

AGENDA

LEBANON

MUSIC

**'Tango Y Nada Mas'**  
*Music Hall, Wadi Abu Jamil Street, BCD*  
**April 23-24, 9 p.m.**  
 01-999-666  
 The fifth Beirut International Tango Festival presents the Quinteto El Arrastre orchestra and vocalist Sandra Rumolino will accompany such talented tango dancers as Mazen Kiwan and Yamila Yvonne, Horacio Gody and Magdalena Gutierrez.

FILM

**'Contemporary Italian Cinema'**  
*Metropolis Cinema Soffil, Ashrafieh*  
**April 25 until May 3**  
 01-204-080  
 To celebrate its fifth anniversary, the Istituto Italiano Di Cultura Di Beirut presents this cycle of nine recent Italian productions, with a special focus on Nanni Moretti.

LECTURE

**'Hegra, la Petra du Hijaz'**  
*AUB Museum, AUB, Bliss Street, Ras Beirut*  
**April 24, 5:30 p.m.**  
 01-340-460  
 The Society of Friends of the AUB Museum invites you to attend this lecture conducted by Francois Villeneuve on the Franco-Saudi archeological excavations in the region.

PHOTOGRAPHY

**'March of the Elephants'**  
*Zinc, Seif Eddine al-Khatib Street, Ashrafieh*  
**Until April 23**  
 03-345-647  
 Taken during one of Christian Ghammachi's trips to Africa, these pieces indulge the artist's interest in, yes, elephants.

**'Drowned in Black Reality'**  
*Mark Hachem Gallery, Salloum Street, BCD*  
**April 16 until May 5**  
 01-999-313  
 This photography of Soufan explores the human body.

PERFORMANCE

**'Hishik Bishik'**  
*Metro al-Madina, Saroulla Building, Level -2, Hamra Street*  
**Thursday-Friday, after 8 p.m.**  
<http://metromadina.com>  
 Now extended for another month, the Metro's latest, all-music cabaret show is a highly Egyptian celebration of Arab femininity, featuring the mesmerizing dance of Randa Makhoul and, perhaps more subtly, through Fayed and Sahab.

ART

**'We Hesitated between Arrangements, Modulations and Manoeuvres'**  
*MINUS 5, beneath Bou Khalil Supermarket, Mkalles Road*  
**April 26 until May 31**  
 01-697-320  
 Caline Aoun, Charbel-Joseph H-Boutros and Stephanie Saade will present their latest artistic installations inspired from minimalist art and dwelling on the notions of absence and presence, light and obscure.

**'AFAK 6: Passages'**  
*Maqam Art Gallery, Saifi Village*  
**Until May 3**  
 03-292-576  
 This collective exhibition displays paintings by Hussein Hussein and Zavien Yousaf, along with sculptures by Abir Wahib.

JUST A THOUGHT

Nothing is built on stone; all is built on sand, but we must build as if the sand were stone.

*Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986)*  
 Argentine story writer and poet

REVIEW

Traces of a TAPLine in the sand

Tabet's new exhibition presents contemporary forms uprooted from historical narrative

By Jim Quilty  
 The Daily Star

**B**EIRUT: The shape is formed by a pair of lines pulled taut around a series of nails tapped into the wall. It might represent the landmass of the Arabian Peninsula, one with little mind to cartographic accuracy.

Roundabout the area where the Qatari, Saudi and Emirati borders could be drawn, but aren't, hang a pair of devices familiar to those trained in the building trades.

The teardrop-shaped metal casings dangle alongside one another like a pair of earrings adorning a shop window, their manly logo, "STRAIT-LINE/Chalk Line Reels," exposed to the world.

From the left reel, a single segment of line extends diagonally upward, tied off by the nail where "Kuwait" is not. From the right reel, the line follows the trail of nail heads on a more circuitous route – a series of segmented lines that ignore such place names as "Oman," "Yemen," "Red Sea," "Gulf of Aqaba."

Were this wall installation to be removed and the nails uprooted, faint traces of the form would remain, ghosted by the chalk line's incidental contact with the off-white paint beneath.

From the next room, a pair of slide projectors can be heard chunk-thinking between themselves. The slides don't throw images upon the wall, but circular frames of light – minute spotlights illuminating nothing, or else something invisibly small from this distance.

Like "Chalk Line," "Slides" lacks an exhibit plaque bearing a title or explanatory text that might distract observers from the work itself. Together with the five other pieces in this exhibition, they aspire to a unique formalism even while steeped in a deep stratigraphy of narrative.

"In 2007, I was driving south to Sur," recalls Rayyane Tabet. "At the

"Mailroom Tags (1950-2013)," 1900 cardstock tags, steel rod, (15x5x1200cm)



"Steel Rings," rolled engraved steel stamped with unique location details. (80x10x0.6cm)



Tabet's "Three Logos," powder-coated steel. (Pegasus, 2.6x2m; oval, 2x3m; star: 2x2m).

time the main highway from Beirut was obliterated because of the 2006 war, so you had to take these detours.

"A kilometer south of Saïda, I looked right and on this hill between me and the Mediterranean were these huge cylindrical shapes. I walked toward them and found myself inside this gigantic industrial ruin, 22 massive shapes that I had no understanding of whatsoever.

"This shepherd came along with his flock – it's true," Tabet laughs, "a shepherd. I asked him, 'What is this thing?' 'This,' he told me, 'is what's left of TAPLine.'"

The Trans-Arabian Pipe Line Company names a significant moment from the Middle East's socio-economic and political history.

Established in 1946 as a joint venture between Mobil, Esso and Caltex, TAPLine built, operated and maintained a 1,213-kilometer-long, 78-centimeter-wide steel pipe that transported oil overland from Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean.

After the U.K. partitioned Palestine, TAPLine abandoned plans to connect Dhahran to Haifa, relocating the terminus to Zaharani, Lebanon. In 1983, with the region's manifold geopolitical contradictions impinging upon the pipeline's operation, the company was dissolved.

Tabet has been excavating TAPLine since his first contact in 2007. Some of the fruit of his labor is nowadays suspended from the walls and ceilings of Karantina's Sfeir-Semler Gallery. The exhibition title, "The Shortest Distance Between Two Points," leaves an empty space for the four words that complete this aphorism.

These absented words also alight upon the show's conceptual heart. The absence echoes something of the artist's practice, too, which compelled him to deracinate his works from the layers of narrative from which they grew.

"From the beginning I was interested in [TAPLine] as a formal exercise," Tabet says. "It could allow for a space where form would be more present than accounts and stories and witnessing and all that.

"The first three or four years were spent going through witnessing accounts, a lot of nostalgia and melancholy. It took a

long time to get past the broken nature of these stories and to focus on [mute] forms, objects, shapes.

"I feel if we were to just trust objects ... that they carry as much weight and energy as these stories. Except that people were telling me stories about things that happened in the past. These tanks on the hill exist in our present."

Hanging from the ceiling near "Slides" are three large mobiles – a red Pegasus (2.6x2m), a blue oval (2x3m) and a red star (2x2m) – hung to appear as if they're superimposed over one another. Elements of "Three Logos," as this exhibit is called, may be familiar – especially the winged horse, the main feature of the Mobil Petroleum logo.

Facing "Three Logos" from the full

length of the room's east wall (and mirrored on the adjacent room's west wall) are a series of glass-covered, wood-framed A4 papers emblazoned with the TAPLine letterhead.

Save an undocumented change in the letterhead design – which went from monolingual English to English and Arabic (or vice versa) – the pages are all identical and blank. Yet each page is also unique, insofar as each has borne the effects of time differently.

Diagonal lines of discoloration across the face of individual pages betray a history of varying exposure to the elements. Other pages are soiled or bear minute tears and abrasions. The deep wrinkles on many attest to their having been crumpled into a wad, then flattened out.

Age, neglect and fastidious exhibition make these papers resemble the artifacts that sometimes emerge from the desert landscape, and the maps that record such terrain.

Of the exhibition's seven pieces, Tabet says, six are formal pairings. Two are made from found materials from the company's abandoned Hamra Street headquarters.

"I got in touch with the owners [of the abandoned offices], asking if I could photograph the place," Tabet explains. "They were flabbergasted. ... They're, like, 'It's trash. Just take the trash.'"

"I took everything," he continues. "Most of it is material that I came to realize was of no interest to me – documents with content on it. ... Now I'm talking to AUB about [donating] it to the library so they can archive it.

"These documents can be useful for historians, who are interested in facts."

"I kept three things." Tabet views TAPLine as an exercise in geometry and form. "You're building a form so much longer than it is wide, [that] if you ever want to explain it to someone, to show them the entirety of the thing, its thickness disappears and it is literally rendered as a line.

"If you want to show someone a section of the pipeline ... then its overall dimension in the plan disappears, because [the pipeline is so] long.

"I feel this rift between the plan and the section is also at the core of this project both philosophically and conceptually. ... This tension, which is primarily a formal one, potentially opens up all these other questions – which are more political and social."

The works in "The Shortest Distance Between Two Points" will not make onlookers swoon with their intimations of the sublime. Foolish as it is to anticipate art market trends, it's challenging to imagine a buyer purchasing one of these works to grace a mantelpiece.

Yet there is an admirable mingling of rigor and generosity here, both in the artist's negotiation with TAPLine's compelling and timely narrative and in his disciplined sieving through layers of story to distill these forms.

Two of the works are manufactured objects that replicate forms Tabet found during his research.

"Steel Rings" reproduces a series of 40 pipeline sleeves. Each is stamped with its distance in kilometers from Dhahran, longitude-latitude coordinates, and elevation: KM1174, 33° 16' 01" N – 35° 36' 54" E, 524m, at one end of the series; and KM1213, 33° 29' 37" N – 35° 21' 03" E, 77m at the other.

They record TAPLine's brief foray onto Lebanese soil.

Rayyane Tabet's "The Shortest Distance Between Two Points" is up at Sfeir-Semler Gallery until July 20. For more information see [www.sfeir-semler.com](http://www.sfeir-semler.com).

Rushdie relives magic of 'Midnight's Children'

By Hillel Italie  
 Associated Press

**NEW YORK:** Thanks to the printed word and the moving image, Salman Rushdie has recaptured the worst part of his life and relived one of the best.

Last fall, the 65-year-old author published the best-selling memoir "Joseph Anton" about his years in hiding that followed the 1988 publication of "The Satanic Verses" and the call for his death by Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

"It was cathartic to write 'Joseph Anton,'" Rushdie explained during a recent interview in midtown Manhattan. "And 'Midnight's Children' was the book where I really became a writer."

Much of the world learned about Rushdie after "Satanic Verses," which made him an author far more talked about than read.

Forced to live under an assumed name, Joseph Anton, he felt as if he had lost control of his own life's narrative. In his memoir, he turns himself into a kind of literary character, referring to himself in the third person, and uses narrative to get his own back.

"Now that time belongs to me," he said. "It's not just something that happened to me."

Nowadays, Rushdie is promoting the film adaptation of his breakthrough Booker Prize-winning 1981 novel "Midnight's Children," one of the most highly praised works of fiction of its time.

At more than 500 pages, "Midnight's Children" is a multilayered narrative about Saleem Sinai, a child born at the very moment of India's independence

from Britain, and his terrifying, exhilarating and fantastic adventures that join his story to the story of his country.

Widely regarded as a landmark of neocolonial fiction, the novel follows Saleem through India's independence and internal conflict, war with Pakistan and the 1970s "State of Emergency" declared by then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. It is a journey with a beginning, middle and end, but also one with countless detours and magic-realist grace points – from powers of mind-reading to a nose with the most profound sense of smell.

"Midnight's Children" was a coming-of-age story for Saleem, and for Rushdie. His 1975 debut novel, "Grimus," was quickly forgotten – and Rushdie has long preferred it remain so.

Rushdie then thought he might try a novel about childhood. The author had been born eight weeks after India's independence and he soon realized the genius of making his character arrive at the moment itself. He "stumbled around" at first, trying to write in the third person, when he decided to let Saleem speak for himself.

"I was shocked. This was a kind of voice I had not heard before," said Rushdie. "I thought, 'What's this?' It was a very garrulous voice and I decided to just run with it. I found his voice and through his voice found mine."

When Rushdie first met with director Deepa Mehta, they were supposed to discuss a more recent novel, "Shalimar the Clown." Mehta, whose films include the Oscar-nominated "Water," also asked about the rights to "Midnight's Children."

He will share any blame or credit. Rushdie wrote the screenplay ("Deepa

twisted my arm"), provided off-screen narration and consulted with Mehta closely on the production, which stars Satya Bhabha as Saleem.

At 140 minutes, "Midnight's Children" still comes nowhere close to capturing everything in Rushdie's book. Instead, Rushdie and Mehta agreed about removing subplots and digressive narrative devices.

One notable change is the ending. In the movie we hear Rushdie reflecting on the events over the decades and concluding, with hope, that "they possess the authentic taste of truth, that they are, despite everything, acts of love."

The novel ends more darkly, as if anticipating the trouble to come. Saleem declares "it is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be both mas-

ters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace."

"The book was haunted by the darkness of the time of the Emergency and I didn't want to end the movie that way," Rushdie said. "I wanted the ending to be a kind of beginning, one that suggests the start of another day."



Rushdie: "'Midnight's Children' was the book where I really became a writer."