

"Home Beirut. Sounding the Neighbors" at MAXXI, Rome

EXHIBITIONS

A new chapter of the series of *Interactions across the Mediterranean* dedicated to the relationship between Europe and the Middle East. The story of a city, a laboratory of resistance, artistic innovation and hope seen through over 100 works by 36 artists.

Ziad Abillama / Shirin Abu Shaqra / Etel Adnan / Tamara Al-Samerraei / Mounira Al Solh / Haig Aivazian / Ziad Antar / Caline Aoun / Marwa Arsanios / Tarek Atoui / Vartan Avakian / Eric Baudelaire / Tony Chakar / Ali Cherri / Roy Dib / Maroun El-Daccache / Fouad Elkoury / Sirine Fattouh / Laure Ghorayeb / Ahmad Ghossein / Mona Hatoum / Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige / Hatem Imam / Lamia Joreige / Mazen Kerbaj / Bernard Khoury / Walid Raad / Marwan Rechmaoui / Graziella Rizkallah Toufic / Stéphanie Saadé / Rania Stephan / Jalal Toufic / Paola Yacoub / Akram Zaatar / Cynthia Zaven

With the participation of Al Maslakh / Annihaya / Arab Center for Architecture / Foundation for Arab Music Archiving & Research

Cultural diversity, the memory of war, the effervescence of the present, the profound urban transformation, the prospects for the future: all these are *Home Beirut. Sounding the Neighbors*, at MAXXI from 15 November 2017 to 20 May 2018.

The exhibition, curated by Hou Hanru and Giulia Ferracci is a new chapter of the project *Interactions across the Mediterranean* which, after focussing on the contemporary art scene in Iran (2014-2015) and Istanbul (2015-2016) this time turns to Beirut, a dynamic city processing the past and acting as a laboratory for the future; it does so through over 100 works by 36 artists, expressions of an inter-Mediterranean culture enjoying vigorous growth.

Over the last two decades, Beirut has become an example of resilience, dynamism, cultural vivacity and hope of which contemporary art is both a testimony and a dynamo, even at this time of renewed tension. The very history and reality of the city always echoes and interacts with lively but conflictive events happening in the neighborhoods, near and afar. The city, rich in cultural, economic and political diversity, is constantly transformed through a negotiation with the globalising world. However, it is profoundly anchored in a collective obsession: how to deal with the idea of belonging, or, how to make this place a “home” for all, while everyone has a different sense of identity?

Hence the title of the exhibition, *Home Beirut Sounding the Neighbors*. With an exhibition design that has visitors navigate the complexity of the city, the show is organized in four sections, each conceived as a “home” devoted to one aspect of the city’s kaleidoscopic artistic scene: memory (*Home for Memory*), hospitality (*Home for Everyone?*), local mapping (*Home for Remapping*) and joy (*Home for Joy*).

HOME FOR MEMORY tackles the existential theme, shared by many artists, of the contradiction between memories of the conflict and the desire to rebuild a new civil society. This section deploys works, above all photographs and videos, reflecting on archiving, collections and documentation with pieces midway between testimony and imagination, in which the reconstruction of events remains a permanent challenge, if not an impossibility. Memory becomes a bridge connecting past, present and future, as in the work *Collapsing Clouds of Gas and Dust* by Vartan Avakian, a series of crystals created artificially from dust recovered from a building used by snipers during the war, a metaphor for the cyclical nature of history and a reflection on the concept of the commemorative monument, or in the video *Beirut Exploded Views* by Akram Zaatari, set in a post- apocalyptic city. Among the works in this section are the series of drawings *33 Jours* and *Beirut, July – August 2006*, by Laure Ghorayeb and Mazen Kerbaj, mother and son: she is a poet, journalist and illustrator, he is a musician and illustrator. Together they tell the story of the 33 day-war of 2006, drawing on paper facts and emotions and then publishing

the drawings on his blog. The now historical video *Measures of Distance* (1988) by Mona Hatoum, forced to stay in London at the outbreak of the war in 1975, recounts her relationship with her distant mother through fragments of letters, intimate conversations and images. Here the private dimension of the mother-daughter relationship intertwines with the public experience of the tragic war.

HOME FOR EVERYONE? The migrant crisis is an issue that has always been contemporary in Beirut. Yesterday as today, due to the conflicts and the migratory flows, Armenians, Greeks, Syrian and Palestinians, peoples with diverse origins and religions, have chosen this city as their new home for a few months or a lifetime. All this has contributed to the creation of a rich, complex and cosmopolitan culture. In this section we find the dual video installation *Remembering the Light* (2016) by Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, winners of the *Marcel Duchamp Prize 2017*: sharing the element of water, they evoke the current migratory phenomenon entrusting a reflection on human destiny to the poetry of the images. The video *A Spectacle Of Privacy* (2014) by Roy Dib, through the dialogue between a couple with relationship issues, recounts the Israeli-Palestinian question, drawing an analogy with a sexual encounter; the ones by Jalal Toufic are devoted to Ashura, the Islamic religious commemoration that takes on diverse meanings depending on the context.

HOME FOR REMAPPING investigates the profound changes that the Beirut area has lived through: from the wounds of war to natural disasters and through to the construction boom, the city has transformed radically. All the social conflicts and reconciliations of the past 40 years are inscribed in its re-planning process. Among the works in this area: *Beirut Caoutchouc*, the great map of the city of Beirut by Marwan Rechmaoui, made with rubber and unfolding on the floor where the public are invited to walk on it; the video installation *After the River* by Lamia Joreige dedicated to the river traversing Beirut, a space capable of recounting the history of the city through its progressive deterioration. This section also features in *Shipping Container Floor* by Caline Aoun, *Deutsche Bank's Artist of the year 2018*, a carbon copy of the bottom of a container

presenting a critical witness and reflection on the invasion of global capitalism in the city's life today.

HOME FOR JOY Beirut has always produced beauty, even in the hardest of times: visual arts, music, dance, film and poetry never ceased to exist, with the destruction of war actually nurturing them as forms of resistance and resilience. The city is teeming with examples of cultural infrastructure – foundations, galleries, archives, arts centres – and offers a rich output of visual arts, music, dance, theatre, film and poetry, all recounted in this section. Here we find, among other works, the drawings from the *One Year* project (2016) by Mazen Kerbaj, who designed the cover of the exhibition catalogue: one drawing a day, a visual diary that playfully records the passing of time. Music as an expression of joy is at the centre of the video installation by Ziad Antar. The most emblematic image belongs to the dancer Alexandre Paulikevitch who, facing the camera of Sirine Fattouh, danced into the ruins of a destroyed village in a real ecstasy, suggesting a joyful Phoenix Nirvana of the war-torn home!

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until 20 May 2018