

Reviving Cosmopolitan Beirut
A Case Study of Three Modernist Art Spaces

by

Daniella Samira Maamari

Bachelor of Architecture
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Submitted to the Department of Architecture in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Signature of Author
Department of Architecture
January 16, 2020

Certified by
Nasser Rabbat
Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Architecture
Thesis Supervisor

Certified by
Caroline Jones
Professor of Art History
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by.....
Leslie Norford
Professor of Building Technology
Chair of the Department Committee on Graduate Students.

Thesis Committee

Advisors

Nasser Rabbat
Aga Khan Professor
Director, Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture
Department of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Caroline Jones
Professor of Art History
Director, History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture and Art
Department of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Reader

Rania Ghosn
Associate Professor of Architecture and Urbanism
Department of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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ABSTRACT

Prior to the Lebanese Civil War, Beirut boasted a vibrant art scene. The war took its toll on the city's infrastructure, leading to the relocation and shutdown of the existing galleries and art institutions. Since the war, art in Beirut is being revived along different tracks, in tandem with its complex geopolitical identity. My thesis argues that artists, gallerists, and architects collaboratively assert a specific message and image of Lebanon, by creating a nostalgia appealing to certain moments in Beirut's past (or the prospective future). I track the architecture of the different art galleries and institutions and supplement it with the kind of art they exhibit, to create preliminary categories, each vying for its own identity of Lebanon. In the thesis, I choose the modernist architecture category as the emblematic postcard image of prewar Beirut, featuring the modernist architecture that endured the war and came to represent Beirut's cultural Renaissance. I chose to focus primarily on the following three representative examples of modernist art spaces in Ras Beirut: Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Saleh Barakat Gallery, and Dar El Nimer. The self-funded art spaces are located in Ras Beirut, an area ingrained in the Lebanese national memory as the site of mutual coexistence between Christians and Muslims. I contextualize the physical qualities of each gallery within the concurrent local and regional sociopolitical conditions to examine the role they may be playing or the political agenda they may be pushing. I analyze the image projected by the institution through the archival material, texts, catalogues, interviews with the directors of the spaces, the curators, and the architects who renovated/designed them, as well as their general reception by the public through newspaper clippings and occasional art reviews. With their focus on Lebanese and Arab artists, a sentimentality towards the area's history, and a disdain with the city's postwar development, these galleries mobilize modernist buildings to resurrect the cosmopolitan Beirut, the modernist cultural hub of the Arab left intellectuals in the 1960's and early 1970's.

Thesis Supervisor: Nasser Rabbat

Title: Aga Khan Professor and the Director of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture

Dedication

Mom and dad, I dedicate this thesis to you.

Thank you for all you have done (and continue to do) for me.

I would not be here if it weren't for your endless care, love, and support.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	7-10
Chapter 1: Introduction	11-18
Chapter 2: The Rise and Fall of Beirut's Cosmopolitanism	19-39
Chapter 3: Galerie Janine Rubeiz	40-71
Chapter 4: Saleh Barakat Gallery	72-91
Chapter 5: Dar El Nimer for Arts and Culture	92-111
Chapter 6: Conclusion	112-121
Bibliography	122-125
Appendix	126-128

List of Figures

Fig. 1. Exhibition of Robert Helou in the Mar Mansour Church in downtown Beirut in 1996.

Fig. 2. Map showing the initial art spaces under study.

Fig. 3. Chart showing the preliminary categories: traditional Lebanese architecture, the modernist, the industrial and the contemporary (st)architecture.

Fig. 4. Map showing the three chosen art spaces and their locations in Ras Beirut.

Fig 5. Timeline Showing the Main Events Affecting Ras Beirut's Growth

Fig. 6. Map of Ras Beirut showing the demarcation (green) line, Hamra, Raouche, and the locations of the current art spaces under study.

Fig.7. Façade of the Saint George Hotel dons the sign "Stop Solidere".

Fig. 8. Part of Nadine Touma's installation at the entrance to the Strand Cinema.

Fig. 9. From the project of decorating the entrances to cinemas on Hamra Street

Fig. 10. A rally in the Beirut Theater to sign a petition calling for municipal elections

Fig. 11. Beirut Theater is opened for the fourth time

Fig.12. Map showing the concentration of art spaces before and after the Lebanese Civil War.

Fig. 13: Janine Rubeiz's Appointment as Commissioner for Women's Affairs in the Progressive Socialist Party.

Fig. 14. Jad Tabet's Sketch of Dar El Fan (from memory).

Fig. 15. Dar El Fan's Inclusive Program: Children's Painting Exhibition in Dar El Fan's Garden

Fig.16. Dar El Fan's Library.

Fig. 17. Timeline Showing the Different Phases of Dar El Fan and a Chart of Some of its Main Exhibitions.

Fig. 18. The Different Topics Addressed in Lectures at Dar El Fan.

Fig. 19. A Selection of Lectures and Conferences of Dar El Fan Showing the Broad Range of the Institution

Fig. 20. A Selection of Films Screened at Dar El Fan Showing the Broad Range of the Institution

Fig. 21. A Selection of Music and Other Events at Dar El Fan

Fig. 22. Timeline Showing the Transitional Period of Dar El Fan.

Fig. 23. "نهب محتويات دار الفن والأدب" (Loot the contents of Dar El Fan)

Fig. 24. Exhibition Poster of the Exhibition Lebanon 78.

Fig. 25. Typical Postcard View of Raouche in the 1960's, Lined with New Modernist Buildings.

Fig. 26. The Nadim Majdalani building (right) and the Shams Building by Architect Joseph Philippe Karam (left) facing the sea

Fig. 27. Interior Space of the Janine Rubeiz's Former Home Turned Gallery.

Fig. 28. Poster of Beirut Taba'an Exhibition in 1989

Fig. 29. Timeline Showing the Transitional Phase of Dar El Fan from Janine Rubeiz's Home to the New Art Space.

Fig. 30. Plan of the New Space of Galerie Janine Rubeiz. Courtesy of Karim Bekdache Architects.

Fig. 31. Design study of the facade with honeycomb structure, October 1953.

Fig.32. Hexagonal Travertine Exterior Cladding of Galerie Janine Rubeiz.

Fig. 33. Huguetta Caland's Bronzes Exhibition in 2015

Fig. 34. Timeline Showing the Different Phases of Saleh Barakat Gallery's Building

Fig. 35. A burning car near Clemenceau cinema in Al-Hamra during clashes between the Amal movement and the Progressive Socialist Party in Beirut.

Fig.36-37. Images of the New Masrah Al Madina Space.

Fig. 38-39. Images of the Building Housing Saleh Barakat Gallery

Fig. 40. Newspaper Clipping: Nathir Ismail in "Agial Gallery": The continuation of the seventies experiment)

Fig. 41. Street View of the Space of Saleh Barakat Gallery before Renovation.

Fig. 42. Underground Space during the Renovation Project.

Fig. 43. Saleh Barakat Gallery Interior View Showing the Cascading Stairs on the Right.

Fig. 44. Interior View of the Underground Gallery.

Fig. 45. Timeline Showing the Different Phases of Dar El Nimer's Building, Villa Salem

Fig. 46. Villa Salem Original Architectural Drawings by Architect Lucien Cavro

Fig. 47. Plan of Dar El Nimer. Existing structure as drawn by Roula Mouharram

Fig. 48. Apractice Studio Exhibition Poster showing the Innovative architectural details of Villa Salem.

Figs. 49. Exterior View of Villa Salem before Otium was Introduced

Figs. 50. Exterior View of Villa Salem after Otium was introduced

Figs. 51-52. Arab Center for Architecture's Exhibition of Modernist Architecture in Villa Salem.

Fig. 53. Image of Dar El Nimer taken from the Entrance Ramp.

Fig. 54. Diagram based on the Renovation Scheme of Atelier Hamra showing the change and experience in the accessibility to the Dar El Nimer

Fig. 55. Garden at the Entrance Ramp. Image taken by the author.

Fig. 56. Image from the Exhibition "La Mer Patrie". Image taken by the author.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Prior to the onset of the Lebanese Civil War, Beirut boasted a vibrant art scene. The war took its toll on the city's infrastructure, leading to the relocation and shutdown of the existing galleries and art institutions. After the war, with the lack of traditional exhibition spaces, Beirut's artists mobilized abandoned historic buildings with artworks and installations in the 1990's. It was a means to reclaim their city. Art and architecture are inextricably linked in postwar artistic practices in Beirut. The mutually beneficial relationship between art and architecture remains present to this day, coming forward with the collaborations occurring between artists and architects in the formation of art and its institutions.



*Fig. 1. Exhibition of Robert Helou in the Mar Mansour Church in downtown Beirut in 1996.
Photo scanned from Galerie Epreuve d'Artiste Archive, Sursock Museum Library, Beirut.*

In the nineties, a lineage of artistic and cultural institutions and festivals dominated Beirut's art scene, one after the other, making it more visible, open and diverse. These developments offered a much needed space for reflection and experimentation (Theatre

de Beyrouth, Ayloul Festival, Ashkal Alwan...) and led to the abundance of art and cultural institutions with different images, directions, and affiliations. Art in Beirut is now being revived along different tracks, in tandem with its complex geopolitical identity. This project thus originated by identifying all buildings of historic value that are being used as art spaces after the civil war (roughly 1990 onwards), to examine whether or not there is a relation between the architecture, art, and the symbolism engendered by these decisions.

My thesis argues that there is a symbiotic relation between artists, gallerists, and architects, who collaboratively assert a certain message and image of Lebanon. Their images and visions are embodied in the design and operation of the physical space, whether in urban terms or architectural ones (display strategies, accessibility, proximity to other institutions, audience...), which create a nostalgia appealing to certain moments in Beirut's past (or the prospective future). With the Aga Khan Travel Grant, I traveled to Beirut in June/July 2019 and conducted the necessary fieldwork to respond to this question. I began by identifying the different categories of art spaces, according to their architectural styles, to see if the choice of a certain historic architecture embodies a yearning towards a particular historic epoch of Lebanon's past.

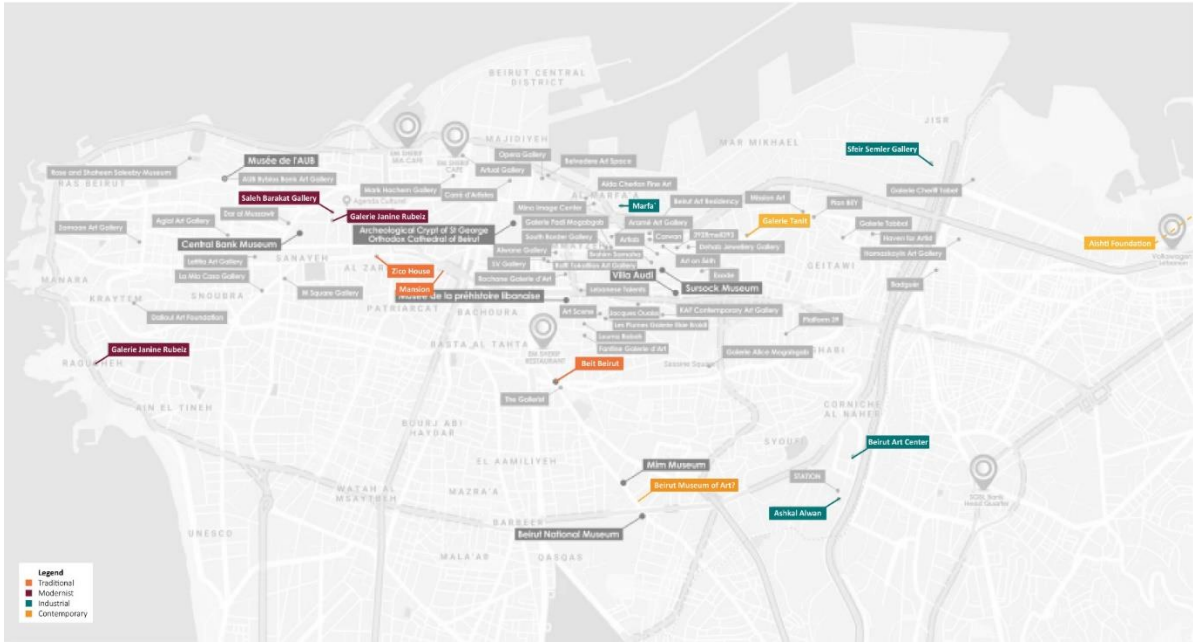


Fig. 2. Map showing the initial art spaces under study. Created by the author.

	Traditional Lebanese Architecture	Modernist Architecture	Industrial Architecture	Contemporary (St)architecture
Public	Beit Beirut Cultural Center (built 1924) 2016 Sodeco	Saleh Barakat Gallery (2016) (& Agial Gallery-1990) Hamra L.E.F.T. Architects	Sfeir Semler Gallery (2006) Quarantina Bernard Khoury	Aishti Foundation (2015) Seaside Road, Antelias David Adjaye
Private Civil Society	Zico House (Built 1935) 1994 Spears Mansion (built 1930s) 2012 Zokak El Blat Villa Paradiso 2013 Gemmayze	Dar El Nimer (2015) Hamra Lucien Cavo/ Renovation: Serge Brunst Galerie Janine Rubeiz (continuation of Dar El Fan 1967) Raouche Karim Bekdache Architects	Ashkal Alwan (moved in 2010) Jisr el Wati Youssef Tohme & Anastasia el Rouss	Beirut Museum of Art Controversy APEAL Foundation (2015) Sodeco Galerie Tanit (2007 & 2017?) Mar Mikhail Jean Marc Bonfils

Fig. 3. Chart showing the preliminary categories: traditional Lebanese architecture, the modernist, the industrial and the contemporary (st)architecture. Created by the author.

I track the architecture of the different art galleries and institutions and supplement it with the kind of art and its exhibitions to create preliminary categories. These categories broadly split into the traditional French mandate buildings, the modernist buildings, the industrial spaces, and the contemporary (st)architecture. Each category vies for its own

identity of Lebanon, be it Beirut the French, Beirut the Prewar/Modern, or Beirut the Postwar/Postmodern.

I choose the modernist architecture category, as opposed to the other three, as the emblematic postcard image of prewar Beirut, featuring its modernist architecture that endured the war and came to represent Beirut's cultural Renaissance. I focus primarily on the following 3 modernist spaces - Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Saleh Barakat Gallery, and Dar El Nimer - as representative examples. These galleries are located in modernist buildings, built around the mid-20th century, allowing for historical research and understanding of the architecture from its inception to the current day. The historical dimension and distance promote a better understanding of the sociopolitical conditions within which they operated. All three art spaces are present in a similar geographic area, Ras Beirut. Neighborhoods in Beirut carry a lot of significance. It is unsurprising as such that the majority of my case studies of galleries with similar architecture, and projecting a similar image, exist in the same neighborhoods.



Fig. 4. Map showing the three chosen art spaces and their locations in Ras Beirut. Created by the author.

I argue that these spaces and their programs attempt to revive an image of Lebanon's prewar modernist era, the period of Beirut's glory days. Ras Beirut, where the self-funded art spaces are all located, is an area ingrained in the Lebanese national memory as the site of mutual coexistence between Christians and Muslims. These well-established galleries and the individuals running them, cash in on the allure of culture that once characterized Ras Beirut's identity, making way for an understanding of the three galleries under study vis-à-vis the history of the area and its development.

With their focus on Lebanese and Arab artists, a sentimentality towards the area's history, and a disdain for the city's postwar development, these galleries mobilize modernist buildings to resurrect the Ras Beirut of their childhoods: the modernist cultural hub of the

Arab left intellectuals. This category proves to be the most glaring case of a connection between the chosen architecture and the image that is being projected.

I contextualize the physical qualities of each art space within the concurrent local and regional sociopolitical conditions (political events, funding sources...) to examine the role they may be playing or the political agenda they may be pushing. In each gallery, I examine the methods of choosing new locations and spaces, which include factors such as funding, availability, type of desired space, and its broader implications. I analyze the image projected by the institution through the texts, catalogues, and advertisements they produce (descriptions, reference to other art practices, platforms used to advertise...), as well as their general reception by the public through newspaper clippings and occasional art reviews.

At the onset, I would like to recognize the difficulty faced in finding information for this thesis for a number of reasons, such as the lack of proper archiving, research on such topics, the effects of the war on the status of existing archives, and the recency of the phenomena I am tracing. As such, fieldwork in the form of interviews with architects, artists, and gallerists was necessary to provide much-needed information and insight into the operation of these art spaces, the processes by which artists and architects are chosen, and the rhetoric used to project the image of the institution, whether through the spatial experience, media, or other outlets. The interview guide included questions on the description of the institution, spatial experience, artists and collaborators, catalogues, and press reviews, to name a few.¹ The *Annahar* newspaper archives (images

¹ Please see Appendix for the interview guide.

and newspaper clippings) were beneficial in understanding the different phenomena at work in the geographic locations I am studying, the status of the art world and its institutions, and reviews of art exhibitions in the required time periods.

In the Galerie Janine Rubeiz/Dar El Fan chapter, two main sources were used: the book, *Janine Rubeiz et Dar El Fan*² and *Utopia al Madina al Muthaqaqa* (Utopia of a Cultured City) by Khalida Said. The interviews with Nadine Bekdache (gallerist of Galerie Janine Rubeiz) and Karim Bekdache (designer of the new space of Galerie Janine Rubeiz) were instrumental to acquiring the necessary information. The Saleh Barakat Gallery chapter depended on interviews with Saleh Barakat (gallerist of Agial Art Gallery and Saleh Barakat Gallery), Walid Sadek (artist and writer), Nidal El Achkar (founder of Masrah Al Madina), Meguerditch Apogian (architect of the former Masrah Al Madina), Makram Al Kadi and Ziad Jamaledine (L.E.F.T Architects: designers of Saleh Barakat Gallery). For the Dar El Nimer chapter, the conversation with Omar Thawabeh (communications and content) and Lama Kobrously (collections and projects), as well as a conversation with

²In 2003, Galerie Janine Rubeiz hosted a book launch and exhibition in honor of Rubeiz's career. Ghassan Tueni, veteran Lebanese journalist, politician and diplomat who headed the "Annahar" local newspaper, spearheaded the efforts to develop off this book on Rubeiz and Dar El Fan. For three years, his teams searched for the necessary documentation, gathering testimonies, participant depictions and lists of activities hosted in this unique cultural ecosystem, beacon of the Golden Age of Lebanese culture. According to Tueni, the book is not meant to bring back the past, but serves as an attempt "to recreate something born out of a new context. An homage to Janine, yes, but also a message to the new generations." The works of Shafic Abboud, Yvette Achkar, Amin El Bacha, Halim Jurdak, Jamil Molaeb, and Are Rayess, which were shown in Dar El Fan between 1968 and 1975, were lent by their owners for the event. They offer a glimpse into the range of genres and techniques that characterized the pre-war artistic scene in Beirut and the well-rounded program of Dar El Fan. Zad Moultaqa, Lebanese pianist, contributed a written musical interlude. Janine's play, *Lamia et Antoine*, written in 1949, was performed by students from the International College.

Salim El Kadi of Apractice Studio, Dr. Joseph Hourani, and Dr. George Arbid from the Arab Center for Architecture, provided much insight into the current workings of the institution.

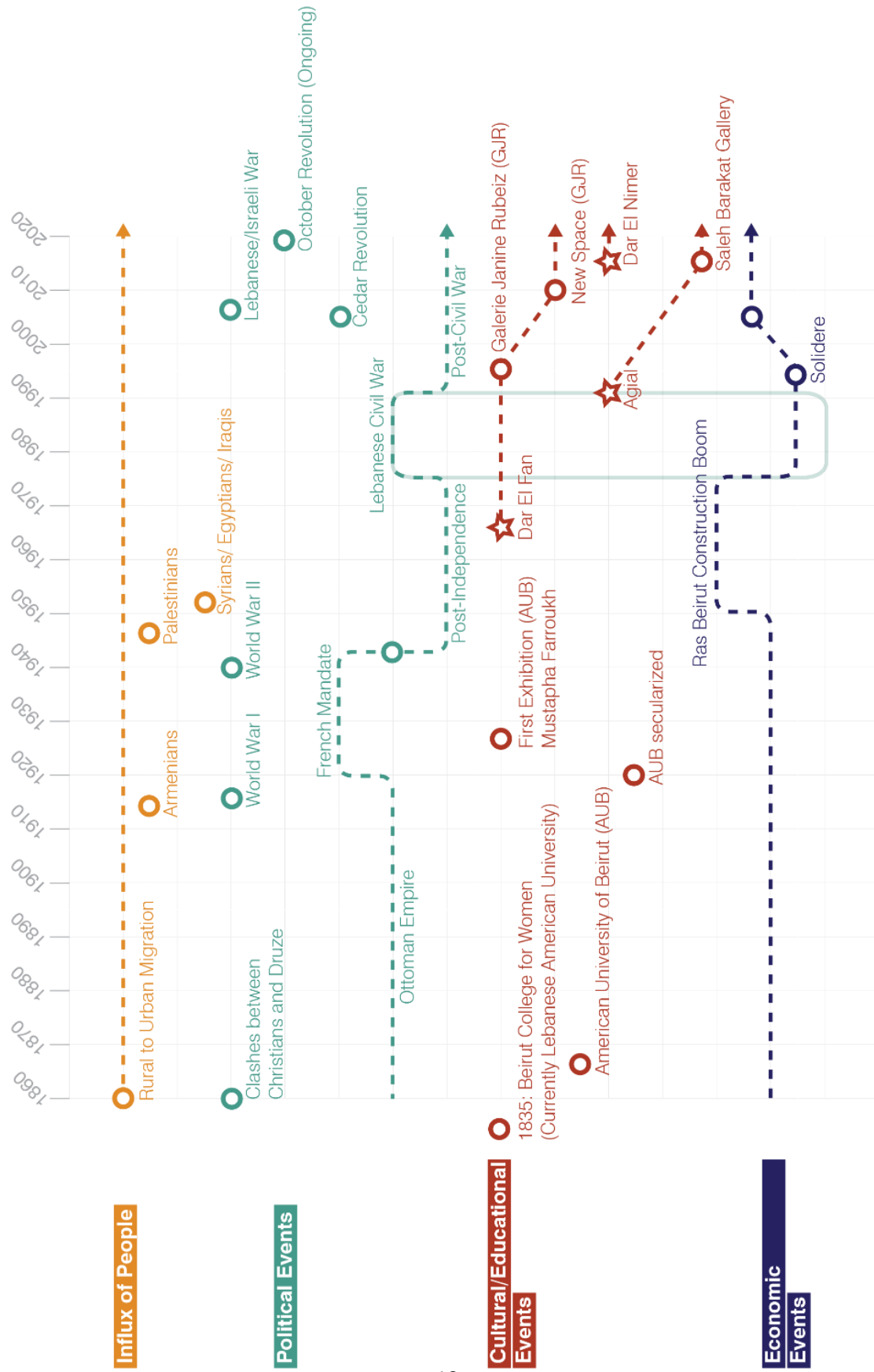


Fig 5. Timeline Showing the Main Events Affecting Ras Beirut's Growth. Created by the author

Chapter 2: The Rise and Fall of Ras Beirut's Cosmopolitanism

Ras Beirut is a distinctive locale that provides a window into Lebanon's cosmopolitan culture, centered on a strong cultural and commercial street, Hamra Street. The formation of Hamra Street came in response to local and regional fluxes in people and capital. Much like other areas in Beirut, urbanization in Hamra began with the incessant flow of individuals from rural areas as a result of the collapse of the silk industry, erosion of local markets and the clashes of 1860 between the Maronite Christians and Druze in the mountains.³ The completion of the Damascus Railway in 1895, new harbor works and the influx of French, American and British missions turned Beirut into a strategic administrative center in the Levant and increased its urban footprint. These new inhabitants, however, settled in self-sufficient quarters of relatively homogeneous and compact neighborhoods, "7arat" or "ahya"⁴. Physical and social spaces were almost identical for the different ethnic and religious groups who slowly and steadily made their way towards the garden farming area of Hamra, West of Beirut's city center.

The Seed of Ras Beirut's Cosmopolitanism

It was not until the founding of the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 1866 (formerly the Syrian Protestant College) that Ras Beirut (of which Hamra is a main area) attracted highly educated, middle-class populations of various nationalities, religions and sects. The founding of AUB was arguably the most important factor in the development of Hamra as

³ Samir Khalaf and Per Kongstad. 1973. *Hamra of Beirut: A Case of Rapid Urbanization*. Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill. p.16

⁴ Samir Khalaf. 1987. *Lebanon's Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press. p.220.

a “fashionable and buzzing” cosmopolitan area and the first instance of Hamra’s large scale urban transformation.⁵ Urban expansion and density, street patterns and ecological processes resulted from the competition for space and location surrounding AUB. By 1919, two main arteries, Jeanne D’Arc Street and AbdulAziz Street radiated from the university. Suburban villas, such as Villa Salem, the current home of Dar El Nimer, were built along these streets to accommodate the Anglo Saxon populations, the new converts to Protestantism, and individuals seeking employment and education at AUB.⁶

⁵ Samir Khalaf. 1987. *Lebanon’s Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 261-269.

⁶ Urbanization in Hamra measured at 7% of the total area and intensified between Jeanne d’Arc and AbdulAziz. By 1930, 30% of the landscape surrounding AUB and the hospital was dotted with traditional suburban villas. Samir Khalaf and Per Kongstad. 1973. *Hamra of Beirut: A Case of Rapid Urbanization*. Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill. p.32

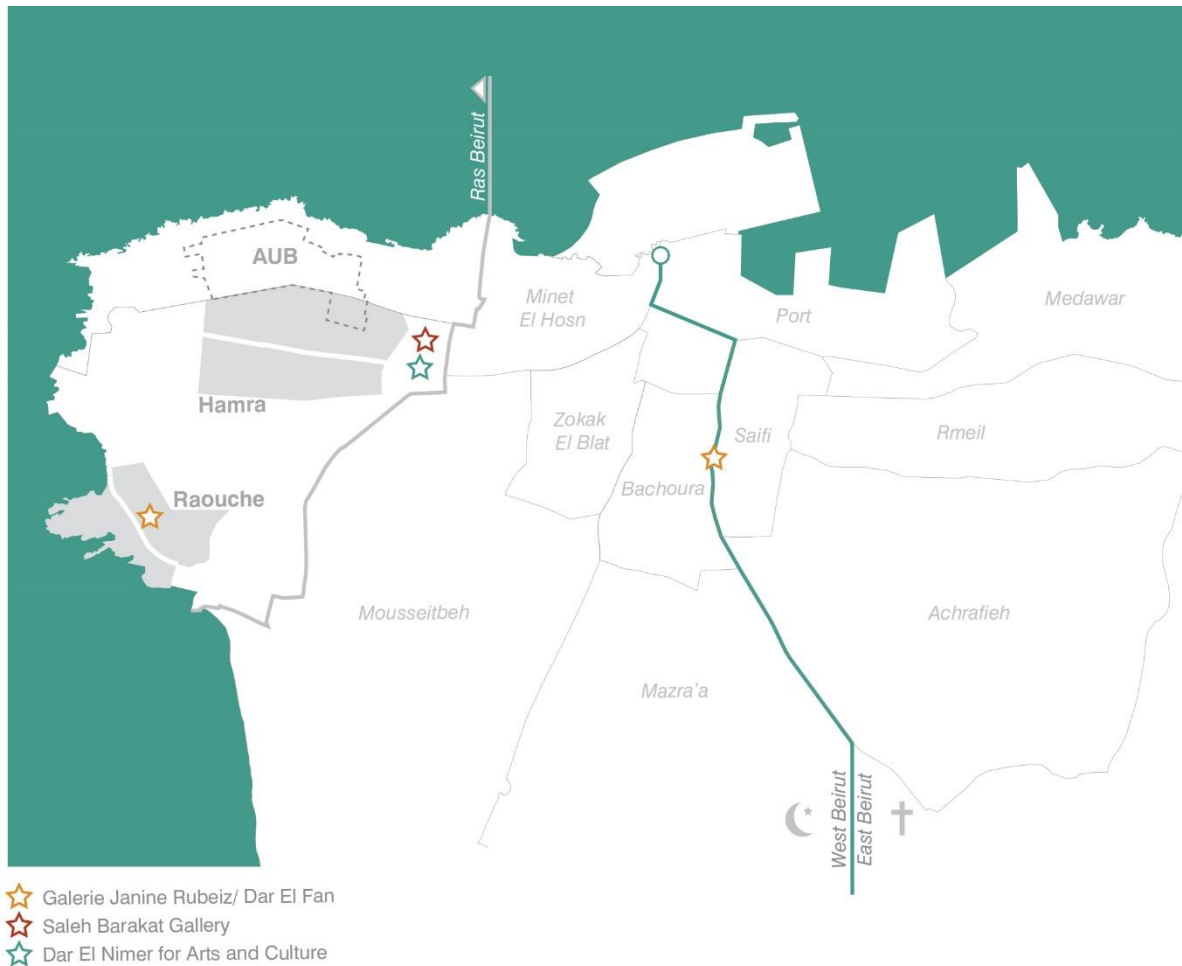


Fig. 6. Map of Ras Beirut showing the demarcation (green) line, Hamra, Raouche, and the locations of the current art spaces under study. Created by the author.

Lebanon as a French Protectorate (1919-1943)

The period between the two World Wars marked a significant advance in the intellectual and cultural history of Ras Beirut. Lebanese and Arab thinkers grappled with questions about their heritage and identity, under colonial rule. Beirut witnessed an unprecedented traffic in diverse ideas and dignitaries. AUB, strengthened by the increasing support for the education and opportunities it provided, expanded its curriculum and was secularized in 1920. Its alumni were beginning to make a name for themselves, and occupying leadership and governance positions in countries throughout the region. Simultaneously,

AUB welcomed the first considerable group of local scholars, educated in the United States and eager to participate in the social, intellectual, and cultural debates outside AUB's walls. They contributed to the research, activism, and civic concerns of Ras Beirut and its inhabitants.⁷

In addition to educational developments, the newly introduced cultural programs and activities like music, public performances and theater, gained wide appeal. Such activities allowed individuals and groups to "transcend their parochial identities and melt into a common cosmopolitan subculture". They increased political participation and lead to subtle changes in the lifestyle and conduct of the Ras Beirut neighborhood.

The "Golden Age" of Hamra Street

Upon receiving its independence from France in 1943, Lebanon's government adopted liberal policies that enacted strict banking secrecy laws, kept the tax bite small and placed few restrictions in the way of business development.⁸ The laissez faire business climate created unique conditions, and the Arab World entrusted its money to Beirut's talented money men. The results were spectacular and Beirut witnessed increasing economic growth, estimated at 4-5% as of 1960, peaking in 1975 at the onset of the Lebanese Civil War.⁹

Hamra's central location in proximity to the city center, the sea, and the well-established, open-minded, English speaking communities near AUB and the hospital continued to

⁷ Samir Khalaf. 1987. *Lebanon's Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press. p.274-275

⁸ Samir Kassir. 2010. *Beirut*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 347-358.

⁹ *BusinessWeek*. 1966. "Beirut Is Where the Action Is," April 30, 1966.

attract a host of local and regional highly educated middle class populations. It lies west of the downtown Beirut area, which remained till the 1940's, the main cultural and commercial hub of the city. However, the General Masterplan of 1951-54, only officially approved urban plan for Beirut, paved the way for Hamra's development. The plan merely isolated a network of roads derived from the holistic Ecochard Plan of 1944. These streets were partly implemented by the Lebanese government to accommodate the open network of circulation between the city's main port and airport. Though their main purpose was to bypass the city center and its main square to mobilize troops in the event of an axis invasion, these roads planted the seed for decentralization. They allowed Hamra to grow despite the masterplan which aimed to divert urban growth along the southern axis of Metropolitan Beirut. The topography east of the city center and presence of low income settlements (Armenian refugees in 1914) influenced the unanticipated westward expansion. Since the masterplan did not provide any zoning, the transfer of land was rendered possible through cadastral legislation.¹⁰

Ras Beirut stood out as a singular, successful model of a melting pot of cultures and religions, as opposed to the mosaic of disparate conglomerations of groups with specific religions and sects present elsewhere in Beirut. Sunni Muslims occupied the southern flanks of the city (Basta, Mousseitbeh, Mazraa') whereas the Maronite and Orthodox Christians occupied the Eastern flanks (Medawar, Achrafieh, Rmeil). Ras Beirut was receptive to the influx of migrants seeking to be assimilated in its cosmopolitan culture.¹¹

¹⁰ Samir Khalaf. 1987. *Lebanon's Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press. p.215-237

¹¹ Samir Khalaf. 1987. *Lebanon's Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 270-279.

In 1948, Hamra witnessed a large influx of Palestinian migrants fleeing the Israeli Occupation. The area's liberal and cosmopolitan character was further reinforced by the incoming Syrian and Egyptian intellectuals fleeing the political instability and the nationalization of private enterprise in their respective countries.¹²

Modern (ist) Hamra: A Cultural and Commercial Hub

By the 1950s, Beirut City Centre was no longer the only hub commercial and cultural hub of Beirut. Hamra gained primacy through the proliferation of educated professionals and increased institutional presence.

“With roughly not more than 2% of the country's population, Ras Beirut has nearly 18% of Lebanon's engineers, and almost 13% of its hospitals (not considering the bed capacity), nearly 18% of all government ministries, 21% of all embassies and consulates, 23% of travel agencies, and 18% of all hotels and cinemas.”¹³

The prominence of Ras Beirut foreshadowed an increased commercialization of Hamra. There is evidence of parcelization and individualization of plots as early as 1928, which encouraged land transactions, speculations and the pursuit of real estate as a viable economic venture. Khalaf notes that while the cadastral map of 1930 contained 275 parcels and increased to 671 parcels in 1955, this number decreased slightly to 658 parcels in 1967, resulting in a change of ownership from individual to corporate property through the pooling of small parcels into larger building sites.¹⁴

¹² Samir Kassir. 2010. *Beirut*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 347-358.

¹³ Samir Khalaf and Per Kongstad. 1973. *Hamra of Beirut: A Case of Rapid Urbanization*. Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill. p.29

¹⁴ Samir Khalaf and Per Kongstad. 1973. *Hamra of Beirut: A Case of Rapid Urbanization*. Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill. p.44.

The change in the urban character of Ras Beirut was swift and Hamra Street was soon lined with modern high-rise apartments and office buildings built with reinforced concrete and clad with glittering curtain wall façade systems.¹⁵ “Ground Play: A Case of Urban Resilience in Hamra Street” is a study conducted by Ziad Jamelddine and Makram al Kadi in 2016 as part of a workshop in Columbia’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation.¹⁶ The study traces the modernist structures nested in Hamra Street and identified the “office building/cinema” typology of Hamra that proliferated in the 1950s and 1960s. It was customary for buildings to comprise a mix of commercial, recreational and institutional functions.

“It is not uncommon, for instance, to have the basement of a building utilized as a stereo-club, bar or night-club, or possibly a garage or warehouse; the ground floor as a movie house, side-walk cafe, restaurant or display parlors; the first few floors bank and financial premises, executive and administrative branch offices of foreign companies, marketing research outfits, insurance companies transportation and airline agencies, single or collective doctor's clinics, offices of other professionals, side by side with beauty shops, Swedish massage institutes and haute couture and fashion shops; and the upper floor as residential units, pent-house, apartments and roof gardens.”¹⁷

The earliest instance of the modernist building comprising cultural spaces on the ground floor and offices above, was the Cinema Al Hamra building. Constructed in 1956, this

¹⁵ Though the share of suburban villas (2-3 floors) contributed 54% of all buildings in Hamra in 1952, their share dropped significantly to 30% in 1967. Conversely, modern high-rise buildings (5 floors or more) made up 12% of all buildings in Hamra in 1952 and rose to 38% in 1967. Khalaf cites an additional 86 buildings (10% of existing buildings) converted from residential to commercial use in some capacity, most often by introducing commercial activities on the ground floor level.

¹⁶ Columbia GSAPP. 2016. “Rue Hamra, A Case Of Urban Resilience In Beirut, Lebanon.” Publication of the architecture workshop led by Ziad Jamaledine and Makram Al Kadi on August 5 - 19, 2016. <https://www.arch.columbia.edu/summer-workshops/2016/beirut>.

¹⁷ Samir Khalaf and Per Kongstad. 1973. *Hamra of Beirut: A Case of Rapid Urbanization*. Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill. p.51

building set the stage for the erection of modernist structures along all of Hamra Street.¹⁸ The opening of Cinema al Hamra was followed by the inauguration of several other theaters, cafes, and soon enough commercial retailers such as ABC and Aiglon fashion.¹⁹ Adjacent to Cinema Al Hamra, Makdisi, Schayer and Adib constructed the Murr Building in 1958. The combination of these two adjacent buildings, Cinema Al Hamra and the Murr (Horseshoe) Building constituted the first attempt by architects to design a street's elevation with modernist buildings.²⁰ The Murr (Horseshoe) Building boasted Hamra's first and most famous sidewalk café, the Horseshoe. It was frequented by writers, poets, actors, artists and activists alike.

Hamra's Café Culture

Since their introduction in Ottoman times, the café's in Beirut were a semi-public space for socializing, seeking employment, and indulging in the oral storyteller, *al-hakawati's* amusing tales. In the 1940's, the French prompted an increasingly mixed gender culture and audience of café-goers in the city center. Hamra's cafés, nestled in the newly established modernist commercial centers, were modeled after the Parisian trottoir cafés.²¹

¹⁸ Columbia GSAPP. 2016. "Rue Hamra, A Case Of Urban Resilience In Beirut, Lebanon." Publication of the architecture workshop led by Ziad Jamaledine and Makram Al Kadi on August 5 - 19, 2016. <https://www.arch.columbia.edu/summer-workshops/2016/beirut>.

¹⁹ Esha Nag. 2013. "Hamra Street in Beirut Hasn't Been the Same since the Civil War Struck Lebanon." *Gulf News*, March 21, 2013. <https://gulfnews.com/general/hamra-street-in-beirut-hasnt-been-the-same-since-the-civil-war-struck-lebanon-1.1160975>.

²⁰ Jad Tabet. 1998. "From Colonial Style to Regional Revivalism: Modern Architecture in Lebanon and the Problem of Cultural Identity." In *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City*, edited by Peter Rowe and Hashim Sarkis, p. 83-105. Munich, New York: Prestel.

²¹ Lara Deeb and Mona Harb. 2013. *Exploring Leisure, Morality, and Geography in South Beirut*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. p.11-13.

The mix of functions in buildings allowed for a proximity that accelerated the growth of Beirut's vigorous, rich, cultural scene. The post-independence cultural awakening, fueled by the prolonged influx of intellectuals and cultural practitioners from the region, resulted in a symbiosis between the café culture of Hamra, the entertainment forms of cinema and theater, and the scholars, artists, and political figures it attracted. Beirut was bursting at the seams with people and ideologies, as conflicting as nationalism, Pan-Arabism, communism, and capitalism.²² The political spectrum in Beirut was astounding, but the considerable leftist presence left an indelible mark on Ras Beirut's disposition. Certain cafés became synonymous with several leftist Arab political parties, such as the Ba'ath Party, the Communists, the Syrian Socialist Party, and the Nasserites.²³ They became the unofficial headquarters for political debates and a place for local and international scholars and professionals to mingle, while being exposed to stimulating cultural activities.

Intellectual engagement was on trend and soon new platforms to document the existing cultural ecosystem emerged. Daily newspapers began publishing cultural supplements. *L'Orient*, a French language daily newspaper released a weekly series on the art collections of politicians in 1960 and *Annahar* newspaper released its cultural supplement, *Al-Mulhaq*, in 1964.²⁴ Book releases, music, and dance performances

²² Samir Khalaf. 1987. *Lebanon's Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 270-279.

²³ Nadia Barclay (2007). *Café Culture in Beirut: A Center for Civil Society (16th century – present)*. Master's Thesis submitted to the Growth and Structure of Cities Program, Bryn Mawr College. p.15

²⁴ Sarah Rogers. 2018. "Galleries and Cultural Centers in 1960s Beirut, a Brief History." *Perspective #1*. *Saradar Collection*. <http://saradarperspective.com/perspective1/essays>

became celebrated events. Political groups established their respective newspapers, programs and publications.²⁵

Art Spaces in the 1960's

Art, by virtue of its ability to represent and question the various contrasting identity-framed ideologies flooding Ras Beirut, was not spared the political rhetoric. As the region felt the looming threat of the Israeli presence in 1967, Pan-Arabism peaked and Arabs took note of their fragmented, threatened existence. One glaring example was the formation of the General Union of Arab Plastic Artists (al-Ittihad al-'amm li-l-fannanin at-tashkiliyin al-'arab) in 1971, as a platform for the examination and propagation of art by Arab artists, who found themselves riddled with similar concerns of reconciling contrasting identities, modernities and political emancipation.²⁶ Beirut's art infrastructure was shaped, similarly to its political landscape, by the external forces diametrically opposed notions of nation and identity on the young post-colonial nation. Beirut's cultural institutions and galleries were equally varied in their agendas, affiliations, and scope.

The different types of art spaces created a strong intersection between artists, the public, and the art market. The first category included foreign cultural missions and embassies in Beirut (The Kennedy Center, The British Council, Goethe Institute, University Christian Center, Italian, Spanish, and Russian cultural centers, Arab Cultural Club and Islamic Cultural Center), institutions of higher education (AUB and the Academie Libanaise des

²⁵ Samir Khalaf. 1987. *Lebanon's Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 281.

²⁶ Nada Shabout. 2018. "Transregional Solidarity: The Arab Biennial in Retrospect." *Mezosfera*. May 2018. <http://mezosfera.org/transregional-solidarity/>

Beaux Arts- ALBA), and national ministries are credited with the initial push for the art scene in Beirut. Though these institutions all carried clear cultural and diplomatic significance, they served as the main venues for art exhibitions from 1929. In the 1960's, however, the institutions' art programs introduced local artists and augmented the appreciation of the local cultural landscape.²⁷

Cafés constitute the second category of art spaces. Led by Café La Palette in the early 1950s, they served as the primary model of artist-run spaces in Ras Beirut, combining a program of art exhibitions, literary gatherings, and political talks.²⁸ Cafés served as both the daily stomping grounds and galleries for local artists. In an interview with Esha Nag of *Gulf News*, Lebanese artist and writer Nabeel Abu Hamad, recalls the continuous debates and arguments on the latest trends in the world of art that would happen at the Horseshoe Café in the 60s and 70s. The main attendees included Paul Guiragossian, Rafiq Sharaf, Jean Khalife, Mounir Najm, and Ameen Basha. They continuously debated whether their art was to be abstract, figurative, international, or keeping with Oriental traditions.²⁹ Even at the height of Hamra's commercialization, there remained a delicate balance between its cultural and commercial aspect, regulated by individual building owners. Nabeel Abu Hamad recalls Munah Dabaghi, the owner of the Horseshoe, asking artists not to sit in the Horseshoe at peak times since they could only afford coffee and

²⁷ Sarah Rogers. 2018. "Galleries and Cultural Centers in 1960s Beirut, a Brief History." *Perspective #1. Saradar Collection*. <http://saradarperspective.com/perspective1/essays>

²⁸ Sam Bardaouil and Tim Fellrath. 2018. "Witness to a Golden Age: Mapping Beirut's Art Scene 1955-1975." *Perspective #1. Saradar Collection*. <http://saradarperspective.com/perspective1/essays>

²⁹ Esha Nag. 2013. "Hamra Street in Beirut Hasn't Been the Same since the Civil War Struck Lebanon." *Gulf News*, March 21, 2013. <https://gulfnews.com/general/hamra-street-in-beirut-hasnt-been-the-same-since-the-civil-war-struck-lebanon-1.1160975>.

would take the place of customers with purchase power. Achieving a balance between making profits and still creating a culturally vibrant environment, allowed for a rich atmosphere that encouraged acts of defiance, but maintained a trendy, economically viable venture. The controversial play *Henri Hamate* by the progressive theatre group “Majdalyoun” was censored by the Lebanese authorities in 1969. In an act of resistance, the lead actor, Nidal al Ashkar (founder and director of Masrah al Madina), performed the play to the public at the Horseshoe’s sidewalk.³⁰

Between 1955 and 1975, galleries dotted the area west of Damascus Road, which later became the “green line” demarcating the edge of West Beirut. Ras Beirut lies completely within it. By the late 1960s, Ras Beirut alone comprised more than 20 galleries, the first of which was fittingly name Gallery One.³¹ The majority of these galleries were individual endeavors assuming distinct agendas. Contact Art Gallery (1972) and Gallery One (1963) exhibited Lebanese and Arab art almost exclusively. Some galleries, like House of Art, prioritized commercial profit and organized exhibitions in venues as far-ranging as banks, hotels, and corporate companies.³²

Cultural centers were also used as exhibition venues, especially for minorities like the Armenian community, who voiced their communal and political identity within the walls of Centre d’Art Alex Manoukian. Dar el- Karameh, established in the late 1960’s by Ismail

³⁰ Moe Ali Nayel. 2014. “Beirut Theatre Retains Alternative Roots.” *Al Jazeera*, May 4, 2014. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/beirut-theatre-retains-alternative-roots-201442313218799564.html>.

³¹ Sam Bardaouil and Tim Fellrath. 2018. “Witness to a Golden Age: Mapping Beirut’s Art Scene 1955-1975.” *Perspective #1. Saradar Collection*. <http://saradarperspective.com/perspective1/essays>

³² Sarah Rogers. 2018. “Galleries and Cultural Centers in 1960s Beirut, a Brief History.” *Perspective #1. Saradar Collection*. <http://saradarperspective.com/perspective1/essays>

Shamout, a prominent Palestinian artist, head of the Palestinian Liberation Organization's Art Department, and one of the founders of the aforementioned General Union of Arab Plastic Artists, served as a meeting place for Palestinian refugees. Another institution, single-handedly established in 1967 by Janine Rubeiz, Dar El Fan presented a solid and intriguing case of a locally grown avant-garde cultural center, located on the edge of Ras Beirut.³³

A New Post-war Artistic Landscape

This section traces the various unfolding events that have shaped the current artistic landscape in Beirut since the end of the war. It sheds light on the various forces, such as immigration, the failure of the Solidere project, and the boom in the Dubai art market, shaping the new post-war artistic scene in Beirut.

The war disrupted much of the artistic activity established in the 1960's and early 1970's. Around 80% of all art galleries in Beirut, concentrated in Ras Beirut, either closed permanently or relocated elsewhere. Galerie Epreuve d'Artiste is one such gallery that was located in Clemenceau (West Beirut) before the war, and moved to Kaslik (50 km north of Beirut) to resume its activities. It was not until the end of the war that it once again moved to Beirut, this time to Achrafieh (East Beirut). The art scene changed as a natural result of the immigration of many artists and gallery owners, seeking stability and security abroad. Although collectives from Beirut's "alternative" art scene made efforts to "resurrect" Ras Beirut, they eventually needed to relocate outside Ras Beirut due to economic and spatial considerations. With their exit from Ras Beirut, these organizations

³³ Ibid.

paved the way for other artistic endeavors, individual in nature, like the three art spaces under study.

Despite the initial optimistic outlook that characterized the early 90s, the introduction of Solidere, a project for the reconstruction of the city center of Beirut, effaced the hope of a reconstruction that would conserve ties to the immediate past of Beirut (the period right before the war). It greatly altered the trajectory of the art world and its spaces as well. Solidere's Zaytunay Bay marina development and subsequent crippling of the iconic Saint George hotel, showcases one clear example of the effort to push for a specific image of Lebanon as a Dubai-style capital for real estate investment and entertainment, unconnected to its past (even if commercial) heritage. Eventually all the modernist buildings that were renovated, such as the Phoenicia Hotel, came as a result of personal initiatives. For that same reason, structures like the Holiday Inn and the Saint George Hotel suffer from decay and abandon, as they await the personal decisions to repurpose or completely demolish.



Fig.7. Façade of the Saint George Hotel dons the sign "Stop Solidere". Image taken by the author.

The reconstruction efforts of the Beirut city center dedicated large sums to the reconstruction of select buildings, mostly in the French mandate style, sweeping away the traditional souks and abandoning or bulldozing many modernist structures. Since the reconstruction focused on the city center, the other parts of the city, such as the westwards Ras Beirut , in its modernist character, were left to chance. However, the political insecurity that ensued with the assassination of the former Prime Minister and founder of Solidere, Rafic Hariri and the Cedar Revolution of 2005, allowed other areas in Beirut to receive much-needed attention and capital flow.

Additionally, the new generation of postwar artists created an infrastructure that allowed them to express themselves in different ways, in a range of different institutions. By the early 1990's, art galleries such as Agial Art Gallery (1991) and Galerie Janine Rubeiz (1993)

started opening and the Ministry of Culture of Lebanon was founded (1993), although the latter's role in the development of the currently vibrant art scene is minimal.

In 1994, Zico House, an incubator for a range of music, art, and civil society activities was launched by Moustapha Yamout, who fought during the war alongside the communists.³⁴

His space provided a central location in West Beirut, on Spears Street (the extension of Hamra Street), that fostered the development of collectives such as Ashkal Alwan and the Arab Image Foundation, providing office space and much needed technical support for their first exhibitions in public spaces (i.e. Sanayeh Garden Exhibition in 1995). The annual Ayloul Festival (1997-2001) was the single most important event that catalyzed the Beirut art scene and gave its artists exposure to the international art market. These collectives hosted exhibitions in the public spaces of Ras Beirut, used abandoned buildings and reopened the famous cinema halls of Hamra Street as sets for exhibitions and performances.



Fig. 8. (Left) Moussa Wissam. Annahar. 2000. "جزء من تجهيز نادين توما عند مدخل سينما ستراند" (Part of Nadine Touma's installation at the entrance to the Strand Cinema), Annahar, November 25, 2000.

Fig. 9. (Right) Moussa Wissam. 2000. "من مشروع تزيين مداخل دور السينما في شارع الحمرا" (From the project of decorating the entrances to cinemas on Hamra Street), , November 25, 2000.

³⁴Moustapha Yamout (Zico), interview by the author, Beirut, July 18, 2019.

All these entities were quite nomadic, moving offices frequently, working from cafes, bars, and cars, existing anywhere they could; the same was true for their exhibition venues. The preeminent cultural institution fostering exciting multidisciplinary works, hosting exhibitions and performances all throughout the 1990's was the Theatre de Beyrouth. However, the broad scope of the program (politics, entertainment, lectures, book releases, exhibitions...) and intermittent closures paved the way for other art spaces to step in and fulfill the needs of the artists and the community.³⁵

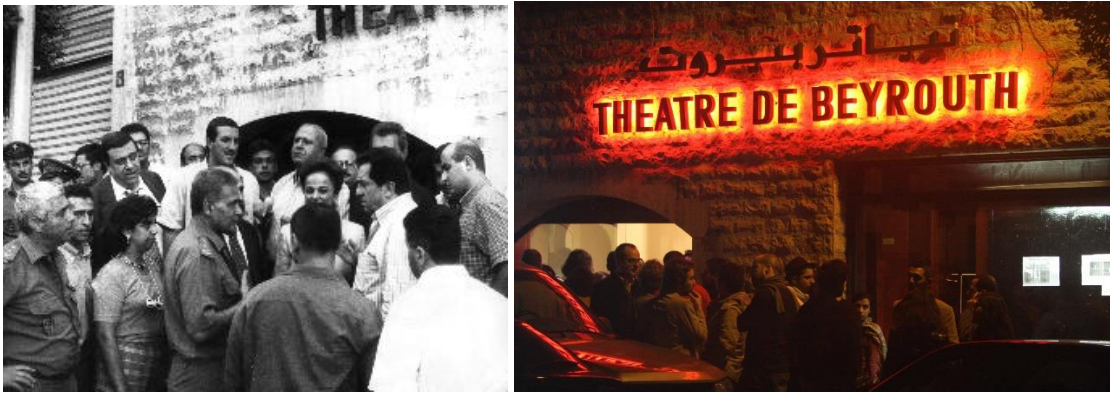


Fig. 10. (Left) Annahar. 1997. "اجتماع حاشد في مسرح بيروت لتوقيع عريضة تطالب بالانتخابات البلدية" (A rally in the Beirut Theater to sign a petition calling for municipal elections), August 9, 1997.

Fig. 11. (Right) Annahar. 2009. "افتتاح مسرح بيروت للمرة الرابعة" (Beirut Theater is opened for the fourth time), December 4, 2009.

In the early 2000's, many developments occurred, with new galleries opening up in several locations. Eventually, these groups settled in spaces other than Ras Beirut for reasons related to increased real estate value and the lack of large spaces to accommodate the creation and exhibition of conceptual art. When the Beirut City Center was closed due to security concerns, this led to the development of "other" areas that

³⁵Pascale Feghali, interview by the author, Beirut, July 16, 2019.

had not received the necessary funding to recover from the war,³⁶ such as Hamra. Gemmayze and the area next to Beirut River, both located in the former East Beirut, attracted the majority of the new art spaces. Especially in the case of Ras Beirut, a former vibrant cultural scene needed to be regained. The existing cultural void was somehow filled by the new galleries that invested in the modernist art spaces of Ras Beirut to resurrect the area's rich cultural past.

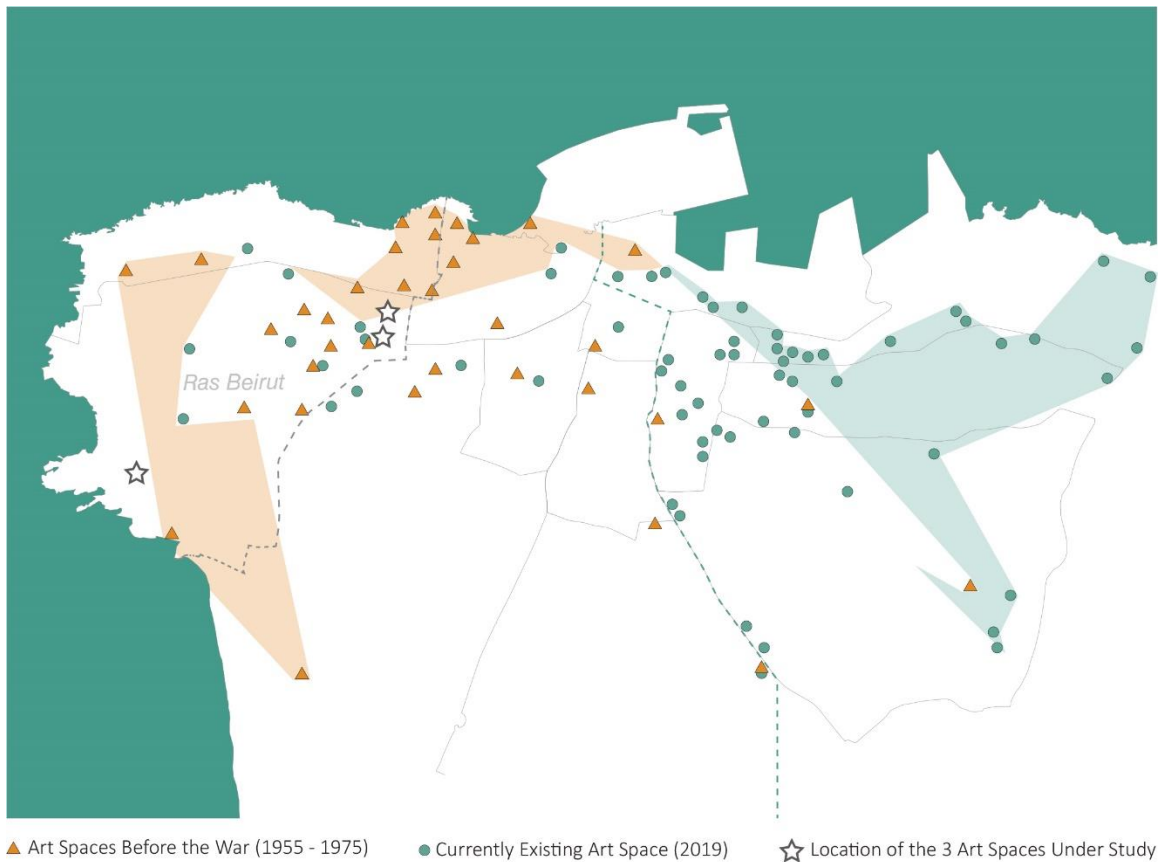


Fig.12. Map showing the concentration of art spaces before (triangles) and after (circles) the Lebanese Civil War. It shows how the hub of the art world moved from Ras Beirut towards the Eastern parts of the city and the location of the three art spaces under study (stars). Created by the author.

³⁶ Lara Deeb and Mona Harb. 2013. *Exploring Leisure, Morality, and Geography in South Beirut*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. p.11-13

An Increased Appetite for Contemporary Arab Art

“Though contemporary art of the region has gained more disciplinary attention since 9/11 and to an even greater degree since the revolutions...Even before the revolutions of 2011, art markets in the Middle East exploded.”³⁷ Auctions and art fairs in the Middle East, especially in the Gulf region, produced a ripple effect and encouraged the development of several new art galleries all over the region. Auction house branch Christie’s in 2005, Bonham’s in 2008 and Sotheby’s all opened in Dubai. Institutions like the Abu Dhabi Louvre and Guggenheim, the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, and the Kuwait City Museum of Modern Art injected a much-needed art infrastructure. The plethora of auction houses and “brand-name” museums and auction houses to the increased appetite for contemporary Arab Art worldwide.³⁸ Especially since the Gulf region was formerly devoid of art institutions for the promotion of Arab art, this new interest in contemporary Arab art is fostering a new clientele and generation of collectors and artists. Art galleries like Agial Art Gallery and Galerie Janine Rubeiz were some of the pioneering galleries who played a primary role in the development of the art market by introducing their artists to collectors and large-scale art institutions.³⁹

Locally, the Beirut Art Fair, which began in 2009, and has been gaining traction.⁴⁰

According to gallerists like Saleh Barakat, art fairs like Art Dubai have “a lot of new faces”

³⁷ Nancy Demerdash. 2012. “Consuming Revolution: Ethics, Art, and Ambivalence in the Arab Spring.” *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 2 (2012), <http://www.brismes.ac.uk/nmes/archives/970>.

³⁸ Nancy Demerdash. 2012. “Consuming Revolution: Ethics, Art, and Ambivalence in the Arab Spring.” *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 2 (2012), <http://www.brismes.ac.uk/nmes/archives/970>.

³⁹ “Essay: Middle East Art Ecosystem | Kiyon Art.” 2018. June 2018. <http://kiyan-art.com/essay-middle-east-art-ecosystem/>.

⁴⁰ Arsalan Mohammad. 2017. “Beirut’s Art Scene Is in the Midst of a Reawakening, Its Movers and Shakers Say | Artnet News.” September 29, 2017. <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/beirut-art-scene-1099994>.

and excellent “foot flow.”⁴¹ “There are some serious long-term indicators now. The market is more sophisticated...There's a real renaissance now, and Dubai is a good platform for that,”⁴² says Saleh Barakat. Prices have been rising steadily for several Arab artists, such as Lebanese artist Saliba Douaihy (1915–94) whose works would have sold for \$5000- \$10,000 a decade ago, now cost somewhere between \$50,000 and \$100,000.⁴³ Additionally, Beirut has benefitted specifically, since 2011, from the influx of Syrian artists who were seeking home and a platform for their art. The Damascene art scene, growing steadily from 2004 to 2011, was disrupted by the start of the war. Jordan, Egypt and Turkey were more complicated for artists to move into, so they moved to Beirut, naturally. The founder of Ayyam Gallery, Khaled Samawi said: ““The Syrian art scene is probably more vibrant today in Beirut than it ever was in Damascus.”⁴⁴

These are the conditions within which the three art spaces under study (Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Saleh Barakat Gallery, and Dar El Nimer), run by individuals in Beirut, appeared or reappeared in new spaces in Ras Beirut from 2011 to 2016. The following chapters delve into each gallery as a unique case study and example of an art space that benefits from local and regional conditions and utilizes modernist architecture to revive the image of a prewar modern Beirut, through art and architecture.

41 Arsalan Mohammad. 2017. “Art Dubai Finds Its Footing Thanks to a Saudi Art Renaissance and the New Louvre Abu Dhabi.” September 29, 2017. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/art-dubai-2018-1251863>.

42 Brooke Anderson, Don Duncan. 2010. “Contemporary Middle East - WSJ.” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 21, 2010. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB127378397101791153>.

43 Andrew Russeth. 2015. “Arab Spring: Modern Middle Eastern Art Finds a New Audience in the West.” *ARTnews*, April 2, 2015. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/modern-middle-eastern-art-finds-new-audience-in-the-west-3867/>.

44 Ginanne Brownell. 2014. “Syrian Artists Set Up Base in Beirut - The New York Times,” June 18, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/19/arts/international/syrian-artists-set-up-base-in-beirut.html>.

Chapter 3: Galerie Janine Rubeiz/ Dar el Fan wal Adab

...تعتقدون أن خلق جو أدبي فني فكري كوسموبوليتي في بيروت (الستينات) صعب؟ سترون ما أسهل الصعب...
Do you think creating a literary, artistic and intellectual atmosphere in Beirut (the 1960s) is difficult? You will see how easy it is...⁴⁵

Phase 1: Dar El Fan Wal Adab (1967-1976)

Significance of Dar El Fan

The Utopia of a Cultured City (Utopia al Madina al Muthaqqafa) is a book written by Khalida Said on the cultural initiatives that arose in the era between Independence (1943) and the start of the Lebanese Civil War (1975). It presents an in depth study of *Al-Nadwa* *Al-Lubnaniyya* (Cultural Symposium), the Fairuz-Rahbani Collaboration, *Shi'r* (Poetry) magazine, *Mawaqif* (Positions) magazine, and *Dar El Fan*. It constituted Said's first attempt at uncovering the secrets of the Lebanese cultural project. The five institutions she chooses viewed culture and creativity as a civic concern, and served as cornerstones in the conception of a citizen, a nation, a social structure, and the revitalization of a community.⁴⁶

Said views the mid-century cultured modern Lebanese individuals as an extension of the Lebanese cultural renaissance, individuals who did not wait for the resolution of sectarian and political conflicts to launch their initiatives and interrogate their Lebanese and Arab heritage. To her, the individual nature of these endeavors that rose without economic, political, or sectarian affiliations of any type were able to belong to the

⁴⁵ Lebanese poet, journalist, and translator Ounsi El Hajj in conversation on Janine Rubeiz's initiative of Dar El Fan. Ounsi El Hajj, "منارة مدينة" (City Lighthouse), in Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p.6.

⁴⁶ Khalida Said. 2012. *يوتوبيا المدينة المثقفة (Utopia Al Madina Al Muthaqqafa)*. Beirut: Dar El Saqi. p. 181-201.

Lebanese culture in its broadest sense. Individualism is one of the key characteristics that shielded Lebanese culture from any external or pre-directed government-set trajectory, as was the case in the neighboring Arab countries, governed by military or religious rule. By presenting Janine Rubeiz and her cultural endeavor of Dar El Fan, this chapter argues that the individualism of these endeavors, though it indeed fostered a ripe culture for artistic and cultural production, was by no means apolitical. In this chapter, we see the overt political gestures, affiliations, and audience that characterized the cultural program of Dar El Fan, from its initiation to its eventual metamorphosis into the current Galerie Janine Rubeiz.

Who is Janine Rubeiz?

Janine Rubeiz was an ambitious, highly educated woman, raised in a well-to-do Christian Orthodox family from Achrafieh, Beirut. She studied architecture and set design and worked extensively in theater⁴⁷, within the framework of the “Baalbeck International Festival”, which she joined in 1962. Initially, Janine wanted to create an art gallery in Beirut. However, as a member of the Council of Arab Theater, she made a detailed study for a plan to expand the modern acting institute and turn it into a center for theatrical knowledge. Her project eventually included creating a compound dedicated to the theater arts, within the festival. The proposal was presented to the Ministry of Education and set to be executed as part of the Lebanese University.

⁴⁷ Her first encounter with theater arts begun with her trip to Morocco accompanying the “Modern Theater” group in 1961, serving as their moral, emotional, and communication support. She found herself intrigued and in a position of power recitatives further learning travel to Strasbourg Institute to study theater set design.

Years later, however, Janine's disdain for the government's dealings with the theatrical arts led her to refine her initial ideas into *Dar El Fan Wal Adab* or *House of Arts and Culture*. Leila Osseiran, Lebanese novelist and political scientist, credits Janine's leftist tendencies to her awakening regarding the sense of class differences in society. Prewar Beirut society witnessed an unprecedented opulence and spending, far from any desire to initiate cultural dialogue between the government and creatives.⁴⁸ Janine mocked the state of affairs, arguing that the price tag on one of these opulent events for the upper class was enough to initiate a cultural foundation.⁴⁹

In 1967, she single-handedly established the first local cultural center in the Arab world to integrate a totalistic view of culture that serves as a meeting point of poetry, theater, music, art, and political debates. Though she was not a writer, Janine left behind a plethora of complete texts that give insight into her vision for the institution, Lebanon, and the Arab World more broadly. She was not an artist, but the exhibitions she offered provided several mirrors reflecting the soul of Lebanon and the region.

Socialist Tendencies

Though she came from a bourgeois family, she was introduced to Marxism by her father, Dr. Rubeiz, one of the first Arabists. She took an interest in French literature, clear tendency towards Marxist theory, and interest in the revolutions and liberation movements occurring worldwide in the 1960's. She tore all existing frames in search of

⁴⁸ Leila Osseiran, "لحرية... ماذا بقي من الحلم الكبير؟" (Freedom...What Remains of the Big Dream?), in Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p. 10.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

the truth and her search directed her towards the socialist party, before the war.⁵⁰ In the Socialist Progressive Party, she found room for her ambitions.⁵¹ She was not just a cultural activist, but a political activist as well. Her plans were supported by the founder of the Socialist Progressive Party and prominent politician in the 1960s, Kamal Joumlatt, who showed a consistent eagerness to use his power as minister to pass budgets for festivals and other cultural endeavors. She eventually earned the title of the Vice President of the Socialist Progressive Party in Lebanon in 1977.⁵²

⁵⁰Elias Khoury. "إمرأة تحيا" (A Woman Lives) in Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p.12.

⁵¹Amal Dibo. "المرأة انسان وشريك كامل: قضية جانين ربيز" (A Woman is a Human and Complete Partner: The Cause of Janine Rubeiz) in Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p. 25-39.

⁵² Souad Najjar. "الإصرار على تجسيد الحلم" (Insistence on Embodying the Dream) in Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p. 40.



Fig. 13: Janine Rubeiz's Appointment as Commissioner for Women's Affairs in the Progressive Socialist Party. Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p. 32.

The Democracy of Culture

"نحن اللبنانيين العرب، بعد قرون من الإنحطاط، وبعدها تحولت ثقافتنا إلى ترف وتحول فنن إلى لهو مقصور على الأمراء، علينا أن نوفر لجميع المواطنين حق الثقافة"⁵³

"We, the Lebanese Arabs, after centuries of degeneration, and after our culture has been turned into luxury and our art into entertainment reserved for royalty, we have to make the right to culture available to all citizens."

⁵³ Dar El Fan 1977. "إقتراحات من أجل سياسة ثقافية" (Recommendations for a Cultural Policy), in Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p. 17.

Her humanist leaning towards the impoverished or secluded factions of society, amplified by her upbringing in a traditional Orthodox Christian community, put her face to face with the struggle of women in Eastern societies.⁵⁴ Janine found it necessary to organize an independence coalition within political parties to encourage women's liberation. The liberation and socio-economic, cultural and political participation of Lebanese women is the best indicator of democracy in the country. Whether the proposal was socialist or progressive or democratic, the considerable participation of women presented, according to Janine, the necessary coup against the decay, monotony, and injustice hindering the rejuvenation of the country. She developed several proposals for the initiation of new ministries, such as a Ministry for Women's Affairs, and a Ministry of Culture that is independent of the Ministry of Education.⁵⁵

Phase 1: Dar El Fan Wal Adab

“Dar El fan was a typical old Lebanese house. She [Janine] was insisting on that. An old house with a garden, and with a small restaurant in the garden...She wanted something typical Lebanese, she finally found an old Lebanese house. It used to be owned by Antoine Tabet. He was a communist person. She was pro the left wing.”⁵⁶

In 1967, Janine was already on the lookout for a space for Dar El Fan and her sights landed on this abandoned house on Bechara El Khoury Street. When Janine introduced the concept of the establishment of “Dar El Fan” to the owners of the house, the family of the

⁵⁴ Amal Dibo. “المرأة انسان وشريك كامل: قضية جانين ربيز” (A Woman is a Human and Complete Partner: The Cause of Janine Rubeiz) in Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p. 25-39.

⁵⁵ Dar El Fan 1977. “إقتراحات من أجل سياسة ثقافية” (Recommendations for a Cultural Policy), in Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p. 14-17.

⁵⁶Nadine Bekdache, interview by the author, Beirut, July 4, 2019.

late architect Antoine Tabet, they were thrilled to forgo renting the space and allow for the initiation of a center for cultural and artistic events.



Fig. 14. Jad Tabet's Sketch of Dar El Fan (from memory).

Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p.7

Jad Tabet, architect and current president of the Order of Engineers and Architects in Beirut, lived in the space of before it was donated by his family to Dar El Fan.⁵⁷ He provided descriptions and a sketch⁵⁸ of the traditional Beiruti house constructed in the mid-19th century. The house lay amidst a spacious orchard overlooking Beirut's city

⁵⁷ Jad Tabet. "دار الفن بيتي" (Dar El Fan, My Home) in Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p.7

⁵⁸ There is no image of Dar El Fan's exterior. This lack of images is due to the fact that photographers were specifically hired to document only the most important events, usually for a large sum of money. Consequently, Galerie Janine Rubeiz was only able to provide me with a few images of an exhibition of Chafic Abboud and one of Huguette Caland in an art showroom. Newspapers presented the bulk of images at the time, but it was not possible to request them. (Nadine Bekdache, interview by the author, Beirut, July 4, 2019.)

center. The urban expansion of Beirut quickly extended to the area, where orchards made way for dense infrastructural and urban developments. Abdel Baset Fakhoury Street was paved along the main façade of the house, leaving a narrow passage with a few steps into leading into the main space of the house overlooking the street, and a little garden in the backyard. A high stone wall separated the garden from the rest of the neighborhood enclave, composed of houses arranged one next to the other around tight passages and interstitial green spaces, connecting to Basta and Ras El Nabaa neighborhoods from either side.

"يتجلى البعد المعماري في شخصيتها من اختيارها مبنى دار الفن كمحيط وموقع ونقطة تلاق بين
59 مختلف أقسام المدينة، وكفسحة وطراز هندسي لبناني محض هذا إختيار معماري."

"The architectural dimension of her personality manifests itself in the choice of the building of Dar El, as a perimeter, location, and point of contact between different the parts of the city, an arena and traditional Lebanese architectural style. This is an architectural choice."

The house, set on the intersection between Abdel Baset Fakhoury Street between Al-Nasira (Nazareth) and Khandaq Al Ghami', was affected by the 1958 revolution, which permanently altered the face of this seemingly stable neighborhood. It lay on the demarcation line between the general security forces, stationed in Asseily building, east of the garden and the barricades of the popular resistance in the inner neighborhoods. The revolution lasted a few months, but the stability of the neighborhood was further

⁵⁹ Khalida Said. "جانين ربيز في الذاكرة المسرحية" (Janine Rubeiz in the Theatrical Memory). A conversation with Wassek Adib in *Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel*, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p.52.

shaken by the implementation of large infrastructural projects, such as Bechara El Khoury highway and Independence Street, initiated by the new Chehabi government⁶⁰ that the saw the destruction of major portions of its urban fabric.

The new functions pertinent to Dar el Fan were accommodated within the house's walls, without much physical alteration. The middle "dar" or main living space, became a hall for lectures, exhibitions, and theatrical performances. The bedrooms were transformed into a cafeteria, a library, and a small music room. The interior contained simple, natural wooden furniture, light and clear, different from the heavy and somber furniture of the time, giving a new and unique ambiance.⁶¹



Fig. 15. Dar El Fan's Inclusive Program: Children's Painting Exhibition in Dar El Fan's Garden. Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p.138

Fig.16. Dar El Fan's Library. Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p.75

⁶⁰President of the Lebanese Republic: Fouad Abdullah Chehab (1958-1964)

⁶¹ Jacqueline Massabki. "La Maison Voisine!" (The Neighboring House) in Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p.9.

Program (Art/ Politics)

The program of Dar el Fan catered to a wide audience with its diverse and avant garde array of conferences, lectures, films, exhibitions, musical concerts, workshops and much more. It often featured the audience and speakers of the leftist movements at the time and discussed matters of pressing socio-political concerns. From 1967-1976, Dar El Fan hosted over 240 conferences, 60 poetry nights, 90 exhibitions, 150 film screenings and 6 theatrical plays. The topics of the built environment, representation and political involvement of women in society, analysis of socio-political events, and experimental artists featured extensively in the program. The following diagrams form a chosen collection of events that is meant to demonstrate Dar El Fan's wide range and appeal. Lecturers and exhibitors included famous architects such as Le Corbusier and Hasan Fathi, artists and art historians such as John Carswell, novelists like Emily Nasrallah, politicians, and artists such as Huguette Caland, Chafic Abboud, Aref Rayess, and Jamil Molaeb who maintained the collaboration with Dar El Fan throughout the war and into the next phases.



Fig. 17. Timeline Showing the Different Phases of Dar El Fan and a Chart of the Some Exhibitions. Created by the author

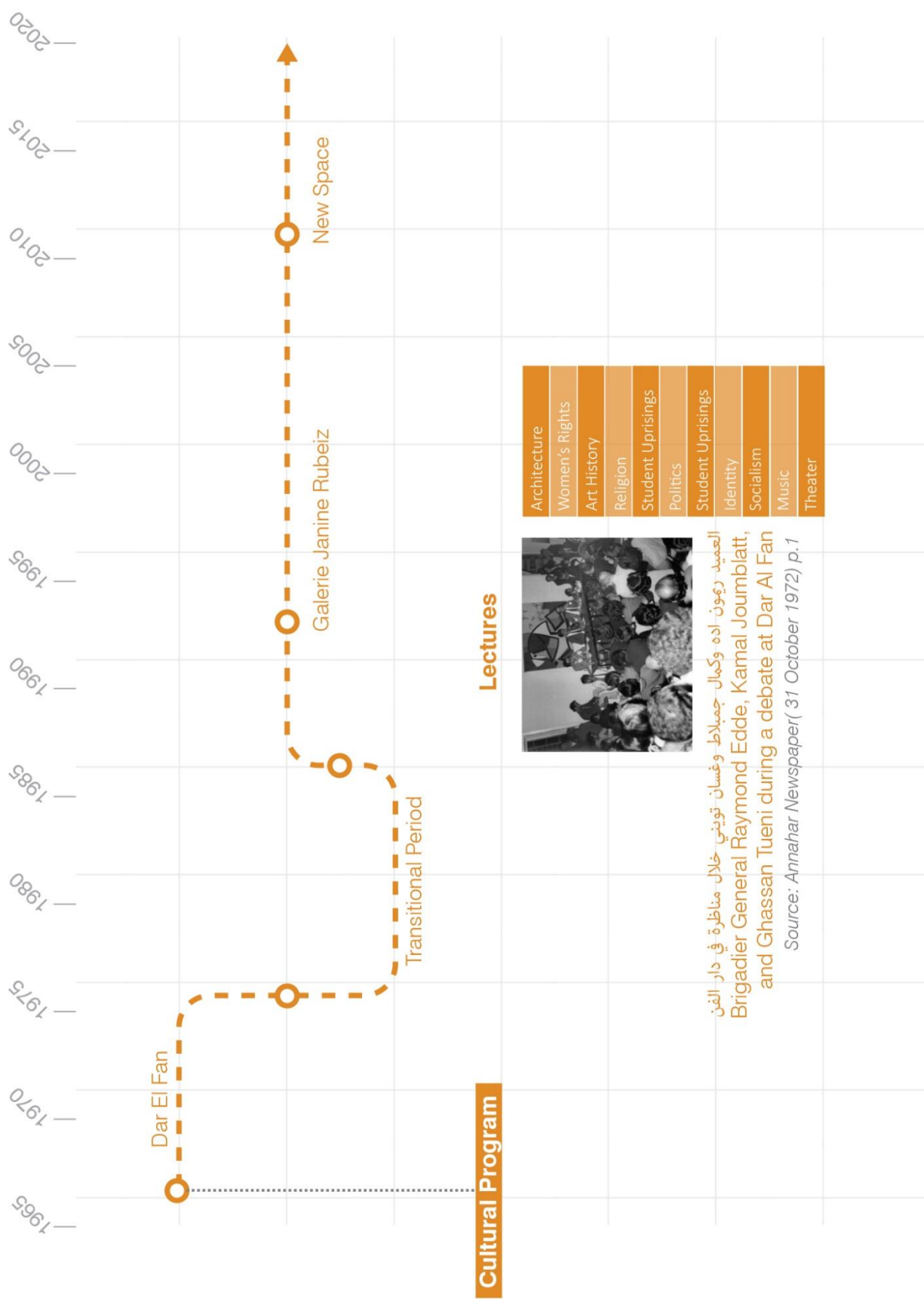


Fig. 18. The Different Topics Addressed in Lectures at Dar El Fan. Created by the author.

1/4/1968	John Carswell (conf. +proj.)	"Western Influence on Islamic Painting during the 20th century"
8/4/1968	Roger Assaf	"Présence du Brecht"
3/2/1969	Jean Démon	"Mariage et Sexualité"
13/3/1969	Shafic Abboud	"Le Propre de l'Art"
19/3/1969	Valentine Fougères	"Les Arts Plastiques au Service de l'Architecture"
30/4/1969	Jean Durtal	"La Femme et son Evolution, de Colette à Simone de Beauvoir"
24/11/1969	Kamal Bekdache and Samir Frangieh	"الإنتفاضة الطلابية"
12/1/1970	Royce Hanson	"Urban Crisis"
19/1/1970	Laure Moghaizel	"Des Femmes et des Mythes"
6/4/1970	Khalida Said and Abdallah Zakhia	"النساء والمرأة"
27/4/1970	Imam Moussa Sadr	"المرأة العربية ومعركة التحرير"
1/5/1970	Kamal Joumbliatt	"Les Travailleurs et les Artists" (Fête des Travailleurs)
26/10/1970	Claude Bourdet	"Culture et Actions Révolutionnaires"
23/11/1970	Youssef Sayegh	"المدلول الإقتصادي والتحرر الاجتماعي"
15/2/1971	Halim Barakat	"تطور الدراسات العربية في إسرائيل"
22/2/1971	Samir Jabbour (Institute for Palestine Studies)	"Idéologies Autochtones et Européocentrisme"
1/3/1971	François Châtelet	"Création et Révolution"
7/6/1971	Etel Adnan	"هل من فلسفة تريبية عربية؟"
8/11/1971	Abdallah Abdel Dayem	"New Julfa: The Armenian Community in the 17th Century"
15/12/1971	John Carswell	"Contemporanéité de l'Architecture Arabe Moderne"
10/1/1972	Hasan Fathi	"الأحزاب والمرأة"
20/3/1972	Nakhle Motran	"المؤسسات الديمقراطية في لبنان"
31/10/1972	Kamal Joumbliatt, Raymond Eddé, and Ghassan Toueini	"المنبر مفتوح أمام طلاب الجامعات"
27/11/1972	Students of the Lebanese University, Arab University, Saint Joseph University, and Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts	"الموسيقى الشرقية"
11/1/1973- 8/2/1973	Toufic Basha, Salim Khoury, Mounir Bashir, and Walid Gholmieh (series)	"سلسلة من 7 محاضرات: الإقسام اللبناني"
6/11/1973	Kamal Joumbliatt, Kamal Saliby, Bishop George Khodr (series)	"إنعكاس المراحل المتجددة في القضية الفلسطينية على أوضاع لبنان"
5/2/1974	Shafic El Hout and Zouheir Mohsen	"ندوة حول: قضية المرأة اللبنانية وأفق تحررها"
7/5/1974-28/5/1974	Janine Rubeiz, Laure Moghaizel, Khalida Said, Emily Nasrallah, Linda Matar...(series)	Série de 4 Conférences sur l'Habitat
4/2/1975	Hasan Fathi, Samir Khalaf, Khalil Khoury, Assem Salam, Wassek Adib...(series)	"سلسلة من 7 محاضرات حول: التبول والتحديات المطروحة على الإنسان العربي"
12/11/1974- 21/1/1975	Youssef Sayegh, George Corm, Pierre Eddé, Hisham Bsar, and Bishop George Khodr...(series)	أسبوع المرأة الدولي بالإشتراك مع جريدة "النهار"
19/5/1975- 24/5/1975	Houda Badran, Emily Nasrallah, Svetlana Daskalova, Linda Matar...(series)	

Fig. 19. A Selection of Lectures and Conferences of Dar El Fan Showing the Broad Range of the Institution

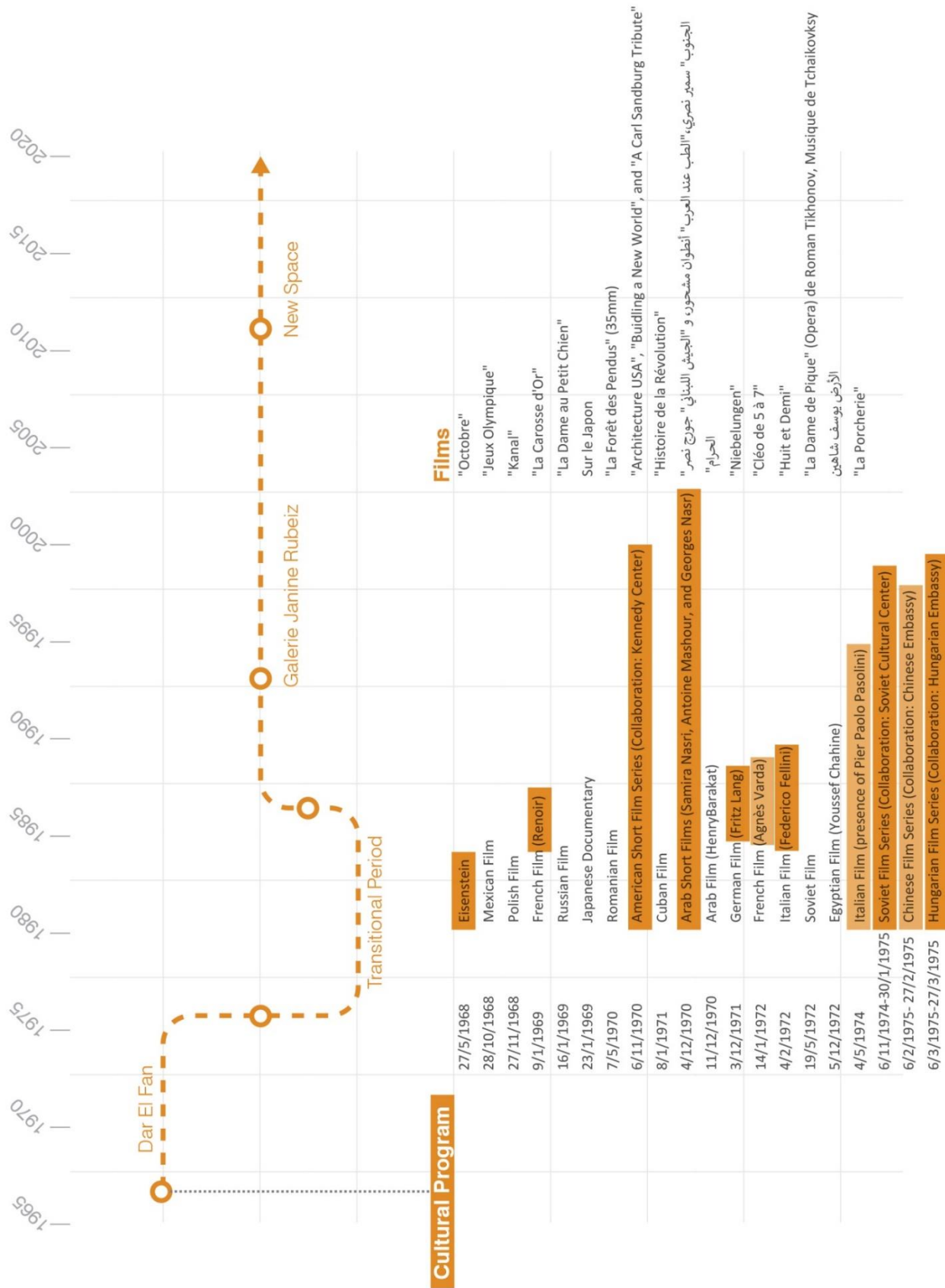


Fig. 20. A Selection of Films Screened at Dar El Fan Showing the Broad Range of the Institution

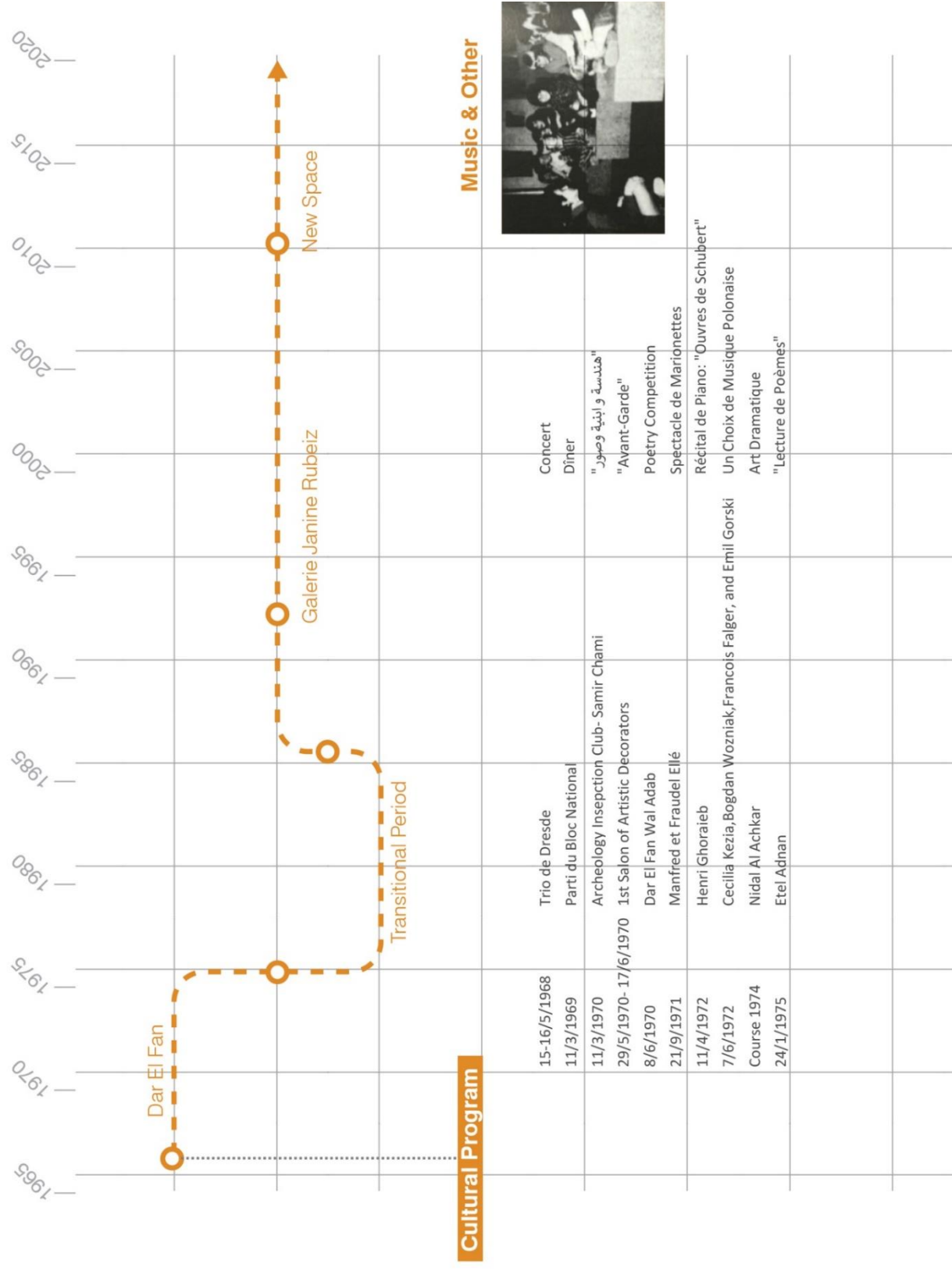


Fig. 21. A Selection of Music and Other Events at Dar El Fan

Phase 2: Transitional Period

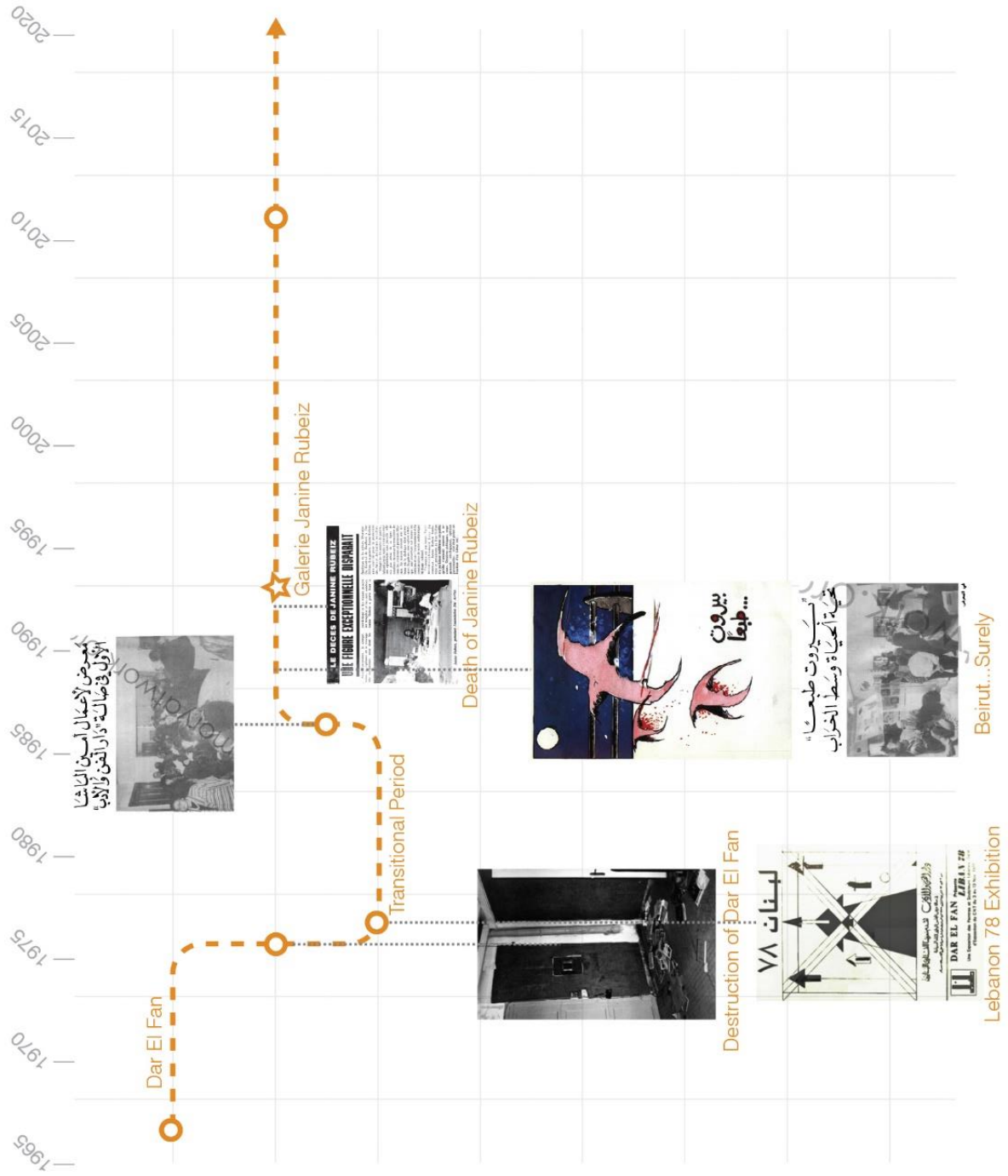


Fig. 22. Timeline Showing the Transitional Period of Dar El Fan. Created by the author.

Destruction of Dar El Fan

“All these we could not save in the war, militias came into the center and damaged, burned and ruined all the documents. What Janine was able to save and take out was very little compared to the volume of work, it was a real institution, a real center, with sculpture, poetry, cinema films, politics and other issues.”⁶²

The “declared” Lebanese civil war, as Said terms it, witnessed the dissolution of several time-honored and newly-born cultural institutions, from “Baalbak international Festival” and theatre, to the conferences of Dar Al Nadwa, the circle of the Lebanese School of Theater, the theater program at the Lebanese University, and Dar Al Fan Wal Adab. She recalls the struggle of the directors of these cultural institutions, who similarly to Janine Rubeiz, kept culture alive in an effort to avoid stagnation and the “lag” of societal values. During the war, they worked adamantly and resiliently to revive culture, link communities, motivate artists and their audience, and organize events in a fickle and life threatening environment.⁶³



Fig. 23. Annahar. 1976. “نهب محتويات دار الفن والأدب” (Loot the contents of Dar El Fan), Annahar, February 5, 1976

⁶² Nadine Bekdache, interview by the author, Beirut, July 4, 2019.

⁶³ Khalida Said. 2012. *يوتوبيا المدينة المثقفة (Utopia Al Madina Al Muthaqqafa)*. Beirut: Dar El Saqi. p. 181-201.

In an interview with Karim Bekdache,⁶⁴ son of Nadine Bekdache and architect of the new space for the Galerie Janine Rubeiz's, we discussed how the war turned most cultural institutions in Lebanon into “refugees”. He gives the examples of Dar El Fan that organized exhibitions and programs in commercial spaces such as the Carlton Hotel (designed by Karol Schayer in the 1950s), and the spaces of other institutions such as Dar Al Nadwa in Hamra Street, and the Ministry of Tourism’s Glass Hall (designed by Assem Salam), in modernist buildings as opposed to the traditional Lebanese house of Dar El Fan. He expressed the contrast between the avant-garde exhibitions, conferences, discussions, and theatrical performances that revolutionized the culture of Beirut before the war, and the traditional Lebanese architecture housing the institution.

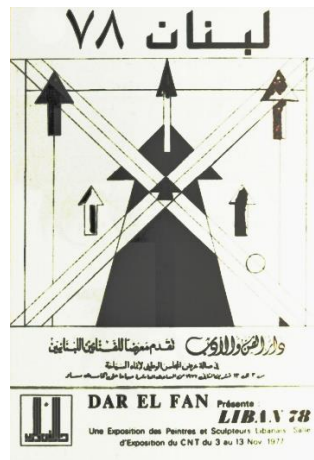


Fig. 24. Exhibition Poster of the Exhibition Lebanon 78. *Janine Rubeiz Et Dar El Fan: Regard Vers Un Patrimoine Culturel*, (Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2003), p. 81.

In 1977, Rubeiz organized the exhibition Lebanon 78 and released a “Proposal for a Cultural Policy” that, according to Sarah Rogers, “marked the end of an era, and the

⁶⁴ Karim Bekdache, interview by the author, Beirut, July 10, 2019.

beginning of another one".⁶⁵ When most of the art and cultural spaces in the city had closed down, Rubeiz provided artists with a sense of purpose and a space to exhibit their art.

From Dar El Fan (House of Art) to Her Dar (House)

"War was stressful. It was a survival game [...] especially that we were promoting art at a time when people are not thinking of art. This is an achievement by itself."⁶⁶

In an effort to adapt temporarily to the civil war conditions and the lack of mobility between East and West Beirut, Janine Rubeiz transformed half of her own apartment in Raouche into an art gallery, not expecting that this would last for long. Although Raouche was one of the main luxurious, modern hotspots of Ras Beirut, where café's and hotels flourished, the current primacy of Raouche is debatable. Raouche was the lavish cornice of Beirut, filled with café's, hotels, and beach views that featured regularly in postcards and films, and characterized Beirut's prewar touristic image. It had been attracting high income populations since 1952.⁶⁷ The evolution of the city of Beirut, during the war and after, diminished Raouche's past splendor, despite its proximity to the city center and suburbs.

⁶⁵ Sarah Rogers. 2018. "Galleries and Cultural Centers in 1960s Beirut, a Brief History." *Perspective #1. Saradar Collection*. <http://saradarperspective.com/perspective1/essays>

⁶⁶ Nadine Bekdache, interview by the author, Beirut, July 4, 2019.

⁶⁷ Samir Khalaf and Per Kongstad. 1973. *Hamra of Beirut: A Case of Rapid Urbanization*. Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill. p.25



Fig. 25. Typical Postcard View of Raouche in the 1960's, Lined with New Modernist Buildings. Old Beirut. <https://oldbeirut.com/?og=1>.



Fig. 26. The Nadim Majdalani building (right) and the Shams Building by Architect Joseph Philippe Karam (left) facing the sea. Old Beirut. <https://oldbeirut.com/?og=1>.

Rubeiz's home in Raouche was turned into a gallery space, with a living room, three exhibition spaces open to one another, and a glass balcony to maintain the sea view.⁶⁸ Initially, the apartment contained furniture, but it was later emptied and the windows closed with boards. "It was a proper gallery," says Nadine Bekdache, as she recalls the transformation of the space. Only minor changes were implemented while she was still alive. Upon her death, the apartment was gradually modified and completely transformed into a gallery. Karim Bekdache, at the time, augmented the wall area, removed furniture, and installed new lighting. The space was now ready to host more serious exhibitions under its new name, the Galerie Janine Rubeiz.



*Fig. 27. Interior Space of the Janine Rubeiz's Former Home Turned Gallery.
Courtesy of Galerie Janine Rubeiz.*

Nadim Majdalani (Building and Architect)

⁶⁸ Nadine Bekdache, interview by the author, Beirut, July 4, 2019.

Artistic practices were quite a common endeavor in Janine’s family. Both Nadim Majdalani, her husband for a while, and she herself studied architecture. Nadim Majdalani was a modernist architect, notable for building several structures in the modernist style in Beirut in the 1950s. He is famous for his involvement with the iconic French designer Jean Royere, whom he convinced to settle in Beirut in 1947. The pair established Galerie L’Atelier on Avenue Sleiman Boustany, where the works of Royere were permanently exhibited. The two also won several commissions to design major interior design projects, and the Beirut office became an outpost for the work of Royere in the Middle East, till 1955.⁶⁹

Janine’s Dying Wish: Take Care of Beirut

“In 1991 she organized a very large exhibition and called it ‘Beirut Tabaan’ [Beirut Definitely], because for her, Lebanon and Beirut is very important...It was her testament [signature]. Her message: Take care of Beirut.”⁷⁰



⁶⁹ Selections Arts. 2017. “The Genius of Jean Royère,” June 16, 2017. <https://selectionsarts.com/design/the-genius-of-jean-royere/>.

⁷⁰ Nadine Bekdache, interview by the author, Beirut, July 4, 2019.

Fig. 28. Poster of Beirut Taba'an Exhibition in 1989

*Annahar. 1989. "إعلان حول نشاط لدار الفن والأدب" (Announcement about the activity of Dar El Fan Wal Adab)
Annahar. October 27, 1989.*

Phase 3: From Cultural Center to Art Gallery

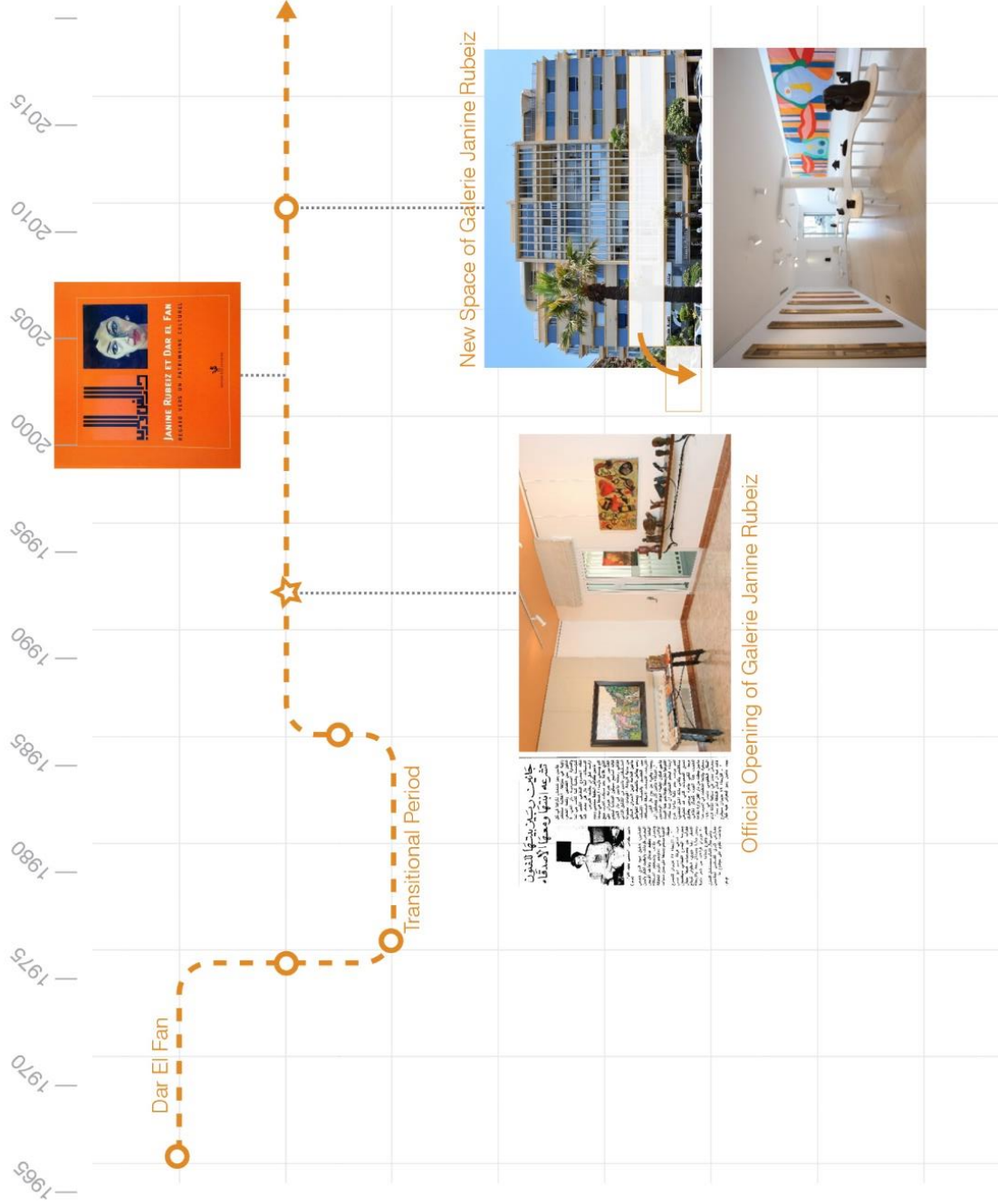


Fig. 29. Timeline Showing the Transitional Phase of Dar El Fan from Janine Rubeiz's Home to the New Art Space. Created by the author

Who is Nadine Bekdache?

Gallerist Nadine Majdalani Bekdache, who worked alongside her mother Janine Rubeiz, in the management of Dar El Fan since 1982, accrued tremendous experience in the nurturing of local artistic talent and means of distribution of predominantly Lebanese and Arab art, on the local and international scales. Bekdache first opened “Galerie Janine Rubeiz” in 1993 as an homage to her mother, upon her death at the end of the Lebanese Civil War. The gallery was launched in the same apartment used throughout the war that accommodated a gallery in half of its space. Bekdache is very connected to Raouche and this building in particular. She has fond memories in it, even during wartime, but the connection to the city and more specifically her “attachment” to the sea, grounds her in Raouche: “Everybody moved away, everybody bought houses in the eastern side, everybody moved up the mountains, many said be careful as a Christian...However, we never faced such risks in our life. I will never go out, neither outside Lebanon, nor outside Raouche.”⁷¹

When asked about how the perception of the institution changed when it moved from being Dar El Fan to an art gallery, Bekdache responded: “Yes before that it was ‘Dar El Fan’, and Janine used to invite from her home, for exhibitions, in her own name. The name was already in the market, but not as an institution ‘Galerie Janine Rubeiz’...The complete vision has changed. I cannot repeat Dar El Fan Things have changed now, we cannot discuss the same things, or ask difficult questions, and there is an increasing difficulty in speaking freely.” Bekdache spoke about the decline in the quality of political

⁷¹ Nadine Bekdache, interview by the author, Beirut, July 4, 2019.

discussion and the amnesia that swept the people. As such, the gallery focused on art as a means to deal with the country's difficult political situation. Bekdache lends to art the agency to tell the story of a nation and get people through struggle.⁷²

However, some characteristics are maintained between the two institutions, Dar El Fan and Galerie Janine Rubeiz. The relationship between them is apparent in the spillover of artists who exhibited in both institutions over time.

“All the big names, the artists all of them had exhibitions in Dar El Fan in the late 1960s and 1970s, such as Chafic Abboud, I know him very well since I was very young, Yvette Ashkar, all these big names, they all worked with Janine in the 1970s and collaborated with Dar El Fan and became friends, remained friends and worked with me.”

Bekdache stresses the importance of seeing the development of the artists' works over time by simultaneously educating the public on their artistic journey and building their audience. She emphasizes longevity and “nurturing” artists. Over the years, Bekdache lengthened the time that an exhibition is on display at the gallery. In that way, people take the time to appreciate the effort and value behind the artworks and their curation, instead of organizing an exhibition each month and risking becoming a commercial gallery. Bekdache prefers to work with artists “on long-term basis, not on short term, not on a deal-basis, and not on a commercial level.”⁷³

⁷² “At least with art, you struggle with art, you survive with art, and finally the country will survive with you, with art and creation. What better is there that culture, art, and books to talk about one's nation?” *ibid.*

⁷³ Nadine Bekdache, interview by the author, Beirut, July 4, 2019.

Phase 4: Current Space (2011- to date)

The Renovation Project

Bekdache pooled Majdalani, his grandfather and architect of the building, with the modernist architects of the 50s and 60s, such as Karol Schayer, Wassek Adib, Pierre Nehme, and Joseph Philip Karam, who were building in Beirut, in the modernist international style. They created the postcard image of Beirut as a modern, cosmopolitan city. Bekdache, who renovated the whole building more than fifteen years ago, discusses the challenging task of repairing the façade, by carefully patching the blue mosaics, piece by piece. The upper floors were also renovated; aluminum rods and balustrade, faithful to the original design, were installed. Air conditioning units were removed and efforts were made to try to unify the look the building, keep the original material colors, in order to retain its original design.

As Lebanon began showing signs of improvement after the end of the civil war, there was no more room to redesign the gallery on the residential second floor of the building in Raouche. In 2010, a wonderful opportunity to re-use the former Scotch Club, a resto-pub on the ground floor of the same building owned by the family, presented an optimal solution for the difficult accessibility to the residential apartment flat. Nadine's son, Karim Bekdache, an architect who has worked on several exhibition design strategies in a range of museums including the Sursock Museum, was tasked with transforming the former Scotch club, a resto-pub, into the current gallery space.

The extension of the Scotch Club, made of wood, steel, and a ceiling of asbestos, was added in the 1960s as a temporary structure. As such, it was difficult to obtain a permit to redesign the space given the legal and structural constraints. While fitting the

specifications of an art gallery in this space, Bekdache implemented a lightweight steel structure and used the existing wall so as not to add more footprint. To increase ceiling height, the gallery was excavated 60 cm downwards, to reach the exact level of the foundation.

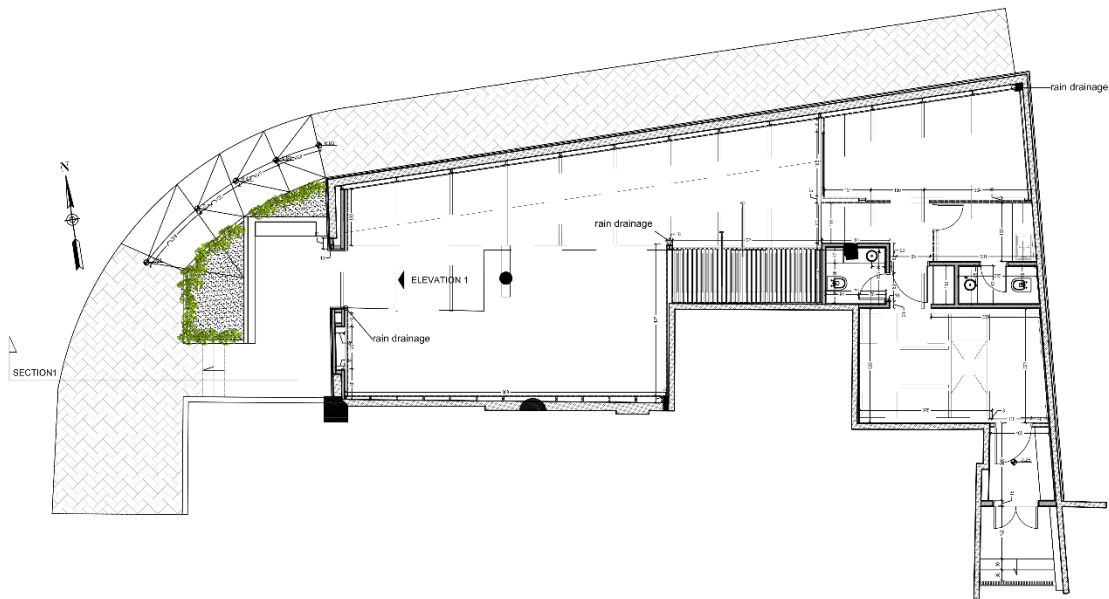


Fig. 30. Plan of the New Space of Galerie Janine Rubeiz. Courtesy of Karim Bekdache Architects.

The new drop in level created a split-level at the entrance of the sidewalk. To homogenize the cladding of the corner gallery and the bulkiness of a wall clad with tiles, Bekdache opted for the classical material used profusely by modernist architects, travertine. He did not want to emulate the mosaic that is the signature of the Nadim Majdalani building and can be seen in many of the buildings he designed in Ras Beirut (i.e., the Cortas Building). He wanted to create this extension with the same material from the period during which it was constructed, cladded in a modern way. In this way, the extension is attached to the building, but distinctly different. In the external cladding, Bekdache was happy to assume the constraint of the existing blind wall. In the interview,

he makes reference to Bijenkorf, the commercial center in Rotterdam designed by Marcel Breuer. He was fascinated by the pattern of the facade's hexagonal marble pieces, saw-cut in different directions, and applied it to the gallery's exterior walls to create continuity in the envelope and blur the corner condition.⁷⁴

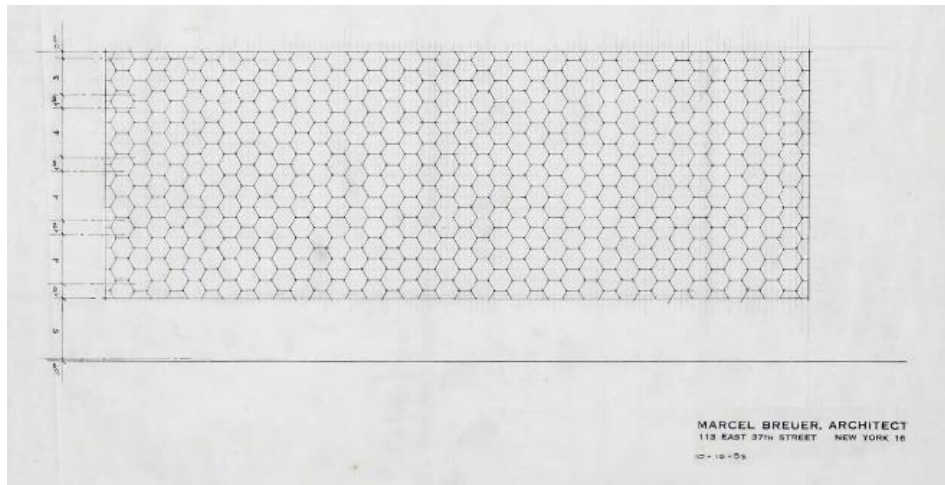


Fig. 31. Design study of the facade with honeycomb structure, October 1953. Marcel Breuer Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries. Retrieved from "Bijenkorf Department Store." <https://wederopbouwrotterdam.nl/en/articles/bijenkorf-department-store>.



Fig.32. Hexagonal Travertine Exterior Cladding of Galerie Janine Rubeiz. Image taken by the author.

⁷⁴ Karim Bekdache, interview by the author, Beirut, July 10, 2019.

Internally, blind walls were added to hang paintings, but there were no windows available, only artificial light, which allowed for the introduction of skylights using the steel grid, while still being invisible to passersby. PS lab, a local (a point which Bekdache stressed) lighting design firm, designed the lighting for the gallery. They created provisions to clips projectors onto the steel structure. This created flexibility for lighting and walls and the ability to conceal (more or less with a special cap) or reveal lighting fixtures overhead. The exhibition space and service areas (offices, restrooms and storage) were differentiated in treatment; the service area was darker in tone, required false ceiling provisions, and donned a false skylight. In the design, storage presented another challenge, and an interesting painting rack was incorporated in the small, but “adequate” gallery space. However, it was not enough to accommodate all the artworks, so the former gallery on the second floor is still being used as a storage area and permanent exhibition space for interested buyers.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Karim Bekdache, interview by the author, Beirut, July 10, 2019.



*Fig. 33. Huguette Caland's Bronzes Exhibition in 2015
Courtesy of Galerie Janine Rubeiz*

The architect himself is interested in Lebanese art and artists. He has done a lot of scenography work, curating and setting up exhibitions at both, the Sursock Museum and the Beirut Exhibition Center. His vision for g J R's new space was not meant to be a strong exhibition gesture. He claims that "space made to exhibit art should be a neutral space". Especially in the case of Galerie Janine Rubeiz, an entity that has historical roots and is attached building of equal sentimental and historical value. With Dar El Fan's legacy of showing avant-garde and provocative artists nobody else at the time, this Gallery is not here to impress a new generation of artists and collectors but rather to present a simple, non-pretentious modern art gallery, rooted in the history and the avant-garde culture of Beirut. In line with this philosophy, not much was done in terms of marketing, which translates well the idea that one may pass by the gallery, not notice it and that's okay. All the different iterations of Dar El Fan from 1987 to the new space of Galerie Janine Rubeiz

are set in the same modernist building, but the aesthetics of the interior changed over time. The upper space is still used as a storage for artworks.

Galerie Janine Rubeiz currently stands alone as a gallery in Raouche. It succeeds on many accounts, but faces some trouble in attracting people, especially those in Achrafieh (formerly in East Beirut), who still regard Raouche as a “far” location. The change in geographic perception after the war has impacted the business of the gallery. The Bekdaches (Karim and Nadine) exhibit a sentimentality towards the neighborhood and the building, tight family bonds, and a belonging to Ras Beirut. Their link to Dar El Fan, one of the leading cultural institutions of prewar Ras Beirut, has led to a specific outlook very much rooted in reviving the “modern” Raouche that their family knows all too well and enjoyed recognition from.

Chapter 4: Saleh Barakat Gallery

“هل من الممكن إعادة ربط أوصال المدينة ببعضها البعض على النحو الذي كانت عليه سابقا؟ نعم. ولكن كيف؟ لا زلت أبحث عن وسيلة لتحفيز ذلك، ثمّة فوران ثقافي في كل زاوية من بيروت، لا بل في كل منطقة من لبنان، ليس كل مُبتذل يصرخ في وجهنا اليوم هو كل ما في بيروت الآن... هناك الكثير من التجارب الفنية والفكرية تختبئ في شرانقها أو تكاد تخرج أجنحتها إلى ضوء الشمس، العزلة والسأم وهموم الحاضر المتراكمة تجعل الأمر يتطلب مبادرات فردية وجهدا بطوليا”⁷⁶

“Is it possible to reconnect the city to each other as it was before? Yes. But how? I am still looking for a way to stimulate it, there is a cultural upheaval in every corner of Beirut, not even in every region of Lebanon, not every vulgarity screaming in our face today is all that is in Beirut now ... There are a lot of experimental and intellectual experiences hiding in its cocoons or about to come out with its wings into the sunlight, the isolation and the boredom, and the accumulated concerns of the present require individual initiatives and heroic efforts.”

Who is Saleh Barakat?

He is an art dealer and collector of Lebanese and Arab art, with considerable experience in the historiography of art in the region, and a passion to promote it locally and internationally. He is also considered an authority in contemporary Lebanese and Arab art, due to his expertise and long-standing involvement with the first gallery he opened in 1991, the Agial Art Gallery in Ras Beirut. Conveniently named “Agial,” meaning generations, this gallery shows a broad spectrum of art dedicated to modern and contemporary art from Lebanon and the Arab world. The collection presents a historical survey of Middle Eastern art that has been accumulated over 25 years.

⁷⁶Alarawi, Mimosa. 2017. “وضاح فارس يستعيد بيروت البيضاء فوتوغرافيا.” (Waddah Faris Retrieves the White Beirut Photographically), Al-Arab Newspaper, June 2, 2017. <https://alarab.co.uk/>.

Barakat is a reputed curator who participates in art-fairs, off-site projects and also publications. He has worked on numerous curatorial projects such as Ateliers Arabes, the 9th Francophonie Summit Art Exhibition (2002), the Lebanese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2007), “The Road to Peace” exhibition at the Beirut Art Center (2009), and the jointly-curated Shafic Abboud Exhibition at the Beirut Exhibition Center with Nadine Begdache, the gallerist of Galerie Janine Rubeiz (2012). Twenty-five years after establishing Agial, Saleh Barakat opened the Saleh Barakat Gallery in 2015. Though the role of Lebanon as a prime art market dwindled after the war and the rise of the Dubai art market, Barakat believes that Lebanon is still an incubator for art, with its constant fluxes in artists, artistic initiatives, and spaces for their dissemination.⁷⁷

Barakat attributes the need for a new space to several reasons. Although he views Agial’s size as appropriate for a city like Beirut, Agial’s space has low ceilings and is too small to host retrospectives for his artists, such as Saloua Raouda Choucair, Chafic Abboud and Michel Basbous, who have become more established over the years. Barakat resorted to exhibiting in the Beirut Art Center and the Beirut Exhibition Center⁷⁸ (designed by the same architects who designed the Saleh Barakat Gallery, LEFT Architects). However, the Beirut Art Center became more dedicated to conceptual art. The Beirut Exhibition Center, which was part of Solidere’s attempt to inaugurate temporary functions to inject “life” and “culture” into the Beirut City Center, closed down in 2013, leaving Barakat with little space to host these large retrospectives. When the space of the former Masrah Al Madina

⁷⁷ Teodros, Ruwan. 2016. “A Gallerist’s Big Step to Clemenceau.” *The Daily Star*, July 29, 2016.

⁷⁸ Nadine Kanaan. 2016. “صالح بركات: بيروت معقلاً للفن والتعدد.” *Al-Akhbar*. May 21, 2016. https://al-akhbar.com/Culture_People/214079.

and the Cinema Clemenceau was up for sale, Barakat hastened to buy it, not just for its size and location, but also its historical and sentimental background as a cultural site.

"ف«في شهر أيار (مايو) 1991 افتتحت «أجيال»، واليوم في عيدها الـ25، أردت أن أقدم لنفسي هدية مميزة» في فضائه الجديد، سيتبع صالح بركات النهج نفسه، مستكملاً اكتشاف فنانيين جدد والرهان على «الفن اللبناني الحقيقي، مهما كان نوعه، وتسويقه وإظهاره إلى العالم»، مع المحافظة على التاريخ وتكريمه، لأنّ «المستقبل لا يمكن أن يُبنى على أساس إلغاء الماضي».

*"In May 1991, Agial opened and today, on its 25th birthday, I wanted to give myself a special gift" he said. In his new space, Saleh Barakat will follow the same approach, continuing the discovery of new artists and betting on "true Lebanese art, whatever its type, marketing and display to the world", while preserving and honoring history, because "the future cannot be built on the basis of canceling the past."*⁷⁹

History of the Building

Even before the initiation of Cinema Clemenceau, the site was home to another cultural institution, Dar Al Uloom (Home of Science), which operated from 1909-1914 as a university for Muslim studies in Beirut. After traveling to London, its main founders brought the scouting movement to Lebanon and initiated the Ottoman Boy Scouts in 1912, on the same site that later became Cinema Clemenceau,⁸⁰ Masrah al Madina, and now Saleh Barakat Gallery. The site shows the breadth of the coexistence and chronology of the various cultural and educational functions in the area, which contribute to the perception of the neighborhood as a strong cultural realm.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Muslim Scout Association of Lebanon. 2009. " Facebook. نشأت أول حركة كشفية في الوطن العربي كشفية في الوطن. November 1, 2009. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/muslim-scout-association-of-lebanon/>.

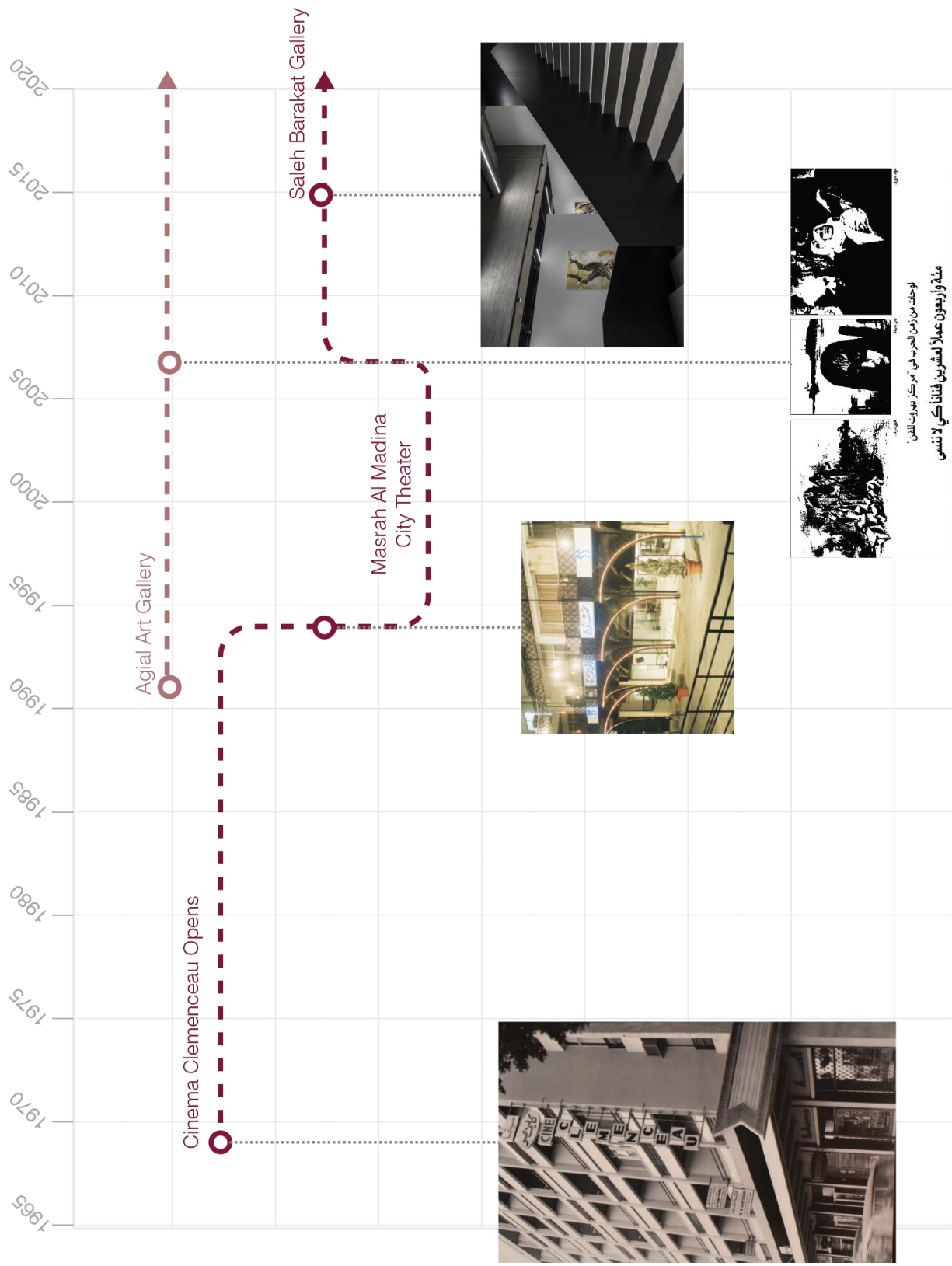


Fig. 34. Timeline Showing the Different Phases of Saleh Barakat Gallery's Building
 Cinema Clemenceau Image. Retrieved from: Imad Kozem.2012. Pure Nostalgia.
 Newspaper Clipping. Retrieved from: Laure Ghorayeb. 2009. لوحات من زمن الحرب في مركز بيروت للفن. 2009. Annahar. 22 June, 2009.

Phase 1: Cinema Clemenceau (1969-1975)

Cinema Clemenceau was established in 1969, by Abdallah Yamani, as the first art house cinema in the Middle East, promoting independent artistic and experimental films.⁸¹ Its program included the likes of Tarkovsky, Fellini, Antonioni, Bergmann and Costa Gavras. The management prided itself with its experimental program that carefully curated a selection of films attracting a specific recurring audience.⁸² Cinema Clemenceau was part and parcel of Hamra's booming prewar cinema culture. It stood on the ground floor and underground space of a modernist apartment block on Clemenceau Street, between AUB and Hamra Street. Historically, the area which is now referred to as Clemenceau builds on the educational and cultural history of the area, with the presence of the American University of Beirut and the French Embassy nearby strengthening its character as a neighborhood for the highly educated elite populations living in Ras Beirut. The modernist apartment block was typical of Hamra's urban character, which moved from the more low-rise suburban villas to the mixed use high-rise modernist apartment blocks in the 1950's and 1960's.

⁸¹ Nathalie Ross. n.d. "Saleh Barakat Gallery." SOBEIRUT. Accessed July 7, 2019. <https://www.sobeirut.com/saleh-barakat-gallery>.

⁸² "اليأسون في كليمنصو يا للقصيدية بيضاء سوداء، جلادون وإهانات من قصي كان متفائلا". (Les Miserables in Clemenceau, What a Black and White Poem, Executioners, and Insults. "Whoever was estranged, was optimistic"), Annahar, 28 January, 1981.

Phase 2: The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990)

During the Lebanese Civil War, Clemenceau, the area within which both Dar El Nimer and Saleh Barakat Gallery are located, became the scene for the fights between the Socialist Progressive Party (headed by Joumblatt) and the Amal Movement (founded by Moussa Al Sadr), both of whom used to interact amicably within the walls of Dar El Fan before the war, giving lectures, talks, and debates. According to George Arbid, founder of the Arab Center for Architecture, Villa Salem was the home of Hussein Al Hussein, ⁸³ who lived on one of the floors and may have owned part of the building for a while. Two buildings away from Dar El Nimer to be specific, lies the Joumblatt neighborhood, crowned by the Joumblatt residence. The area witnessed multiple bombings, assassinations, gunfire, and other forms of violence. Despite the violence and possibly as a result of it, the area was left untouched after the war and retained its urban fabric characterized by suburban villas and general quietness unparalleled in the Ras Beirut area. ⁸⁴

⁸³ Hussein al Hussein was the co-founder of the Amal Movement who refused to fight alongside the Palestinian Liberation Organization during the war, and resigned as soon as Amal entered the Lebanese Civil War.

⁸⁴ Samir Khalaf. 1987. *Lebanon's Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press. p.220.



Fig. 35. A burning car near Clemenceau cinema in Al-Hamra during clashes between the Amal movement and the Progressive Socialist Party in Beirut. Iyad Sami. 1985. سيارة محترقة قرب سينما كليمينسو في الحمراء أثناء الاشتباكات بين حركة أمل والحزب التقدمي الاشتراكي في بيروت" Annahar Newspaper, 25 November 1985.

Phase 3: Masrah Al Madina (1994-2004)



*Fig.36-37. Images of the New Masrah Al Madina Space.
Courtesy of Meguerditch Apogian (architect in charge of the rehabilitation project)*

Masrah Al Madina was part of the alternative art scene that dominated Beirut in the 1990's. The cohort of institutions that encouraged contemporary postwar artistic practices included: Ashkal Alwan (Lebanese Association for the Plastic Arts) initiated in 1995; Theatre de Beyrouth; Ayloul Festival, which ran from 1997 to 2001; and Zico House, which opened in 1993. These collectives reclaimed the cultural spaces and architecture of the city by hosting artistic and theatrical installations and events. Masrah Al Madina was one such organization, initiated by Nidal El Achkar. El Achkar previously gave workshops and lectures in Dar El Fan before the war started and performed the censored play *Hamate* on the Horseshoe's sidewalk in 1969. She set a prime example of a cultural institution that chose a former cultural landmark of Ras Beirut, built in the modernist style, and repurposed it for another cultural function, her theater of the city, Masrah Al Madina.

She acquired the space of Cinema Clemenceau in the early 1990's. It is highly likely that the cinema, like many other cinemas in Ras Beirut during the civil war and during the 2006 July War, opened its doors to people seeking refuge underground, from the violence occurring at the street level. Regardless, the cinema had been operational for a long time and the space direly needed a facelift. In 1994, El Achkar tasked architects Meguerditch Apogian and Pierre Nehme, who worked in the modernist style, with the renovation project. Pierre Nehme's repertoire includes the modernist Electricite du Liban building, among others. The architects changed the programmatic use of the cinema into a new concept theater. The new design accommodated three different stage configurations (central, front and side) and seated approximately three hundred individuals. Despite the clearly modernist repertoire of the architects, the entrance canopy of the new theater was overtly decorative, a wrought iron, non-structural arcade, with Arabesque motifs.⁸⁵ It was common to "revive" the cinema spaces of Hamra through the initiation of different cultural and artistic programs as discussed earlier. It was not just the civil war that has led to the change in function of cinema halls in Beirut. The introduction of new technologies in cinematic production and the proliferation of new cinemas in the malls such as the ABC, Le Mall, and other commercial outlets, have rendered the cinemas of lower capacity, such as the Clemenceau Cinema, unable to compete in the market. Subsequently, many of the cinema spaces, such as the Eldorado cinemas on Hamra Street (Ch.1), were turned into

⁸⁵ Meguerditch Apogian, phone call by the author, Beirut, July 2019.

large underground outlet stores, with exaggerated spatial experiences and a lack of any trace to the space's past splendor.⁸⁶

Masrah Al Madina contributed to the view of this building as a cultural landmark with its diverse, experimental program that instigated and accompanied the development of postwar artistic practices in Beirut by providing a new, fresh space for its dissemination (such as some of the Ayloul Festival's program), especially at a time when the postwar artists were becoming exposed to external funding and marketing opportunities. Masrah Al Madina illustrates the urge to use former cultural spaces and transform them accordingly to accommodate the theater. The space of Cinema Clemenceau was rehabilitated and transformed into Masrah Al Madina, but when the theater's lease was up in 2004, they also relocated to another cinema space in Hamra, the Saroulla Cinema.⁸⁷ This building was also a mixed use, modernist structure that accommodated a cinema in the basement, also accessible from the main Hamra Street. The presence of such cultural institutions and their lifespan are based on both individual efforts and the type of commercial transactions between the landlord, Mr. Boueiri, and cultural organization that allows for a balance between making profit and promoting a sentimental or cultural landmark.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ George Kaadi. 1996. "يا زمان الصالات رجوعاً ألينا" (O Time of the halls: return to us), *Annahar*, December 30, 1996. 1996-12-30. *Annahar*.

⁸⁷ Sanaa Khoury. 2011. "نضال الأشقر: الأمازون تطفى شموعها الخمسين." (Nidal Al Ahkar: The Amazon Extinguishes its Fiftieth Candle). *Al Akhbar*, March 15, 2011. https://al-akhbar.com/Last_Page/84847.

⁸⁸ Columbia GSAPP. 2016. "Rue Hamra, A Case Of Urban Resilience In Beirut, Lebanon." Publication of the architecture workshop led by Ziad Jamaledine and Makram Al Kadi on August 5 - 19, 2016. <https://www.arch.columbia.edu/summer-workshops/2016/beirut>.

Phase 4: Saleh Barakat Gallery



Fig. 38-39. Images of the Building Housing Saleh Barakat Gallery. Images taken by the author.

In an interview, Saleh Barakat reiterated the reasons behind opening a second gallery, 25 years after Agial Art Gallery was launched. The answer was twofold. The first need arose from a lack of spaces to borrow for large retrospectives once the Beirut Exhibition Center was dismantled in 2013. Barakat hosted several exhibitions in the Beirut Exhibition Center and the Beirut Art Center as his artists became more established. He spoke about the trends of art institutions towards extensive branding and the “spectacular”, which he fought extensively in the beginning. He found that the introduction of scenography in contemporary art galleries blurs the boundary between the roles of a museum and a gallery. Barakat asserted, “A museum is a museum [and] a gallery is a gallery”.⁸⁹ To him, a gallery is more resembling of a home, in the sense that only a wall is needed to show what a painting will look like in a home. The white cube space of high ceilings costs large sums of money in upkeep and management. Thus, the artworks become more expensive. To Barakat, this phenomenon attracts a richer clientele and wards off people who may be more interested in art as a “thrill of the heart, rather than an investment.”⁹⁰ The size of

⁸⁹ Saleh Barakat, interview by the author, Beirut, July 9, 2019.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

the space plays an important role in how people view the gallery. He declares his belief that an artwork should be self-sufficient to defend itself out of context. Conceptual art requires the space. Without the space and scenography in contemporary art exhibitions, an element is lost. “Classical” art forms do not depend as much on the spatial qualities of the space. By opening a white cube, Barakat can accommodate contemporary art that requires this type of space, and the more classical art works, the latter of which he favors.

“Classical”

When asked about his role in the beginnings of Ashkal Alwan and the conceptual art scene in Lebanon, Barakat replied that although he is not “into” conceptual art, there was a need to create a kind of cooperative for contemporary art in Beirut. By organizing meetings with friends and artists who were interested in the prospect, Barakat planted the seeds of Ashkal Alwan. He remains committed to this day, and was planning on offering the space of Agial Art Gallery to Ashkal Alwan’s Home Works 8 Forum in October 2019,⁹¹ which was postponed as a result of the ongoing revolution.⁹² Barakat claims that he is always ready to support experimental and video works, although they do not sell. Even though he runs a private institution, the lack of governmental art infrastructure depends on such efforts to address the need, as best as possible.⁹³

The tension between the postwar artists who engaged with the city in an experimental manner and produced works in different media and the prewar artists who engaged

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² “Statement on the Indefinite Postponement of Home Works 8” Ashkal Alwan - Home.” n.d. Accessed January 6, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/ashkalalwanbeirut/>.

⁹³ Nadine Kanaan. 2016. “صالح بركات: بيروت معقلاً للفن والتعدد.” Al-Akhbar. May 21, 2016. https://al-akhbar.com/Culture_People/214079.

primarily in painting and sculpture was palpable. This point became especially clear in the statement released by Maroun Hakim, President of the Organization of Lebanese Artists in 1998, which blatantly critiqued the postwar practices that it deemed an insult to the creative artistic level of the city's artists.

"...جمعيتنا، بما هي مؤتمنة عليه وبما تمثله من قيم فنية وجمالية ونقدية ، تشعر بأنها معنية بالمحافظة على المستوى الفني الخلاق في عرض الأعمال الإبداعية , وخصوصاً في الأماكن والساحات الوطنية العامة. ومعنية أيضاً بإظهار دور الفنان اللبناني وقدرته الإبداعية على المساهمة في مسيرة الإعمار بما يسمح بالمحافظة على القيمة الجمالية للمشهد العام, وبما يؤمن المحافظة على العناصر الفنية، النحتية والزخرفية، في ما يحيط بتشييد المباني الخاصة والعامة"⁹⁴

"... *Our association, with what it is entrusted with and with its artistic, aesthetic and monetary values, feels concerned with preserving the creative artistic level in displaying creative works, especially in public national places and squares. It is also concerned with showing the role of the Lebanese artist and his creative ability to contribute to a march.* Reconstruction to allow the preservation of the aesthetic value of the general scene, and to secure the preservation of the artistic, sculptural and decorative elements, in what surrounds the construction of private and public buildings."

In a conversation, artist and writer Walid Sadek commended Barakat on the effort he made to reconcile the two different strands of the art world (traditional versus conceptual) that existed in postwar Beirut.⁹⁵ The exhibition "The Road to Peace" was the first time that artists who worked during the war exhibited their works in what Barakat termed as a "purge" that could only have been digested when a significant amount of time had passed since the end of the war. The exhibition provided a space for dialogue between the different artists who had a great deal of misunderstanding. According to Barakat, the history of art in Beirut is the accumulation of these differing groups and visions. However, as an art dealer, Barakat is known as a promoter of the more

⁹⁴ Maroun Hakim. 1998. "بيان جمعية الفنانين اللبنانيين إلى الرأي العام اللبناني" (*The Organization of Lebanese Artists' Statement to the Lebanese Public Opinion*). *Mulhaq Annahar*, 14 November, 1998.

⁹⁵ Walid Sadek, Interview with Author, Beirut, July 2, 2019

“traditional”, sellable, modern and contemporary Levantine art. Despite his appreciation and interest in global art practices, Barakat focuses on Lebanese art and the art of the Arab region, the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine) more specifically.⁹⁶ Over the past 30 years, Barakat’s curatorial line has dealt specifically with the Levantine identity in art and artists.⁹⁷ A piece in Al Arab Newspaper recently described Barakat’s interest and passion for Arab art, especially the pioneering art and artists of the sixties, as even more intense and successful than the galleries of the time, such as Waddah Faris’ Contact Gallery.⁹⁸



Fig. 40

Nathir Ismail in "Agiyal Gallery": The continuation of the seventies experiment), Annahar, April 11, 2001.

⁹⁶ Mimosa Alarawi. 2016. "غاليري صالح بركات: رؤيا تضيء لبنان والمنطقة العربية." (Saleh Barakat Gallery: A vision that lights Lebanon and the Arab region) *Al Arab Online*, May 15, 2016. <https://alarab.co.uk/>.

⁹⁷ Saleh Barakat, interview by the author, Beirut, July 9, 2019.

⁹⁸ Alarawi, Mimosa. 2017. "Waddah Faris Retrieves the White Beirut Photographically", *Al-Arab Newspaper*, June 2, 2017. <https://alarab.co.uk/>.

Location

When asked about why he chose this location for his Gallery, Saleh Barakat proceeded to explain how the choice of neighborhood presented a big debate since neighborhoods in Beirut carry much significance. There were several options, such as joining Ashkal Alwan or Sfeir Semler Gallery in the peripheral areas of the city, but Barakat did not want to be in an “off” area. Barakat was seeking a neighborhood proximity gallery. He wanted those who do not have a car or cannot afford to take a taxi or go pick out of reach area, able to visit his gallery. At the same time, he did not want to remain in the much trafficked Hamra Street where Agial is located. Therefore, he chose this location in Clemenceau that is closer to downtown, but not as exposed to the bustle of Hamra Street. He does admit that his gallery is still a private gallery, but hopes to make it as accessible and affordable as possible, with some works priced as low as \$500.⁹⁹ Barakat gave an example of Thaddeus Roe Park, owner of Gallery Ropac in Paris, who specifically chose the location for his space according to the farthest possible reachable location by public transport. As such, he was able to utilize an industrial building where the space as large as 4700 m², while being accessible to the general public.¹⁰⁰

When asked about how the arts scene in Beirut changed after the war, and its relation to the requirements of art spaces, Barakat commented on the difference changes and focused on the new possibility to be more transparent as an art space. As soon as the war

⁹⁹ Saleh Barakat, interview by the author, Beirut, July 9, 2019.

¹⁰⁰ Duponchelle, Valérie. 2013. “Thaddeus Ropac à Pantin.” *Le Figaro.Fr*, April 8, 2013. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/sortir-paris/2013/04/08/30004-20130408ARTFIG00568-thaddeus-ropac-a-pantin.php>.

ended as soon as the war ended, galleries such as Agial required armed doors and underground spaces for insurance purposes. Security was a major concern in the nineties and had a detrimental effect on the ability to provide an open and transparent experience.¹⁰¹ Years later, as the country became more open and movement more possible between the different areas of the city, art spaces were more able to floor spaces with large curtain wall facades that overlook the street and invite passers-by to enter. Barakat's was initially interested in Villa Salem which is now the space of Dar El Nimer, located on the same block.¹⁰² However, upon finding that the former space of Cinema Clemenceau and Masrah Al Madina was up for sale and at risk of becoming a storage unit, Barakat embarked on the process to "rescue" this historic landmark from his childhood. The choice of the space, as previously mentioned was related to the idea that this place was a cultural landmark that the older people recognized and Barakat himself attended as a young child as Cinema Clemenceau and as Masrah Al Madina after the war.

¹⁰¹ Saleh Barakat, interview by the author, Beirut, July 9, 2019.

¹⁰² Agenda Culturel. 2016. "Découverte de La Galerie Saleh Barakat et Des Œuvres de Nabil Nahas." October 6, 2016.

http://www.agendaculturel.com/Visites_guidees_Decouverte_de_la_Galerie_Saleh_Barakat_et_des_oeuvres_de_Nabil+Nahas.

Renovation Project



Fig. 41. (Left) Street View of the Space of Saleh Barakat Gallery Before Renovation. Courtesy of LEFT Architects.

Fig. 42. (Right) Underground Space during the Renovation Project. Courtesy of LEFT Architects.

Saleh Barakat tasked LEFT Architects (Makram Al Kadi and Ziad Jamaledine) with the renovation of his new space saying, “I wanted a Lebanese architect... I only do Lebanese things.” The architects conducted a rigorous research on the modernist structures of Hamra Street. The space of Saleh Barakat Gallery sits at the edge of Hamra and has always been active in its relation to the street, in the sense that the former cinema and theater had its own entrance, separate from the building’s residential entrance. Hamra Street was the inspiration for LEFT Architects who wanted to focus on developing a concept embedded in Lebanese culture and the cultural and historical context of the specific location, especially since the gallery promotes local and regional art specifically. The architects looked at the ground conditions and the corner conditions of the former cinemas and cultural spaces populating Hamra Street. They learned from that condition, which includes a “system of shallow and steep staircases mediating the diverse commercial levels with the bustling street life.”¹⁰³ They applied this experience into the

¹⁰³ LEFT Architects. n.d. “Saleh Barakat Gallery.” <http://www.leftish.net/news/GSB>.

space by introducing a cascading stair that smoothen the transition from the exterior sidewalk and the city level into the underground space of the gallery, while providing the necessary lighting conditions. By inserting a crane that takes the artwork from the ground floor down within the space of the staircase, they foregrounded the background operations of the gallery to the entrance. Thus, they created a “semi-street gallery”¹⁰⁴, and the more private galleries for private clients meetings embedded in the storage spaces surrounding the main underground gallery space. All administrative offices and the mezzanine floor have a full view of the main gallery space at all times.



Fig. 43. Saleh Barakat Gallery Interior View Showing the Cascading Stairs on the Right. Courtesy of LEFT Architects.

¹⁰⁴ LEFT Architects (Makram Al Kadi and Ziad Jameledine), interview by the author, Beirut, July 26, 2019.

The architects had to deal with a lot of limitations, such as the legalities that required transforming the functional and programmatic use of the space and its repercussions. To begin with, Saleh Barakat was not looking for such a large space. To Barakat, the tax is imposed on such a space, both increases the cost of running the space and changes the perception of people towards the gallery, as well as its overall affordability and accessibility. The main problematics of the new design required redesigning the gallery and the accessibility of the artwork into the space, as well as creating a strong experience from the moment of entry to the exhibition of artworks.



Fig. 44. Interior View of the Underground Gallery. Courtesy of LEFT Architects.

The Saleh Barakat Gallery space reconciles Barakat's need for a large, new space, rooted in the culture and image of Beirut, without being overtly nostalgic in its treatment. He understands the "nostalgia" he is participating in the nostalgia understands, as

"sparkling" and "always faint" in the heart of a bustling, present and future city.¹⁰⁵ Despite the rise of the Gulf art market, Barakat still believes in the status of Beirut, although it is "no longer a commercial platform." Beirut's pluralistic identity, as a locale of diversity, openness, culture and secularism is still pertinent. Barakat emphasizes the positive signifiers of Beirut's art market, such as the growing interest and support for art Lebanese universities and the fact that his buyers are predominantly Lebanese. At the time, Barakat expressed his wish to jump on the bandwagon with all the projects that are underway such as "the virtual museum of the national art collection, the Sursock museum, the Beirut Art Center, the Aishti foundation... All motivations to participate in this momentum and make Beirut a true cultural resistant."¹⁰⁶ However, he views that travel is necessary, and his new gallery affords him the ability to build a name internationally, and falls within a strategy to accommodate for the anticipated changes in the Beirut Art Market.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Mimosa Alarawi. 2016. "غاليري صالح بركات: رؤيا تضيء لبنان والمنطقة العربية." (Saleh Barakat Gallery: A vision that lights Lebanon and the Arab region) *Al Arab Online*, May 15, 2016. <https://alarab.co.uk/>.

¹⁰⁶ Agenda Culturel. 2016. "Découverte de La Galerie Saleh Barakat et Des Œuvres de Nabil Nahas." October 6, 2016. http://www.agendaculturel.com/Visites_guidees_Decouverte_de_la_Galerie_Saleh_Barakat_et_des_oeuvres_de_Nabil+Nahas.

¹⁰⁷ Nadine Kanaan. 2016. "صالح بركات: بيروت معقلاً للفن والتعدد." *Al-Akhbar*. May 21, 2016. https://al-akhbar.com/Culture_People/214079.

Chapter 5: Dar El Nimer

ان لبنان عربياً ديموقراطياً سيداً ومستقلاً ليس بالطبع ساحة، لكنه لا يستطيع ان يكون جزيرة معزولة عن قضايا
منطقتنا وعن معارك الحرية والتقدم والتنمية والعدالة فيها.¹⁰⁸

Lebanon is an Arab, democratic, sovereign, and independent, of course not a square, but it cannot be an island isolated from the issues of our region and from the battles of freedom, progress, development and justice in it.

Who is Rami El Nimer?

Rami El Nimer is a private art collector who has been collecting art for several decades, on the multi-faceted identity of the Levant, focusing on Palestine, harking back to the time when cultural exchange was possible in the region and borders were open. He initiated a corporate art collection for the First National Bank in 2009, of which he has director since 2002. He serves on the boards of a number of cultural institutions such as the Palestinian Museum.¹⁰⁹

El Nimer is a native of Nablus (Palestine), where he was raised in an upper-class family with Ottoman roots. His father, Rifaat El Nimer, nicknamed “The Sheikh of Arab Bankers”, instilled in him an avocation for Arab Nationalism from a young age. Rifaat El Nimer was a capitalist by profession and an ardent fighter for the Palestinian cause and broader concerns of Arab Nationalism and unity. He served the political groups he believed in

108 Elias Khoury, and Ziad Majed. 2006. “رسالة إلى رفاقنا في حركة اليسار الديمقراطي اللبناني.” (A message to our comrades in the Lebanese Democratic Left Movement) July 30, 2006.

<http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=71390&r=0>.

109 Nelida Nassar. 2016. “Philanthropist and Patron of the Arts Rami El-Nimer Opens His Foundation to the Public | ART & CULTURE TODAY.” May 27, 2016.

<https://artandculturetoday.wordpress.com/art/museums/philanthropist-and-patron-of-the-arts-rami-el-nimer-opens-his-foundation-to-the-public/>.

without hesitation, especially in the 1960's, when the family fled to Beirut in 1967 and started he making his mark in the banking sector.¹¹⁰

Rami El Nimer is Rifaat's eldest and only son, who took on his father's interest and preoccupation with history. He inherited a rich collection of artifacts from the family's estate in Palestine. Their family estate included a Museum of Arms and Armor and with the help of some family members, he was able to transport rare artifacts from Palestine to Lebanon. Thus, the penchant for collecting the art and artifacts of the region began with Rami El Nimer's family collection, which he has been expanding for the past four decades. As a philanthropist and successful banker himself, Rami El Nimer proceeded to institutionalize the philanthropic work that his family also did, by initiating the "Unite Lebanon Youth Project"¹¹¹ to shed light on the impoverished populations, especially Palestinian refugees. The art foundation Dar El Nimer for Arts and Culture thus constituted Nimer's second attempt at shedding light on the history and culture of Palestine, in the city of Beirut, his home for the last fifty years.

History of the Building

¹¹⁰ مثنويات رواد فلسطين (Rifaat El Nimer).2018. رفعت النمر https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h64WU-oNbik&feature=emb_title.

¹¹¹ "UNITE LEBANON YOUTH PROJECT." n.d. <https://www.unitelebanonyouth.org/>.

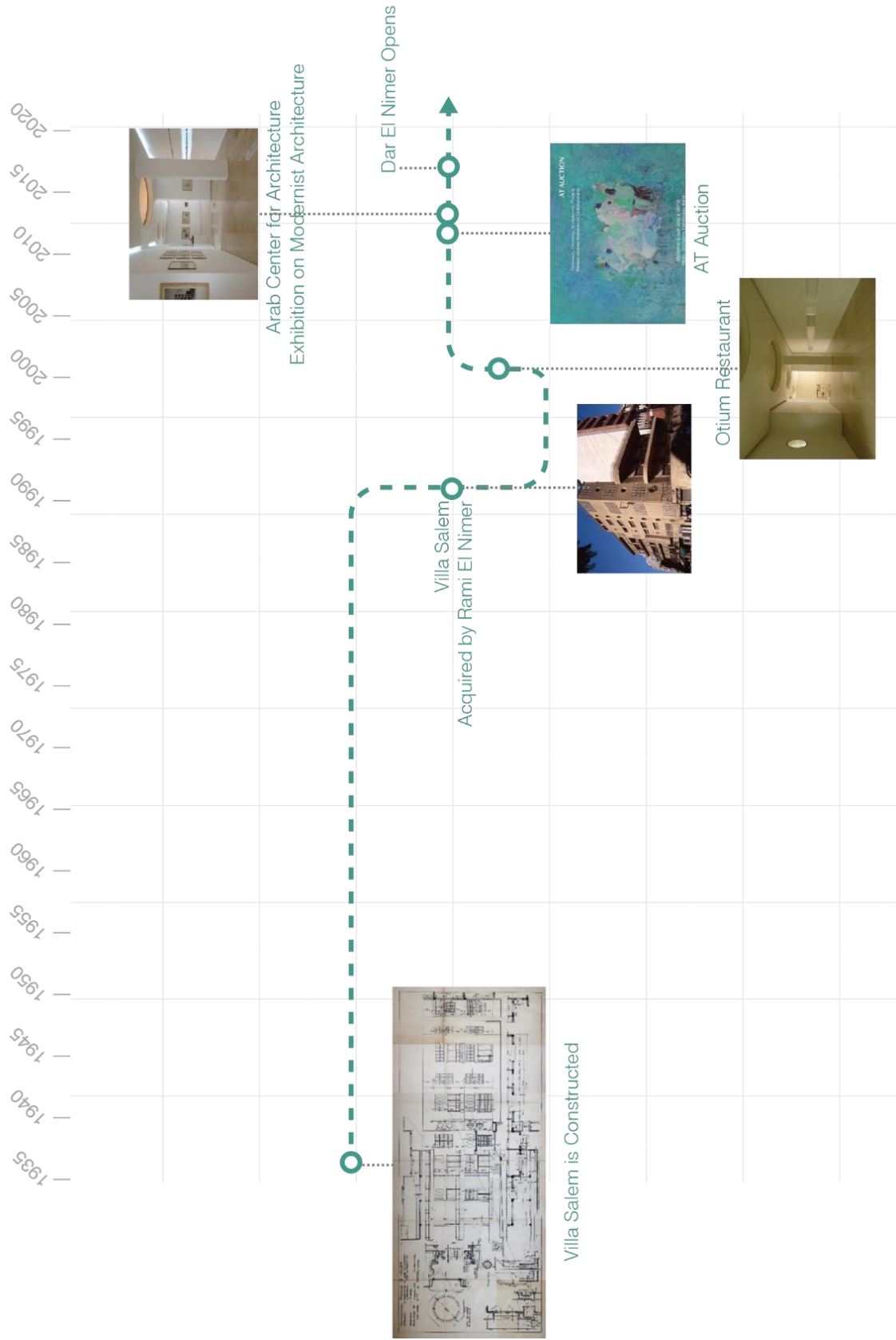


Fig. 45. Timeline Showing the Different Phases of Dar El Nimer's Building, Villa Salem AT Auction Image. Retrieved from: Nada Boulous Assaad. "Lebtivity. 2012. <https://www.lebtivity.com/event/at-auction-by-nada-boulous-assaad>.

Phase 1: Villa Salem

Villa Salem, the location of Dar El Nimer, is one of the first suburban villas that grew as a result of the introduction of the American University of Beirut, to house the new converts to Protestantism and those who found employment at the university or its neighboring facilities. It is a multi-apartment villa, designed by French architect Lucien Cavro, and built in 1936. Cavro worked on several projects in Beirut, including the Henri Pharaon private museum. He was a skilled architect who combined his occidental education in modernist architecture with the existing local conditions, to create an intriguing “place-based modernism” that incorporated art deco elements and responded well to the existing urban fabric of 1930’s Beirut.¹¹² It is one of the first domestic buildings to have a free plan, made possible by the advancement of local cement factories in the 1930’s.¹¹³

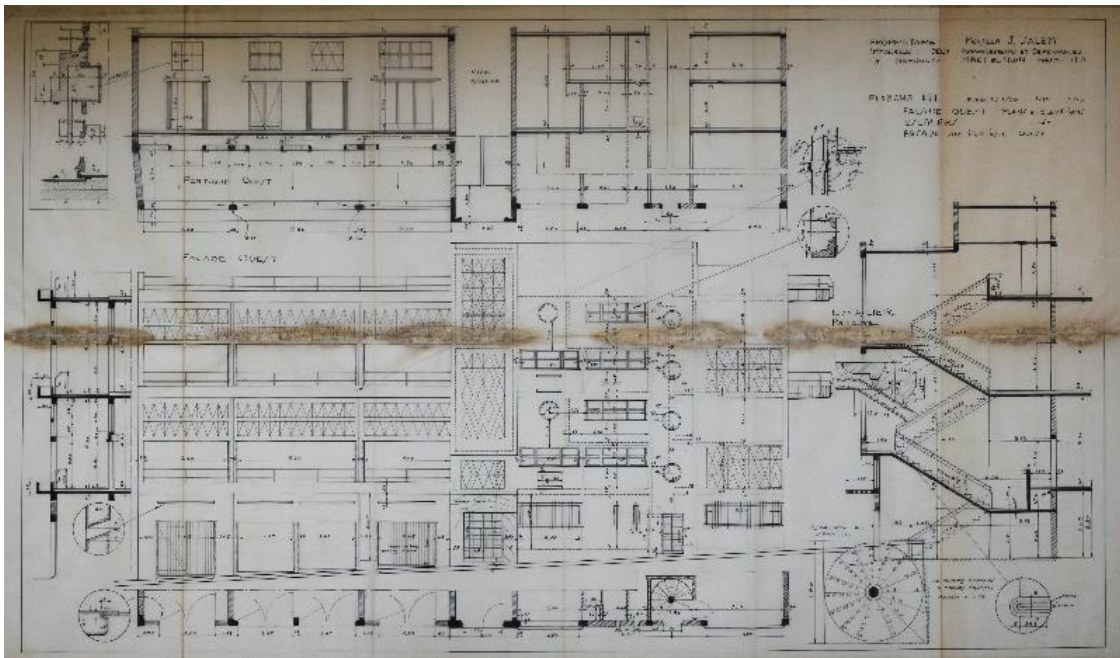
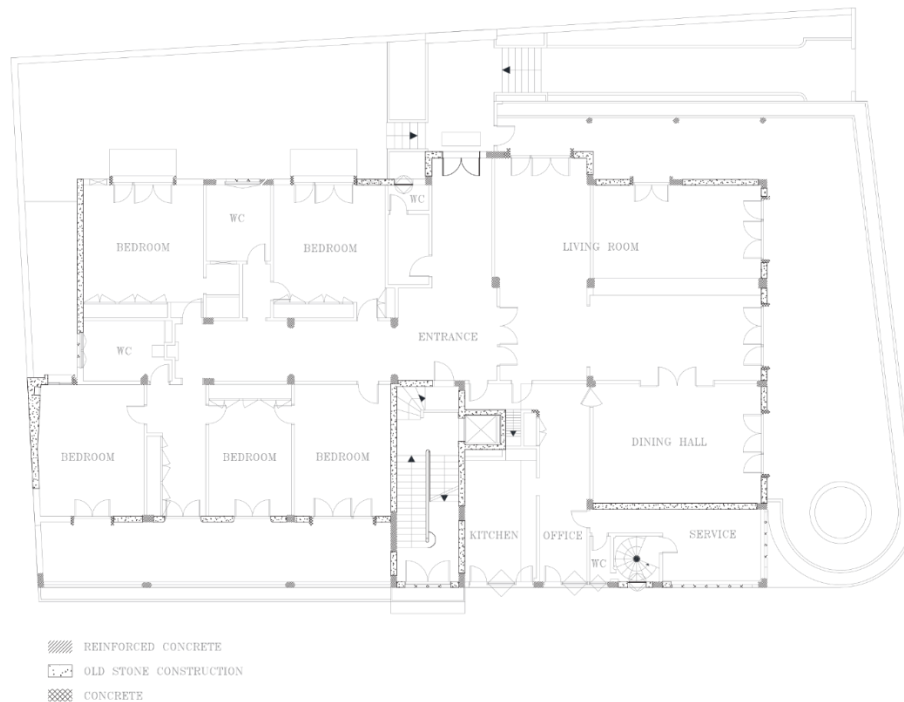


Fig. 46. Villa Salem Original Architectural Drawings by Architect Lucien Cavro.

¹¹² Joseph Hourany, phone call by the author, Beirut, July 2019.

¹¹³ Apractice Studio. 2013. “Exhibition as Artifact” Poster. Retrieved from the Arab Center for Architecture Library Collection.

Courtesy of the Arab Center for Architecture



*Fig. 47. Plan of Dar El Nimer. Existing structure as drawn by Roula Mouharram.
Plan provided by Salim Al Kadi of Apractice Studio*

In the beginning, concrete was used similarly to stone block, to create load-bearing partitions within the space. However, Villa Salem provided internal flexibility by liberating the interior, in reference to Le Corbusier's Dom-Ino House. Thus, it is a prime example of one of the first residential free plan concrete buildings in Beirut.¹¹⁴ El Nimer purchased the villa more than twenty years ago, planning to move into it with his family years later. As time passed, the building proved too large for his family of 4, and he decided to preserve this building he cherished as a space to host artistic and cultural activities.¹¹⁵ In 2013, Apractice Studio in Beirut conducted a rigorous architectural analysis of Villa

¹¹⁴ Apractice studio. 2013. "Exhibition as Artifact" Poster. Retrieved from the Arab Center for Architecture Library Collection.

¹¹⁵ Omar Thawabeh and Lama Kobrously, Interview with Author, Beirut, July 8, 2019

Salem’s architectural details. Salim Al Kadi, lead architect and founder of Apractice Studio, was in talks with El Nimer to renovate the space, before it was commissioned to interior designer Serge Brunst and landscape design firm Atelier Hamra in 2015. Apractice Studio launched an exhibition “Building as Artifact” in the space of Villa Salem highlighting its architectural qualities. They supplemented the exhibition with a poster-brochure detailing the innovation in the design of the building vis-a-vis the construction methods of the time.

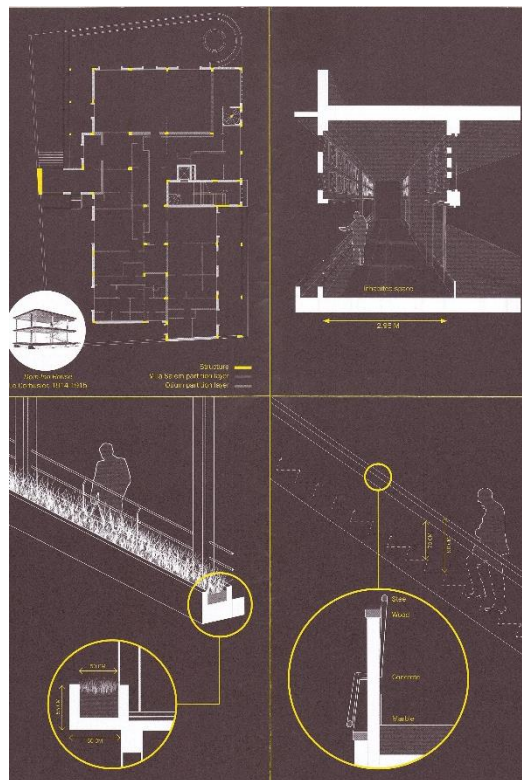


Fig. 48. Apractice Studio Exhibition Poster showing the Innovative architectural details of Villa Salem.

There were several elements that stood out in Villa Salem. Starting with the façade, the use of concrete in the construction allowed for much wider windows, since posts and lintels no longer determined the narrow width of the windows on the facade. The windows integrated geometrical screen patterns of triangles that were separated from

the glass and allowed for a reduction in solar heat gain, as well as introducing a space that integrated and concealed a canopy and shutter within the concrete soffit. The fact that the glass panel and the patterned screen were separated, created a small climate controlled, habitable space, the balcony.

Perhaps the most typically modern feature of Villa Salem was the horizontal circular steel section constituting the exterior balustrade. In its simplicity, the balustrade strengthened the visual porosity between the interior space and the building's urban context. Cavro replaced the typically abstract ornate vegetal balustrade, normally constructed of concrete molds or wrought iron rods, with a simpler section that incorporated real vegetation in its elevation.¹¹⁶

Unlike staircases of the time, characterized by a certain openness as a result of the combination of thin wrought iron designs and floating stone pieces, the free plan of the building was balanced with a solid internal staircase. Bound by two strong vertical planes, the staircase imposed an experiential directionality on the user's movement. The interior railing was made of three different materials: wood, concrete, and steel, designed for maximum ergonomic comfort and echoing the sentiments of the modernist architecture that placed the human body at the center of its design. The building had two different access points, one for the residents of the multiple apartments and another for the housing staff. The staff quarters comprised two bedrooms, a kitchenette, and a bathroom, on each floor. All staff apartments were

¹¹⁶ Apractice studio. 2013. "Exhibition as Artifact" Poster. Retrieved from the Arab Center for Architecture Library Collection.

connected via a circular staircase from the ground floor to the roof of the building, thus providing an independent access for the staff, as well as autonomous homes for them.¹¹⁷

Phase 2: Otium Restaurant and Bar (2000-2010)

At a time when Hamra was being neglected in favor of developing the Beirut Central District, managing partners such as Maher Chebaro, launched restaurants and bars in Hamra Street. He argued that in Ras Beirut, there was great potential for a “strong business, for identity.”¹¹⁸ Chebaro opened Otium restaurant and bar on the ground floor of Villa Salem, and tasked architect Roula Mouharram with the renovation of the space. The restaurant presented the first transformation of the building from a private residence to a public program. The design mainly intervened on the planning of the ground floor, turning the space into three large, and more compartmentalized locations for the kitchen, bar, and restaurant. The circular, porthole windows for instance were used as a motif by architect Roula Mouharram. She used these windows that double as hot air ventilators and accentuate the building’s character as one straddling both the modernist and art deco styles. Mouharram replicated these circular motifs in the design of Otium by adding a false ceiling with large circular openings, and incorporating it in the design of the overall restaurant.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Mustafa Assad. 2001. “Trying to Put the Hum Back in Hamra.” *The Daily Star Newspaper - Lebanon*, October 6, 2001. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb//Culture/Art/2001/Oct-06/103775-trying-to-put-the-hum-back-in-hamra.ashx>.

Phase 3: Multi-Purpose Hall (2010-2015)



Figs. 49-50. Before (left) and After (right) Otium was Introduced. Retrieved from the Personal Archive of George Arbid, Founder of the Arab Center for Architecture

After the closure of Otium and the dismantling of the bar, the building was renovated another time. Architect Majd Kain transformed the ground floor, once again, into another public facility, a multipurpose hall that accommodated a range of public functions, from exhibitions, art auctions, and other events. AT Art Auctions,¹¹⁹ organized and hosted by art dealer Nada Boulos Al-Assaad, transformed the space annually into one that harkens back to “the understated French country look popular when Louis XVI reigned.”¹²⁰ The space of Villa Salem was flexible enough and comprised minimal details that qualified it as an ideal space for experimental exhibitions and events.

¹¹⁹ “AT Auction by Nada Boulous Assaad.” Lebtivity. 2012. <https://www.lebtivity.com/event/at-auction-by-nada-boulous-assaad>.

¹²⁰ Kate Maddox. 2014. “Auction Offers Rare Chance to Buy Classic European Antiques,” May 21, 2014. <http://www1.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Lifestyle/2014/May-21/257222-auction-offers-rare-chance-to-buy-classic-european-antiques.ashx>.



Fig. 51-52. Arab Center for Architecture's Exhibition of Modernist Architecture in Villa Salem. Arab Center For Architecture. n.d. "Modern Design and Architecture in the Arab World: The Beginnings of a Project." Archileb.Com. <http://www.archileb.com/article.php?id=749>.

Phase 3: Dar El Nimer (2015- to date)



Fig. 53. Image of Dar El Nimer taken from the Entrance Ramp. Image taken by the author.

In an interview, Omar Thawabeh stressed that Dar El Nimer came at a time when “the Arab identity is stigmatized” and appeared after the uprisings in the Arab world (2011

onwards). However, this “stigma linked to the Arab identity has a long history.”¹²¹ Presenting a different narrative of the multi-layered identities present in the Arab World, necessitates considerable research and collaborations. Dar El Nimer, despite being a self-funded, not-for-profit organization, comprises a board of advisors and long list of partners, including cultural and educational institutions like the American University of Beirut, New York University Abu Dhabi, Saint Joseph University, Institut Francais, and the Palestinian Museum.¹²² They view themselves as a cultural think tank, since they have no permanent collection in house, no residencies, nor a contemporary art gallery since they showcase exhibitions of mostly antiques and archives. Locally, they yearn to emulate the quality of exhibitions at the Sursock Museum, the antiquities collection at the Nabu Museum, and distance themselves from institutions like the Beirut Art Center and Ashkal Alwan, who they deem as very contemporary and conceptual. Internationally, Dar El Nimer aims to follow in the footsteps of Darat al Funun, The Mosaic Rooms, and the David Roberts Art Foundation.

Location

In an interview with Future Television, founder Rami El Nimer spoke about the location of Dar El Nimer in Ras Beirut and owed its success to its current location and the symbolism it engenders.

“We found that Beirut, especially Ras Beirut, was the magnet for the culture in the Arab World. The symbolism of the location, Beirut, the American University of Beirut, all the scholars who came to Lebanon, the artists, whether they were

¹²¹ Omar Thawabeh, Interview with Author, Beirut, July 8, 2019.

¹²² “About Dar El-Nimer | Dar El-Nimer.” n.d. <https://darelnimer.org/en/about/>.

*Lebanese or Arabs, their meeting point was Beirut and Ras Beirut more specifically.*¹²³

Despite the ongoing gentrification in the area of Ras Beirut, Clemenceau, where Saleh Barakat Gallery and Dar El Nimer stand, still holds “village-like qualities” with its old houses, wild gardens, and buildings of heritage value that have not yet fallen victim to real-estate speculation.¹²⁴ As previously mentioned, although Clemenceau did not receive much attention after the end of the civil war, the area was historically a strong cultural and educational neighborhood in proximity to both Hamra and the American University of Beirut. Both Saleh Barakat Gallery and Dar El Nimer benefit from the perception of the neighborhood and its subdued former glory to reinforce the images of their spaces. The two spaces create a unique artistic block with artistic and cultural exchange. According to Omar Thawabeh, Barakat sometimes recommends Dar El Nimer’s programs and events to his clients. The entities do not share the same identity since Saleh Barakat is solely a gallerist and his space functions as an art gallery, whereas Dar El Nimer is an art institution with an art gallery, an auditorium, a theater, and multi-purpose spaces. Combined with an ever-expanding program, “the scope of Dar El Nimer is larger.”¹²⁵

¹²³ “L’ina inno Beirut, khsousan fi Ras Beirut, yalli kenet maghnatis la kel thaqafat bel a’alam el-a’arabeh. El mawqa’a. Ramziyyet el maken, Beirut, jami’a al amerkiyeh, kel el muthaqaffin li keno yejo a’a lebnen. Kel el fannanin, in keno lubnaniyin aw a’arab, kenet malqahon Beirut wa Ras Beirut ta7didan.” “اخبار 5/4 - مقابلة مع مؤسس دار النمر رامي النمر 4/5 - الصباح - YouTube.” (Morning News- An Interview with the Founder of Dar El Nimer, Rami El Nimer 4/5). Future TV News, 3 May, 2018.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hK1sRY-W-U>.

¹²⁴ AUB Neighborhood Initiative. 2019. “New Faculty Orientation 2019-2020 Neighborhood Handbook.” <https://www.aub.edu.lb/nfo/Documents/New%20Faculty%20Orientation%202019-20%20-%20Neighborhood%20Handbook.pdf>.

¹²⁵ Omar Thawabeh, Interview with Author, Beirut, July 8, 2019

Land(e)scape Design

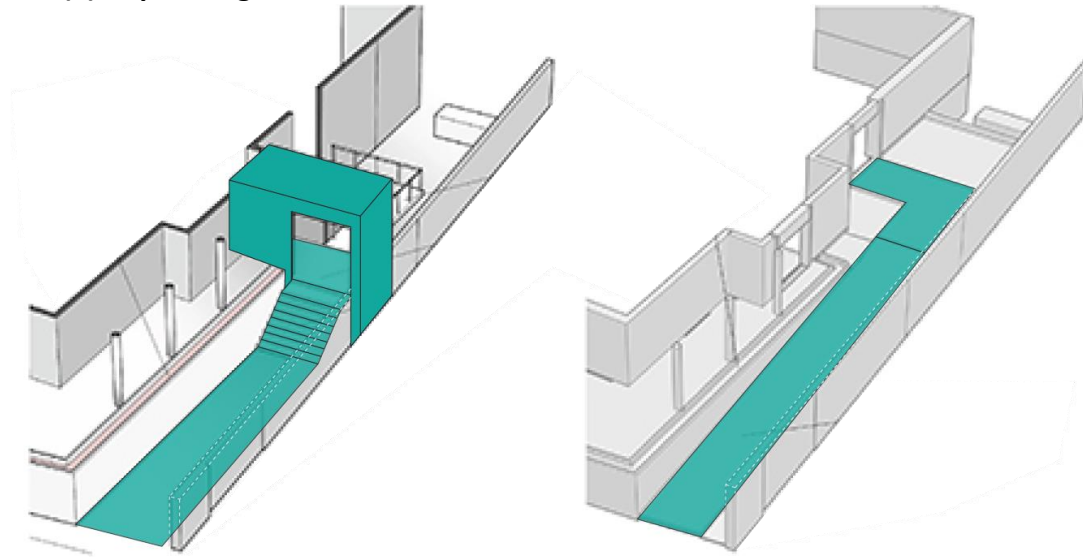


Fig. 54. Diagram based on the Renovation Scheme of Atelier Hamra showing the change and experience in the accessibility to the Dar El Nimer

As for the landscape design, El Nimer hired Atelier Hamra to redesign the main access into the building. The design guidelines required the introduction of a loading dock to receive crates and large packages. The brief asked for a landscape design that would be easy to manipulate, green, inviting, durable, and not pretentious. Atelier Hamra designed a lush, green, and flamboyant garden with a tropical vibe. They replaced the formerly tight passageway and steep staircase, with a ramp that accommodates vehicles delivering packages and artworks to Dar El Nimer. The access also leads visitors into an interstitial space that typical is of Beirut's urban fabric, but exposes them to a rich, lush vegetation that provides a fresh experience and palette.



Fig. 55. Garden at the Entrance Ramp. Image taken by the author.

As for the renovation, it was meant to alter the building without changing its essence. Serge Brunst, who was tasked with the renovation, is an interior architect in Beirut. He redesigned the main gallery space and the rest of the building into a versatile space that accommodated the necessary provisions. He introduced in the main space of the gallery, a false ceiling that incorporated an exaggerated pattern of the exterior claustra that characterizes the main facades and visual identity of Villa Salem.



Fig. 56. Image from the Exhibition “La Mer Patrie”. Image taken by the author.

Villa Salem, since its inception in 1936, was a “posh modernist building” with a restrained vocabulary. Its elegance shone through its delicate architectural features such as the plain, simple, free-standing concrete columns, its hollowed-out claustra and motifs, intricate finishes and details, and extremely efficient layout. The rooms in the former Villa Salem were spacious, plain, and flexible. These characteristics were not typical of the buildings in that neighborhood and time. As such, Villa Salem stood out as a “plain, sedate, and austere” structure, whose beauty lay in its solemnity.¹²⁶

Perhaps the clearest change in the new design is the “polished” look that involved painting the exterior of the building completely white, as opposed to its former typical

¹²⁶ George Arbid, Interview with Author, Beirut, July 25, 2019

Beiruti ochre color. Similarly, another prominent art space in Beirut and one of the most vibrant public spaces, closed in 2007 to undergo its second renovation. It lasted till 2015, when the museum opened with its former stone façade finish was painted completely white. Dar El Nimer's had a similar doll-house effect that exudes a more "polished" vibe. The stark white appearance of Dar El Nimer accentuates the "modernist" aspect of the building, but makes it stand out of its context even more, marking it as a new cultural "landmark".

Upon the building's renovation, some architectural details which characterized this modernist building, such as the joint detail of the window plane and the shading device, were altered. The individual windows that covered each unit of the claustra, were replaced with a glass curtain wall that stretched along the whole length of the façade, with the claustra lying neatly on top. By doing so, the detail provides less distraction from the multiple window units, but flattens this formerly functional claustra system into a façade pattern that is replicated in the ceiling of the gallery. The gallery can at time distract from the artworks on exhibit.

Dar El Nimer's Collection

"Since I'm of Palestinian descent, I collected anything to do with Palestine: books, postcards, stones. I have historical documents from 1620 until 1850, and when I couldn't get them out of Palestine during the Intifada, the family decided to smuggle them for me."¹²⁷

With his collection, Rami El Nimer aims to foster new narratives by examining the cross-cultural complexities of the Middle East and its various interactions in an inclusive, critical,

¹²⁷ Vanessa Khalil. 2011. "Q&A - Rami El Nimer." *Executive Magazine*, July 3, 2011. <https://www.executive-magazine.com/business-finance/finance/qa-rami-el-nimer>.

and creative environment. El Nimer finds his contribution in highlighting and restudying the “endangered legacy” of the Middle East and Palestine more specifically.

The collection encompasses five broad categories. The first category includes Islamic art, with a specific focus on Ottoman area productions and Arabic calligraphy. It includes Quranic manuscripts, textiles, ceramics, arms and armor, tiles, and decorative arts, among others. The second category is that of Christian art, especially the objects created in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, such as icons of Christian liturgical art from the Jerusalem School, proskynetaria (monumental Eastern Orthodox Church icon of mosaic or fresco), manuscripts, textiles, and numismatics, the highlight of which is a rare collection of pottery from the Jerusalem Armenian workshop. Orientalist art of the Levant constitutes the third category. It includes the oil paintings, watercolors, and drawings of prominent European Orientalist artists. Palestine is highlighted extensively in the final two categories. The photographs and souvenirs section focuses on Palestine as a pilgrimage destination and includes manuscripts, maps, letters, postcards, photographs, and other souvenirs produced to guide pilgrims, merchants, and tourists in the old city. As for the modern and contemporary art section, it includes a growing collection of art by 20th century Palestinian artists residing in Palestine or in exile, such as Ismail Shammout and Ibrahim Ghannam.¹²⁸

Exhibitions

Several types of exhibitions are held at Dar El Nimer. Their main website sites three different types of exhibitions: “curated from the El-Nimer Collection, commissioned

¹²⁸ “About Dar El-Nimer | Dar El-Nimer.” n.d. <https://darelnimer.org/en/about/>.

exhibitions in support of artists in different fields of art and hosted exhibitions from the region and abroad.”¹²⁹ They handle several topics tackling the artistic and cultural production of Palestine, the Palestinian diaspora, and the region. Beirut, especially in the 1980's, was an important hub for the dissemination of Palestinian art and its diaspora. Exhibitions such as “Visualizing Palestine”, “Identity Concerns”, “Thief of Baghdad”, and other types of exhibitions such as those of the private collection of Rami El Nimer show the broad range of the institution. The first exhibition of Dar El Nimer was “Midad,” an exhibition that presented artworks, historical documents, and manuscripts to show the broad scope, unifying power, and visual strength of Arab calligraphy. The exhibition themes and program are decided by the board of advisors. “There is no limit to the medium” says Thawabeh, pointing to the fact that most types of art have been exhibited at Dar El Nimer including “paintings, manuscripts, films, installations, video art, fashion, the first satellite exhibition of the Palestinian museum, embroidery, etc...”¹³⁰

Press

Studio Safar,¹³¹ a graphic design and art direction firm in Beirut, designed the brand identity of Dar El Nimer. The complete press kit including catalogues and posters is visually coherent. They are mass distributed in the city and to Dar El Nimer’s media partners: The Daily Star, Al-Akhbar, Agenda Culturel, Future Television, and AlAraby Television. “The beauty of the space is always mentioned” says Thawabeh, who noted the proliferation of phrases highlighting the architectural experience and qualities of the space. One such

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Omar Thawabeh, Interview with Author, Beirut, July 8, 2019

¹³¹ “Studio Safar.” n.d. <http://studiosafar.com/work.php>.

example of the rhetoric used to describe the space is the following excerpt from a newspaper article on the Midad Arab calligraphy exhibition at Dar El Nimer.

"يقع هذا الصرح الثقافي العريق في فيلا سالم في شارع كليمنصو في مدينة بيروت، وهو مبنى ساحر يعود إلى الثلاثينيات من القرن الماضي، تم بناءه على يد المهندس المعماري لوسيان كافرو، وهو من أولى المباني في بيروت التي اعتمد بناؤها نموذج الدومينو الذي ابتكره لوكوبوزيه، مما جعله ملائمًا بالكامل للترميم، ومع افتتاح دار النمر للفن والثقافة يكون قد تم الحفاظ على هذا المبنى التاريخي وأعيد أحيائه كمساحة عامة تفاعلية ومتاحة للجميع وتكريسًا لإعادة تصور تاريخ المنطقة من خلال الفنون"¹³²

"This ancient cultural edifice is located in Villa Salem on Clemenceau Street in Beirut, and it is a charming building dating back to the thirties of the last century, was built by the architect Lucien Cavro, and it is one of the first buildings in Beirut whose construction adopted the domino model, which was created by Le Corbusier. Make it fully appropriate for restoration, and with the inauguration of the Dar Al-Nimer Art and Culture, this historic building has been preserved and revived as an interactive public space available to all and a dedication to re-visualizing the history of the region through the arts."

Audience

The uniqueness of the programs, specifically Dar El Nimer's broad scope of events, gives its platform, an unprecedented primacy to reach new audiences, with pointed educational and cultural activities, inclusive of all. Dar El Nimer resembles a modern day "Dar el fan", located in the vicinity of the current hub of the Socialist Progressive Party, tackling geopolitical and artistic issues with a specific focus on Palestine. Dar El Nimer's collaborations with research institutions and both regional and international museums allow it to engage different audiences and maintain a quality of program that engages

¹³² *Almaghribtoday*. 2017. "دار النمر للفن والثقافة يستقبل أصالة الفن العربي." (Dar Al-Nimer for Art and Culture receives the originality of Arab art) April 14, 2017. <https://www.almaghribtoday.net/>.

those interested in art history, politics, education, or even pop culture. Dar El Nimer also welcomes schools and those living in refugee camps through its various collaborations i.e., with United Lebanon Youth Project and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) schools.

Dar El Nimer is the most recent art space of the three. Villa Salem, however, is the oldest building. The building underwent several programmatic changes over the years. It comprises several innovative details and a unique, striking image that is often used in the press kit, as it is easily identifiable. Dar El Nimer effectively utilized this flexible, modernist space to promote the art and culture of the region, with a specific focus on the past (Fairuz Exhibitions, Thief of Baghdad Posters Exhibition...). As such, the buildings, the specific focus on Palestine and Arab nationalism, quickly harkens back to cultural and artistic scene of mid-century Ras Beirut.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Modernist art spaces in Beirut present the most interesting and glaring case of a concordance, or complementarity between the art, the architecture of the gallery, and the actors (gallerists and artists). The identified spaces all lie in the same geographic location of Ras Beirut, which in itself is the prime representation of the image and relationship to the open and secular Beirut of the 1960's and early 1970's. Ras Beirut is a distillation of the prewar cosmopolitan Beirut, and modernist architecture enhances the image that Ras Beirut collectively projects. The three case studies that represent this trend, or tendency to regain cosmopolitan Beirut are Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Saleh Barakat Gallery, and Dar El Nimer for Arts and Culture.

I argued that the demographic effects of immigration and internal migration as a result of the Lebanese Civil War, lasting roughly from 1975 to 1990, the introduction of Solidere, and the boom in the Dubai art market, led to a change in the postwar artistic scene. Although collectives tried to revive art and abandoned spaces in Beirut, by turn of the century, due to limited means and the need for different kinds of spaces (white cube/industrial), they moved towards different areas. As such, the individual efforts of these galleries provided much-needed exhibition space in white cube galleries stationed in modernist buildings in Ras Beirut, echoing the glory days of prewar modern Beirut.

Historically, Ras Beirut was a single, successful melting pot of cultures and religions in Beirut. Its prominence foreshadowed an increased commercialization and a change in the urban character of Ras Beirut that was soon lined with modern high-rise apartment and office building blocks, accommodating a range of commercial, recreational, institutional

and residential functions, in the same building, at times. The post-independence cultural awakening was fueled by the prolonged influx of intellectuals and cultural practitioners from the region such as Palestinian, Syrian and Egyptian migrants. It resulted in a symbiosis between the café culture of Hamra, the entertainment forms of cinema and theater, and the scholars, artists, and political figures it attracted. Prewar Beirut was bursting at the seams with people and ideologies, as conflicting as nationalism, Pan-Arabism, communism, and capitalism.

Art Spaces Before and After the Lebanese Civil War

Art was not spared the political rhetoric. Art spaces took a variety of forms, such as foreign cultural missions and embassies in Beirut, educational institutions, cafés, and galleries. By the late 1960s, Ras Beirut alone comprised more than 20 galleries. However, the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) disrupted much of the artistic activity established in the 1960's and early 1970's. Around 80% of all art galleries in Beirut, concentrated in Ras Beirut, either closed permanently or relocated elsewhere and many of the artists and intellectuals living in Lebanon had immigrated. After the war, a new generation of postwar artists dominated the artistic scene. Collectives such as Ashkal Alwan, the annual Ayloul Festival, the Arab Image Foundation, Zico House, Masrah Al Madina, and Theatre de Beyrouth, all throughout the 1990's, tried to revive Hamra Street. They hosted exhibitions in the public spaces, abandoned buildings, and reopened the famous cinema halls of Hamra Street as sets for exhibitions and performances. Eventually, these groups settled in spaces other than Ras Beirut for they were unsuccessful at providing the economic basis for their permanence there, and the spatial requirements for the exhibition of their contemporary

conceptual art changed, and could no longer be accommodated in the residential modernist buildings of Hamra.

Introduction of Solidere

The introduction of Solidere, a project for the reconstruction of the city center of Beirut, exacerbated the situation when it effaced the hope for a reconstruction that would conserve ties to the immediate past of Beirut (the period right before the war). The reconstruction efforts dedicated large sums to reconstructing select buildings, mostly in the French mandate style, sweeping away the traditional souks and abandoning or bulldozing many modernist structures. Nonetheless, the political insecurity that ensued in 2005, closed off large parts of downtown Beirut, and allowed other areas such as Hamra, lying outside the city center, and whose development had been left to chance, to receive much-needed attention and capital flow.

An Increased Appetite for Contemporary Arab Art

The initial rise in the interest for the region's history and culture in the post 9/11 period was further instigated by the Arab revolutions starting in 2011. Even before that however, Middle Eastern art markets exploded, as auction house branches opened in Dubai. Art fairs and new art institutions like the Abu Dhabi Louvre, attracted galleries and collectors, and fostered a general interest in modern and contemporary Arab art.

This is the ecosystem within which these three art spaces (Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Saleh Barakat Gallery, and Dar El Nimer) opened or settled in new spaces in Ras Beirut between 2011 and 2016. These art spaces share many characteristics, mainly their modernist architecture, the art medium they prefer, a clear sentimentality and belonging to Ras

Beirut, and the individual nature of these endeavors. Thus, the spaces allow us to track the individuals and their political affiliations and interests. The individual quality provided the stability for these spaces that are funded by one individual, who has bought the space and is there to stay, in the neighborhood they were raised in. It is precisely this stability, financial security and clear program that ties back to Lebanon and the region that has enabled these spaces to bear a resemblance to the former modern Beirut, represented by the architecture of that period.

All the art spaces under study are self-funded and carry the name and legacy of a person: Janine Rubeiz, Rami El Nimer, and Saleh Barakat. All three individuals identify Ras Beirut as their home. The patron model is extremely common for art spaces in Beirut. Since the governmental cultural initiatives are scarce, wealthy private collectors found art galleries and museums to carry their name and legacy (Robert Mouawad Museum, Villa Audi...). They provide their own curated narrative of the art and history of the country as desired by one individual, while “saving” historic buildings from their eventual demise. This model allows for more freedom to express a specific narrative or socio-political stance associated with the owner themselves.

In the case of Galerie Janine Rubeiz, we followed the trajectory of one individual, Janine Rubeiz, as she navigated her way through pre-war Beirut’s cultural landscape. Her ideological beliefs were brought forth through her involvement with the Progressive Socialist Party as Commissioner for Women’s Affairs and eventually Vice President of the party. The various activities she organized and executed in Dar El Fan, such as exhibitions, films, lectures, conferences, and concerts, show an explicit bias towards the leftist

ideologies and political parties. These movements proliferated before the onset of the Lebanese Civil War as a result of the post-independence cultural awakening and the influx of educated populations from Lebanon and the region. Though Dar El Fan initially occupied a traditional Lebanese house, keeping with a nationalist desire to promote Lebanese architecture, the subsequent choices of art spaces that ensued as a result of the destruction of the space, led her to choose modernist architecture time and time again, be it a commercial hotel such as the Carlton or the exhibition space on the ground floor of the Ministry of Tourism, called Salle de Verre.

When Janine Rubeiz opened her home as a gallery, she quite literally made her “dar”, her home, into a house for art, she “sacrificed” her own personal space for the sake of art. The modernist building, designed by her former husband Nadim Majdalani, lay on the strip of Beirut, featured extensively as the postcard view of Beirut, the modernist Riviera was solidified as part of the “Golden Age” image of Beirut.

Janine and her daughter, Nadine, fostered artistic development and continuity in the various phases of the establishment, before and after the war. Although Dar El Fan was dissolved, the networks of connections remain present till now. Dar El Fan was a cultural center and Galerie Janine Rubeiz is a gallery, but they nevertheless kept the same artists such as Chafic Abboud, Huguette Caland, Aref Rayess, Jamil Molaeb, and many more, allowing for a continuity in an art scene that suffered greatly as a result of the war.

As for Saleh Barakat Gallery, he, himself is a well-known curator of modern Arab art. His first endeavor was the Agial Art Gallery which he initiated directly when the war ended in 1991. He launched Saleh Barakat Gallery 25 years after Agial. Both galleries are solely

dedicated to Lebanese and Arab art, which echoes Barakat's Arab Nationalist tendencies. He clearly distinguishes himself from the contemporary experimental artistic practices that dominated the postwar scene, choosing to focus on the more classical art forms, such as painting and sculpture. The modernist space he renovates is the Cinema Clemenceau and former Masrah Al Madina, both important cultural historical landmarks inextricably tied to Hamra's Modernist Golden Age. Barakat recounts his childhood memories in Cinema Clemenceau, the alternative films he watched, and stresses the importance of saving a historical cultural landmark, even if as a gallery space.

Dar El Nimer, house of El Nimer, was initially bought by El Nimer to become his personal family residence. Dar El Nimer is a not-for-profit art foundation established and funded by Rami El Nimer, to showcase cultural production from "Palestine and beyond". Dar El Nimer is a continuation of El Nimer's family collection of arms and armor, on the one hand, and a continuation of the family's philanthropic work. The art foundation opened its doors in 2015 in Clemenceau, one block away from Saleh Barakat Gallery in Villa Salem, an iconic modernist multi-apartments villa, designed by French architect Lucien Cavro in 1936. It is one of the first free plan buildings in Beirut and incorporates unique and innovative details. The building witnessed several transformations over the years, the most public of which is the current Dar El Nimer program.

In Beirut's tight-knit community, and the Beirut art scene more specifically, there is much room for interaction and cooperation. Gallerists such as Nadine Begdache and Saleh Barakat have long cooperated together in curating exhibitions such as Chafic Abboud's retrospective at the Beirut Exhibition Center in 2012, especially since they represent

similar artists, Lebanese and Arab, modern and contemporary artists. They both believe in Beirut's role as a cultural hub and intersection of a range of factors and talents.

The three art spaces under study all prefer the more "traditional" or "classical" art, such as painting and sculpture, as opposed to the more contemporary "conceptual" art characterized by installations and video art. They distance themselves from the contemporary conceptual institutions like Ashkal Alwan and the Beirut Art Center, who have occupied the peripheries of the city. These art spaces were able to open new art spaces in Ras Beirut precisely because the type of art they exhibit does not require any special spatial considerations, like an industrial space on the outskirts of the city. Additionally, all three art spaces are owned by their respective founders. Their financial capacity to acquire these spaces allowed them to sustain their art spaces in "central" locations, as opposed to collectives that rely on donations and foreign funding and often cannot afford to remain in Ras Beirut.

Through their rhetoric and programming, the three art spaces show a sentimentality to a golden age of Lebanon before the war that they wish to revive. They have lived through the war and witnessed the exploitation and transformation of Beirut into a large-scale failed real estate project. They all repurpose modernist buildings in Ras Beirut. Modernist architecture is not considered "heritage" by Lebanese law, so it becomes a case of individual endeavors to save these buildings which characterize the image of Beirut's glory days.

Different approaches to adaptive reuse are adopted in the three different projects, but they all share similar sentiments. Architecturally, the aspect of relying on patterns and

motifs, shows a preoccupation with the modernist “image” signifiers that designers incorporated in the renovation of the art spaces. The hexagonal travertine stone Galerie Janine Rubeiz, the stark white envelope of Dar El Nimer and recurring motifs of the triangular claustra, accentuate the modernist character of the spaces.

Experientially, the three art spaces all introduced an architectural promenade that elongates the experience of the visitor and immerses them in the typologically modernist Ras Beiruti experience set forth by the vertical sorting of the different building functions. The floor in Galerie Janine Rubeiz was lowered and created an opportunity to pause outside the gallery and take note of the entrance that doubles as an elaborate sign. Saleh Barakat Gallery plays on the idea and experience of cascading up and down the streets of Hamra into its cultural spaces. It even uses the overhead space of the wide staircase to transport artwork into the main space. Similarly, Dar El Nimer introduced a wide ramp surrounded by lush greenery to provide a loading dock for large packages. The ramp simultaneously smoothens the experience into the gallery space and provides a longer path, a promenade through a tropical garden.

All three private art spaces show a preoccupation or sense of responsibility towards society and presenting narratives in an accessible, educational manner. They all stress the aspect of inclusion and the participation of a broad range of individuals. They attempt to make the experience of visiting an art space as “unpretentious” as possible, such as exhibiting the work of younger, more affordable artists choosing an art space that is accessible by public transport (Saleh Barakat Gallery) or hosting some pop culture events to engage new audiences (Dar El Nimer). Galerie Janine Rubeiz even went as far as hosting

an open call for artists to express their opinions about the ongoing revolutions. The ability to be open and transparent was not possible until substantial time had passed since the end of the Lebanese Civil War. Insurance companies in the nineties, for instance, urged art spaces to set up their galleries underground for security purposes. Agial Art Gallery's façade is much more protected than the curtain glass façade of Saleh Barakat Gallery. Similarly, Galerie Janine Rubeiz moved from the second floor of a residential apartment to a ground floor space in 2010.

Modernist architecture in 1950's and 1960's Ras Beirut was synonymous with the highly-educated middle class populations who inhabited the area, as well as the wealthy Lebanese families who benefitted from the oil boom in the Gulf and Beirut's laissez faire business climate. The older generation's nostalgia towards this era and its architecture is accompanied with memories of great wealth and prosperity, before the Lebanese Civil War. Designers retrofit these art spaces to suit the standards and specifications of art spaces, while trying to attract the country's richer class and Ras Beirut's, who are often yearning to relive or revive the glory days of their past. As such, the small, white-cube galleries they create lean towards a more "luxurious" and "polished" space, rather than the "raw" industrial white cube gallery feel. The "polished" look comes forth in the design and renovation of the architectural details, such as the lighting systems used and the choice of materials. The modernist architecture in Ras Beirut is also a reminder of a time of growth and openness. At the time, Beirut was experiencing an unprecedented traffic in people and ideas alike. Its cosmopolitan character attracted many, foreigners and locals alike, who wished to be assimilated in its liberal, highly-educated society. Beirut's

diversity was its strength, but led to its eventual downfall. Terms like “cosmopolitanism” and “modernism” meant different things to different groups. Beirut was not just “cosmopolitan” in the sense that it was looking westwards. Ras Beirut was also a hub for Pan Arabism before the war. Defining cosmopolitanism according to the Ras Beiruti context requires further unpacking. However, the three art spaces, in their attempt to revive their past and show the face of a cosmopolitan Ras Beirut, provide a glimpse of the spectrum that characterized the prewar modern, cosmopolitan Beirut, the different symbolism it engenders, and its manifestation in the art and architecture of each art space.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Location (Significance)
Type of Institution
Founder(s)
Current Team
Sponsors
Exhibitions
Artists (& type of art)

Website Description

How do they describe themselves?
How do they describe their space?
How much space do they have?
Is the building mentioned? (Are photos available?)
Is the architect mentioned?
How are the facilities for exhibitions? What do they provide?
How are the facilities maintained?

Catalogues

What kind of exhibitions?
What type of information is mentioned?
What references do they make to other art practices?
How do they describe the exhibitions?
How do they describe the artists?
Think of the type of exhibition in relation to:

- Current themes (at the time of the exhibition)
- Installation and Layout of the Artwork
 - How flexible is the space?
 - How is the artwork exhibited?
- Artists:
 - Who are they?
 - What kind of art?
 - What nationalities?
 - Where have they studied?
 - Established?
 - What topics do they tackle? (in relation to current topics)
 - Who chooses the artists?

Press/ Reviews

How does the media describe them?
Are all their exhibitions mentioned in the agenda culturel?
Do they pay for ads in the agenda culturel?
Do they print posters?

What is their main venue for advertising events (if any)?

How were the exhibitions received?

- Annahar Newspaper
 - Which exhibitions were reviewed?
 - Which exhibitions were omitted?
 - Who was the writer?
 - Who is the art critic or writer whose opinion is respected? Are they invited to events? What does this person often focus on?
 - What was commended?
 - What was criticized?
 - What was mentioned about the spatial experience? Architecture or layout of the art
 - What was mentioned about the exhibition in terms of current issues/ references/ other art practices?
 - Interesting captions
- l'Orient le Jour Newspaper
 - Which exhibitions were reviewed?
 - Which exhibitions were omitted?
 - Who was the writer?
 - What was commended?
 - What was criticized?
 - What was mentioned about the spatial experience? Architecture or layout of the art
 - What was mentioned about the exhibition in terms of current issues/ references/ other art practices?
 - Interesting captions

Reception/General Public View

Are art critics invited? Who are they? Whose opinion do you care about?

Do they advertise through social media or through agenda culture? Radio? Other sources?

What does this say about the type of audience? And how can this be traced?

Is it close (location) to other prominent galleries, cultural institutions (foreign/local), or other art galleries?

Spatial Experience

(Questions to the Curator or Founder)

How would you describe the space of your institutions in a few words?

How much space do you have?

What are the limitations of the space?

How often does an exhibition take place versus time without exhibitions or time preparing the space?

Location/ Typology

What was the reason for choosing this location?
What kind of space were you looking for?
What was your perception of this location you chose before moving in?
How did your experience change after moving in?
What are common comments you receive about the accessibility or character of the space?
Is the architect mentioned?
How are the facilities for exhibitions? What do they provide?

Architects

Name of Architect and/or Firm:

Collaborated with: other developers/ consultants?

Did you choose them or were they imposed?

What do their websites say about the space they designed?

Questions for the architects:

- What was the brief you received for this particular project?
- Who was the client?
- Most of the Projects are renovation/ adaptive reuse projects:
 - How did you deal with the existing site?
 - How do you think the building relates to its surroundings? Architecturally and programmatically?
 - What added benefit do you think the space had for the neighborhood or city?
 - If you were to describe the building visually and spatially in a few words, what would you say?
- What was the client asking for?
 - What was their vision for the space?
 - Architecturally
 - How the artwork will be installed
 - Access to the space
 - Was it meant to be inviting?
 - What kind of crowd do you think was it catering for?
 - Colors/ Mood/ Materials
 - Precedents (what museum or gallery were they referencing?)
 - What was your vision for the space?
 - What do you think of the end product?
 - Same categories
 - Has it been published or presented?
 - In Lebanon or abroad?
 - Online/ in-print or both. List platforms.
 - How was it received?
 - What kind of criticism did the firm or architect receive?
- Would you have recommended this space to be a gallery? Why?