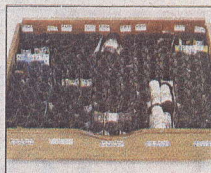




HUMOUR

If sharks close in on you, stay calm **3**



ARTS

Throwing light on imagery of agony **13**



SCIENCE

The nasal link to lasting memory **29**

WEEKEND REVIEW

GULF NEWS

19/09/08



Blurred vision

Sheba Farms is a strange case of a mapping error left uncorrected, tying Lebanon, Syria, Israel and the United Nations in knots. Abundance of water in the area comprising 14 farms makes it prized territory. But oddly enough, neither Syria nor Lebanon has bothered to mark its borders clearly or claim jurisdiction. **Full story on Page 10**

BOOK REVIEWS INSIDE

WEEKEND REVIEW

The Arts

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2008



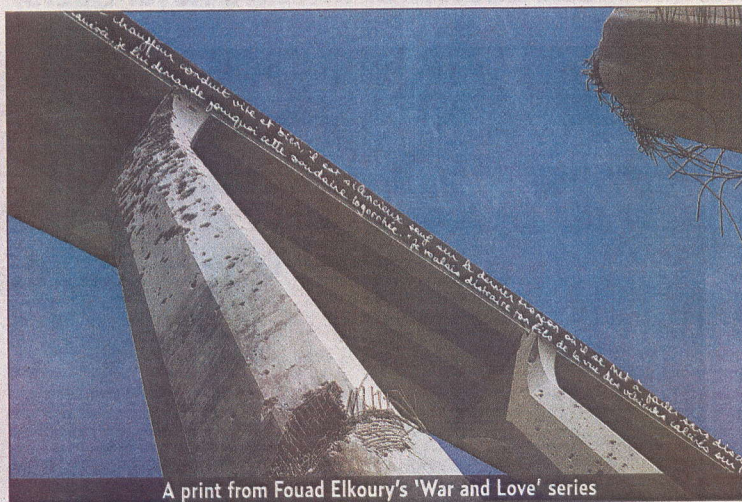
'Latent Images' from the 'Wonder Beirut' series by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

Exposed negatives

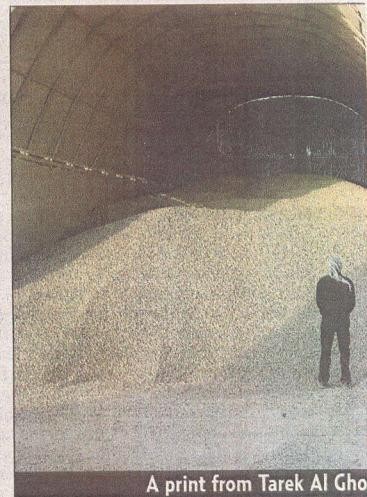
The trauma of conflict — experienced, perceived or embedded in memory — is reflected in multiple forms transcending disciplines at an exhibition in Dubai **Page 18**



'Weapons of Mass Destruction'
by Laila Shawa



A print from Fouad Elkoury's 'War and Love' series



A print from Tarek Al Ghousein's 'War and Love' series

BY LAYLA HAROON
Special to Weekend Review

The interdisciplinary and thought-provoking artworks at *Roads Were Open/Roads Were Closed* — including photographic series and portraits by artists Fouad Elkoury, Joana Hadjithomas, Khalil Joreige, Tarek Al Ghousein and Laila Shawa — map varying approaches and practices around the experience, perception and memory of conflict-related trauma.

Elkoury's *On War and Love* is a series of 33 journal entries recorded during Israel's 2006 war on Lebanon by Israel. The work combines photography and text to reveal the artist's intimate thoughts as he recounts the event — which doubled in its intensity due to his partner's decision to leave him.

"This came as an impulsive move due to the sudden outbreak of war in Beirut in the summer of 2006," Elkoury told *Weekend Review*. "There was no planned motive behind it and while I was writing and photographing I had no idea that this would one day become a coherent ensemble. I was just trying to keep busy in reaction to the political developments. Over this first emotional layer, a more intimate one was added, about love, or the sudden lack of it."

From then on, and during the 33 days of war between Hezbollah and Israel, Elkoury kept working, writing and photographing — reporting daily news of love and war. When the war ended, his photographic diary was com-

plete; all he had to do was re-touch some of them to give the series its final form.

"The abstract idea grew with each passing day. The combination of black-and-white photography, colour photography and text seemed the most natural and suitable form in such a situation. It didn't require any thinking; it imposed itself right from the beginning. Although new to me as a form, it derived directly from the context I was in," he adds.

Al Ghousein's series, *Self-Portraits*, depicts the artist against various settings where open spaces and obstacles intercept each other.

"On one level, *Self-Portraits* presents a commentary on contemporary Western media representations of the Palestinian as terrorist," Al Ghousein says.

"This project started as a result of my growing frustration with the way in which Palestinians and other Arabs were being misrepresented. The series is part of a broader body of work that seeks to investigate notions of identity. The term 'identity' can be taken to mean many things, depending on the context.

"Nevertheless, there has been widespread agreement that significant aspects of identity are related to a particular place. Hence, national identity results from connections to an individual's country of origin.

"However, on another level, the work can

An ode to inspiration

Words and images come together in a commercial



W Our work is full of questions. To face these questions, we try to work on some formal, political thematic and poetic propositions. Our work is open to the participation of others. We always hope there will be a sharing with some person, some individuals — what is called too quickly an "audience" — a sharing of questions and propositions. **W**

— Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

Many photographs by Al Ghousein, who is now based in the UAE, show the artist dwarfed by vast desert landscapes, stuck in front of remnants of walls.

According to him, the one emotion that might strike viewers of his works would be "a sense of being deracinated".

"However, I would hope the experience of my work transcends the experience of a single 'emotion'. While eliciting certain emotions may be a result, it is not my primary aim. Rather it is to produce work that has multiple meanings and interpretations," Al Ghousein says.

London-based artist Laila Shawa's *Weapons of Mass Destruction* is an oversize slingshot, stretched and ready for release. Despite the tension in its strips, the rock in its pocket is grounded and presents no danger. Though imposing in its proportions — and clearly a potent symbol of uprising — the slingshot looks defeated and betrays the rhetoric of heroism inherent in such symbolism, to engage the viewer on a more psychologically revealing level.

"Over the past 40 years of art practice, I have consistently worked in series," Shawa says. "[When] an idea strikes me, I research and contemplate its scope and work the idea until it is exhausted. As a Palestinian artist, representing the political disaster and human tragedy [that have] visited my

be viewed as an exploration of the experience that has resulted from my lack of rootedness and connection to a particular place."

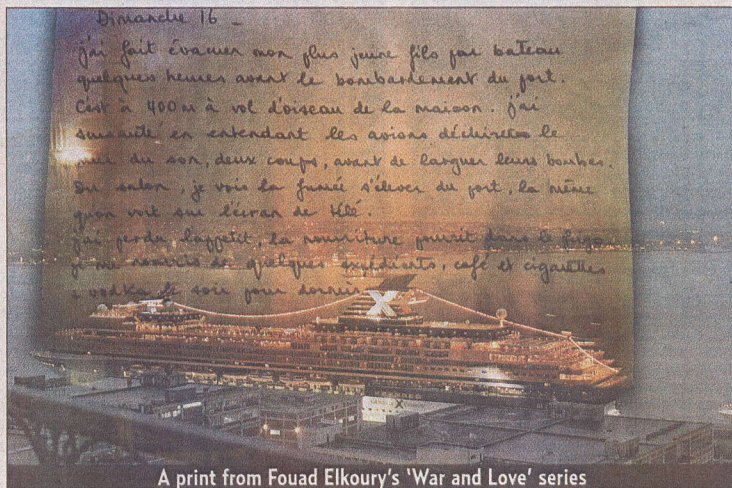
A Palestinian born in Kuwait, much of Al Ghousein's works deal with how his identity is shaped in a context of inaccessibility and loss. Indirectly affected by the realities his counterparts in Palestine face, the artist has spent his time reconstructing from a distance allegories for the barricades and walls erected in the occupied territories.



A work by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige for the series 'Wonder Beirut'



Shawwa's 'Self-Portraits' series



A print from Fouad Elkoury's 'War and Love' series

Complementary films

A film series has been established to run concurrently with "Roads Were Open/Roads Were Closed", bringing together the themes and issues inherent in the exhibition. Film series coordinator Mishaal Al Gergawi will introduce each film and the directors/panelists, while curator Haig Aivazian will moderate discussions.

■ September 20 – Ashbaah Beirut (Beyrouth Fantôme), directed by Gassan Salhab, 1999 at CineStar – Mall of the Emirates.

■ September 27 – A selection of three short films selected by Beirut DC – "Min Beirut la'illi bihubboona" (From Beirut to Those Who Love Us) directed by Beirut DC, 2006; "Kaánana'Ashroun Mustahil" (Like Twenty Impossibles), directed by Anne Marie Jacir, 2000, and "Intihar" (Suicide), directed by Eliane Raheb, 2003.

Art from pain

Art of suffering from animosity's killing fields

My homeland has been part of my oeuvre for a very long time. However, my first direct socio-political works depicting this were the Walls of Gaza series I and II followed by Children of War/Children of Peace and Boy Soldiers. These resulted from the photographs I took from the first Intifada onwards in my hometown of Gaza. These collections, nominally pre- and post-Oslo Agreement commentaries, illustrate the disparity between reality and the political manipulations by all parties involved. Weapons of Mass Destruction is part of these works and should be seen in that context," Shawwa says.

The victims of war, the artist says, are always children and it is they who represent the potential for our future. "During the first Intifada I saw children throw stones, catapult pebbles with home-made slings at armed and armoured Israeli soldiers. The response was always disproportionate — hence the larger-than-life sling. Tanks, bulldozers, machine-guns, F16s. ... True weapons of mass destruction against the primitive toy weapons of boy soldiers from refugee camps. Yet our uprising was deemed an act of terrorism," Shawwa says.

"Central to this work is loss: the loss of freedom, dignity and the loss of a whole generation. Unfortunately, this series is not yet exhausted," she adds.

Shawwa's art can be divided into a number of "periods" or classes based on their subjects. In the 1990s she used photographs to portray the problems of the Palestinians. In the 1960s the structures of Jerusalem heavily influenced her art.

Her identity as a Palestinian defines Shawwa and much of her art has attempted to express

the plight of the Palestinian people. She is also concerned that Islamic societies in the Middle East achieve a balance in their relationship with their traditions and with the modern world — a dilemma highlighted in her painting *Impossible Dream*.

"I recorded a method of communication and punishments which have been sanctified by the [civilised world]. ... I have to criticise what is around me through my painting. I don't believe in painting butterflies and flowers and pretty things," she says of her art.

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige retrace the career of Lebanese photographer Abdullah Farah in *Wonder Beirut*. Alongside this presentation, they are showing a film titled *Yawmun Akhar* (A Perfect Day).

"The *Wonder Beirut* project is based on a stock of postcards which we attributed to a photographer we named Abdullah Farah," Hadjithomas says. "A few months after the beginning of the civil war, in the autumn of 1975, Farah started damaging the negatives of his postcards, burning them as if he wanted them to correspond to the situation.

"He imitated the destruction of the buildings because of bombings and street battles. He began by doing so in a highly organised



W I have to criticise what is around me through my painting. I don't believe in painting butterflies and flowers and pretty things.

— Laila Shawwa

and documented way, following the trajectory of the shelling and defacing the images to parallel the events of the day. This first part is what we call 'the historic process' such as the 'battle of the hotels' that we are showing at The Third Line."

The last part of the project is made up of the "invisible" work of Farah who, although still taking photos of his daily life, no longer developed them. "He is content with [just] taking them," she says.

"The reels pile up. However, he notes every photo he takes in a notebook, describing it in great detail. Hence his images are to be read rather than be seen.

This part is entitled *Latent Images*. Presented as contact sheets, they form a kind of personal diary of the photographer, relating an important part of his family and sentimental life, of his photographic research as well as of the social and political history of contemporary Lebanon," Hadjithomas says.

Wonder Beirut is an ongoing project including several parts such as *The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer* or *Postcards of war and Latent Images*. The artist duo began this project in 1998 and it has been ten years they have been showing it, working on it, making

the project a constantly evolving one. On what inspired the duo to pursue this art, Hadjithomas and Joreige say they are only reacting to the prevailing personal and political situations. "There are needs, things that happen in your life, questions that habit you, encounters.

"Our work is full of questions. To face these questions, we try to work on some formal, political thematic and poetic propositions. Our work is open to the participation of others.

"We always hope there will be a sharing with some person, some individuals — what is called too quickly an 'audience' — a sharing of questions and propositions. We have several exhibitions to come and are very excited about some of them. Some are retrospectives of our films and artworks that are going to be shown together. Such presentations will give an interesting and global view of our work and of the relations there are between our films and our installations.

"The release of our last film, *I Want to See*, with Catherine Deneuve and Rabbih Mroué, in several countries and preparations for a solo show at the museum of contemporary art in Paris in December are under way. And we are finalising our new script," Hadjithomas adds.

Roads Were Open/Roads Were Closed is on at The Third Line gallery, Dubai, until October 2.

Layla Haroon is a freelance journalist based in Abu Dhabi.