

THE YOUTH OF TODAY

“The distinction between children and adults, while probably useful for some purposes, is at bottom a specious one, I feel. There are only individual egos, crazy for life,” wrote American author Donald Barthelme in his 1964 short story, Me and Miss Mandible.

Individual egos, crazy for life...

For Beirut’s young creatives living in a capital of radical contrasts, youth is a time of unique intensity. Finding your place as a designer, stylist, musician, architect, director or producer, male or female, is tough, and climbing the ladder is even tougher. Can you work and create, rebel and be free, force change and even lead in this place, right now, today?

The up and coming stars on these pages don’t have all the answers but they won’t let that stop them trying. Meet Beirut’s new generation of young creatives, shot up close and personal by one of their own brightest new talents, 23-year-old photographer Myriam Boulos.

Individual egos, crazy for life... the world is calling.

CARL GERGES

Musician

Gerges, 28, is a musician in the indie-pop band Mashrou’ Leila, currently in the middle of a world tour. He’s also a passionate architect. When the band started nearly eight years ago, no one could predict how events would unfold. “Quite naturally we started singing about sensitive subjects like gender, social taboos and unconventional love stories,” he says, which may have contributed to them gaining recognition as “the voice of the generation.” It is a flattering title that “motivates the band to remain socially and politically engaged.” He continues: “Communicating with a vast and varied audience and seeing that the youth respond, relate and react to the lyrics and music is what pushes us to come back to Beirut, to our roots, seeking inspiration and new stories to tell.”

What does it mean to be young? “Youth is the appetite for adventure experimentation and discovery, it’s the naivety to believe that everything is possible. It is what makes me fearless today. It makes me push my boundaries and pursue my childhood dream of making music.”
mashrouleila.com





KHODOR ELLAIK AKA KID FOURTEEN

Musician

"Constantly adapting to new approaches and different perspectives, that's what youth means," says Ellaik, "which ironically comes with age." The 29-year-old Mar Mikhael resident should know – his debut album *Dream Kids Never Sleep* has just been released. "You know in the music field, it's often about experience – and not just creative experience – but experience dealing with the industry in general. As you grow older you learn to manage expectations and to take a few blows. That's why it might seem harder when you're young: your enthusiasm will bite you." As to whether he represents his generation, Ellaik is circumspect. "I never thought about it that way. I represent myself first and foremost, but maybe the fact that I belong to a generation makes me represent it automatically."

Where do the kids of Beirut hang out these days? "I can't really say. I have a couple of bars I go to and that's about it. Damn. I sound old already."

soundcloud.com/kidfourteen



INGRID BAWAB

Director/singer-songwriter

Hardworking and innovative young TV and freelance video director, Bawab, first made a name for herself with soulful appearances on *The Voice* and today the 27-year-old is close to launching a brand new album. Growing up she wishes, "I would have known not to worry so much about trying to look older – after all one day you will actually be old." The way she stays young is, "by doing whatever I feel like doing. When you're young you never have to say "No" to anything because it is the time for experimentation. If I could, I would love to stay young forever." Bawab can't say what's influencing Beirut's new up-and-comers because, "truthfully, I'm part of only one clique." She can say this though: "The young people of Beirut are crazy."

On the spirit of Beirut's youth: "Revolutionary in every sense. No one here is accepting or settling for what they have. Everyone is striving for more."

@ingridbawab



BLU FIEFER

Singer/songwriter and producer

“I love asking questions,” says the 23-year-old Mexican-Lebanese Fiefer who’s making some of the most innovative Hip-Hop, Trap and Alternative Pop coming out of Beirut today. Of her new single and video, *Jukebox*, she says, “It’s a commentary about what people expect from you locally – to be a jukebox. That if you pay the right amount of money you will do what’s asked of you. That it’s not about what you want to offer but what is wanted from you.” It’s an issue she cares about deeply, “...You can do things differently than that. I’m proud of what I’ve done. To be able to say I made this because this was my vision, that’s real for me. I wrote this, I produced this, I directed this. And it stinks of me.”

On living in Beirut? “I’m trying to see things as part of a larger picture in order to see the smaller picture. I ask, ‘How can I one day contribute to the country where my mom loves to live?’ And I wonder whether I can do that from here. I’m asking.”

blufeifer.com



TALA MORTADA

Art Director/DJ

The first thing Tala Mortada would tell her child self if she could go back in time would be not to be too tough on yourself. "It's hard to be inexperienced but the more you are the master of your trade, the easier it is to get your message across. Some people were taking advantage of my age to get me to work on big projects for free for "exposure," but you learn how to deal with these situations." At 28, with regular gigs across Beirut and forthcoming musical collaborations with the likes of Etyen, that's all changed. Coming of age in a place like Beirut isn't easy but "personally, I guess it means working out how to find happiness and serenity in a loud messed up place."

How do you stay young? "I know 50 year olds who are younger than me. It's all about how you perceive life and how you live it daily."
talamortada.com



JIMMY FRANCIS

Creative Director

If you've ever been to one of Beirut's legendary Cotton Candy pop-up club nights you'll have definitely seen Francis (not his real name). The 34-year-old creative director is a founding member of the Cotton Candy events team, as well as a partner at creative agency Interesting Times where he directs advertising concepts designed to appeal to Beirut's youth. That, of course, means living the dream. "I was always one of those kids who just couldn't wait to grow up. I would tell myself something like: Chill dude, you're never gonna grow up. I am Peter Pan." He wishes he was a writer and foresees himself running a psychedelic retreat somewhere, "a sort of retirement home for young people." What does it mean to be young and successful in advertising? "In this field, you have to reinvent yourself on a daily basis. You have to stay young, or get old trying."

On kids today? "In one word, it would have to be 'wasted.' You know sometimes words have two meanings."
interestingtimes.me

YAZAN HALWANI

Muralist/street artist

22-year-old Halwani is a muralist and street artist known for his innovative use of Arabic calligraphy and abstract portraiture. He is seen here before his largest-scale mural of the late Lebanese singer, Sabah, in the heart of Hamra. “It is nearly impossible to represent the voice of a whole generation simply because of the heterogeneity that exists within a whole generation,” he says, deliberating on what messages he provides through his work. “This is true of my generation or any other.” Yet his murals, both regionally and internationally, make enormous impact on those who witness them. “All I can do is represent my views and perspectives and hope they will echo someone else’s views and perspectives.”

His approach to art and to life? “Don’t hesitate. When you have a plan or a sketch, work until the work is done. Then take a step back to look at things from afar and keep working from there.”

@yazanhawani



CYNTHIA MERHEJ

Illustrator/Visual Artist

At just 26, Badaro-dwelling Merhej has quickly made a name for herself, her work appearing in numerous books and independent publications across Beirut, and is currently working on a new project in the world of fashion. Is it tough to be creative and successful in this city? "I see a lot of incredible creativity around me, but sadly there is a rarity of institutions both governmental and otherwise that appreciate this talent and look to nurture it. Lebanon is driving our talent away or forcing people to be more conservative to survive in our society instead of giving them the means to push new boundaries." Does that include being discriminated against for being young? "Yes, a lot. People nowadays are not used to someone being so accomplished at such a young age – for the more conservative older generation, it's something they are afraid of. But the fact is I could be half your age and know more than you, and someone could be half my age and know more than me."

Any words of wisdom? "Sometimes things seem much worse in your head than in reality."
cynthiamerhej.com



GHAITH & JAD

Architects/Designers

Business partners Ghaith Abi Ghanem and Jad Melki, 26 and 27, got their start with the Starch Foundation before setting up their eponymous practice – how does their work represent this generation? "Generations crystallize in hindsight; for now we conceive of our work outside of a specific year or moment, but rather as part of an unfolding process that issues from our collaboration." So what do they think it is that interests the Young of Beirut then? "Young people here are mainly interested in experiencing the city around them. We constantly try to discover new areas and infuse life into them whether it is of cultural nature or entertainment. This mélange of both creates an energetic dynamic that attracts the people to interact and get inspired from one another."

What is youth? "Youth to us is exploration, experimentation and even mistakes. It is an eye-opening opportunity that offers a personal understanding about your individuality and strength for you to build on it."
ghaithjad.com

PAMELA NASR

Stylist and Creative Director

When Nasr, 24, came back to Beirut last summer it was the revolutionary spirit of the city that caught her eye. “When I was younger, I always said that nothing would make me come back to live here. I waited for the time to be proven wrong and – deep down I guess I was hoping to be proven wrong – and then I was. I met all these new people and I couldn’t believe that such a good scene had been growing – it is such an exciting time to be here today. And the garbage crisis was happening and everyone was like, “You decided to stay in Beirut while the garbage crisis was happening?” And I said, “Maybe it’s exciting. Maybe I feel like this place is finally alive in a different way.” And it’s that spirit but in a nostalgic way she incorporates into her work. “I look at the 60s and 70s – where there was a revolution in a different way – a sexual revolution and an ideological one. And I dramatize that.”

What advice would you give your younger self?

“To ask more. To be more curious. To not be afraid of needing that. Not to feel fulfilled by what you think you know.”

