

AGENDA  
LEBANON

FESTIVALS:

Docudays



Aresco Palace, Qantari-Hamra, Beirut  
Nov. 8  
+961 3 771880  
Tonight three films:  
Duraid Munajjim's "Exile to Empire" (Iraq/Canada, 60 mins); "Le Plaisir Contagieux" by Serge Avedikian (France, 52 mins); Daniel Schweizer's "Skinhead Attitude" (Switzerland, 90 mins)

EXHIBITIONS:

Angelo Palazzini  
Aida Cherfan Gallery, Beirut  
Nov. 5-26  
+961 1 983 111

MUSIC

Michael Hill  
The Blue Note Café, Makhoul St., Beirut  
Nov. 8-13  
+961 1 743 857  
New York's electric blues guitarist, vocalist and composer makes his triumphant return to West Beirut's intimate jazz venue.

EGYPT

MUSIC:

Sharkiat  
Beit al-Harrawi (behind al-Azhar Mosque)  
Nov. 8, 8.30 p.m.  
+ 20 510 4174/735 2287  
Fathi Salama's band promises a musical meeting of east and west.

Al-Tanboura,  
Beit al-Harrawi  
Nov. 9, 8.30 p.m.  
+ 20 510 4174/735 2287  
This Port Said troupe will perform folk songs and music on traditional instruments

EXHIBITIONS:

Rana al-Nemr  
Townhouse Gallery of Contemporary Art, Cairo  
Nov. 7-Dec. 1  
Tel/Fax: + 20 576 8600 / 576 80 86

The Seventh Salon of Small Art Works  
Centre of Arts  
Al-Mahad al-Swissi St, Zamalek, Cairo  
Until Dec. 2  
+ 20 753 8211  
Paintings, graphics, drawings, sculptures, ceramics, photos and

# Architects embark on campaign to save Tripoli Fair Grounds

Development will disfigure symbol of Lebanese modernism

Rami Farouk Daher  
Special to The Daily Star

**T**RIPOLI: Today the Tripoli Fair Grounds are threatened by development plans that utterly fail to comprehend their architectural rationale and significance. Since the end of Lebanon's civil war, the country's development plans have appropriated a narrow, cliched and parochial definition of "heritage" and "tradition." Development has already seen many sites endangered, disfigured and altered (if not demolished) in the name of economic prosperity. The Tripoli Fair Grounds, it seems, are next.

The middle of the 20th century was a special time for Lebanon - a time when the country was experiencing, and practicing, full-fledged "modernism." Many social scientists have said that Lebanon's cultural production of the 1950s and 1960s was unique and produced a local version of modernism that was influential not only in Lebanon, but throughout the Arab world.

It is argued that this Lebanese modernism - centered on a critical and informed public opinion - played an important role in forging a Lebanese character and reality that was distinct in the region.

Lebanese architecture during that era was part of this modernist discourse. From the 1950s until the beginning of the civil war in the early 1970s, an interesting local version of modernist architecture emerged, signifying a society that was open to different cultural changes and progressive transformation.

Beirut was the heart of this

Lebanese modernism. The St. Georges Hotel (1932-1946), the Shams Building (1957), Aysha Bakkar Mosque (1968-71), the Pan American Building (1952-53) - this era signified an enlightened architectural practice that was both local and global, critical and exceptional.

Such modernism wasn't restricted to Beirut. The 1960s saw the construction of the Marjayoun School, designed by Constantinos Doxiadis, and the Tripoli Fair Ground. Designed by the world-famous Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, the Tripoli Fair was commissioned in a state effort to foster Lebanese modernism.

The Tripoli Fair included the curved International pavilion, the Lebanese pavilion, the space museum, the experimental theater, the experimental collective housing museum, the outdoor theater, and many other buildings. Now considered one of the architectural icons of modernism, the Tripoli Fair not

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only contributed to Lebanon's "modern face," it was a signifier of a "modernized" and "progressive" society.

Professor George Arbid from the American University of Beirut has conducted in-depth research on modern architecture in Lebanon. His work is indispensable for its creating a permanent record of this important phase in Lebanese architecture.

At a time when many such sites are endangered or have been demolished, Arbid's work

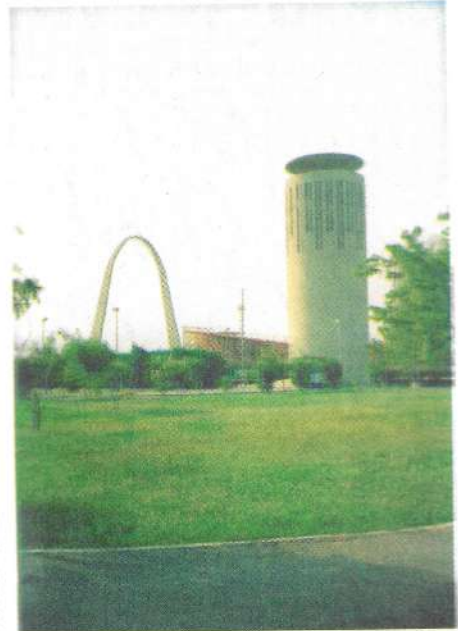
- in the form of public lectures, poster campaigns, publications and advocacy - has great awareness of the significance and meaning of Lebanon's architectural modernism to students and the public at large.

Together with other Lebanese intellectuals, Arbid is campaigning to save the Tripoli International Fair. "Today," he has written: "The Fair is subjected to the same disarray that touches architecture in Lebanon, namely a widespread pastiche of tradition and a misapprehension on architectural identity."

"A design released recently threatens to totally transform the nature of the Fair Grounds. It became clear that an awareness campaign is necessary to preserve the original scheme and buildings, while promoting the use of the Fair Grounds in an appropriate way, before it is too late," he said.

Arbid's worries are warranted. Future investment in the Tripoli Fair Grounds proposes a Tourist City for the area with an amusement park, water park, computer games, shopping venues and other consumer activities. Claiming cultural tourism as one of its main objectives, the plan borrows from local Lebanese heritage and from "traditional" Lebanese architecture to provide the facade for its different buildings and activities.

Like much international "cultural industrial" investment recently, the Tripoli plan claims to provide a "cultural experience" coupled with entertainment that takes place within such desirable "hot spots" as historic city cores and nature parks. Many of these projects claim to address the massive un-



Full-fledged modernism: Tripoli's International Fair Grounds

employment problem afflicting much of the world.

But intellectuals and social reformers have become increasingly critical of such investment projects. They express dismay and reject this sort of heritage exploitation by well-placed private interests whose aim is no more than excessive capital accumulation or the creation of an ever-more banal commodity.

## || 'One can hear the isolated voice of resistance, critical public opinion'

oriented consumer society. Such cultural industries, it is argued, couple "the past" and "heritage" with entertainment to sugarcoat exploitation while eroding cultural standards and local identity.

In the case of the Tripoli Fair, the initiative also threatens to disfigure a significant example of Lebanese modernism.

For over a decade now Lebanon has been undergoing an ambitious reconstruction plan. For cultural and socio-political reasons it is terribly important that different elements of Lebanon's history be sustained for future generations.

Unfortunately, several reconstruction efforts have marginalized Lebanese modernism. The reason is that "heritage" has been defined in a nostalgic, uncritical, and parochial manner. Many of the building projects that dominate these reconstruction efforts are clothed in an ersatz approximation of "traditional Lebanese architecture."

The uncritical acceptance of the corporate agenda behind this urban planning signals the decline and demise of critical public debate about such significant public issues as Lebanon's built environment.

The critical and informed pre-war public opinion, which produced a florescence of avant-garde modernist architecture in mid-20th century Lebanon, is being supplanted by a parochial concern for nostalgia, the man-

ufacture of a collaged postwar urban reality concerned with places of consumption.

Recently, though, one has been able to hear isolated voices of resistance and critical public opinion.

One recent trend has seen the merger of old mentors - senior architects and planners who took part in pre-war construction - and a younger generation of critics. Such critical public groups have been active in starting campaigns to disclose the shortcomings of the various postwar reconstruction schemes, within and without Beirut.

The current campaign to save the Tripoli Fair Grounds and to lobby against the proposed project for the Tourist City is only one example of such resistance to Lebanon's postwar realities.

Its advocates say the campaign against the Tripoli project is not against the notion of investment, job creation, or tourism in general, it is against the exploitation of society, the banal appropriation of "heritage" and "the past," and ignorance of the meaning and significance of particularly Lebanese modernist architecture.

It is unfortunate indeed that Lebanon's modernist patrimony, of which the Tripoli Fair is but one fine example, is considered by some to be alien to the country. Lebanon's modernist architecture is a part of Lebanese heritage, an integral part of its past critical, avant-garde cultural production.

Beirut is striving to become a cosmopolitan, world-class city, and perhaps it is the only city in the "Arab East" that has the potential to achieve such status. Saving and incorporating Lebanon's modernism - represented not only in its architecture but also in its critical public sphere - is a sophisticated and serious step toward achieving such objective.

Tripoli's International Fair is one of very few remaining symbols of Lebanon's disappearing modernism. As such it seems self-evident that it ought to be preserved.



Lebanon's modernist architecture is a metaphor for informed public opinion.

## Dubai's affluence attracts con men keen on separating fools from their wealth

Scams often involve bizarre voodoo rituals where potions are concocted and animals are sacrificed

Laith Abou-Razeh

confidence men are converging

"The people who fall for

these schemes are

hub of the region. Follow economic crime off