



## Culture

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### Timeless art, with a side of lyricism



BEIRUT: Lebanon-based French art restorer [Fanny Seller](#) has collaborated with Lebanese author [Hyam Yared](#) to bring new meanings to notions of migration and identity, thus contemporary reality.

The fruit of Seller and Yared's collaboration is now on display at the French Cultural Center's Espace Montaigne. Entitled "You are my Territory," the exhibition is comprised of 20-odd mixed-media works, along with three installations and 12 photographs.

Women and children are depicted walking toward an unknown destination. Women hide their faces in their hands.

There are representations of ovaries, ladders and buildings – all bent to the task of portraying the duo's vision of women's place in society and collective memory.

Entering the venue, the viewer will fall upon an untitled installation, made up of three large sheets of paper, a wooden ladder and match boxes.

Evidently a study of verticality, the work seeks to depict the obstacles that can crop up while trying to overcome life's mundane difficulties.

"Our shadows are our heights / Move away the building," reads Yared's lyrical exhibit plaque. "The street. The earth. The exit is a wall."

Much more disturbing is another of the exhibition's untitled installations, which represents three large resin ovaries, adorned by balls of yarn. The largest of the ovaries is covered with red wool, which conjures up the image of an organ oozing blood, as though perforated.

The work, it appears, is concerned with the psychological torture endured by women torn by repeated abandonment.

"There are women like cities," the work's exhibit plaque reads, "Burnt by their ovaries with each abandonment." The text seems to suggest that human communities are damaged by emigration in a way akin to that of a woman's losing her children.

In the backroom of the venue has been assembled an installation of another kind, one that lends its name to that of the exhibition.

Separated from the other pieces by a black curtain, "You are my Territory" finds Seller bending her montage skills to Yared's voiceover narration, Cyril Dewaleyne's music and photographs from the Antranik Anouchian collection – made available by the Arab Image Foundation.

Projected on the screen are close-ups of moving water, while dim light emanates from photographs wedged in what appears to be candleholders.

Yared's voice immerses viewers in a trance-like state in which, as she puts it, "our tears are our weights," and where "happiness is promised to the ones with sewn eyes." The territory referred to in the piece's title may not be the one where we live, but the one we cherish in private.

Seller's mixed media-on-canvas portraits highlight the artist's mastery of detail. Each wrinkle of expression, each stain on the hands is rendered with great subtlety.

One work portrays a woman with her eyes closed, her hands covering her nose and mouth. Her forehead has been grazed by a bullet and a line of blood drips from the wound.

Another piece depicts a nude woman, whose posture is reminiscent of Matisse's "Blue Nude." A lone sentence accompanies the painting: "It takes walls to measure mankind."

Seller and Yared's collaboration is less an ode to women than it is a study of how the body is both witness to and proof of our society. Territories are deprived of borders and frontiers, giving way to an entirely new interpretation of the imprint we leave upon the world.

The premise of this exhibition seems to be that temporal considerations enable one to place events and figures within an historical context, but that this does not reveal the essence of the individuals concerned.

To find this, you must – as this exhibition does – strip away the background and context of each work. Bereft of any information about what could have happened to the figures Seller and Yared depict here, and where, viewers are meant to be able to identify with them more readily.

You decide.

"You are my Territory" is on display at the [French Cultural Institute](#) until May 29. For more information, please call 01-420-200.