



NEWS ▾

BUSINESS ▾

OPINION ▾

SPORTS ▾

LIFE ▾

ARTS & ENT ▾

Lubnan

🕒 Sep. 18, 2014 | 12:18 AM

One woman's quest to bring the Phoenician alphabet to life



LIVE NEWS 📡

VIEW ALL 🔍

French minister to visit Lebanon for arms delivery

1 hour ago

ISIS says Australian teen behind Iraq suicide bombing

1 hour ago

Aid groups criticize UN Security Council over Syria

2 hours ago

US to deport ex-Salvadoran minister over rights violations

2 hours ago

New Qatari mediator in Lebanon hostage crisis: report

3 hours ago

Two police officers shot in Ferguson

UPDATE

4 hours ago

Machnouk: Egyptian Embassy received threats



Summary

In Dubai, Romanos Iliya made three-dimensional mock-ups of each

👤 Elise Knutsen | The Daily Star



RSS



FOLLOW



EMAIL



PRINT



SHARE

Advertisement



Phoenician letter, playing with the meanings and symbolism of each.

Finally, using bronze, resin and aluminum, she created large-scale figures based on of the

...

More from
Elise Knutsen



Hariri recording shows his defiant stance against Syria

Rafik Hariri was planning a peaceful coup, STL hears

Dialogue pitches moving Aarsal refugees

...

Entities

Countries

Educational Institutes

Locations & Natural Formations

Continents

Political Group

Software Systems

Advertisement

BEIRUT: If identity crisis is among the most common pathologies suffered by Lebanese, Nayla Romanos Iliya has found the remedy, or at least the one for her. After living abroad for more than 20 years, Romanos Iliya rekindled an appreciation of her Lebanese heritage by creating sculptures based on the Phoenician alphabet. Born and raised in Beirut, Romanos Iliya was educated in French schools during the Civil War, before choosing to study architecture and design at the American University of Beirut.

"When I lived in Lebanon, I was looking West," she explained.

She spent almost two decades bouncing across metropolitan hubs in Europe, North America and Asia, absorbing the cultural and artistic offerings of each city.

Finally landing in Dubai, Romanos Iliya says she became interested in learning about the roots of her own culture. "I definitely didn't want to spend the time going to the mall or having lunches," she said. "It's not my style."

As a Lebanese woman, Romanos Iliya felt a sense of otherness in Dubai. In Lebanon, "We speak Arabic, and we are in the Arab world, but I realized we also kept a lot of the Phoenician spirit," she said.

"Whether you like it or not, Lebanese people have this merchant aspect. We export ourselves all over the world."

She started doing research on culture and identity and took interest in the Phoenician alphabet, a keystone of ancient civilization created, most likely, on Lebanese soil around 1,500 B.C.

Having long held mixed emotions about her home country, Romanos Iliya said that studying the Phoenician alphabet helped restore her Lebanese pride. "It was a healing process for me."

"It was a way for me to get closer to my roots and to try to compensate for the negative feelings I had for some aspects of my home country. I found the alphabet very inspiring ... This was a huge gift to the world."

The script itself contains 22 letters, which have both a phonetic

Hello Tomorrow Emirates

Fly Emirates and experience the business of living

Find out more ▶

Advertisement

GALLERIES



Pictures of the day

Mar. 10, 2015

Advertisement

Beirut Real Estate

Thousands of Apartments For Sale in Beirut. Check Now With Photos!



sound and a symbolic meaning. In Dubai, Romanos Iliya made three-dimensional mock-ups of each Phoenician letter, playing with the meanings and symbolism of each.

Finally, using bronze, resin and aluminum, she created large-scale figures based on of the Phoenician letters. In a series she calls "mini-scrabble" she uses the Phoenician characters, which bear a resemblance to Latin or Arabic letters, to create words in English or Lebanese.

Some of her works make playful use of the Phoenician alphabet's symbolic meanings.

In one, entitled Alphabeit, an almost anthropomorphic version of the Phoenician letter Aleph appears to be walking toward a shape resembling the letter Beit, which meant 'home' in the Phoenician language as it does in modern Arabic.

Other pieces, however, have a deeper and more complicated meaning. In one piece, titled TRAP, the Phoenician letters Taw and Peh, which resemble the cross and crescent respectively, are twisted together, seemingly at odds, set in a wire cage. The piece represents Lebanon's history of religious conflict.

"I felt that I was giving life to those archaic shapes, and showing that they can still be used in a very contemporary way," she said.

Most of her sculptures are set on reflective surfaces. "This symbolizes the sea, by which the Phoenicians spread their alphabet. They were great seafarers," she said.

Having relocated to Lebanon last year, Romanos Iliya is still working with variations the Phoenician script. Her pieces, including Noughts and Crosses, which is currently featured as part of Beirut Art Week, combine the shapes of the letters and their symbolic meanings.

Noughts and Crosses, located in the cosmopolitan bustle of Beirut Souks, combines the Phoenician letter Taw – which looks like a cross, and means 'sign' in Phoenician – and the letter Ayin, which resembles a circle and signifies the eye.

Those less versed in the Phoenician alphabet could be forgiven for

arabnet
BEIRUT 2015
March 17 - 19

The largest event for the digital creative sectors

REGISTER NOW

STAY CONNECTED



EDITORIAL CARTOONS



MOST READ

ALL



Mar 12, 2015 | Lebanon News
Iran, Hezbollah gain foothold in Golan



Mar 11, 2015 | Lebanon News
Meat, cheese seized from McDonald's, Spinneys



Mar 12, 2015 | Middle East
Iraq forces push into Tikrit, ISIS hits back

Mar 12, 2015 | Middle East

thinking the sculpture was depicted a Latin X and an O, which shows the links that this ancient alphabet has with modern alphabets.

The meaning of the piece, she says, is largely open to interpretation.

"The letters are just the inspiration," she said.

A version of this article appeared in the print edition of The Daily Star on September 18, 2014, on page 2.

▲ Interesting

▼ Not Interesting

Recommended

[Qatar aid for Syrian refugees, Lebanese host families airlifted to Beirut](#)

[Rate of C-sections alarmingly high](#)

[Public works minister inspects battered Ouzai fishing dock](#)

[Nurseries blooming as planting season approaches](#)

[Corruption the cause of Lebanon's misery: Rai](#)

[Les Petits Diplomates: etiquette training for children](#)

Advertisement

ArabNet Beirut 2015

Meet with more than 700 digital professionals, from March 17 to 19



Mar 12, 2015 | Middle East
[ISIS lashes out after battlefield losses](#)



Mar 12, 2015 | Lebanon News
[AUB student's death shrouded in mystery](#)



Mar 11, 2015 | Lebanon News
[Lebanon presidential vote postponed to April 2](#)



CLASSIFIEDS



Today's Paper

[Full list of today's paper »](#)

[View our e-paper »](#)

[Subscribe »](#)

STAR'S COLUMNISTS

[VIEW ALL](#)



Rami G. Khouri
[Drama turns to farce in U.S.-Israel ties](#)



Michael Young
[Iran's project will n](#)

FOLLOW THIS ARTICLE

[Interested in know](#)

[CLICK HERE](#)

Comments

Your feedback is important to us!

We invite all our readers to share with us their views and comments about this article.