

Mapping the City

| by *Nayla Tamraz*

As a fragment of the “country”, a landscape is the place where territory, in its geographical and political meaning, is represented. It presents a certain relation to space: a relation of identification, domination, control and political or economic agency. It is a socially, politically and symbolically constructed space. For many artists, landscape is today the place where the notion of territory is activated. This essay engages with the representations of territories that occur in certain artists’ works in the Saradar Collection. We will begin by situating the emergence of landscape and related issues amongst the so-called “modern” generation of artists. Subsequently, we will focus on the use of those topics and the issues related to their formulation in the work of contemporary artists: Ghassan Salhab (b. 1958), Marwan Rechmaoui (b. 1964), Lamia Joreige (b. 1972) and Ali Cherri (b. 1976). This will lead us to draw a poetics/politics of place in the works of the above-mentioned artists in the practice of mapping.

From Landscape to Territory

Landscape painting was prominent in Lebanon during the first half of the 20th century, in the works of painters such as Khalil Saliby (1870-1928), Cesar Gemayel (1898-1958), Mustapha Farroukh (1901-1957), Omar Onsi (1901-1969), amongst others, who found in landscape painting a way to represent the country and a means to give shape to a certain ideal of the Nation. Landscape is therefore the site of a discourse in which subjects are defined as individuals who belong to a national entity. This comes as no surprise: having been educated in Western schools, these painters brought back the European tradition of landscape painting with them. The development of landscape painting in Europe is related to the promotion of a certain ideal of the nation derived from the Enlightenment, and serves as a direct model for landscape painters in Lebanon. Omar Onsi, for instance, dedicates himself to landscape painting and produces multiple views of Sannine, Kesserwan, Mayrouba, Ain Zahalta, Bekaa and the Tallet el-Khayat hill where he was born and where he returned to live. Tallet el-Khayat overlooks Beirut and the sea, from which he also paints views of Ramlet el-Bayda and

its shore. Undoubtedly, his views, just like those of his contemporaries, allow for the construction of a certain representation of a place which is, of course, geographically located, and yet no less idealized and timeless.

The turn of the 20th and 21st century also marks an epistemological and aesthetic turn in which, under conditions of globalization, reflection on the landscape entered the field of the human sciences.

It was first an epistemological turn. Since the beginning of the '80s, spatiality is reintroduced in discourse in the form of a paradigm, that of the territory. The issue of territory takes place within the economic and ideological context of globalization. Territory is both the real and the conceptual place where links between the massive deterritorialization of trade and the desire for anchoring identity are negotiated. Considered at the time best suited to reflect on contemporary issues, the concept of territory is articulated within a postmodernity theorizing an end to the utopias of the previous era. Approaching landscape through the prism of this notion becomes necessarily dysphoric.

It became an aesthetical turn then. In contemporary art practice, in addition to the shift in medium from painting to video, photography or installation, this shift from the representation of space in a genre (landscape) to the representation of space as a territory—that is, as a place where issues related to contemporaneity are negotiated—is an answer to what I call 'the shift of knowledges'. It marks the transition from modernity to postmodernity, from ideologies towards their apparent collapse and, regarding the paradigms of contemporary art in Lebanon, from the idea of a nation to its failure (and to the disintegration of the fundamental ideas that shape it). It is the transition from myth to history.

A place of composition, decomposition, transformation, fragmentation, scarification and negotiation, the very idea of territory is, in light of the history of Lebanon, problematic. It becomes the place of reflection, a field where elements of cultural sociology and the geopolitics of territory can be observed and studied. This reflection on territory will materialize in an object that is both aesthetic and epistemological: the map. As a representation of a territory, a map is also a discourse on territory, that is, a discourse on the issues that pass through it.

The Map in the Contemporary Artistic Practices

There is a long-held proximity between artists and cartographers. Both the fields of art history and mapping, which are *a priori* distinct, were seen by Alberti as parts of a single continuum. Both of them were intended to represent the world. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the artists of the Land Art movement made abundant use of the map.¹ The 1990s and 2000s witnessed the emergence of a generation of artists who initiated a practice that diverts from its initial framework, seizing mapping as a tool for representation.² There are also different reasons for the increasing use of the map in art.

¹ It allowed those artists who were interested in the landscape to apprehend vast areas of territory and to locate works that were often monumental and built in desert regions.

² For example: *Mapping*, an exhibition organized by Robert Storr in 1994 at the Museum of Modern Art of New York, and *GNS*, organized by Nicolas Bourriaud in 2003 at the Palais de Tokyo. They both reflect the important place of mapping within art practices at the turn of the century.

Aesthetically first: as an abstract mode for representing the world, the map shares, ever since its origins, many of the same objectives and tools as two-dimensional art. Artists were involved in the development of the first maps.³ Many contemporary artists also use mapping to create works that combine landscape and graphic outlines, in which cartography becomes a transposition of pictorial technique, and a way to talk about it.

Resorting to this method was part of contemporary artists' tendency to take possession of other disciplinary fields and their tools. If artists borrowed the map as a representative mode, it's because they are attracted to issues related to the relationship between man and territory. Geography as a discipline is a field of possibilities. Its tools are a means to apprehend space, in particular to map it. These artists' work converges on revealing the status of the map as a privileged tool for knowledge and work, because it questions man's place in the/an environment.

Like any discipline assumed to be "neutral",⁴ mapping makes available a methodology as well as a certain *scientificity* to artists. In fact, mapping has never been a neutral or an objective process. Reality transposed by a cartographical image is nothing but a possible view of the territory. It depends on what its author chooses to highlight and show. This "subjective objectivity" goes almost in the direction of an artwork. This way, artists appropriate the general approach of the map. They project their discourse and issues onto it. This displacement of objective data towards a specific and sometimes symbolic exploitation of this same data is, however, organized into a system of knowledge that refers to the basis itself of the map—in its first function, that of producing knowledge.

When Deleuze and Guattari introduce their concept of mapping (Deleuze & Guattari, 1976 & 1980), they do not directly designate the practice of geography usually referred to by this concept. By this act of re-presenting space through the map, in a "geographical" mode, Deleuze tells us that communities and peoples map their way of occupying their territories with their practices, but also with their myths and their dreams (Deleuze, 1993, p. 83). The geographical activity is coupled with a symbolic dimension. The map is the site of a discourse.

It is on this mode of representation that Marwan Rechmaoui, Lamia Joreige and Ali Cherri work quite explicitly.

³ Leonardo da Vinci used to carry out topographical surveys and draw maps. In his work, the art of the painter meets that of the cartographer, like for example in the background landscape of the *Mona Lisa*. Until the nineteenth century, the map was approached like an analogous process to painting. In both cases, it is a process of transposition of the world to a flat surface.

⁴ "First theorist of the *perspectiva artificialis*, Alberti shows that pictorial representation is subject to vision. Any spatial representation is reduced to man and his point of view. This imposition of a single point of view is applicable to both the record of space and its artistic restitution. But unlike perspective, mapping negates the point of view, at least potentially: what is notated and has coordinates that escape the dictatorship of a single point of view. The map becomes a geometric plane that allows an infinity of points of view. This view (called "ichnographic") of the marks made on the ground is theoretically the result of an infinity of zenithal points of view. Therefore, two nearby yet strictly opposite processes take place at the same moment. With the *perspectiva artificialis*, the horizontal gaze of the vertical support (of the painting) becomes linked to a hypothetically single point of view, hence a one-eyed one. With the geometric plane, a hypothetically vertical gaze falls down towards the horizontal plan of the territory that is recorded before being deferred on a horizontal surface (the map): the gaze is released from the single point of view. The first process will allow the artist to support his single point of view, the second one will allow the engineer to claim his neutrality. Of course, the artist who masters perspective will be in his own way a scientist, and the engineer-cartographer will be able to express sensitivity or artistic talent. However, the first states the singular, the other reaches for the universal; the first chooses a point of view (and a moment), the second seeks to neutralize the point(s) of view from which he has produced data." (Cf. Monsaingeon, 2013, p. 34. Translated from French by the author).

An Unquiet Cartography: *Trembling Landscapes* by Ali Cherri

The work of Ali Cherri falls within clear topographical dimensions: the desert (*The Digger*, 2015), the forest (*The Disquiet*, 2013), or cities (*A Circle around the Sun*, 2005). His work has always had a clear relationship to space, to an anxious geography with highly existential content.

Trembling Landscapes (2014) is part of a wider project in which Cherri works on the idea of catastrophe and chooses the map as a discursive modality. Relying on satellite images (Google Maps) that he then transcribes with lithography, a technique he chooses for its precision (it is about maps after all), but also for its aesthetics (the contrast between an older technique and the images produced with contemporary instruments of knowledge that it is meant to reproduce), this project engages in studying the history of earthquakes in cities like Beirut, Damascus, Tehran, Algiers and Erbil, acting as an investigation into the geological cracks in the region. The seismic faults revealed through aerial views and transcribed on the lithographed map are topographical objects where the potential threat of imminent catastrophe is embodied. Therefore, they are like the signs of the presence of 'disquiet', to borrow the title from one of Ali Cherri's videos produced a year earlier.

As a corollary to the map, Ali Cherri's video develops through the modality of the walk.⁵ *The Disquiet* is a video that shows sequences of long walks in nature alternating with archive images and shots on a seismograph registering what we could understand either as already ongoing disasters or ones yet to come, as well as apocalyptic images.⁶

Through a narrative described as the history of earthquakes in Lebanon, the video places us immediately in the regime of unavoidable disaster, which is documented by the voice-over. Tools of knowledge try to measure it in order to make it scientifically valid, but we are to understand that those tools are insufficient, because the catastrophe discussed here is not only a natural phenomenon. The catastrophe takes on an existential dimension, with Cherri developing the idea of a 'seismographic body'.⁷

Cherri transposes this relationship of the body to the territory into a cartographic model where earthquakes and natural cataclysms are clearly detours to talk about political upheavals in the region. They show that below the ground we walk on, beneath

⁵ The long walk developed by Ali Cherri in *The Disquiet* is to be understood also in the frame of artistic and scientific creative mechanisms developed by certain artists: "Today the walk combines the artistic creative mechanisms as well as the scientific ones. Today the walk has become a fully-fledged artistic medium. In his artwork *A Line Made by Walking*, the land artist Richard Long had already in the '60s made a walk for days through the large American fields. In this work, the artist draws on the ground the visible and invisible sunlight at a time (Tiberghien, 1995). His works have initiated, as early as the '70s-'80s, a long movement of artists affiliated to the medium of walking and thereby linked to a whole range of properly geographical concepts such as landscape, place, course, path, border and, amongst them, the map (Volvey, 2012). Often identified as 'landscape-scale' art, the work of walking artists is measured indeed to the place... Also, using the walk as a medium or as a tool for experience in a scientific process is not unusual. The walk is used as an observational device in the social and human sciences, and in geography, as a field practice. (Olmedo, 2018, pp. 229-232. Translated from French by the author).

⁶ Like the views on the Beirut River. An allusion to a news item dated February 15, 2012 according to which the reason behind Beirut River turning red was an industrial chemical dumped in the water.

⁷ It is the body that registers traumas and scars, which also refers to another dimension of his work. Therefore, the reflection on space that he suggests in his work is inseparable from a reflection on the body. (*My Pain is Real*, 2010. *Tryptich - Studies from a Human Body*, 2012). In a seminar from 1927 on the work of Burckhardt and Nietzsche, Warburg described them as "receivers of mnemonic waves and very sensitive seismographs". What this implies is that the historian cannot be reduced to the status of a chronicler of the times. For Warburg, the historian is driven by the phenomenon of empathy by which, faced with the threatening aspects of the historical life, they might lose their way. Warburg used to present himself as a Burckhardtian seismograph, a time pathology sensor. For Georges Didi-Huberman, Warburg was affected by history, consumed by it (Didi-Huberman, 1999, pp. 5-20). In *The Surviving Image*, he describes Warburg as gifted with a too sensitive a seismic knowledge of the world events (Didi-Huberman, 2002, p. 123).

surface level events, important shifts are taking place. Lebanon does indeed stand on several major fault lines. This investigation into the geological situation in Lebanon, trying to look for the traces of an imminent disaster is, in essence, the work developed in *Trembling Landscapes*. Broadly speaking, the precariousness of Middle Eastern cities' landscapes is compared to the social and political anxiety that characterizes the location of these cities and the broader region.

Map and Territory: Artistic Practices in Marwan Rechmaoui's Work

Divided and organized by the social, political and economic practices of a group of people, the territory describes a way of appropriating, by different groups, the spaces in which those practices take place. Through the power relations they establish with their territory, the groups of people give a representation of themselves and their history. By this act, the territory is associated with a sense of identity and belonging. This is the idea of the project developed by Rechmaoui in many of his works, *Blazon* (2015) in particular, and *Beirut Caoutchouc* (2004-2008).

Marwan Rechmaoui's work is the result of extensive research and archival work on Beirut. It is presented as the desire to understand (and to make understandable) the structures that allow us to think the city. Often monumental, his artworks have an important spatial dimension. Formally, but also thematically, they always negotiate with space, in its geographical, sociological and political dimensions.

To make *Beirut Caoutchouc*, Rechmaoui built on the maps of an urban topography office in Beirut and translated the digital data into electrical then mechanical data. *Beirut Caoutchouc* is a large black rubber floor sculpture 'a map of Beirut' embossed with an accurate record of roads and highways, as well as the sixty segments that divide the city's neighborhoods, the new and old demarcation lines.⁸

Through what is presented as a research into the history of the city and its impact on its inhabitants, Rechmaoui's work is critical, raising questions on urban planning, issues of borders and limits, as well as the ghettoization process behind them, and beyond that, the process of territorialization. Rechmaoui's reflection results in an observation: the city today appears to be as fractured as it was during the civil war, suggesting that the war never really ended.

The result is a model halfway between a paper map (the object of the gaze) and real life (the space of an immersive experience), an object that is suited to the viewer's gaze and with which they can interact. Hence, by placing us and the geographical dimension on the same level—almost literally, because on this rubber map of Beirut we are invited to walk—*Beirut Caoutchouc* introduces us to a symbolic territoriality and into a meeting space both with the artistic work and the city that it represents.

⁸ "At the time I was working with the piece in 2002-2003 a lot of the highways in Beirut were already in place. Earlier discussions about urban development were coming true, but those highways would disconnect regions, and create more enclosed neighbourhoods. One would have to cross above or below the city, not noticing anymore the city and people who live on both sides of the highway. These new borderlines between areas started to cause political problems. All the attention shifted from the infamous Green Line [an imaginary line that divided Beirut during the civil war, and was dangerous to cross], into smaller lines that are inside neighbourhoods now, so the city is really being divided into smaller and smaller quarters." (Rechmaoui/2010, 2017, p. 152).

Ten years after *Beirut Caoutchouc*,⁹ with *Blazon* Marwan Rechmmaoui continued his research, inspired again by the history and geography of Beirut, and by different written and oral narratives, in order to put in place a cartography (a 3 dimensional map) designed according to socio-cultural criteria, and making use of etymologies relating to each community and its history.

Based on the idea that the city of Beirut has been in a perpetual state of alert since the so-called 'end' of the civil war, the idea came to Rechmaoui to design an army. Each neighborhood is thus seemingly controlled by an armorial symbol. The idea was to create a state of mind where the viewer would have the impression of crossing a military camp or a battlefield on the eve of a conflict.

Hence, *Blazon* should also be understood as a map of the wars to come.¹⁰ In this installation, Rechmaoui imagines Beirut as divided into six legions. Each legion corresponds to a territoriality which was built according to political, economic and demographic criteria. Each legion is assigned a color, an insignia, a shield, coats of arms and a flag. To that end, he develops a military semiology (which intersects at several points with cartographic practices as the implementation of a system of signs) serving a codified representation of Beirut.¹¹ This grammar, or language, that Rechmaoui establishes is based on the signification of the blazons as well as the shape and color of the flags. Quite a few combinations are made possible by the activation of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes, and by the implementation of a syntax that could evolve into a discourse. This game of combinations reveals, by extension, the games of power and religious, economic, political and social obedience.

This "semioticized marking" is what delimits the territory, a usage that is seen in animal behavior. The concept of territory has indeed been studied through animals and more specifically birds. It is particularly active in ethology, the "scientific study of animal behavior", whose denomination dates back to the mid-19th century (Saint-Hilaire, 1854, vol. 1, p. XXII) and that aims to observe plants and animals in order to find elements that contribute to understanding human behavior. It is in ethologists' studies that the study of the ritornello (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 397) by Deleuze and Guattari finds its roots. In their work, they theorize the concept of "territory" based on the ritornello, that is, the whistle emitted by birds marking out, while fluttering, their nesting territory. They say that children sing a ritornello in the dark because they are scared. What surrounds and envelops them is unknown. Faced with this formlessness, they sing and regain confidence, because they are at the center of their song, of their territory, conquered from darkness. Hence, the territory is, for the living, an extension of the self, an environment secreted around oneself to protect from a threatening exteriority.

The interest in urban planning in the work of this artist, who has a background in engineering, finally found form in his interest in building. *Spectre* (2006-2008) is probably

9 "The process started from *Beirut Caoutchouc* (2004-2006), originally. The fifty-nine neighborhoods are in that work. But *Beirut Caoutchouc* is one layer which maps the roads and real estate divisions. With *Blazon*, I research more deeply the city. I used the previous information from *Beirut Caoutchouc*, and I developed it in *Blazon*. I did a thorough historical research for this project, focusing on the history of Beirut since the 1830s, when it started to become modern. Before that, Beirut was a small town on the Mediterranean coast that had not much importance. But in 1831, historical events happened in a way that it drew the picture of Beirut today." (Rechmaoui/2016, 2017, p. 224).

10 Landscape painting and the historical genre have often taken a cartographic form. In the classical paintings of battles that showed armies in action across battlefields, the question as to whether it was a landscape or a map was indeed relevant.

11 Claude Raffestin develops the idea that processes of territorialization are also analyzed on the level of a representational system: "semioticized" spaces translated and transformed into territory. (Raffestin, 2019).

the installation that best reflects this. It also allows us to think about territory in its relationship to the body (through the intermediary of the intimate sphere). The corporeality present in *Beirut Caoutchouc* and *Blazon* through the physical presence of the viewer who, by their interaction, participates in the creation of territory is here conceptually present in the work itself. It's in this context that *Spectre* allows us to follow this reflection where a building or architecture (as a variant of the map), suggests what we could approach as a territory within the territory (in which the body itself would be a territory within the territory of the building). Therefore, *Spectre* acts as a link between the individual and the geography of the city in a similar way to how it is presented in other works by Marwan Rechmaoui.

Spectre is a replica of a modernist building in the style of Le Corbusier, the "Yacoubian building" (owned by a Lebanese Armenian called Yacoub Yacoubian, not to be confused with the Cairo's Yacoubian building) in Ras Beirut, that was built at a time of political and economic transformations, which are reflected in the urban landscape of the '60s. The great double-block structure with 10 floors and 140 apartments was a commercial and residential building before being gradually transformed during the 1975-1990 civil war.¹²

A metaphor for the modern architectural heritage of Beirut, *Spectre* simultaneously questions the relationship of modernity to its communal utopias. Today, the Yacoubian building is inhabited by a very diverse population of residents, very different from the building's original intentions. They offer an example of cohabitation that is, on a larger scale, obviously problematic. But by altering the original model, which is probably the proof, according to Rechmaoui, that this modernist utopia imported from the West, has put forward a certain model of civic organization that is not all that well adapted to the local culture. *Spectre* becomes a space of questioning.

Mapping as autopsy: the anatomy of places in Lamia Joreige's projects

In a work that dates back to 2010,¹³ Lamia Joreige attempts to approach the representations related to the city of Beirut the way we approach a body in order to study its different layers. Or, in other words, to perform an autopsy of it. She invites us to consider the city in its organic dimensions, which means the city that is subject to

12 "Yes, there are probably fifteen or twenty buildings in Beirut from the late 50s to early 60s. In 1955, laws and regulations started changing in Lebanon. The region was living in turmoil, between social changes and the new oil economy. Real estate investors came to Lebanon and skyscrapers changed the cityscape with commercial and residential construction. The project *Spectre* is a replica of the Yacoubian building, one of these buildings built in 1961. It was designed according to modernist ideas and aesthetics, to accommodate upper middle class or Arab bourgeoisie who spent some time in Beirut either for vacation or business. It was located in Ras Beirut and in its basement was the most important nightclub in Beirut in the 60s, Venus. The building began deteriorating from the mid 70s onward, when the civil war started. Many of the tenants took refuge in different areas of Beirut or left the country so it stayed empty for a couple of years until 1978. This was when the Israeli invasion of the south happened, causing the biggest migration of people of all different sects from the south to Beirut, creating many squats. Of course with time, the façade of the building and the interior changed. It was supposed to have a consistent model of windows and unifying colour for the outside. The ACs were not supposed to be hung on the exterior and all these interventions really transformed this ideal modernist concept into something else. I don't know what to call it. I am not saying its negative or positive, but it was transformed into something else. Again, this work [*Spectre*] had a lot to do with questioning the ideas of modernism and what happens when something goes wrong. This ideal collapses very quickly, but it also raises the question, if this happens, what is the alternative? Is it really chaotic or is it something different, something parallel to what was there before? Because from a modernist point of view, this is chaos. All the people here are from various groups – income, gender, ages – and they manage to live in one structure and use one entrance for the building, which accommodates probably 750 people." (Rechmaoui/2010, 2017, p. 153).

13 *Beirut Autopsy of a City* (2010).

transformations inherent in the idea itself of a body, in its biological sense. Performing an autopsy on a living body (rather than a *dead* one) is then an action that is defined, from the outset, by its openness to the future and its uncertainties.

In medicine, the autopsy is a method that could be compared to archeology. In both cases, the work consists in making cuts into a surface with a thickness in order to extract knowledge from it. Transposed to the body of the city, this metaphor, together with a methodology, allows her to show the *palimpsestic* character of the *autopsied* urban space, that is, the multiple spatial and temporal layers.

Born from what could be called an “anxiety” related to the city and its possible disappearance,¹⁴ the project, in its three chapters, consists of photographs and videos that narrate catastrophic episodes from Beirut’s history up until a post-apocalyptic vision at some point in 2058. This anxiety or this anguish is then mixed with a constant fascination for the transformation of the city. Performing an autopsy on the body obeys this double dynamic: understanding the body and thus trying to appropriate it; and, at the same time, witnessing its metamorphosis, until the departure, the exhaustion, of its materiality itself.

Adopted as a methodology that consists in collecting narratives that give corporeality to the city and its history, Joreige will apply this approach to her whole work dedicated to the representation of the city. This second phase in the artist’s work, following a first body of work focused on the memories of the civil war (or wars),¹⁵ shifts towards work on territory, a process that she continues in *Under-Writing Beirut* (2013-ongoing).

In this project, divided into several chapters,¹⁶ Joreige explores places that interest her and attempts, in the same way, to rebuild their history, by simultaneously questioning the representations that are related to them, the movements of their populations, and the political choices that led to their transformation and that of the communities that inhabit them. Lamia Joreige then adopts a socio-political and a socio-economic approach, as well as a methodology that is part archeology, part documentary practice and part field study, trying to understand why those places are sedimented, and the extent to which they contribute to the shape of a certain idea of the city, and also the extent to which they are representative of its contemporary identity.

After the first chapter, *Mathaf* (2013), dedicated to the National Museum, the two following chapters deal more specifically with issues related to territory, its representations, and issues related to its history.

Nahr, or *The River* (2013-2016) explores the notion of landscape through the space adjacent to the river, today dried up, and that separates Beirut from the Southern suburbs, the target today of a large real estate project. Joreige offers a portrait of a territory taken in such problematic situations as waste management, the impoverishment of riparian citizens, the settlement of migrant populations (Armenian, Palestin-

¹⁴ “I woke up one day, thinking that the city I’ve been living in could disappear, that disappearance is not exclusively a historical process, nor an extinct one. This anxiety led me to investigate the specific moments that endangered the life of Beirut from 1200 BCE until 2058 AD.” (*Lamia Joreige, Works 1994-2017*, Kaph, 2018, p. 157).

¹⁵ *Objets de guerre* (1999-ongoing), *Replay* (2000) and *Replay (bis)* (2002)... Even if the artist’s interest for cartography is already visible in projects such as *Here and Perhaps Elsewhere* (2003).

¹⁶ “Mathaf” (2013) was the first chapter. “Nahr”, the second chapter (2013-2016), and “Ouzai”, the third chapter (2017- ongoing).

ian, and Syrian, established by successive waves from 1915 until today) and the urban development that drives the river region towards accelerating gentrification. *The Nahr* project unveils a rapidly changing territory, as well as the precariousness of the urban structures and the uncertain future of the populations inhabiting them.

In the framework of this project, Joreige imagines a series of drawings in wax, pencil, pastel and crayon,¹⁷ inspired by different maps of the river. They show the evolution of the territory and its neighborhoods over the years through sinuous lines that develop in some places into colored stains. Simultaneously floral representation and an anatomic map, the resulting image is part of a gesture that, while making way for the accidental development of the figure, always regains control of it. It is perhaps also, for Joreige, a way to think the organic character of a stain in expansion, miming territory on paper, and thus the development of the spaces described. These poetic autopsies become a space where the physicality of the territory and the materiality of color reflect one another and dialogue with each other. Those organic patterns are the same ones that she reuses in her project *Ouzai* (2017-ongoing), which constitutes the third chapter of the project *Under-Writing Beirut*.¹⁸ Like the *Nahr* series, the series of drawings *Coastline* is based as well on the different maps of Beirut.¹⁹ The topography of the Ouzai coastline and its surrounding region is developed organically, taking abstract floral and organic shapes indicating *localities* all along the seafront, places where sociological changes are imposed by the experience of war, the phenomenon of immigration and the exacerbation of religious affiliations.

In a conversation with Kader Attia,²⁰ Lamia Joreige refers to this more specifically plastic dimension in her art practice. For the artist, painting or drawing are more difficult to anchor in a real context and, consequently, less obvious media for conveying political gestures. This more formal aspect of her work therefore becomes inseparable from the fieldwork and its ability to display different media.

Because “Ouzai” is a project with a definite political foothold. In her presentation of the project, the artist recounts the birth of this neighborhood in South Beirut known for its complex socio-political history in the ‘50s, when this strip of land made of sand dunes attracted its first inhabitants, rural Lebanese citizens driven to Beirut by a changing economic system, until the settlement of Shiites who came from South Lebanon following constant bombardment then invasions of their southern villages by the Israeli army, until the establishment of the political power base of Hezbollah in the region.

Lamia Joreige carries out fieldwork research by interviewing local residents. The stories

17 “The River”, 2015, Wax, watercolor and graphite crayon on Arches Velin paper, 42 × 31 in, 106.7 × 78.7 cm.

18 In a sequence of the film *And the Living is Easy* (2014) filmed in 2011 at a time when Lebanon strangely didn’t seem to be affected by the disruptions of the Arab world, Joreige imagines characters talking about their mixed feelings about their city. Among them is Firas (Firas Beydoun), who is filmed with a friend in a coffee shop in Ouzai. He complains about the decline of the region and contemplates the airplanes landing at the nearby Beirut International Airport. The story of Firas is the starting point for a research that becomes the subject of the third chapter of *Under-Writing Beirut*. What’s the problem here?

19 *Coastline*, 2018. Wax, pigments, pastels & crayons on Velin d’Arche paper. 75 x 106 cm.

20 “My painting, which was initially somewhere between figuration and abstraction, moved toward abstraction. It dealt with the body and the city, which are subjects pretty close to those I was dealing with in my multimedia installations and videos. But I couldn’t anchor my painting in reality, in other words, I couldn’t anchor it politically. I missed being on the ground, meeting reality head-on, even if I was going to turn it into something fictional. I’m still drawing, but today my drawings get included in projects like *Under-Writing Beirut – Nahr*” (Joreige, 2018, p. 138).

gathered, as well as the information collected from legal and historical documents, are put on display in a series of 15 pencil drawings along with typed blocks of text, entitled *A Brief History of Ouzai*.²¹ It is accompanied by a metal sculpture that reproduces the topographical coastline in a series of works entitled *Ouzai, Cartography of a Transformation* based on aerial photographs from the Directorate of Geographical Affairs in the Lebanese Military from 1956 to 1995, and from Zoom Earth in 2017.²² Joreige juxtaposes and superimposes those aerial views, enabling us to understand, in a poetic way, the gradual transformation of Ouzai along the years.

Digging into this region's history, in the end the artist asks the following question: to what extent is a territory such as Ouzai representative of contemporary Lebanon? In other words, to what extent are the issues that Lebanon faces today related to sectarian divisions and community affiliations, to the displacement of populations, to outrageous urbanization, to sociological inequalities, to the relationship between the private and the public sectors, to the reconstruction and the reconciliation? *Ouzai* is therefore an eminently political and critical work that calls for a reflection on the links between politics and poetics: how can art think and suggest outside prevailing rhetorics?

Territoriality in Crisis: The Course throughout the City in Ghassan Salhab's Work

The word territory comes up frequently in interviews with Ghassan Salhab. When he talks about himself, he often returns to his experience of the "geographical, territorial and identity displacement" caused by his departure from Senegal, his country of birth, and his return to Lebanon with his family, and to that of having found in cinema "another country". Also it is cinema that reintroduces him to the city: "The movie theatre, it is a relationship to the city, with a territory, with darkness, with others in that shared darkness, even if there were only four or five of them." (Salhab, 2011. Translated from French by the author)

Salhab apprehends the city, in other words, territory-wise.²³ This is why he films his movies in Lebanon, in Beirut more particularly. Also for him, "the central question is not 'what is the topic?', the question, if there is one, is rather 'where?'. The question is that of place not topic, the place as a living entity, unknown and familiar. A place that is equally inner, 'invisible' and exterior".²⁴ (Salhab, 2011. Translated from French by the author.)

And to the question "what's the issue in Lebanese cinema?", Ghassan Salhab answers: "I believe that the more or less recurring problem or issue...is...that of identity...Because Lebanon is a nation-state that fails to be a nation or a state...This necessari-

21 *A Brief History of Ouzai*, 2017, Graphite pencil and inkjet print on paper, 40 x 30 cm each.

22 *Ouzai*, 2017, metal alloy, 90 x 240 cm, Edition of 3+1AP.

23 "I had the need to apprehend the city territory wise. It is hence during the Lebanese wars, from 75 to 90, that I started to find my marks like an animal. This is by the way the reason why I have never really filmed in Paris. I know Paris very well, but I return to this animal relationship, I am not in my territory." (Salhab, 2014- translated from French by the author).

24 "My movies speak Arabic, they are inscribed in a territory, they are in a place, and a place is not a simple decor; a place carries a lot of stories and histories, in their plural or singular form, especially in Lebanon [...]" (Salhab, G., 2011- translated from French by the author).

ly creates a sort of a moving territory, then sometimes this moving territory can be emotionally moving...To get back to cinema...the question is: what is my place in the world, what is my place here, in this territory?" (Salhab, 2014). And to film the territory, "there is not only the visual or the physical [territory]. The inner territory is very important but the inner territory is also affected by the exterior territory and vice versa". (Salhab, 2014)

In an experimental video, *La Rose de personne* (2000),²⁵ Salhab shows a car crossing the legendary Hamra Street in Beirut. The trajectory is shown at different times in different places but at a same time, by superimposing six image layers and sound footages. Space-time is multiplied, creating gaps that work like voids preventing the image from uniting, and forcing the idea of a whole to fail. This whole disaggregate suggests instead a multiple and necessarily fragmentary experience that the video tries to contain. It's an attempt to tell a certain relationship to the city, and specifically to this street. However, the thickened image seems to express its struggle to represent a fleeing object. The singular editing of *La Rose de personne* shows in some way the filmmaker's helplessness in the face of a space that reconfigures itself constantly. The effect is dizzying: does the city really exist?

The same technique of superimposition, and also the same helplessness, are present in *Posthume* (2007). In the aftermath of the Israeli attack on the southern suburbs of Beirut in 2006, Ghassan Salhab also filmed a trajectory in the city. The video doesn't develop a specific storyline beyond the one developed through the discontinuous trajectory along the urban streets of the ghostly suburb, leading to restricted areas where the camera and viewers are prevented from going further, and hence from seeing the destruction. Here the superimposition of images has the effect of dilating and disconnecting space-time with reality, although this space-time is omnipresent. The narrative is taken in charge by the activity of diggers, the display of conflict traces, which are many details that reveal a whole, or a view of a whole, considered impossible. At the interface of spaces and times, characters contemplate, witness, or are they simply faces?²⁶ Other voiceovers make the link between different faces that are there only as contact points gathering around them the city's different planes, as well as the diverse disembodied voices that we hear. They make the link between the city and the body.

In Ghassan Salhab's work, the map's ability to draw contours is questioned. It is replaced by a diluted and diluting thickness. The technique of superimposition, as practiced by Salhab, has indeed the effect of diluting limits. It's a symptom, that of the crisis of narrative, the crisis of the image in its very territoriality, the crisis of space lived as a comprehensible whole, as well as an aesthetic tool to tell a problematic topography.

25 As a tribute to a poem by Paul Celan from his poetry collection *Die Niemandsrose* (*La Rose de personne* in French). More precisely, *La Rose de personne* gets its name from the poem "Psalm": "A nothing/ we were, are, shall/ remain, flowering:/ the nothing-, the no one's rose." This poetry collection would be a tribute to the murdered voices in Auschwitz. Paul Celan's work is largely inspired from the Shoah, and has often been considered as a possible answer to Theodor W. Adorno who said that "writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage". Salhab's video could be understood as an ode to what is still possible to be said after the crisis. More broadly, it clarifies his poetic relationship to the city.

26 "My characters fail to inscribe themselves in a territory, a history and a filiation (...). Most of my characters are trapped in monologues, as if the words were circulating between them without managing to cross the border of bodies." (Salhab, 2003 - translated from French by the author).

Conclusion

Contemporary art is perhaps the best place for a reflection on territory, and for an investigation of the aesthetic tools of its representation. It allows for the establishment of a reflection on power, and politics as the place it is exercised. Michel Foucault's (2004) writing on this matter allow territory to be apprehended as the place where power is practiced, but also as the place that allows us to think power. The map as an aesthetic practice and its corollary, the trajectory, become the places where aesthetic reflection on the landscape can be renewed. Ideologically loaded, the landscape as utopia sees in the emergence of reflections on territory an extension and a re-actualization of its principles through the prism of a world that is consequently seen as a globality, of course, but a disturbing globality in crisis. This leads us to rethink the practices around the territory in Lebanon, in light of more global issues. The discourse on territory, a place where the postures and the politics related to a constantly negotiated space are performed, since the divisions resulting from the Lebanese civil war to their re-activation in a political and economic form in the post-war Beirut, moves towards a more general discourse that is involved in a problematic post-modernity.

Nayla Tamraz is a Lebanese writer, curator, researcher and professor of Literature and Art History at Saint Joseph University of Beirut where she has also been, from 2008 to 2017, the Chair of the French Literature Department and where she created, in 2010, the MA program in Art Criticism and Curatorial Studies that she currently heads. She also organized several events including the symposium *Littérature, Art et Monde Contemporain: Récits, Histoire, Mémoire* (2014, USJ, Beirut). In parallel, she leads a career as an art critic and a curator. In this context, she co-curated the exhibition *Le Secret* (Espace Ygreg, Les bons voisins, 2017) in Paris and curated the exhibition *Poetics, Politics, Places* that took place in the Museum of Fine Arts of Tucuman in Argentina, in the frame of the International Biennale of Contemporary Art of South America (BienalSur, 2017). Her research is about the issues related to the comparative theory and aesthetics of literature and art in their historical context, which brings her to the topics of history, memory and narratives in literature and art in post-war Lebanon. Her current research explores the relationship between poetics and politics as well as the representations associated to the notion of territory.

Bibliography:

Bermingham, Ann. "The Picturesque Decade." In *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740 - 1860*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1976). *Rhizome*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1980). *Mille Plateaux*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.

Deleuze, G. (1993). *Critique et clinique*. Paris : Les Editions de Minuit.

Didi-Huberman, G. (1999). Sismographies du temps. *Les cahiers Au Musée national d'Art moderne*, 68, pp. 20-5.

Didi-Huberman, G. (2002). L'Image survivante, Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.

Foucault, M. (2004). *Sécurité, territoire, population*. Paris: EHESS, Gallimard, Seuil.

Lamia Joreige, Works 1994-2017 (2018). Beirut : Kaph Books.

Marwan Rechmaoui Metropolis (2017). Beirut: Kaph Books.

Monsaingeon, G. (2013). *Mappamundi, art et cartographie*. Marseille: Editions Parenthèses.

Olmedo, E. (March 2018). A la croisée de l'art et de la science: la cartographie comme dispositif de recherche-crédation. *Proceedings du 4e colloque du CIST: Représenter les territoires/ Representing Territories*, Proceedings, Rouen, pp. 232-229.

Raffestin, C. (2019). *Pour une géographie du pouvoir*, Lyon: ENS Editions.

Saint-Hilaire, G. (1854). *Histoire naturelle générale des règnes organiques, principalement étudiée chez l'homme et les animaux. vol. 1*. Paris: Librairie Victor Masson.

Interviews:

Joreige, L. (2018). Kader Attia in conversation with Lamia Joreige (K. Attia, Interviewer). *Lamia Joreige, Works 1994-2017*. Beirut : Kaph Books, pp. 137-142.

Rechmaoui, M. (2017). Hans Ulrich Obrist in conversation with Marwan Rechmaoui/2010 (H.-U. Obrist, Interviewer). *Marwan Rechmaoui, Metropolis*. Beirut: Kaph Books, pp. 149-154.

Rechmaoui, M. (2017). Hans Ulrich Obrist in conversation with Marwan Rechmaoui/2016 (H.-U. Obrist, Interviewer). *Marwan Rechmaoui, Metropolis*. Beirut: Kaph Books, pp. 223-230.

Salhab, G. (2003, February 12). Après Beyrouth fantôme en 1998, le cinéaste libanais Ghassan Salhab explore la capitale dans terra incognita (E. Chicon, Interviewer). *L'Humanité*, Retrieved from: <https://www.humanite.fr/node/279731> (last visit: 14/11/2019).

Salhab, G. (2011, July 10). Entretien avec Ghassan Salhab (L. Ghaninejad & D. Yon, Interviewers). *Derives.tv*, Retrieved from: <http://derives.tv/entretien-avec-ghassan-salhab> (last visit: 14/11/2019).

Salhab, G. (2014, June). Interview du réalisateur Ghassan Salhab sur Beyrouth (J. Wach & H. Bougon, Interviewers). *Ville et cinéma*, Retrieved from: <http://saradarcollection.com/Collection/XMLContent/10001971.pdf> (last visit: 14/11/2019).



Omar Onsi

A View From Ramlet el Bayda, c. 1933

Watercolor on paper. 28 x 41 cm.



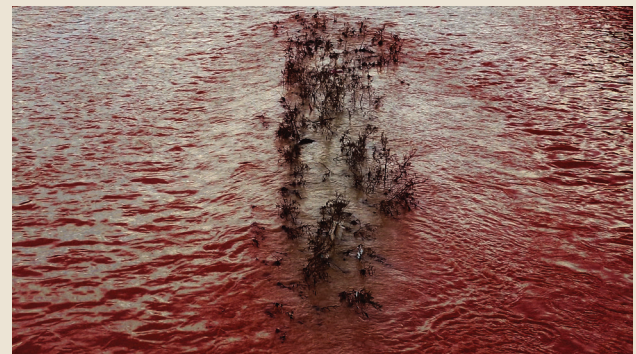
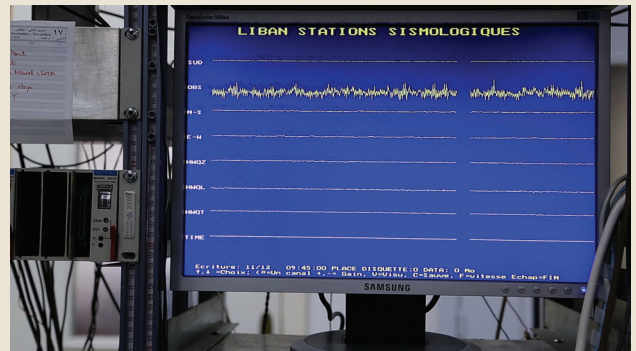
Omar Onsi
View of Sannine, c. 1949
Watercolor on paper. 38 x 53 cm.



Ali Cherri

Trembling Landscapes (Beirut), 2014

Lithographic print and archival ink stamp. 4 x 72 x 102 cm. Ed.3/7 (+ 2AP)
courtesy of the artist and Iman Farès Gallery



Ali Cherri
The Disquiet, 2013
 Film HD, Color, 20min, Stereo, Arabic
 courtesy of the artist and Iman Farès Gallery



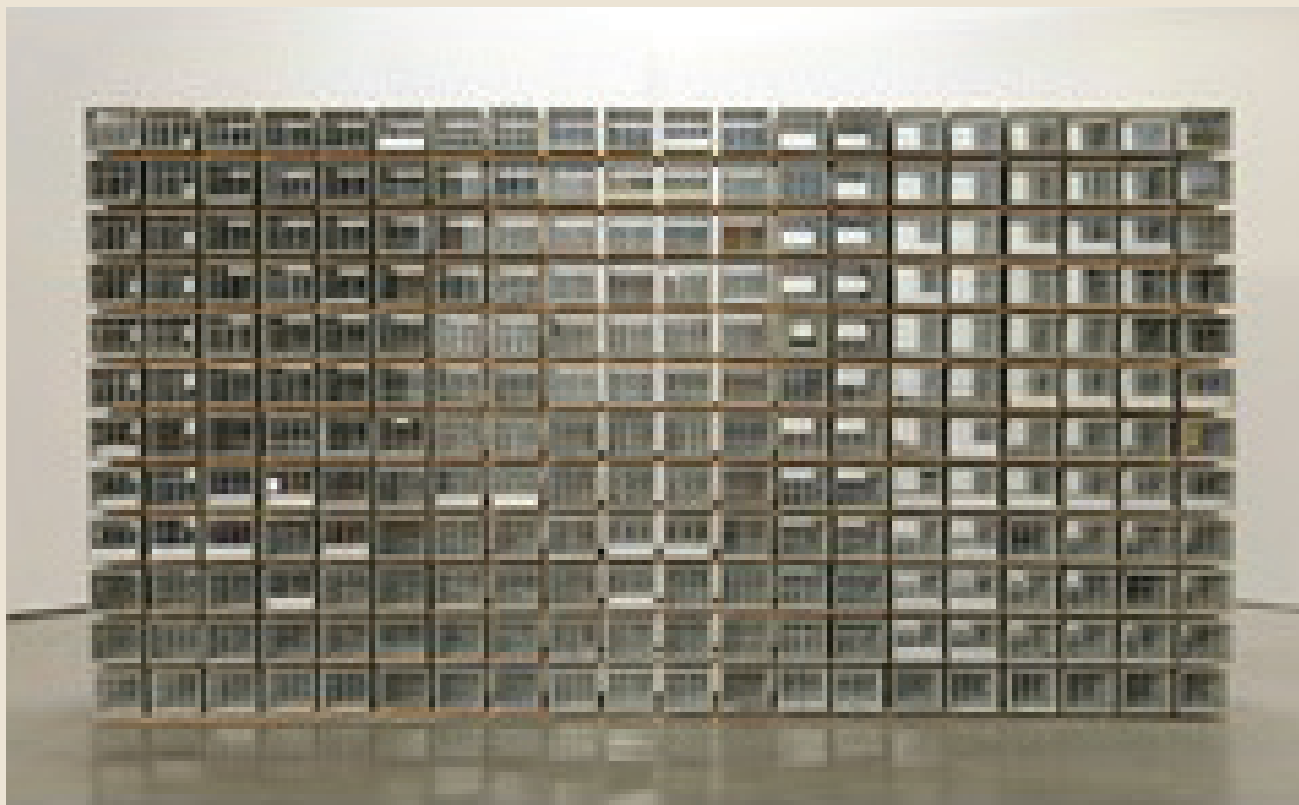
Marwan Rechmaoui
Beirut Caoutchouc, 2004-2006
Rubber mild out. 825 x 675 x 3 cm.



Marwan Rechmaoui

Blazon, 2015

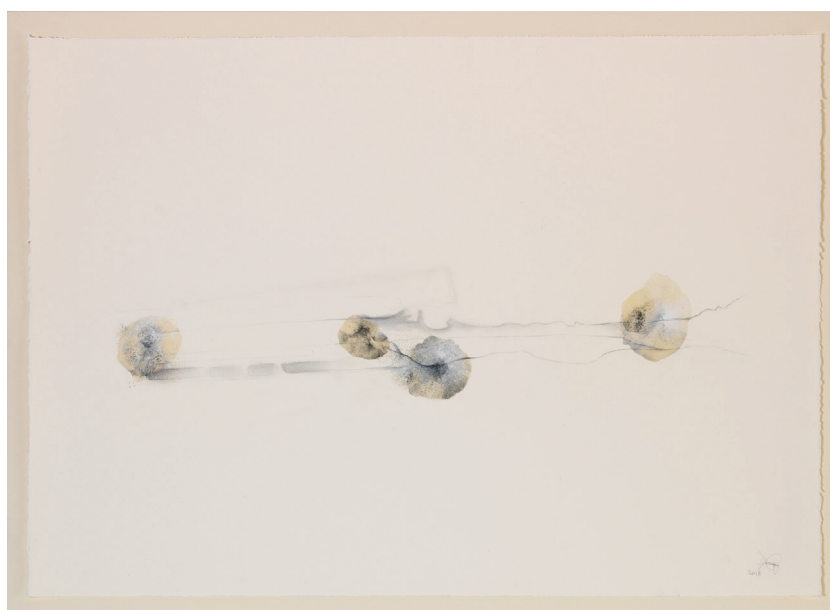
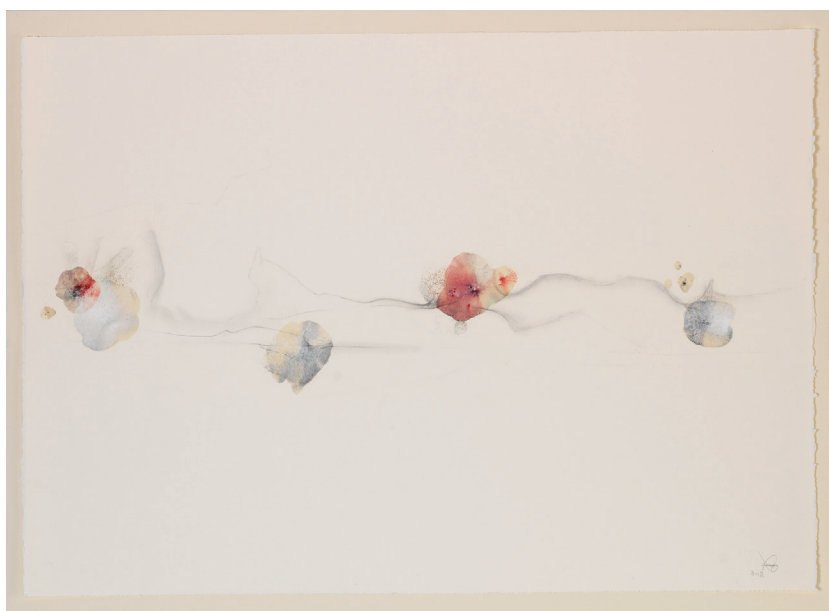
357 embroidery and applique on textile flags and 59 laser cut on stainless steel shields. Ed. 1/3 +2 AP



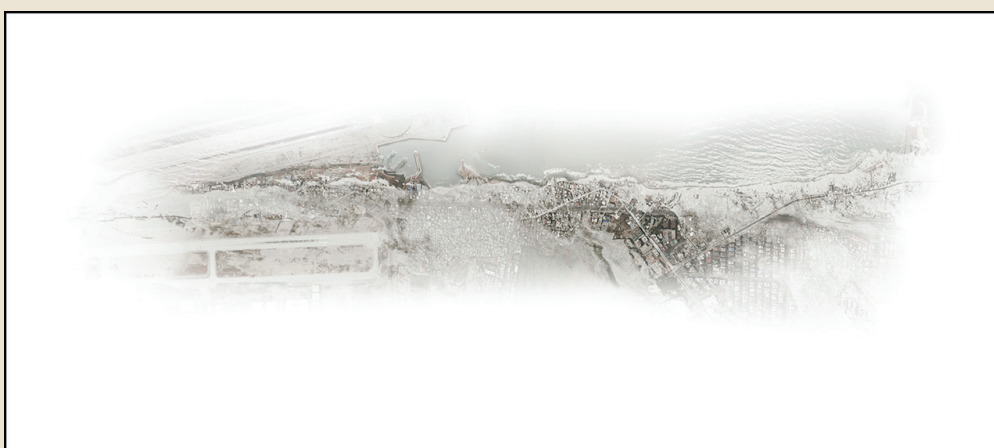
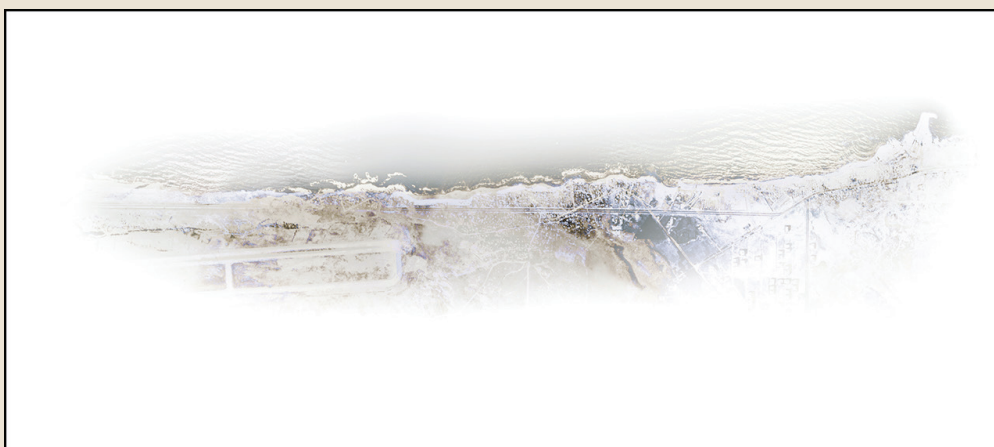
Marwan Rechmaoui

Spectre, 2006 - 2008

Non-shrinking grout, aluminium, glass . 225 x 420 x 80 cm. Ed.2/5 +1 AP

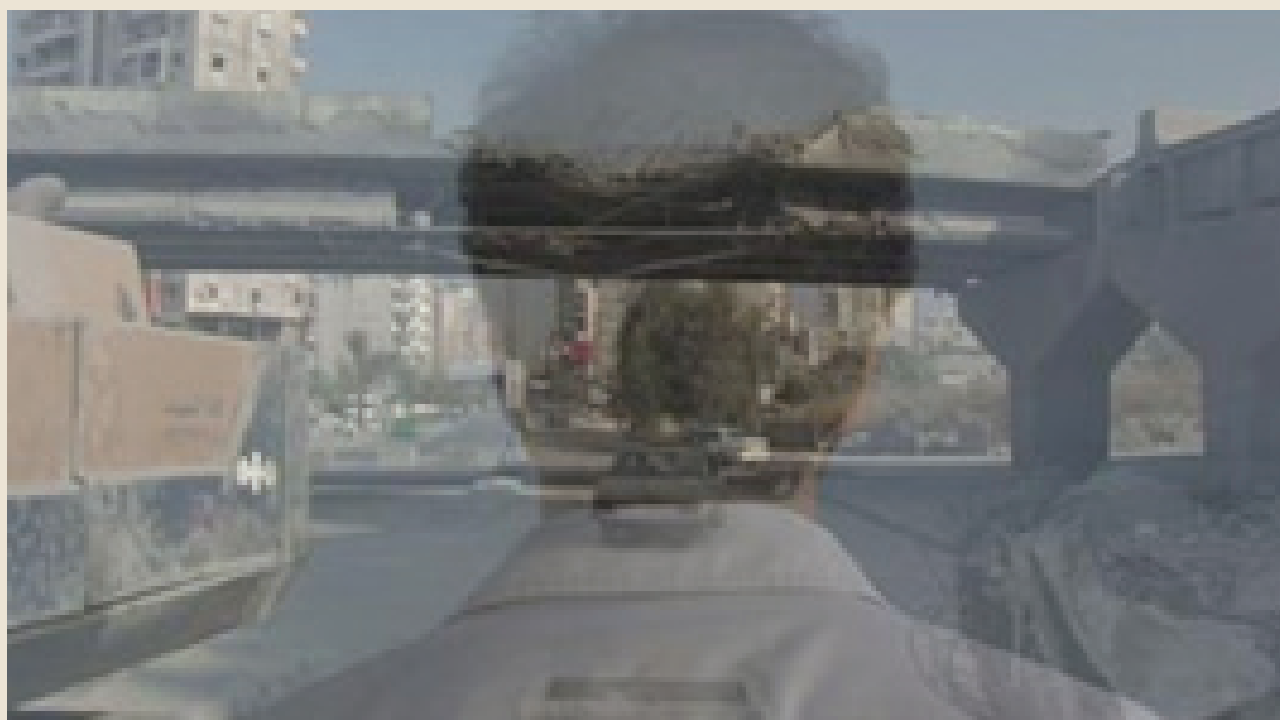


Lamia Joreige
Coastline 6, 7 & 8, 2018
 Wax, pigments, pastels and crayons on Velin d'Arche paper. 75 x106 cm each.





9 | Ghassan Salhab
La Rose De Personne, 2000
10 min. Ed. 1/3 +2 AP



10 | Ghassan Salhab
(Posthume), 2007
29 min. Ed. 1/3 +2 AP