

AGENDA

LEBANON

MUSIC

‘Due Virtuosi’

*Hotel al-Bustan, Beit Mery*  
**March 18, 8:30 pm**  
+961 4 972 980/1/2  
The dashing young violin player Sami Merdinian from Argentina joins forces with Italian pianist Enrico Pace, a previous winner of the Franz Liszt piano competition. The program includes works from Stravinsky, Tartini and Respighi.

‘Symphonic Masterpieces’

*Hotel al-Bustan, Beit Mery*  
**March 20, 8:30 pm**  
+961 4 972 980/1/2  
A series of Italian-themed masterpieces, including Respighi’s “Fontane di Roma” and Tchaikovsky’s “Capriccio Italiano” are played by the Lebanese Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Francesco Lanzillota, with Enrico Pace on the piano.

BOOK FAIR

‘Lebanon in Books’

*Souk al-Tayeb, Saifi Village*  
**March 20, 9 am**  
+961 1 442 664  
Beirut’s weekly farmer’s market celebrates books about Lebanon in fields such as culture, heritage, food and guidebooks. Joumana and Youmna Medlej will sign their new book “Excavating Beirut.”

PERFORMANCE

‘Viva la Diva’

*Babel Theater, Hamra*  
**Until March 28, 8:30 pm**  
+961 1 744 033  
Penned by Hoda Barakat and directed by Nabil al-Azan, Randa Asmar performs this black comedy about a Lebanese actress who flees the country rather than facing her personal issues. In Arabic with French subtitles.

ART

Esteban Lisa

*Villa Audi, Achrafieh*  
**Until April 17**  
+961 05 464 120, ext. 110  
The pioneering Spanish painter Lisa, who conveyed his mystic conception of life and art through abstract cavases, is the subject of a retrospective courtesy of the Spanish Embassy.

Oussama Baalbaki

*FFA Private Bank, Downtown*  
**Until May 4**  
+961 1 985 195  
The southern Lebanese artist, a silver medalist in the painting competition at the 2009 Francophone Games, exhibits his winning works as well as several newer canvases.

‘Travel Journal’

*Galerie Piece Unique, Saifi*  
**Until March 18**  
+961 1 975 655  
Egyptian-Lebanese artist Tamima Fahmy presents her pictorial travel journal, completed over two years of navigating the globe.

‘Soft Sculpture’

*Running Horse Contemporary Art Space, Karantina*  
**Until March 27**  
+961 3 710 225  
A quartet of local artists explore the idea of sculpture through non-traditional forms.

Just a thought

What does it matter how many lovers you have if none of them gives you the universe?  
  
Jacques Lacan  
(1901-1981)  
French psychologist

REVIEW

Strangers behind the looking glass

The inaugural exhibition at Tehran’s Mohsen art gallery deals with ‘being’ and ‘otherness’

Mehdi Moghimmnejad  
Special to The Daily Star

TEHRAN: Suppose you meet a friend on a Tehran street and ask, “How are you?” Chances are your friend would simply say, “I’m doing okay” – or, as we’re likely to say in Farsi, “I’m alive.” This “being alive” is a close approximation of Heidegger’s *dasein* – a form of “being there,” denoting nothing more than existing in the world, just like all the others who, like you, simply are.

With so many “beings” about, civil relations ensue, which may explain why relationships with others have been discussed by so many intellectuals – from Husserl, Martin Buber, Levinas, Sartre and Lacan to Sohrevardi and Ibn-e-Arabi.

“Being” and the attendant human relations – particularly the relationship between the artist and those they live among, in amity or animosity – were at the center of “The Other,” an 18-artist multi-media show that recently inaugurated Tehran’s Mohsen art gallery.

Curated by 27-year-old artist Ali Ettehad, this exhibition delicately investigated the range of possible encounters and the variety of artistic points of view that the works elicit.

Among the most distinguished works in this selection, Nikoo Tarkhani’s “The Image Through the Mirror” may be the only one that refers the spectator to a specific definition of “the other” in a defined discourse.

Tarkhani contrived a simple design for the piece. Her own portrait has been printed on metalized paper (not unlike gold leaf) and divided into two parts. The subject’s face is covered by multiple of pictures of other people.

In Lacanian discourse the “mirror stage” is the point when the child deliberately experiences its own body and can distinguish the line between “I”

and “Other.” This line, however, begins to disappear in Tarkhani’s work. Here, the artist sees herself accepting the other’s gaze. Moreover, she is inseparable from those who have played a role her identity formation.

Tarkhani’s use of self-portraits and family pictures is a theme that also crops up in the work of Samira Eskandarfar, Jinoos Taghizadeh, Farid Jafari Samarghandi, Behrang Samadzadegan and Samira Alikhan Zadeh.

Barbad Golshiri’s “Middle East Impromptu” is a work that has a different point of view regarding “the others.” In this grey-scale video that seems to have been filmed by a closed circuit camera, the artist recites a long, impromptu monologue while his face has been completely covered and walled by a framework reminiscent of a cell.

It is unnecessary to focus on every word of Golshiri’s rant. The meaning of this work is concealed within its basic idea: Intellectuality is delusional, diminished into words. The

artist seems at once to suffer and enjoy a lustful sense.

Here, Golshiri sees himself in a merciless battle with the other. This “Other” consists of complicated relations that, for him, exemplify the ideological atmosphere of Middle Eastern art and artists.

The artist tried to justify the ostentatious aspect of his work by saying he was cognizant of it. If we consider Golshiri himself as a part of the art of this region, then we have to admit that even he is not immune from his own sarcastic tone.

Nima Esmailpour’s “Americans Ask: Who Attacked Our Country,” on the other hand, engages with the political meaning of “the other.” The work puts George W. Bush’s famous declaration of September 20, 2001, alongside images of the events of September 11 of that year.

What matters here are the historical roots of the idea that the Orient and the Occident are polar opposites of one another. From the time Hellenic Greeks labeled foreigners as “Barbar-

ians,” as Edward Said famously remarked, Western intellectuals and politicians have considered the Orient as “the other.”

These days, the delusional expression of this view has it that the Orient is a permanent danger and aggressor. This other is responsible for all disorders in this world. Today, the threat of nuclear weapons in Iran and North Korea, mingled with that of Islamic extremism, play the same role in Western geopolitical thinking as Eastern Bloc played during the Cold War. Sentiment in the Middle East vis-a-vis the US and Western imperialism simply reverses these roles.

With “Choose Your Background,” Amir Ali Ghasemi takes a decidedly more light-hearted tack. Part of a larger project involving photos documenting a street performance, “Choose Your Background” depicts a Tehran resident asking Berlin residents to choose one of the icons of Tehran as a background for a memorial photo.

In this witty piece, Ghasemi

restores sweet memories of innocent transnational contact, while mocking the distance between countries that makes citizens look like tourists in their own homeland.

In “The Last Day in Saint Andrias,” Sohrab Mostafavi Kashani transforms citizens of a virtual city into real people, with whom we are familiar. The essential subject in this work is the complicated world of the videogame Grand Theft Auto, which makes such interactions possible. In these snapshots, Kashani’s aliens look much more realistic than their animated representations.

Hamed Sahihi’s short video “Thunder and Lightning” sees “the other” in an angel’s concealed figure. In “Duino Elegies,” Reiner Maria Rilke believed what impresses us is the appalling presence of angels.

Here, the heavenly creatures wait silently for the sound of thunder or a raindrop to be revealed. These angels must have something to say, a message. That is the etymological route of the word “Mal’lach” in Arabic and Hebrew, and also “Angelos” in Greek.

For the last word, it’s appropriate to point out an artwork whose outstanding quality lies in its nature. The music of Kaveh Kateb is not a soundtrack to accompany the works in this exhibition but a free-standing work of its own. Kateb’s is a work that could accompany the viewer back to the streets of Tehran, back to the simple everyday encounters that constitute our “being alive.”

For more information about the exhibition at Moshen Gallery, contact info@parkingallery.com.



A still image from Sohrab Mostafavi Kashani’s “The Last Day in Saint Andrias.”



Nikoo Tarkhani’s “The Image Through the Mirror.”

Mysteries of monotheistic pharaoh unveiled with DNA tests

Paul Schemm  
Associated Press

CAIRO: The DNA tests that revealed how the famed boy-king Tutankhamun most likely died solved another of ancient Egypt’s enduring mysteries – the fate of controversial Pharaoh Akhenaten’s mummy. The discovery could help fill out the picture of a fascinating era over 3,300 years ago when Akhenaten embarked on history’s first attempt at monotheism.

During his 17-year rule, Akhenaten sought to overturn more than a millennium of Egyptian religion and art to establish the worship of a single sun god. In the end, his bold experiment failed and he was eventually succeeded by his son, the young Tutankhamun, who rolled back his reforms and restored the old religion.

No one ever knew what became of the heretic pharaoh, whose tomb in the capital he built at Amarna was unfinished and whose name was stricken from the official list of kings.

Two years of DNA testing and CAT scans on 16 royal mummies conducted by Egypt’s Supreme Council of Antiquities, however, gave the firmest evidence to date that an unidentified mummy – known as KV55, after the number of the tomb where it was found in 1907 in Egypt’s Valley of the Kings – is Akhenaten’s.

The testing, whose results were announced last month, established that KV55 was the father of King Tut and the son of the Pharaoh Amenhotep III, a lineage that matches Akhenaten’s, according to inscriptions.

KV55 had long been assumed to be too young to be Akhenaten, who was estimated to be in his 40s at the time of his death – but the testing also established the mummy’s correct age, matching the estimates for Akhenaten.

“In the end there was just one solution for this genetic data fitting into the family tree and this showed us this must really be Akhenaten and could not be any other,” said Albert Zink, director of the Institute for Mummies and the Iceman at the European Academy in Bolzano, Italy, who worked on the project.

Now experts are planning more tests to uncover further details about Akhenaten’s royal family. The new attention could also give a push to a planned new Akhenaten museum that will showcase his mummy near Amarna, his capital midway down the Nile in what is now the province of Minya, 220 kilometers south of Cairo.

In one tantalizing discovery,

the testing established that another unidentified mummy was Akhenaten’s sister, that he fathered Tutankhamun with her and that she appears to have died from violence with blows to her face and head.

Still elusive is Nefertiti, the chief wife of Akhenaten, famed for her beauty. Egypt’s antiquities chief, Zahi Hawass, has said one of his goals is to track down her mummy.

“The Amarna period is like an unfinished play,” Hawass said at the February press conference announcing the new discoveries. “We know its beginning but have never succeeded in discovering its end.”

The discovery of Akhenaten’s remains lay to rest long-time speculation over his physical appearance. Royal statues of the time show an effeminate figure with womanly hips, elongated skull and fleshy lips – leading to speculation he suffered from any number of rare

diseases that distorted his body. But the mummy and DNA tests showed a normally shaped man without genetic conditions that might give him both masculine and feminine features.

“It ought to dampen down some of the more dramatic interpretations,” said Barry Kemp, who has been working on the Amarna excavations since 1977. “But people do love a good story.”

Jerome Rose, of Arkansas University, who has been working on the site with Kemp, said the discovery “makes our work at Amarna of greater interest.”

What the discovery does not resolve, however, is the mystery of how Akhenaten died. Unlike Tutankhamun’s well-preserved mummy, which showed he suffered from congenital defects and malaria, Akhenaten’s remains are little more than bones with no soft tissues to provide clues to his death.

In fact, the difference in

preservation between his skeleton and all the other royal mummies could have been due to his different religious beliefs or animosity by those burying him.

“I think it’s another evidence that it really could be Akhenaten; he was treated differently, not in the same way as the other mummies,” said Carsten Pusch, of the Institute of Human Genetics in Tubingen, who also worked on the project.

For most of the world, King Tut embodies ancient Egypt’s glory, because his tomb was packed to the brim with the glittering wealth of the rich 18th Dynasty (1569-1315 BC). But Tut was in fact a minor king. Akhenaten’s reign, which began around 1350 BC, was far more momentous.

He broke with the powerful priests of Amun, Egypt’s chief god, repudiated Egypt’s many deities and ordered the worship of the sun disk, Aten. He also moved his court to his new capital at Amarna, which grew to some 30,000.

Along with the religious revolution, he oversaw a dramatic change in Egyptian art, promoting a naturalist style at odds with the rigid conventions and stiff tomb paintings with which the world is familiar. In one example of the exuberant new style, remnants of a painted gypsum floor from the palace show colorful ducks exploding

out of a riot of Nile reeds.

But after his death, he was purged by his successors and remained unknown to the world until the discovery in the 19th century of his city at Amarna – one of the only existing ruins of an ancient Egyptian city, rather than just a temple or tomb.

For a Victorian Europe already fascinated by the flood of discoveries in Egypt, news of a monotheist centuries ahead of his time seized the public’s imagination. Theories have swirled over Akhenaten’s lega-

Discovery lays to rest long-standing speculation over his physical appearance

cy, with some like Sigmund Freud even speculating he may have influenced Judaism, a theory that, while discounted, has been remarkably enduring.

Unlike the animal and man-shaped deities of Egypt, Akhenaten’s cult took a step toward the worshipping of something more abstract.

“He was prepared to believe only in the supernatural source of power that he could see with his own eyes, the disc or orb of the sun,” said Kemp.

Akhenaten also set forth a new moral code. “His courtiers praised him for teaching them

to distinguish between right and wrong, and I think it likely that he wrote a treatise of moral guidance that has not survived,” he added.

The discovery of Akhenaten’s body could be a boon to Minya, one of the poorer provinces in Egypt – quintessential “flyover” territory, skipped by tourists heading straight from the Giza pyramids outside Cairo to the temples of Luxor in the south, where the Valley of the Kings is located.

The museum in Minya will house the mummies of Akhenaten, his mother Queen Tiye and his ill-fated sister-consort and “tell the story about Akhenaten,” Hawass said.

Amarna’s ruins were once a regular stop for cruise boats steaming south from Cairo. But an insurgency by Islamist militants during the 1990s drove the tourists away and few have returned more than a decade after it was crushed.

The city’s modest hotels still bear faded 1980s-era tourist posters touting the area as the “cradle of monotheism,” with an image of Akhenaten.

Kemp says the occasional tour group does pass through to see the extensive Amarna ruins.

“There is a definite Akhenaten fan club,” said Kemp. “I am intrigued by the existence of those who make a spiritual pilgrimage to Amarna.”

HOROSCOPE

Aries (Mar. 21 – April 19)	Taurus (April 20 – May 20)	Gemini (May 21 – June 21)
Why won't anyone speak clearly? It may become irritating when your friends talk around their problems without making any sense, but this is just a temporary annoyance.	A good friend is extremely helpful – they're there for you today, no matter what you need. Things should start to look a lot better really soon, so be thankful and move on.	Today is perfect for tackling single projects or issues and moving them forward – trying to multitask is a sure route to frustration. Details are sure to spin out of control attempt too much.
Cancer (June 22 – July 22)	Leo (July 23 – Aug. 22)	Virgo (Aug. 23 – Sept. 22)
If you need to do serious work today, try to take over planning or other big-picture activities. Your ability to handle tiny details isn't where it should be, so think big.	Your skepticism needs to shine today – otherwise, you're sure to believe just about anything anyone tells you. Minimize the likelihood of pricy mistakes by resisting the shops.	Your life is in flux today, but that doesn't mean you can't just kick back and relax a little. You may find that you need to deal with little changes rather than the major alterations.
Libra (Sept. 23 – Oct. 22)	Scorpio (Oct. 23 – Nov. 21)	Sagittarius (Nov. 22 – Dec. 21)
Your instincts for beauty are sharper than ever right now, so it's the perfect time to redecorate or help someone else make their life a little sweeter. Reach out and see what happens.	Use your superpowers to zip through your work or chores today – you have far more going on than others realize. Your great energy should help make life much more interesting.	It's a really great day for reading the world like a book. You can see morals and metaphors everywhere if you look, and you might decide to make a big change late in the day.
Capricorn (Dec. 22 – Jan. 19)	Aquarius (Jan. 20 – Feb. 18)	Pisces (Feb. 19 – Mar. 20)
You may feel like volunteering or otherwise making a difference today. Things are going your way, and if you share the good times with others, you may be able reap the benefits.	Think big today. Your energy is best spent on projects designed to affect great masses of people, rather than just a few friends or associates. You may make a big difference soon.	Indulge yourself somewhat today – you have enough good energy to spare some for fun or amusement. If you want to buy yourself something nice, now is the time to do it.



The colossus of Akhenaten in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.