



Illuminating Ritta

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Lebanese poetry performance artist and blogger Ritta Baddoura opens up about writing amidst the bombs

Performed poetry is tough to come by around here, but following last summer's war in Lebanon, Ritta Baddoura channeled her energy to bring action to her words. Meanwhile, her blog, *Ritta parmi les bombes*, garnered a following – not for her reportage, but for her poetry. With two collections published (the first when she was 19), Ritta has also signed to release a book of her short poems, along with images by Lebanese photographer and friend Randa Mirza, to be released at the end of the year. She sat for a chat with *Skin* last February.

What's the idea behind performing poetry?

I started experimenting with poetry performance three years ago. I started to feel that I was bored with poetry readings... since poetry is taken out of a book, you aren't having an intimate relationship with the reader so why not take it one step further by moving. I cut pieces of poetry and let myself be creative... One of my finest experiences was working with two percussionists and a guitarist for a performance after the war for Nafas Beirut. At one point you lose yourself, you become a channel... I heard myself saying things I had never thought before.

What inspires you?

It's an interaction of many factors that link perception and emotion. Mainly it is the inner life of a human being and the body experience through the senses. Social events and changes are interesting in how they affect the human being.

Tell me about the characters in your writing.

Sometimes the poem is centred on me and my relation to people close to me... There are other poems where I am surprised when I finish writing that there was no me in them. Sometimes it's only empathy. It's connecting observations and emotions around me and translating them into form. There's no definite attitude.

Why did you start a blog?

I've never done anything on the Internet before July 2006. When the war started, I was feeling very frustrated. A close friend told me to start a blog. It was an adventure and an attempt to do something productive. I titled my blog "Ritta parmi les bombes" (Ritta among the bombs). I began with three poems I had written. I expected fewer people to visit the blog after the war but I found it to be the opposite... Since mid-August, the blog has had over 23,700 visitors.

How is it different than your other work?

For me, it's really been an experience to be writing on the Net and having this kind of direct contact with my writing. When I write to be published... it's a different timeframe to feel the poem, to write it, to mature it. [On the Internet] there's more freedom and more openness and people choose to come and visit the page each time. For me, it's an adventure and it just started.