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TheNational

arts&life

love we

The Glam Tropical range of soaps by Nesti Dante. Available in such tantalising flavours as dragon fruit, star fruit and kumquat, the sturdy, square soaps smell, well, deliciously tropical and last for ages. And at only Dh22 each, you can afford an entire fruit salad's worth. At Beyond Beauty, Harvey Nichols, Dubai (04 409 8888)

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Fashion
The dress code
Charlize Theron adds a touch of drama to the red carpet **al5**

The wild bunch
It's all about flower power this summer **al6**

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little black book

Travels in food and fashion

Shahi Hamad, the head buyer at the Dubai boutiques Five Green and 50°C, describes her favourite destinations.

At the moment I live in Umm Suqeim in Dubai. I live at my family home, so I didn't really have a choice about the location, but I love my neighbourhood as I've been there for so long. I'll soon be moving out and living in the Old Town, though, which is going to be an amazing development. I'm really looking forward not only to having my own place but being able to walk everywhere. I grew up in London, so when I moved back to Dubai the main thing I missed was walking everywhere I needed to go.

I love to travel. It's become a tradition to go to Miami every year with my girlfriends – we usually rent a condo, which is so much more fun and personal than hotel rooms. London and New York are yearly destination stops, too. In London I like the little boutique hotels they have such as the Rockwell in South Kensington (www.therockwell.com), while in New York, I love the W Hotel (www.whotels.com). I can't wait for them to open here.

While I'm in London I always love to visit the Tate Modern (www.tate.org.uk). The V&A (www.vam.ac.uk) is great, too, as they always have fashion- and design-related exhibitions. When I lived in Paris, I would always go to the Institut du Monde Arabe (www.imarabe.org) in the 5th arrondissement, as it made me feel closer to home, with its programme of exhibitions, its museum, its cinema, its library and its restaurants. I also recently discovered the contemporary art centre Palais de Tokyo (www.palaisdetokyo.com) in Paris and I love that, too.

I still like shopping at Portobello Market in London. It's not what it used to be – it's a lot more expensive and touristy – but I love just spending the whole day on Portobello Road. I always have a great time. Also in London, I like Comfort Station (www.comfortstation.co.uk), a little accessory shop off Brick Lane owned by a designer friend. Her stuff is so unique and it never goes unnoticed when I wear it.

The boutique 10 Corso Como (www.10corsocomo.com) in Milan is always fun and different. I love shops that mix designer with urban – I can totally relate to that. And in Basel (www.baseworld.com) in Miami – it reminds me of my own shop, Five Green: they have a similar mix of brands, great music and books, and they've just opened a furniture store, too.

My mum is a very talented streamstress, so I would never get any clothes made for myself without getting her opinion first. Actually, as a shop owner, we have our own tailor, who I use for my pieces.

My absolute favourite restaurant in London is the very unprepossessing Stick & Bowl (+41 20 7937 2778). It's the smallest, dingiest Chinese restaurant on Kensington High Street, but I've been going there since I was 15 years old. It's family-run and they haven't renovated in over 10 years, but I love the nostalgia. For something a little more up-market, I'd go to the Nobu Berkeley (www.noburestaurants.com) – I love that they have a more chilled-out version now that you can just pop into at any time. For dim sum, nothing beats Ping Pong (www.pingpongdimsum.com) on Great Marlborough Street, although I also think Steam Sum Dim Sum (800 78326) in Dubai Festival City is a hidden gem. In New York, Balhazar (www.balhazar.com) in SoHo makes the best brunch ever, and I'm obsessed with burger joints when I travel – I don't know why. For dinner parties I always take a dessert, something everyone can enjoy – cheesecake from the Lebanese restaurant Zayra in Dubai (01 343 5154) is perfect.

I don't have much time for pampering, but when I do I love to have facials with Iwona Pruska, who has a spa on Beach Road in Dubai (04 394 6007) – I've been going to her for more than eight years. If I moved countries, I would have to take her with me.

I find art and photography very inspiring, but my two favourite artists are both fashion photographers. Helmut Newton's works are wonderful with a sense of classic fabulousness, while for a bit of fun and irreverence, David LaChapelle is top of my list. His work is incredibly vibrant and colourful, but there's always a witty, surrealist edge.

*** Gemma Champ**

Shahi Hamad is the head buyer for 50°C in Burj Dubai.
Pawan Singh / The National

TheNational

Calling all teenagers

As part of an upcoming series on teenagers in the UAE, The National wants to hear from you. Please write to us, using 200 words, on any one of the following subjects.

1. How do you feel about living at home?
2. How valuable are your friends and relationships?
3. What do you love/hate about your social life?
4. What do you love/hate about school/university?
5. What are your hopes and fears for the future?

Send your response by e-mail to: education@thenational.ae and clearly state your name, age and place of study. All entries must include contact details. A selection will be reprinted in The National.

All entries must reach us by June 30.

arts life: lebanon

Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

An art scene divided

Perhaps because it recognises 18 different religions and runs its affairs on a system of governance calibrated to represent them all, Lebanon can sometimes overplay its plurality. To get the gist of the day's news – which tends to be, shall we say, eventful – requires watching four television channels, reading three newspapers and balancing the contradictory claims of competing online news services.

The contemporary art scene in Beirut might seem, at times, like a refuge from politics, a safe space for the open contemplation and contestation of ideas and a hotbed of critical and aesthetic innovation. But in reality, it is just as bitterly divisive. The fact that artists tend to cohere around associations – which are necessary entities in a state that boasts no real infrastructure for culture – only makes matters worse.

The art scene sometimes seems ruefully reminiscent of the splinter factions of the Palestinian political landscape in the 1970s, with, say, the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts and the Lebanese Artists Association-Painters and Sculptors standing in for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the PFLP-GC (for General Command).

So it was that the month-long exhibition Lebanon Now: New Media Art opened last week at a gallery space in Verdun run by the Lebanese Artists Association (LAA). Not to be confused with Art Now in Lebanon, which was curated by Andree Sfeir-Semler and featured several artists more commonly tied to the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, Lebanon Now is the brainchild of Chaouki Chamoun, an artist, professor and the newly named director of the LAA.

Until recently, the LAA was an all but moribund organisation known for "the old age, outdated ideas, bad works and bad taste" of its members, explains Ricardo Mbarkho, one of the participating artists in Lebanon Now, who contributed substantially to the overall scope of the exhibition.

If Beirut's art scene could be polarized, like Lebanon's political class, into the governing majority and the opposition, its leading figures would be Ashkal Alwan's Christine Tuhme on one side and Mbarkho on the other. One could be tempted to take things further and claim that Tuhme's camp is situated on the left and Mbarkho's on the right. But such divisions never work out in practice, and in this case – though Mbarkho terms Lebanon Now a quintessentially capitalist endeavour that owes its existence to funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) – they detract from the otherwise playful works on view.

Lebanon Now includes seven artists' projects that articulate "positions that are shaped by the use of new technology", Mbarkho says. "You need the positions before the technology," he adds, "and you reach them by questioning your environment and your sociopolitical sphere."

Shawki Youssef's contribution is an online, interactive game that asks viewers to piece Lebanon together like a jigsaw puzzle. There is the remotest of possibilities that you will win the game, but most likely you will lose, triggering hilarious on-screen messages that connect your failure to the seemingly unrelated pronouncements of politicians in local newspapers.

Mansour El-Habre's piece is an experimental website that delves into the mystery of how a man lost his middle finger, a riddle that has no clear answer but uncovers many unpleasantities about Lebanon's civil war in the process.

Rabih Khalil's work is an internet search engine titled Lebanon Everywhere that endlessly composes the word "Lebanon" from the text of any given website, a comment, perhaps, on the tendency among the Lebanese to see themselves at the centre of every plot, conspiracy theory and complicated conundrum in the world.

Mbarkho's contribution is a series of digital "paintings" that translate key agreements in Lebanon's history, from the Constitution and the National Pact to the recently brokered Doha Accord, from texts to RGB image files.

But in the end, does funding from USAID compromise the show, as many Beirut artists might argue? "We're not buying arms with it," Mbarkho quips. "I'll take money from anyone for culture. In Lebanon, you can be sure that anything you do will be taken for what it is, and its opposite."

The fact that artists tend to cohere around associations only makes matters worse

tomorrow

Health ▶

Sarah Womack asks if your mobile phone is damaging your health

Visual arts

Arsalan Mohammad on where to buy affordable art

<http://thenational.newspaperdirect.com/epaper/services/OnlinePrintHandler.aspx?issue=60982008062900000000001001&page=2&paper=A4> 7/2/2008