

Don't Forget To Count Your Blessings



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NEUTRAL GROUND

Artist-Run Centre

Exhibition text in response to the art exhibition:
Don't Forget to Count Your Blessings by Christina
Hajjar at Neutral Ground Artist-Run Centre, April
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EXHIBITION RESPONSE

Her little Lebanon,
you are living in her heart,
you are preserved in her memory.

Although she has never been among your
warm embraces,

she can feel the bright sight of Beirut in
the aroma of rosebuds.

You know, Lebanon, here in North
America, coffee makers make our coffee
but there, care and love make people's
coffee.

Oh, dear Lebanon, you are like a comet in
her life, she just saw you, and in the blink
of an eye, you were gone!

She must follow your fleeting trail
everywhere.

Your signs of beauty shine in the taste of
her mother's foods,

your signs of strength are obvious in the
strong taste of her father's coffee,

and your loneliness is found between the
arms of your diaspora children.

She cannot have you; she cannot touch
you and she cannot smell the fragrant
rose perfume of your hookah lounges.
But she can recreate the miniature
Lebanon of her heart here.

Beautiful little Lebanon, live, stay in her
heart,

and live in the hearts of anyone who saw
you.

She will continue this dance with you
until she sees you free, safe, and happy.

Don't Forget to Count Your Blessings is an exhibition by Christina Hajjar. It is also a feeling experienced when stepping into the gallery. Dynamic blue wallpaper, featuring the artist's patterned design, warmly invites you in. In the center of the room, people are seated on couches, busy talking and playing backgammon next to two TV monitors displaying the artist's video work. Behind the couches there are a lot of snacks and it makes it feel like being at a friend's house.

It is not like a party; it is more like sneaking into another person's house while in a dream. Although Hajjar has never visited Lebanon, it is at home in her heart. The exhibition is inviting and home-like while also being made up of distinct artworks. Small-scale objects and potted palms create intimacy and liveliness, as does the inclusion of music. Middle Eastern rhythms boost the viewer to accept the exhibition as a hookah lounge.

Four large and impressive framed photographs of the artist's sister, feature her dancing with a plastic tablecloth swinging in the sky. The strong blue of the sky reminded me of this proverb in Farsi: The sky is the same color everywhere, no matter where you are;

however, it is not true about the land. Sense of belonging comes from strong family bonds. Hajjar's mother believes Lebanon is not a safe place to travel, she is still making coffee in the Lebanese way, and she teaches it to her own daughter.

Our relationship with the land and the culture related to specific geography is not easy to forget. In the same, it takes generations to develop bonds with the new geography we immigrated to; or even feel belonging to the land we were born. Immigration is not like travel where you board a plane and suddenly see yourself in another place. Cutting the threads to a homeland you have never been may sound easy, but cutting all the pains and attachments is like cutting the umbilical cord that demands a new birth.

The Lebanese rose carries the same meaning as the tale of The Little Prince: "It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important." All the memories that a family keeps in their members' minds, make the rose unique for Hajjar.

One of the video installations, presents the process of the artist's leg being tattooed. Eye-catching, the video shows

the contradictions of freezing weather outside and the heat of the hookah's charcoals, the torn part of the bedlinen after the painful process of tattooing the delicate pattern of the rose.

A piece of Lebanon is shining in the heart of the city of Regina. The exhibition *Don't Forget to Count Your Blessings* is a place where you can find Lebanese love, nostalgia, food, music, and art.

BY SHIMA AGHAAMINIHA

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