

**CORONAVIRUS NEWS**

**Saudi Arabia reports 175 new COVID-19 cases, 3 deaths**



Arab News Thursday . August 11, 2022



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# ARAB NEWS



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# Lebanese photographer Dia Mrad: Documenting the

## Latest Updates

KSrelief's supervisor  
general meets



# UIC destruction



Dia Mrad shot this picture of the inter

## Short Url

<https://arab.news/rzrj4>

Updated 19  
February 2021

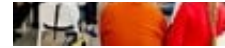
RAWAA TALASS

February 19, 2021  
09:30

2881

- How Dia Mrad's images of damaged buildings have captured the

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... mood of Beirut

DUBAI: It's become one of the most powerful photographs of the results of the August 4 explosion in Beirut: An interior mural of the face of Lebanon's revered poet Kahlil Gibran, partially destroyed and trapped between broken roof tiles and scattered debris, peeking



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~ 22811

peering  
out  
through  
an  
entirely  
collapsed  
wall. It  
sums up  
the  
devastation  
wrought  
on  
Lebanon's  
heritage  
by the  
blast.

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“When I  
first saw it  
I got  
goose  
bumps,”  
says  
Lebanese  
photographer  
Dia Mrad,  
the man  
behind  
this image  
— which  
has since  
gone viral  
— to Arab

News. “I think, with that photo, I was able to capture everything that we were all feeling at that point; complete devastation. The look in Gibran’s eyes was very expressive to a lot of people — the way that anger mixed with sadness and disappointment showed on his face.”



Mrad's image  
of an interior  
mural of Kahlil  
Gibran  
exposed by  
the August 4  
Beirut Port  
explosion.  
(Supplied)

---

As  
Lebanon  
continues  
to suffer  
the  
simultaneous  
crises of  
an all-but  
nonexistent  
government,  
an  
unprecedented  
economic  
collapse,  
and the  
COVID-19  
pandemic,  
Mrad has  
made it  
his  
mission to  
document  
the  
damaged  
facades of  
buildings,  
including  
palaces  
and

estates,  
and their  
shattered  
interiors.  
Some of  
them date  
back to  
the late  
1800s,  
when  
Lebanon  
was under  
Ottoman  
rule.

“In a lot of  
places, it  
doesn’t  
feel like it  
happened  
six  
months  
ago, it  
feels like  
it was  
yesterday.  
The  
destruction  
is still as  
evident as  
it was on  
day one,”  
Mrad says  
of the  
damage,  
although  
the same

can also  
be said of  
people's  
morale.  
“You can  
see it in  
people's  
eyes,” he  
says. “It's  
all  
changed.  
You used  
to go  
down on  
the  
streets  
and see  
happy  
faces and  
people  
just going  
about  
their day.”



**Dagher  
Estate was  
founded by  
the Dagher  
family in the  
mid-1700s.  
(Supplied)**

---

Shortly  
after the  
blast at  
the port



the port,  
Lebanon's  
Ministry  
of Culture  
stated  
that  
approximately  
640  
historical  
buildings  
— mostly  
in the  
popular  
neighborhoods  
of  
Gemmayze  
and Mar  
Mikhael —  
had been  
damaged  
in the  
explosion,  
with close  
to 60 of  
them at  
risk of  
collapsing.  
“They are  
the most-  
damaged  
areas as  
they were  
closest to  
the port.  
They just  
happen to  
be the

areas that  
are  
richest in  
cultural  
and  
architectural  
heritage,”  
says  
Mrad,  
adding  
that such  
precious  
buildings  
lack  
protection  
laws.

“They are  
classified  
in a list,  
but  
there’s  
supposed  
to be  
incentives  
to  
maintain  
them,” he  
explains.

“The  
government  
should be  
more  
strict with  
owners  
about  
what they

can and  
can't do. A  
lot of  
these  
buildings  
are  
abandoned  
because  
owners  
don't  
want to  
renovate  
them. If  
they're  
not  
interested  
in  
heritage,  
they'd  
rather just  
destroy  
that small  
building  
and sell  
the land  
for  
millions  
of  
dollars.”



Dagher  
Estate's  
garden was  
gutted by the  
blast,  
including the

—  
loss of a  
Jacaranda  
tree that had  
been planted  
more than  
100 years  
ago.  
(Supplied)

---

This  
notion of  
intentional  
destruction  
was  
Mrad's  
initial  
motivator  
to do  
something,  
he  
explains.  
"There  
was  
always  
that fear  
of  
wanting  
to  
somehow  
preserve  
the  
memory  
of these  
buildings  
for the  
future in  
case they  
were  
gone," he

gone, he  
says. “I  
think this  
was one  
of the  
biggest  
reasons  
that drove  
me to take  
that many  
photos.”

A master’s  
graduate  
in  
architecture,  
Mrad has  
always  
admired  
the  
diversity  
of his  
cosmopolitan  
city’s  
architectural  
scene.  
“It’s so  
related to  
history,”  
he notes.  
“There  
were  
different  
movements  
in  
architectural  
style,

where the traditional Lebanese style was affected by the Art Deco movement and modernism. What is fascinating is that it still shows in the urban landscape.” Through his recent work, Mrad is creating a before-and-after series, assessing the extent of the damage caused by the blast. He is planning to compile a selection of his

## photography in a book.



Dia Mrad is  
a Lebanese  
photographer.  
(Supplied)

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An image  
just as  
striking as  
his shot of  
the  
Gibran  
mural is  
Mrad's  
picture of  
the  
interior of  
the  
Feghali  
House in  
Achrafieh,  
with its  
golden  
drapes,  
pastel-  
green  
walls and  
ornate  
ceiling.  
After the  
explosion,

it looked  
ransacked,  
with  
fallen  
chairs and  
shards of  
broken  
glass  
littering  
the  
ground.  
“To see it  
all  
collapsed  
like that is  
like  
seeing the  
Mona Lisa  
exploded,”  
says  
Mrad.

One of his  
more  
dramatic  
depictions  
of exterior  
damage is  
the  
Dagher  
Estate,  
founded  
by the  
Dagher  
family in  
the mid-  
1700s. Its



garden  
was  
gutted by  
the blast,  
including  
the loss of  
a  
Jacaranda  
tree that  
had been  
planted  
more than  
100 years  
ago.



This is  
Sursock  
Palace after  
the blast.  
(Supplied)

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Mrad isn't  
focusing  
his energy  
purely on  
his  
personal  
projects,  
however.  
Using his  
background  
in  
photography,  
he is  
currently

involved  
with the  
Beirut  
Heritage  
Initiative,  
a local  
organization  
that is  
spearheading  
efforts to  
repair  
what has  
been  
destroyed.  
Although  
the teams  
have faced  
setbacks  
— from  
COVID-19  
restrictions,  
to  
negligence  
from the  
state and  
a lack of  
access to  
donation  
funds  
from  
abroad —  
they have  
been able  
to  
renovate a  
few  
structures

structures,  
temporarily  
shelter  
buildings  
with  
protective  
material  
and install  
scaffolding  
to prevent  
collapse.

Will it  
prove to  
be  
enough?  
Mrad  
doesn't  
sugarcoat  
his  
answer.

“There  
has  
definitely  
been a lot  
of  
improvement,”  
he says.  
“But in  
terms of  
actually  
rebuilding  
or getting  
back to  
how it  
was, we're  
...”

still a very  
long way  
off from  
that.”



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Topics:

**DIA MRAD**  
(/TAXONOMY/TERM/382286)