

'L'Art Blesse' Helps us to Understand How The Beirut Blast Affected Art

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Walking in to Villa Audi, it's like time has stood still since the Aug. 4 blast. Cracked mirrors in doors fracture what little light enters around thick black curtains. The chandelier that fell during the explosion remains on the floor.

The most notable difference is that now over 60 artworks cover the two-floor villa, as part of "L'Art Blesse" (The Wounded Art), a new exhibition curated by Jean-Louis Mainguy. "The exhibition is a mix of all the paintings and sculptures that were affected by Aug. 4, while giving a chance for artists who created after the blast, to have a place for us to understand how the blast affected their art," Mainguy told The Daily Star.

Left unrepaired are two metal sculptures titled "Peace" and "Entangled Love" by Nayla Romanos Iliya, from the "Phoenician Alphabet" series, which now betray scratches and dents in the curving steel and bronze lines.

"The way they were damaged is what made me not want to repair them," Romanos Iliya told The Daily Star. "They were both in the lobby of Le Gray hotel and both fell on the floor and what struck me was that 'Entangled Love' has minor scratches on the surface, as if it was wounded more on the inside than the outside.

"The other is a totally different case. It was much lighter in structure, because peace is so fragile," she added. "When it was in good shape it was talking about peace on Earth with a spherical shape and now, with the damage, it really shows the point of how important it is to keep peace alive and how easy it can break."

Among the works that have emerged in the blast's aftermath are nine muted paintings by Nabil Nahas showing the destroyed streets and people's reactions.

Music and poetry also play a part in the show, with classical and oriental music composed by Lebanese greats wafting through the halls. Poems placed alongside many of the works reflect their themes.

"We have classical and oriental Lebanese music from the likes of Georges Baz, Toufic Succar and others who truly captured the soul of traditional Lebanese music [that] people might have forgotten about," Mainguy said. "We need to have an act of memory with this blast. We must remember but we must preserve what was damaged and what was forgotten – all the people who built the cultural scene of Lebanon over these years."

Many galleries and studios reside in Gemmayzeh and Mar Mikhael, where many more artists had their works stored or on show on Aug. 4. The cultural sector has been recovering slowly since then, with some galleries reopening and artists holding shows related to the aftermath of the blast. Many are adamant to never forget, while moving forward.