

INTERVIEW

# An unfamiliar world of art unveiled

The Venue's evocative new contemporary art exhibition brings Uruguay to life

By **Chirine Lahoud**  
The Daily Star

**B**EIRUT: Latin America is not terra incognita for Lebanon. Over the last century and a half, millions of migrants have left this region for South America. Yet local knowledge of the continent tends to be piecemeal – with Brazilian football being more familiar than Uruguayan contemporary art.

"Contemporary Art of Uruguay," the group exhibition now up at The Venue, the Beirut Souks' portentously named exhibition venue, and sponsored by the Uruguayan Embassy in Lebanon, is comprised of paintings, drawings, prints, digital art and tapestry by twelve of the country's contemporary artists, including Carlos Grip-pu, Bruno Sfeir, Antonio Andivero and

was to associate Uruguayan items (horses being considered by many to be part of the country's cultural heritage) with Western landscapes.

Each of these artists speaks with a distinct voice.

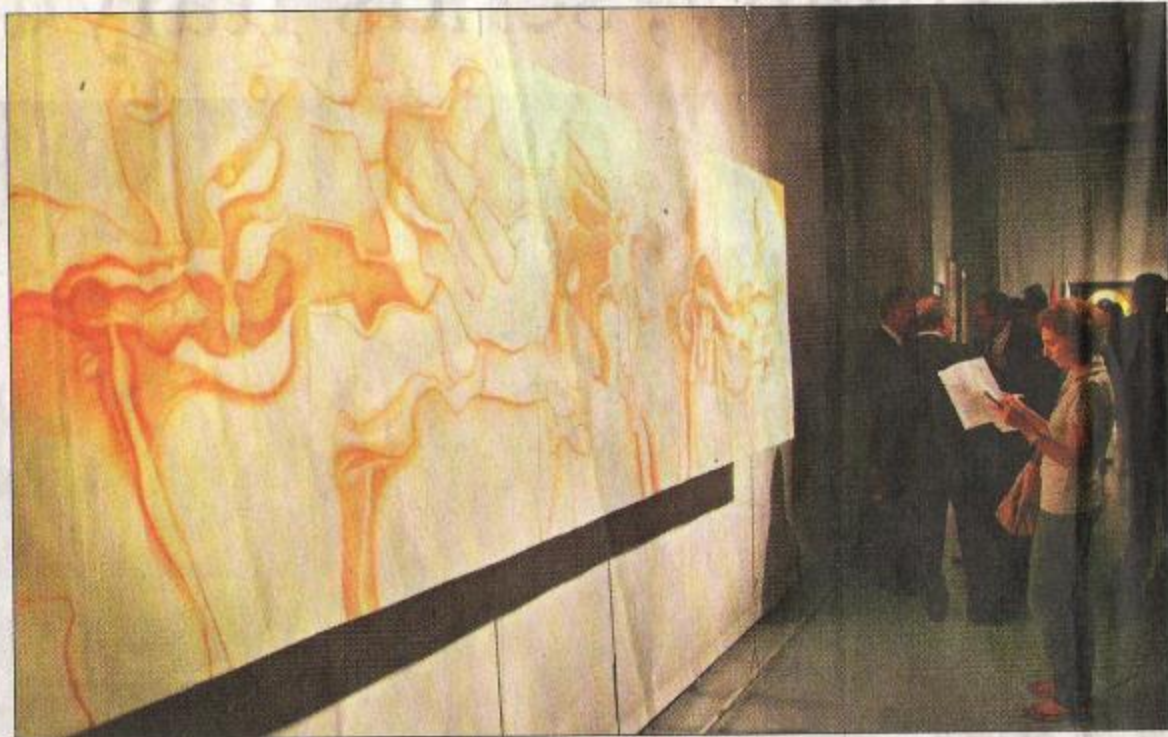
"The Public Dreams Machine" (2005), by Antonio Andivero (b. 1934) is comprised of five pastel-on-cardboard pieces, which express the artist's attraction to transcendental and cosmic themes. Assembled to form a single piece, it conveys the impression of infinity transcending the frame.

The show also includes a selection of the most recent work of Bruno Sfeir (b. 1970), who happens to be of Lebanese descent. These oil- and pastel-on-canvas pieces depict abstract geometrical forms which, in a phone interview with The Daily Star, he described as "surrealistic."

Sfeir said his work expresses the need to have a "spiritual quest" and that the experience of gazing at his work should be "dream-like."

"They are images transforming themselves," he said, "functioning the one to the other."

It is true that as you gaze at Sfeir's



Antonio Andivero's "The Public Dreams Machine," pastel on cardboard.

Cecilia Brugini.

It is "a dynamic form of art," said Jorge Luis Jure, the Uruguayan Ambassador in Lebanon, "an art that isn't what we expect from Latin America."

It took two years to decide which works by which artists would be included in the show, Jure said, explaining that this exhibition attempts to contribute to Beirut regaining "its position as a cultural and artistic platform," and to form hitherto unexploited bonds between the two countries.

"There are some exceptional works," said Jure.

A series of photographs by Rimer Cardillo (b. 1944) combines U.S. landscapes with Uruguayan symbols. In his multi-media "Horse Series," for instance, he uses a mixture of woodcuts, silkscreens, drawings and photos with horses engraved on what seems to be a field or swamp.

Cardillo's objective, Jure explained,

works the mind does reconfigure them as human shapes, abstract figures with a feminine aspect. In one of his untitled compositions, the artist used such dark, warm hues of orange, brown and ochre, colors not uncommon in painting from the Middle East.

Sfeir explained that some viewers find "a typical Arabic dancer" in his abstractions – composed of curvy lines, enhanced by the canvas' warm colors. Others have detected sheet music in the center of the work, and arcades that are evocative of the architecture of the region.

Other works displayed in "Contemporary Art of Uruguay" are a more explicit tribute to Middle Eastern art, specifically that of Lebanon.

The exhibition catalogue suggests that Carlos Grippo (b. 1946) has had a "long fascination [with] the Middle East and Lebanon." Indeed, Grippo produced two acrylic and oil-on-

canvas works especially for this show, entitled "Lebanon 1" and "Lebanon 2."

"It is Lebanon in reconstruction," said Jure of Grippo's works. Indeed there are many symbols of reconstruction in the artist's "Lebanon 1," such as makeshift wooden scaffolding set upon a shattered, pock-marked building façade and red-and-white plastic tapes of the sort sometimes used to mark construction sites.

To enhance this impression of reconstruction, behind the war-damaged façade, Grippo painted an arch-shaped metallic structure, not unlike the metal apparatus used to retool historic architecture for contemporary needs.

"The situation that I represent," Grippo said, "can have another meaning for the spectator."

Gazing at "Lebanon 1," onlookers may discern other symbols characterizing the artist's Lebanon. A waiter, his

back to the room, stands before a checkered tablecloth – yet the banquet table, chairs and other items, among which narghileh (hubble-bubble pipes) are prominent, have been left as white silhouettes.

"My paintings are realistic," he said. They stand for the artist's vision of Lebanon, as a country in perpetual construction and renewal."

This collective exhibition unveils an art scene with which most local art-lovers are little aware, revealing that the art of Uruguay is, as Jure would have it, "modern and not ethnic."

"Contemporary Art of Uruguay" is on display at The Venue, Beirut Souks until July 8. For more information, please call 09-636-529.



Three untitled oil-on-canvas works by Bruno Sfeir.



A piece from Rimer Cardillo's mixed media "Horse Series."