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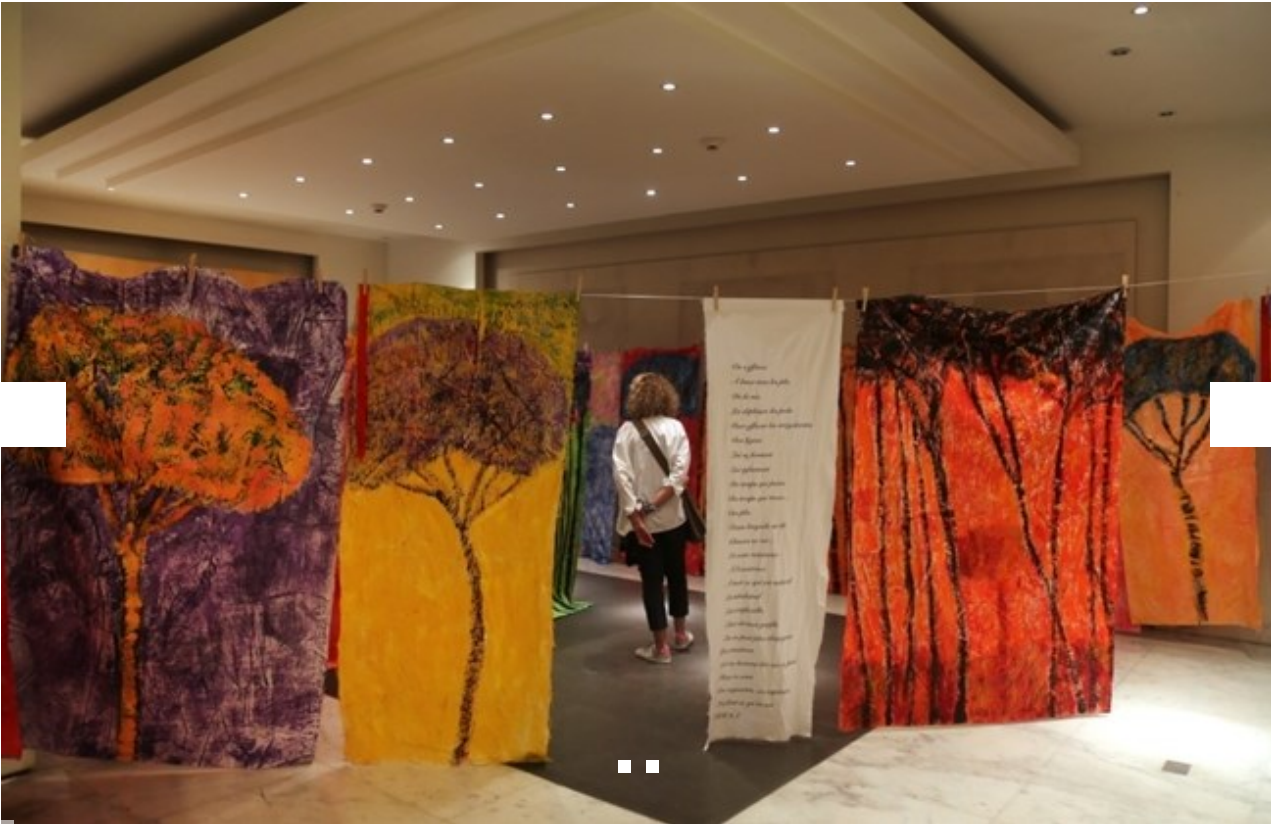
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Wrinkles on the canvas of life



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Marguerite Meyer | The Daily Star

BEIRUT: In Japanese, there is a peculiar word, shinrin-yoku, that literally means “forest bath.” It’s what you do when you take a long walk in the woods, feel the sun’s rays breaking through the trees and unconsciously inhale the essential oils from the tree bark.Taking

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a walk in the woods clears your head. It inhibits the release of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. It activates the self-healing powers of the body and readjusts focus upon what is really important in life.

What has been known in Japan for centuries, has lately even been confirmed by medicine.

It might be a stretch to find the tranquility of rural Japan among the polished facades of Beirut’s Mina al-Hosn district, but this is where Randa Ali-Ahmad’s exhibition “De Fil en Fil” (“From fold to fold”) opened Thursday evening.

Looking into the first room of the space, “shinrin-yoku” might just be the word that pops into one’s mind.

A good dozen large-scale paintings surround the visitor. These acrylic-on-canvas works depict groups of trees, with Ali-Ahmad’s trademark texture, broad strokes and strong, earthy colors. These pieces are very pretty, very idyllic, one might say decorative.

The onlooker detects more and more detail over time, however - the reflection off some bark, a flash of blue sky, rays of light dancing on the forest floor. Sometimes, some things are worth a second look.

Indeed the show is intended to be an invitation to look beyond the surface, the Beirut-based artist says.

Accompanying the exhibition is her own textual reference to a poem by famed French poet and screenwriter Jacques Prevert, while the sound of chirping crickets wafts in the background. ““Quand la vie est une foret / chaque jour est un arbre,”” Ali-Ahmad says. “This inspired me to write my own continuation of the poem.”

“De Pli en Pli,” the artist elaborates, is intended of contrast today’s trend of celebrating superficial appearances and seemingly perfect norms. Her project seems to invite visitors to try and find beauty in the simple, in the imperfect, in real life.

The third part of the exhibition consists of a crisscross of cords strung across the room. From these are hung large sheets, painted in bright colors, once again reflecting a tree motif, enhancing the structural textures of the first part of the exhibition. This work is more abstract, and might irritate visitors attached to more realistic depictions of nature.

“I did not want to erase the folds and crinkles of the sheets on which I painted,” Ali-Ahmad says. “Wrinkles, after all, are what

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make objects and humans more interesting.”

The sheets resemble freshly washed laundry hung up to dry in the sun. “This used to be how we did it,” Ali-Ahmad says.

“It was a simple life. Nobody does that anymore.”

“De Pli en Pli” is on display through Sept. 30 at the Karagulla Building, Mina al-Hosn, open daily 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 4-7 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday 5-7 p.m.

A version of this article appeared in the print edition of The Daily Star on September 21, 2019, on page 8.

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