

Synopsis on BEYroute: -21 September - 2 October 2011

Curator: Rola Khayyat

BEYroute (curated by Rola Khayyat) is part of a broader project called Roaming Images (curated by Soritios Bahtsetzis).

Roaming Images is a crossroads between Greek and Arab Culture through the eyes of contemporary artists. This overall project is part of the third Thessaloniki Biennale, hosted by the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art (MMCA), within the “Cultural Crossroads” initiative of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture & Tourism.

Basically, Roaming Images is the framework encompassing a series of shows in various stations of the Arabian Peninsula including the broader area of the Middle East. In cities such as Muscat, Sharjah, Damascus, Alexandria, Jaffa and Nicosia, appointed correspondent curators such as myself, have been asked to select the artists based in these cities and conceive and implement a project, specially inspired by the theoretical framework of Roaming Images. Finally, Roaming Images integrates these works in a single presentation along with the documentation, at the MMCA in Thessaloniki (between September 18, 2011 – January 8, 2012). The outcome of this endeavor is a kaleidoscopic view of contemporary art, a map of creativity along these geographic and cultural routes.

The theoretical framework of the Roaming Images Project is to raise questions of interpretation on ‘world pictures’ – How can we scrutinize issues of representation and orientalist stereotypes? In Thessaloniki the project also includes satellite projects, such as the conference “Iconic-Architectonic” that took place last March and the exhibition “Photography as a Means of Creating or Subverting Stereotypes”, a students’ photography exhibition, curated by Lena Athanasopoulou, that will take place at the National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation – Thessaloniki Centre, and that is organized by the Architecture School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in collaboration with schools from the Middle East and Greece.



Dalia Khamissy, from the series 'Lebanon's missing', 2010, Digital Print, 40x40cm
- Courtesy of the Artist

The concept:

BEYroute addresses the notion of the photographic representation of life under recurrent war. Each artist, in his/her own way, brings to the fore significant tremors in Lebanon’s national and personal memory and identity. Tanya Traboulsi’s work provides a sneak peak into the private worlds of the militiamen during the Civil War. Dalia Khamissy’s work puts the spotlight on the silenced memories of Lebanon’s forgotten war generation. Roy Samaha and Ayla Hibri’s work enter the home terrain, and testify to memory through spaces and objects. Rayya Haddad harks back to Lebanon’s diminishing heritage through a nostalgic lens. George Haddad delves into the persistent thriving memories, which inhabit Beirut’s camps. Rola Khayyat and Rania Matar portray a post-war city through shades of the extraordinary in the ordinary. BEYroute is an exploration of the Lebanese post-civil war experience and its dialogue with memory,



Rania Matar, *Defiant* from the series 'Aftermath of War', 2006, Giclee Print, 40x60cm - Courtesy of Galerie Janine Rubeiz

which transpires into oft overlooked facets of 'normal' life during 'abnormal' conditions. The vision is to have an assembly of images which evoke strokes of quotidian life in Beirut, of a city in constant flux, abandonment, re-invention, and change - addressing this particular intertwining of ordinary and extraordinary, drama and banality, memory and forgetfulness. This exhibition revolves around the nexus of photographs to memory, addressing the notion of photographic representation and the impact this has on the way we see and interact with the world.

Lebanon has long suffered wars, civil and non-civil, and this exhibition, in particular, will seek ways of bringing artistic sensibility to the realm of war by exploring its effects on the imaginative life worlds of the artists who were both inspired and affected by their experiences of Lebanon's war(s). Memories of war linger in odd shapes and sizes and have their expression in both tangible and

abstract ways, yet when both realms collide what forms of memory can be produced?

This exhibition addresses such questions as: How do photographs carry memory across space and time? How do they mediate culture and identity?

Looking at how photographs mediate memory, this exhibition explores, in particular, how artists relate notions of identity, culture and affective experience to their material signifiers. How do photographs structure memory? Might bringing such photographs into the public archive and mining them for their testimonial value allow for more expansive histories and better representation of voices and narratives? Such questions probe alternative expressions of memory, identity and representation or misrepresentation, through the artists' endeavor to elevate the material object to the realm of the affective and imaginative.



George Haddad, from the series 'Beirut Jungle', Cedar Grove, 2011, 60x80cm - Courtesy of the Artist

BEYroute Artists:

Dalia Khamissy was born in Beirut, Dalia received a diploma in photography from the Universite Saint-Esprit Kaslik in 1999. Her work revolves mostly around the social and socio-political stories in the Mid-East region. In 2005 she worked as a photo editor for the Associated Press in Beirut for nearly 2 years, before quitting at the end of 2006 (after the Israeli offensive on Lebanon and its aftermath). Since then, she went back to documenting mostly the aftermath of Lebanon's wars and social issues, especially those concerning women rights. Dalia's work has been published on the BBC, Aperture Magazine, The Times UK, Eyemazing, Bite Magazine, Amnesty International, Monocle, Financial Times, Ibraaz, Le Monde, Wall Street Journal, MERIP, Le Nouvel Observateur, IRIN, Le Temps and Transit Beirut, among others.

Her solo exhibitions include: 'Abandoned Spaces' at Centro Andaluz de la Fotografia (Almeria, Spain 2010); 'Abandoned Spaces' at the 2nd International Festival of the Freedom of Expression (Cadiz, Spain,

2010); 'Abandoned Spaces' at the 3rd Granada 'Cines del Sur' Festival (Granada, Spain, 2009). Her collective exhibitions include: 'The Flaneur' at the Collectives Encounter at Format International Photography Festival (Derby, UK, 2011), '15 Minutes Exhibition' slideshow which toured in Brazilian photo Festivals (FotoFestPoA, PARATY EM FOCO, DeVERcidade) and at 1500 Gallery (New York City, USA, 2010 etc); Art Dubai with the Empty Quarter Gallery (Dubai, UAE, 2008); and 'Regard des Photographes Arabes Contemporains' at MAMA (Algiers, Algeria, 2008), CAAC (Seville, Spain, 2006), GL Strand Museum (Copenhagen, Denmark, 2006), IMA (Paris, France, 2005) amongst others.

Dalia Khamissy is represented by the Empty Quarter Gallery (Dubai, UAE). Her photographs are in the permanent collection of the Institut du Monde Arabe (Paris, France).

Rania Matar was born and raised in Lebanon, Rania moved to the U.S. in 1984. Originally trained as



Roy Samaha, from the series 'Missing Originals/Inheritance and Dispossession', 2008-11, Mixed media installation, series of ten photographs printed on paper mounted on aluminum and framed, accompanied by one video of 1 min duration looping and broadcasted on a small tube television set - courtesy of Espace Kettaneh Kunigk and the Artist - installation on wall (height 200 cm, width: 300 cm)

an architect at the American University of Beirut and Cornell University, she worked as an architect before studying photography at New England School of Photography and at the Maine Photographic Workshops in Mexico with Magnum photographer, Constantine Manos. She currently works full-time as a photographer and teaches documentary photography at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. She also teaches photography most summers to teenage girls in Lebanon's refugee camps with the assistance of non-governmental organizations. Matar's work focuses mainly on women and women's issues. Her previous work has focused on women and children in the Middle East, and her projects – which examine the Palestinian refugee camps, the recent spread of the veil and its meanings, the aftermath of war, and the Christians of the Middle East – intend to give a voice to people who have been forgotten or misunderstood. In Boston, where she lives, she photographs her four children at all

stages of their lives, and is currently working on a new body of work, "A Girl and her Room," photographing teenage girls from different backgrounds.

Her work has won several awards, has been featured in numerous publications, and exhibited widely in the U.S. and internationally. Her first book titled *Ordinary Lives* was released in October 2009, published by the Quantuck Lane Press and distributed by W.W. Norton.

George Haddad is a freelance photographer based in Beirut, Lebanon, who loves to capture a multitude of subjects and genres. By using certain photographic techniques he tries to show the city as he sees it; crowded, ugly and un-planned, with a lack of any cultural or traditional design, a fake city built upon centuries of civilization. George also feels that Lebanon is a crossroads for people of different cultures and backgrounds and is most comfortable working with and photographing them.



Ayla Hibri, Swimmers from the series 'Bonbon', 2011, Digital Print, 38x38cm - Courtesy of the artist

Roy Samaha a Lebanese video artist and photographer, lives and works in Beirut, where he was born. With a background in film studies, he started exhibiting videos in 2003. Samaha's work deals with personal history, death, and mourning as well as the memory of personal objects. He particularly criticizes the constant assault of images, both propaganda and advertising, one is subjected to in contemporary society. Samaha's work has been shown in international festivals, including Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (2003), at the Singapore Biennale (2006), the Rencontre Internationale (Paris/Madrid/Berlin, 2007), Meeting Points 5 (Brussels/Berlin/Egypt, 2009), and in Aberdeen (Scotland) in 2010. He has also taken part in collective exhibitions in Beirut and Munich. A resident at Apexart New York in 2010, Samaha also worked ten years in the television industry and now gives seminars about alternative video practices at Saint Joseph University and the American University in Beirut.

Rola Khayyat I grew up in the latter years of the Lebanese civil war, which etched itself into my memory alongside 'normal' memories of childhood and adolescence. I believe this intertwining of ordinary and

extraordinary, dramatic and banal, to be an experience that lends itself readily to artistic examination. When the war ended and the era of 'peacetime' ensued, a silence about the violent events of the past settled over society. As a student of history at the American University of Beirut I became interested in war-time art as a way toward interrogating this silence by re-creating, re-presenting, re-collecting, narrating and articulating the war. I expressed this interest during my training at the Florence Academy of Art where I studied the Old Masters' techniques in painting and drawing. I was inspired to think more figuratively about my war experience as a complex site of memory that can be revisited, reconstructed and understood through a visual language and the manipulation of images. I took this further while participating in the international workshop, Metafora, in Barcelona where I continued to examine life in war through painting and photography. Through my compositions I revealed the apparently irreconcilable dominance of comfort and chaos that characterizes the daily life of war from the perspective of a child. I currently live and work in Berlin Germany, as an independent artist and curator, and collaborate on projects with Art Laboratory Berlin,

Tanya Traboulsi is an independent photographer who spent her childhood and youth between Lebanon and Austria. Tanya's work includes reportage, documentary and music photography and has been widely published across the region. She is currently based in Beirut. Her work spans people, places, fashion and music. Since 2007, her on-going "Music is Life" series has documented the flourishing Lebanese alternative music scene as it evolves locally and internationally. Some of these photos were collected in 2010 in the publication "Untitled Tracks: On Alternative Music in Beirut". Tanya's photographs have been published in numerous newspapers and magazines such as Agenda Culturel, Aishti Magazine, Chicago Tribuen, Colors magazine, Diva, Los Angeles Times, L'Orient Le Jour, Monocle, NOX, Songlines, The Daily Star, The National Magazine, The Observer, The Wire and others.



Rayya Haddad, untitled, from the series 'Kan Lebanon', 2007, Digital Photography, 60 x 40 cm - Courtesy of the Artist

Rayya Haddad is a Lebanese-American freelance photographer and artist based in Beirut, Lebanon. She holds a BFA from the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. Her photographic work spans many areas and is highly sensitive to colors, moods and environments. Commercially, she has photographed for a number of private clients, non-profit organizations as well as corporate companies. Haddad's work has been exhibited in 3 continents spanning, museums, galleries, and private and alternative spaces. With a strong social conscience and an emphasis on educating, Haddad actively works with underprivileged children and has taught photography to adults, children and youths in Chicago and Beirut's Palestinian refugee camps.

Ayla Hibri was born and raised in Lebanon, Ayla lives and works in Beirut. Ayla received a Bachelor of Arts from The Academie Libanaise de Beaux Arts (ALBA) in 2008, and then went on to specialize in a Master's in Photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, graduating in 2011. Her work has been shown in solo shows such as 'Wet Socks' (2011) at the DIY in Beirut, Lebanon, and a series of group shows, such as 'Weird it up' (2010) in Chicago, USA, 'Pease be upon upon you' with artist Zena El Khalil in Torino, Italy, and a group show at the Rochane Gallery (2009) in Beirut, Lebanon.