

Mission: Museum

by Muhammad Yusuf

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The Association for the Promotion and Exhibition of the Arts in Lebanon (APEAL) has announced the launch of a design competition for a new modern and contemporary art museum in the heart of Beirut, Lebanon.

Situated on a historic and symbolic site across from the National Museum in the Achrafieh district of Beirut, the museum is being considered as one of the most significant developments for Lebanese art and culture in a generation.

The yet-to-be-named museum is envisioned as a multidisciplinary hub of art and design dedicated to

showcasing modern and contemporary Lebanese culture. Set to open in 2020, its collections and programmes are being developed with the aim of bringing together diverse populations and narratives from the region and beyond. It hopes to retain an independent governance structure.

The new museum is envisaged as an anchor along Beirut's new 'museum mile', home to the National Museum and Museum of Lebanese Prehistory, the Mineral Museum (MiM), Beit Beirut (House of Beirut) and the Metropolis Center. It will be located on a site owned by Universite Saint-Joseph.

The call is for a design that has architectural integrity and presence, which responds to the strategic location of the site and its confluence of diverse communities. The design, it is emphasised, should maximise external spaces to create synergy between the university and museum programmes, as well as to provide respite from the surrounding vibrant cityscape.

The museum programme comprises flexible exhibition and performance spaces, in addition to extensive community and education spaces, conservation and storage, digital and archive centre, along with family amenities.

APEAL is known for its leadership as an international platform promoting arts and culture from Lebanon. Its search for an innovative architectural design is dedicated to its core mission of nurturing and promoting art from Lebanon and the Lebanese diaspora, both regionally and within an international context. The museum design competition is open to architects of Lebanese origin practicing either in Lebanon or abroad.

An independent jury of renowned international and regional experts that will look into the project is being chaired by Lord Peter Palumbo, Chair of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, and includes Zaha Hadid, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Julia Peyton-Jones, Rodolphe Khoury, Lamia Joreige and Fares Al Dahdah, in addition to representatives from APEAL and Universite Saint-Joseph.

The organisers underline the fact that the finalist has to be an exceptional architect who identifies with the project's

values and understands the significance of designing a cultural institution in the current urban, social, economic and political context of the country and region. The winning proposal will be selected in Fall 2016.

This is the first of many announcements on the ongoing museum project. In the coming months, announcements regarding its official name, details about its collections, programming and curatorial staff, will be made. The search for the museum's founding director is also underway.

APEAL is a non-profit organisation dedicated to showcasing and encouraging Lebanese artists by projecting their artwork beyond conventional borders and onto a larger screen.

One of its goals is to create a common platform and magnet for creativity by presenting eclectic collections gathered from a universe of gifted visual, literary or performing artists. The body strives to be a point of connection in vital cultural conversations between civilisations.

Composed of Lebanese and international members from around the world, the group envisions launching exchange programmes between artists from the Lebanese scene and counterparts elsewhere, from universities to art academies.

It will grant scholarships to promising talent and contribute to the formation of trained curators and professionals to help put them on a par with their peers elsewhere. APEAL was also the group that was behind the Lebanese pavilion at Venice in 2013.

Beirut is a multilayered combination of the ancient and contemporary, a city that intertwines sensibilities from both East and West. The new museum will reflect this history, building on the collective creativity not only of the times, but also of those who have gone before.

"Beirut is perpetually redefining itself: Mediterranean and Arab, cosmopolitan and nationalist, secular and religious, liberal and conservative, political and hedonistic, superficial and genuine ... a city in search of its identity, at the crossroads of cultures from the Arabian Peninsula to the Caucasian plateaus and across the Mediterranean Sea", says Elie Haddad, Dean, School of Architecture and Design, Lebanese American University, Beirut.

Lebanon has long been known for its vibrant cultural scene, including artists, intellectuals, architects, designers, poets and writers. This changed with the start of the civil war in 1975, and by the time it ended in 1990, only a few art galleries remained in Beirut.

Now, fully a generation post-war, the country boasts a rich and re-emergent artistic community, exceeding that which existed ante-bellum. The international art world is increasingly recognising the talent coming out of the region.

Galleries and art fairs recently established locally and in the Gulf region, have contributed to the market growth and reintegration of Middle Eastern artists within the international context. In Lebanon, new voices are being discovered, lost voices are being recovered and opportunities for exchange are being embraced.

The site for the museum is centrally located in the heart of Beirut, where the civil war's demarcation lines once stood, along two vital arteries that bring diverse communities together.

The museum aims to:

- * Create opportunities for dialogue in the service of building an engaged civil society
- * Nurture and promote local artists within an international context
- * House a pre-eminent collection of modern and contemporary art
- * Build partnerships and facilitate cross-cultural interactions
- * Promote Beirut as a centre for free exchange of ideas and global knowledge
- * Provide active educational programmes and workshop space
- * Engage local communities across Lebanon, the global Lebanese diaspora and the international community
- * Be a gathering place that welcomes and brings people together
- * Represent the further development of a modernising civil society in Lebanon
- * Expand the city's cultural resources and offerings

The museum is being conceived as a dynamic contemporary place, loyal to its social and cultural responsibilities. It will acknowledge the historic significance of its site and its adjoining institutions, providing a connective fabric across Beirut's divide.