

'Gaza Zeytoun'
Muiz (2012)



the festival, throughout October.

The festival is clearly pitched to the wider public, broadening appeal from a collection of cultural events for the seasoned museum-goer to an exciting season of happenings for all Londoners. These range from exhibitions, concerts, talks, debates, readings and book signings, to film screenings for the Middle East North Africa Film Festival and the Iranian Film Festival, performances, an Iranian winter solstice celebration (!), supper clubs and ubiquitous street art.

'Tea and Coffee Portobello Wall Commission' is one such special event. A narrative journey by artist Nadia Hammoud into the parallel historic journeys that brought tea and coffee from the Middle East and Asia to London cafes and coffeehouses over the centuries, set in contrast to the journeys of some of the residents of the multi-cultural Portobello district.

Meanwhile, complementing Hammoud's tales of the origins of the traditional cuppa, over in neighbouring Notting Hill, Sarah Al Hamad's been firing up her cooker. 'I love the Nour Festival's new and varied programming, - especially the musical evenings at the Leighton House and of course, my own new Gulf-themed supper clubs'. Al Hamad's participation in Nour is indicative of the way in which dozens of Arab Londoners are enthusiastically participating in proceedings. In Hamad's case, not only has she written 'Cardamom and Lime: Recipes from the Arabian Gulf' but during October and early November, she hosted a quirky supper club in The Mosaic Rooms, sharing her culinary traditions and heritage with plenty of hungry locals from across the city.

While the Festival's events may have outgrown Leighton House, some might fear that they have become watered down, to appeal to the wider public. Perhaps they have lost their relevance to the local immigrant community from which they originated? 'The Nour Festival is certainly a kind of taster of Middle Eastern culture and politics,' says curator Malu Halasa. 'But I mean that in a very positive way' she adds, reassuringly. Halasa's talk on Syria's 'Art of Resistance' at Leighton House in October looked at popular art - cartoons, graffiti, cell-phone cinema and posters - gaining prominence in Syria during recent times. Halasa, a Londoner herself, co-curated the 'Culture in Defiance' exhibition at the Prince Claus Fund Gallery in Amsterdam earlier this year. 'There is certainly more to the region than the politics and the wars going on there. The culture and arts in all the different Arab countries also reflect the reality of the Arab people, so to be able to hear the music of Reem Yusef Kalani, see the graphic interpretations of Muiz and then encounter the art of the Syrian resistances gives people who don't know the region a well rounded introduction.'

It's interesting to see that children and teenagers haven't been forgotten in this broad cultural effort to engage with London's ethnic mix. Workshops and practical activities have been designed to emphasize the importance of Arab culture on the world today. The Science Museum, for example, joined forces with Al Manaar

