثنية او المسيحية، كأن لرؤى

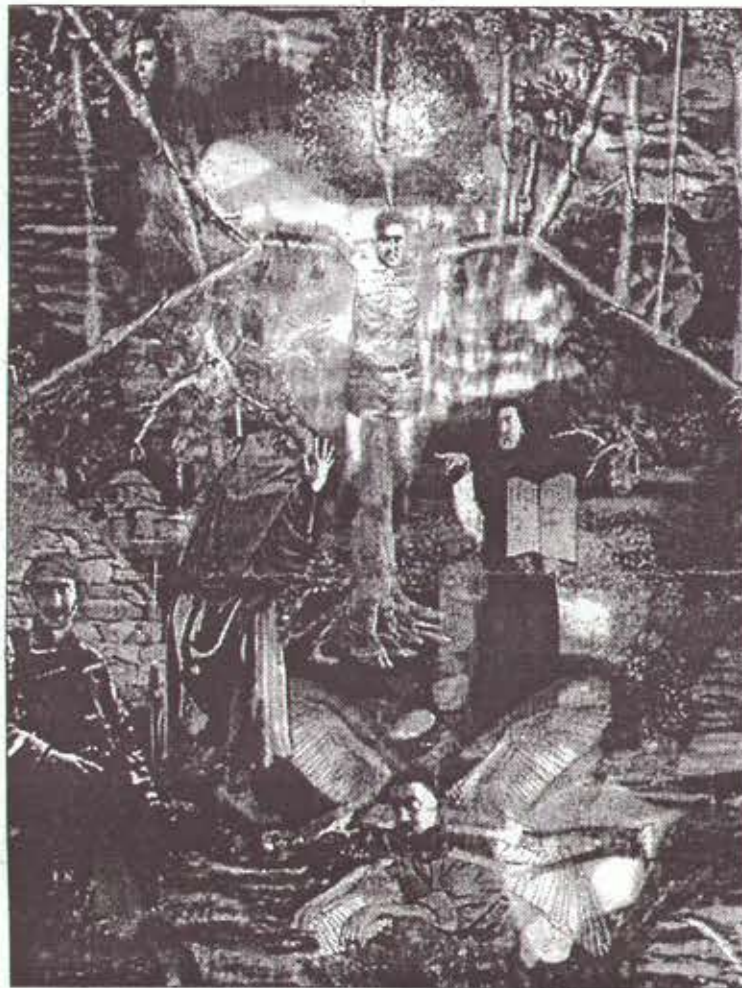
EXPOSITION

Les tableaux photographiques de Ralph Hajj à la galerie Agial



« *Ship of fools : The feeding and maintenance of identity* », un tableau photographique de Ralph Hajj (93x121 cm).

Des compositions colorées foisonnantes de personnages, grouillantes de formes humaines, d'êtres hybrides, d'objets divers, de faune, de flore... Des tableaux, qui évoquent quelque part les peintures de Jérôme Bosch, sont accrochés, jusqu'au 22 août, à la galerie Agial, rue Abdel-Aziz. Signées Ralph Hajj, un photographe libanais vivant au Canada, ces œuvres traitées sur Photoshop expriment essentiellement les préoccupations identitaires de l'artiste. *Ecce Homo : autoportraits through the death of identity ; The Birth of Identity ; The ship of fools, feeding and maintenance...* Des tirages (uniques ou en éditions limitées) collés sur toiles, où se mélangent, se superposent, s'interpénètrent, et émergent progressivement au regard des éléments du quotidien, des signes et symboles, des fragments photographiques et de mémoire. Hautement émotionnelles, les constructions photographiques de Ralph Hajj distillent des indices sur un univers singulier fait de nostalgie, d'hypersensibilité, de révolte et de quête des sources. Quête qui se perçoit également dans une autre série d'images, à la composition nettement plus laconique, où le portrait de femme et l'autoportrait, retravaillés, déformés, ou encore jouant sur les flous partiels, dégagent une subtile perplexité. Celle qui ressort des questions que se pose Ralph Hajj : « *Suis-je totalement intégré dans le pays où je vis ? Dois-je retourner aux racines, au bercail ?* » Des interrogations existentielles que cet artiste libanais écartelé entre deux cultures « développe » en photos.



« *Ecce Homo : Autoportraits through the Death of Identity* » ou des autoportraits « maquillés » disséminés aux quatre coins de la toile.



Une œuvre intitulée « *First Question : Should i Return ?* » (50 x 50 cm)

VISUAL ARTS

FOR SOME OF TODAY'S YOUNG ARTISTS, THE SURFACE OF THE WORK IS OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE. PERHAPS THAT'S WHY SOME LOCAL ART-SUPPLY STORES CLAIM INCREASED SALES OF VARNISH

It's all on the surface

HENRY LEHMANN
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Painters who have, for whatever reason, stayed away from the local art scene for a number of years might be shocked on their return to Montreal.

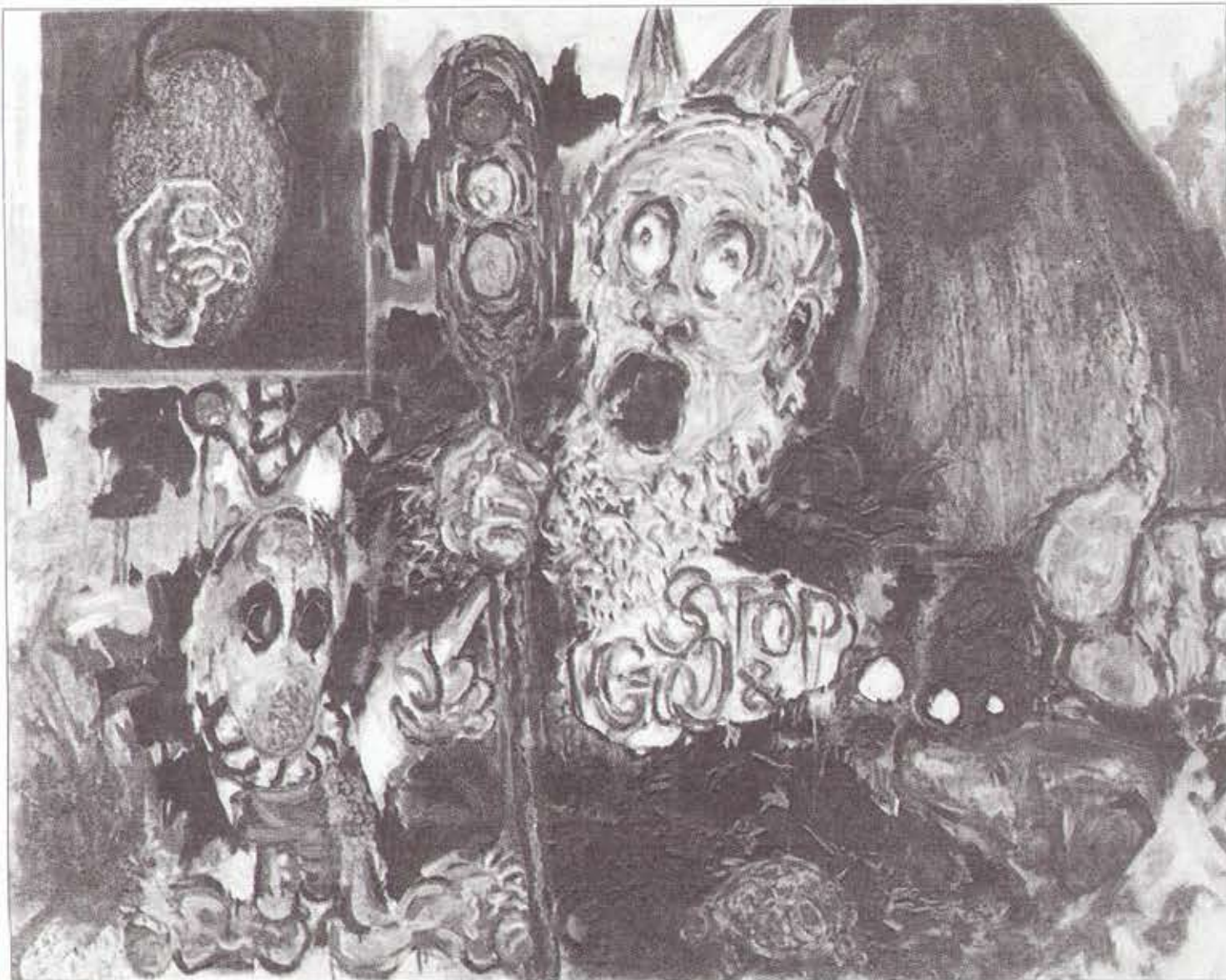
For a long time, no doubt inspired by the meteoric financial success in the 1980s of New York Julian Schnabel, it seemed as if artists were turning out their own Schnabels pulsing with arabesque lines and, arguably, celebrating the triumph of serious and slick expressionism over calculation or even, indeed, signs of skill or, for that matter, obvious concern for materials were considered terminally gauche by self-avant-gardists.

Notably, the work of Benjamin Klein at la fabriq, one of the most interesting new galleries in Montreal, is not exactly the picture of craftsman-like perfection in contrast to the work of young artists in the 1990s, who put an increased focus on technical accuracy in terms of detail and, above all, on the obsessive of the paint finish. Obsessed with the finish shared by most Renaissance masters.

Typically, Klein's oil on canvas, titled *Daddy You're a Fool*, seems designed for the visual compositional stability we associate with slow-burn portraiture. On one side of the canvas, we get a leering jester, his eyes looking like a mud-pigment slithered out from the mouth of Odilon Redon's fetid dreamscapes.

However, the true jester is the figure, the whites of his eyes looking as big as dinner plates. Interestingly, this cartoonish character may represent all the fears we may have in the good old days of a buckling, to-hell-with-it style once popular in gothic Funk Art. Another possibility, this one the evil cynicism of the 1960s at its best, is brought home to us by the big, fat feet, which recall the ant clodhoppers in some of Philip Guston's oddly initial art.

The feet are anatomically correct of the jester, but also float like radicals, orbiting in a positional galaxy that also includes a carefully painted dog



Benjamin Klein's oil on canvas titled *Daddy You're a Fool*.

COURTESY OF LA FABRIQ

and a small turtle. In many cultures, the turtle is symbolic of the functions of the universe. Here, trailing unexpectedly cheery dashes of red, this creature may be more a reference to roadkill. Yet between the lines flowing around the turtle, the current of paint and brushwork is anything but murderous, with the careful and aesthetic application of the pigment apparently being a priority.

"Surface sells," says Jesh Hanspal, director of the gallery; but, then, it sold for Leonardo as well, at least when he finished a work. Of course, it should be understood here that la fabriq, which is now 1½ years old – early old age for an art gallery – specializes in the work of emerging young artists recently graduated from art school. The gallery is directed by the highly

knowledgeable team of Hanspal, for whom art is a pleasure and a business, and Laurence Cailbeaux, who recently studied art in Paris.

This is, in the best sense, a commercial gallery, and they have so far benefited from no government grants. There is a major price for total self-reliance in an art scene such as ours that seems almost entirely dependent on life-support systems like the Canada Council. Hence to survive, la fabriq must, to use a dirty word, sell and sell again. Yet till now the quality of the art exhibited has almost never descended to the kind of pure commercialism that puts general taste – or art-world taste – ahead of quality as a consideration.

Maybe Schnabel can still get away with his semi-tough, shoot-

from-the-hip "masterpieces" with scabby surfaces. But these days, for young artists such as those often selected by la fabriq, the surface of the work – that which separates viewer from the illusions created in the pictures – is of primary importance. The surface functions both as a window onto that alternative realm of images and, paradoxically, as an eternal barrier – at least until the art conservateurs have a go at the work and decide to strip the varnish.

(There must be deeper meaning in the fact that some local art supply stores claim increased sales of varnish, which can become just more added makeup for a picture.)

In the mixed-media works by the other artist in the current show, Ralph Hage – now completing a PhD in semiotics at the

Université du Québec à Montréal after getting his MA in art history from the Université de Montréal – transforms whole sheets of canvas into what might be described as skins – or, perhaps skeins.

In one such piece, titled *Flights and Repose*, it seems we're peering into some kind of translucent crystal substance, faceted and fractured. What meets the eye, in terms of subject matter, is a series of vignettes, one depicting what looks like an all-out battle involving a couple, another consisting only of distant hills.

And firmly posted at the lower centre of the composition is what might be an artist, who, like Hage, is in love with the natural curve and the tension of pure line. Certainly, the handful of sacred pencils clutched in one

hand by this somewhat nerdy figure should do fine, even for the visually bristling line-fest in the work in question. And the careful handling of the man's contours and proportions suggests a concern for both subject matter and anatomical decorum that a while back was thought to have been permanently tossed out the window.

This beautiful and oddly strange work is possibly meant as visual commentary or sketch on the life of an artist.

Admission to the cheery and professional gallery, with the traditional white walls of a contemporary art space, is free, and the quality of the art itself makes a visit even more worthwhile.

Paintings and multimedia works by Benjamin Klein and Ralph Hage in a two-man show titled *Beauty Is Hard to Define and Power Is Elusive* is at la fabriq, 4467 Earncliffe Ave., until Aug. 28. Call (514) 996-0435 or go to www.lafabriq.com

EXHIBITIONS

St. Peter and the Vatican: the Legacy of the Popes, at the crypt of the Notre Dame Basilica in Old Montreal. Daily, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., until Sept. 18. Tickets: \$6 to \$15. Call (514) 790-1111 or visit the website www.vaticanmontreal.ca.

Centre communautaire Elgar, 260 Elgar St. Works by Shelley Freeman, until Sept. 23. (514) 765-7270.

Maison Beaudry, 14678 Notre Dame St. E. Nés à nez, continues until Sept. 10. (514) 872-2240.

Maison de la culture Côte des Neiges, 5290 Côte des Neiges Rd. Works by Leopold Plotek, ends today. Pique-Nique, until Oct. 9. (514) 872-6889.

Maison de la culture Frontenac, 2550 Ontario St. E. Art & D dans l'île, multimedia exhibition; plus drawings and poems by Daniel Guilbeault, until Aug. 27. (514) 872-2157.

Maison de la culture Marie-Uguay, 6052 Monk Blvd. Roches Nomades, an installation by Lise Létourneau and Wanda Campbell, continues until Aug. 27. (514) 872-2044.

Maison de la culture Notre Dame de Grâce, 3755 Botrel St. Works by Martin Bureau; works by Thierry Arcand-Bossé; Along the Roads of the Cambrian Shield, Present and Past, by Paul Kelly, all until Aug. 27. (514) 872-2157.

Maison de la culture Plateau Mont Royal, 465 Mount Royal Ave. E. Dépaysements de sens, ends today. Call (514) 872-2266.

Maison de la culture Pointe aux Trembles, 14001 Notre Dame St. E. Parades, until Sept. 4. (514) 872-2240.

Stewart Hall, 176 Lakeshore Rd. in Pointe Claire. East-West Oriental/Occidental Landscapes, until Aug. 28. Call (514) 630-1254.

FREE HOUR

DEEP ROOTS

ARTS Arab artists' abstract images

LORRIE BLAIR

Historically, Muslim aesthetic tradition was based on the belief that only God is worthy of worship. From that, Muslims derived notions that only God's word was to be embellished and living creatures were not to be imitated. For artists, there was a reluctance to reproduce the human figure because doing so replicated God's act of creation. In response to this dilemma, Islamic artists adopted a highly intellectual and abstract visual vocabulary.

In the exhibit *Arts arabes actuels*, four artists both pay homage to their roots and address issues spawned by their immigration. They celebrate their ethnic heritage as well as their shared experiences in Montreal.

Joseph Chahfe's three large monochromatic canvases are pure abstraction. One is textured to simulate a brick wall. Another resembles newspaper, but the ink has been smeared and the words are illegible. Clearly, Chahfe paints in his own language.



Charles Gros' cloud-gazing elegance

Ralph Hage's four untitled plexiglas boxes extend the traditional use of calligraphy in Arab culture. The surfaces of his clear boxes are covered with code-like symbols – a kind of personal, implied alphabet. Moving from left to right, the symbols covering each box become increasingly complex and, layer upon layer, magnify in volume; it's like being in a foreign country surrounded by strangers, all shouting at you in language you can't understand.

Charles Gros is represented by three small, elegant prints and a larger, mixed-media triptych. In one print

there appears to be a couple embracing, but seeing it is not unlike using one's imagination to find images in clouds. The triptych, *Histoire d'un peuple*, with its painted ominous clouds and sex ads from a Quebec newspaper glued to the centre of the canvas, reflects an immigrant's experience. Immigration can cause artists to lose their place in the world, and they must work hard to reconstruct it. Nothing, not even classified ads, can be taken for granted.

Ali Kichou's enigmatic installation *Yama Akrilla* consists of a large wall-hanging made from burlap and a tall, free-standing wooden totem. Tightly spaced symbols that read like a cryptic alphabet have been painted on the burlap's surface and, from a distance, give an overall appearance of mud-cloth. The totem, which stands on the floor directly in front of the wall piece, is also covered with burlap and at its top is an African-like mask. The two parts are linked by unravelled burlap and black and white eggs. The work is mysterious and visually stunning.

Arabs are heir to a legacy of more than 30 centuries of art, but Arab artists are an unfamiliar and seldom-heard voice in the West. Chahfe, Hage, Gros and Kichou are about to change that. ■

Arts arabes actuels
at Maison de la culture Côte-des-Neiges
5290 Côte-des-Neiges till Nov. 23

LE DEVOIR

CULTURE

Images du monde arabe

Culture
multiformeCLÉMENT TRUDEL
LE DEVOIR

Les Arabes forment un univers très diversifié. La quatrième édition d'*Images du monde arabe* qui se déroule à compter du 17 octobre à Montréal est susceptible, si besoin est, d'en fournir une interprétation nuancée.

Sur l'Irak, on peut supposer que ce sont les séquences de CNN qui ont marqué nos rétines, avec les bons soins du général Schwarzkopf. Les six films ayant trait à l'Irak ne changent rien à l'image de l'autocrate Saddam Hussein; ils nous en disent un peu plus sur ceux et celles qui sont les victimes méconnues de cette guerre du Golfe, car il y a eu aussi le sacre du «peuple des marais» par les troupes de Saddam et *La Chute d'un Eden*, qui en rend compte, ouvre le volet cinéma du festival à la Maison de la culture de Côte-des-Neiges, le samedi 18, peu avant le film retrouvé *The Broken Wings*, basé sur une œuvre de Kahlil Gibran, auteur de *Prophète*. Est aussi évoquée la vie de sept artistes irakiens exilés en Italie (*Amid the Alien Corn*) et celle d'une artiste exilée à Londres, Nahida Rammah, dans *Wasteland*.

Plusieurs des 27 films à l'affiche — soit à la Maison de la culture de Côte-des-Neiges, soit au cinéma de l'ONF, rue Saint-Denis — constituent une première pour le Canada ou pour le Québec. Ces journées culturelles cinématographiques se concluront le vendredi 31 par *Quatre Femmes d'Égypte*, la plus récente production de Tahani Rached qui réalise un rêve: présenter la recette de tolérance de femmes qui auraient tout pour s'entre-déchirer, mais qui arrivent à tenir un débat civilisé malgré leurs brisures religieuses ou idéologiques.

Mohamed Fadel (Égypte) nous replonge quant à lui dans l'année de la nationalisation du canal de Suez avec *Nasser 56* (142 min, à l'ONF, 24 octobre).

L'initiative est due au Centre d'études arabes sur le développement (CEAD) en collaboration avec Alternatives. On se renseigne au (514) 982-6606.

Quelques-uns des documentaires ou docudrames à l'affiche touchent la vie quotidienne des résistants palestiniens, certains événements qui touchent Beyrouth qui renait de ses cendres et recouvre la mémoire: *Once Upon a Time: Beirut*.

Un film tout récent du cinéaste Omar Amiralay (Syrie-France) évoque le souvenir d'un scientifique séquestré et assassiné par le Djihad islamique: *Par un jour de violence ordinaire, mon ami Michel Seurat*. Seurat fut enlevé en 1985, le même jour que le journaliste Jean-Paul Kauffman — relâché, lui, après plus de trois ans de captivité!

L'un des peintres présents hier au lancement officiel d'*Images du monde arabe*, Ralph Hage, récuse l'exotisme ou une certaine critique entend confiner les artistes arabes contemporains. Il souhaite que les trois lieux d'exposition retenus (Centre Strathearn, Maison de la culture Côte-des-Neiges où il y a vernissage demain soir, et ONF) soient amplement fréquentés pour que soient connus les courants vraiment actuels d'un art qui a lui aussi recours à l'abstraction et aux installations pour s'exprimer.

Le volet musical d'*Images du monde arabe* repose sur deux récitals: celui du groupe Doula (21 octobre, Maison de la culture Côte-des-Neiges) avec répertoire de chants traditionnels arabo-andalous, et celui du groupe Samaï (6 novembre, Centre Strathearn), et de sa musique arabo-berbère.