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Mute Movements: A new book that documents the collective performance art journey of Beirut youth
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It is called Mute Movements, but the newly released book by Cornelia Krafft, formerly of the AUB Fine Arts and Art History Department, documenting the emergence of a performance art scene in Lebanon, speaks a lot.

It says that there is talent among Beirut's youth that is worth tapping into and developing.

It says that even with a shoestring budget, you can still produce quality performance art.

It also says that performance art in Lebanon can speak volumes to the social, political, and cultural issues plaguing the country, and particularly its youth.

Officially launched on March 26, 2015 at AUB's West Hall, Mute Movements is the first book of its kind in Lebanon. It illustrates the collective work of students and artists (aged 19 to 25) by exploring their everyday challenges and concerns through the medium of performance.

Krafft, an artist, choreographer and former FAAH assistant professor, had initiated the course Performance Art at AUB in 2009. Through her book, she aims to document the performance art that was produced under her direction and thus encourage people to "see, believe, understand and nourish" the relevance of artistic endeavor and allow it to flourish. By choosing silence as the tool of communication, a bridge is built through the performers' bodies to a widest possible audience without the barrier of language.

"Most people have only very little idea about the strong artistic talents of young people in Lebanon," she said. "This book for me is a silent embrace of the whole journey and hopefully will become a platform to build upon in the future."

She added: "I dedicate this book ... in memory of and thanks for the wonderful and unforgettable moments that we shared over the years. Those moments were a gift, a beautiful experience filled with happiness, excitement and artistic and professional challenges. Together we had explored new horizons, sharing the best of each day in this unique country, Lebanon."

Krafft encouraged her students and collaborators to continue along the path of life with the same magical curiosity, openness of spirit and special energy.

Captured in high-quality photographs and narrated through the performers' own words, the book invites the reader to embark on an inspirational journey through modern-day Lebanon as seen through the eyes of these young artists striving to confront internal and external challenges on the personal, national, and regional levels. Their "mute" performances, situated in provocative locations, demanded attention and triggered debate. Played out in unorthodox settings – abandoned buildings, war ruins, along the sea shore, in city streets and run-down cinemas – these performances required almost as much of the spectators as of the players with their fundamental questioning of issues of collective relevance: social responsibility, personal and regional identity, cultural heritage, censorship, conflict, freedom, and repression.



“The fragility, instability and daily challenges that govern our lives at this time in the history of Lebanon, place us all on an edge yet inspire us to create and urge all of us to face and confront our personal, social, and political issues through art,” Krafft said. “It is crucial to hear the voices of the emerging generation and to provide them with platforms for the expression of freedom and

After 100 Springs 2014 photo by Alia Haju

recognition, for which AUB has always been a pioneer and strong provider in this region; and such experiences form the backbone of AUB’s educational mission, where experimentation and propagation of creativity in any form are encouraged.”

According to Krafft, when she came to Lebanon and AUB in 2009, she could not have imagined the extent of personal and creative growth that would come about, through her engagement with the country, its people and her new professorial position.

The book’s minimalistic aesthetic and design enfold a wealth of artistic images, an extraordinary record of the evolution of Performance Art in Lebanon across five fertile years of artistic endeavor. Across the pages of the book, each performance unfolds in documentary-like fashion, revealing the extent to which contemporary education in the fields of performance, set design, and visual arts can engage and inspire its audiences. While the focus is on Lebanon and its youth, the bigger picture is a work in progress with relevance extending far beyond the borders of one small country, making Mute Movements a valuable and highly enjoyable reference work of international importance.

The book in its final form consists of 304 pages, with around 186 students, alumni and outside artists’ work being showcased. As the core of the book is visual, it talks for itself, transcending the barriers of language. 1,000 copies have been issued for the first edition, priced at \$40, to be available at AUB Press and Librairie Antoine and other selected bookstores.

““I extend my gratitude and thanks to the AUB President’s Club for its most generous support and trust to bring this book to life, as well as the AUB Press,” Krafft said. “Above all, may this publication encourage many more talented young people from Lebanon and the whole region to continue to engage in the arts with dedication and passion in order to enable the artistic landscape to flourish and expand with their contributions.”



<http://www.aub.edu.lb/news/2015/Pages/mute-movements.aspx>

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