



Beirut بيروت Beyrouth

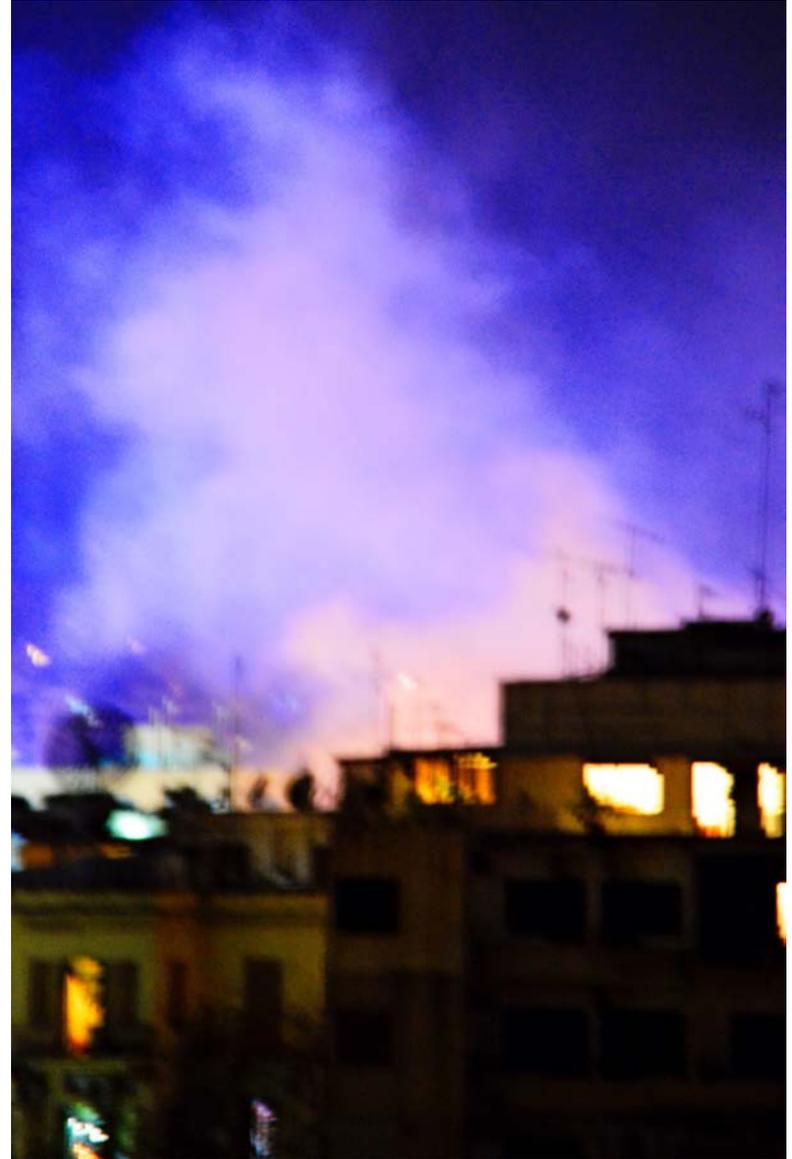
Beirut بيروت Beyrouth

by Elizabeth Hefty  
2021

Dedicated to the two men who were with me on this journey: to Dan, who began it with me, and was the driving force behind my first steps in the Middle East; and to Bob, who walked with me through the streets he knew, and showed me sights he had seen, and helped me see the city through new eyes. And, finally, to Beirut, which has weathered so much and where I finally found myself.









LIVE

LOVE

BEIRUT

33

33

# Preface



SECTEUR 71 | منطقة ٧١  
MAR NICOLAS | شارع نقولا

شارع مكار نقولا  
RUE SAINT NICOLAS

RUE 60 | شارع ٦٠



KEEP  
CALM

*There is a place I once was. A place where I wanted to stay. I hide, like a child, hoping no-one would find me. If I was very quiet. Stay. Hidden away. But I was found and dragged back. Home, they said. But it wasn't home. Home was the place where I wanted to stay.*

Why do some places constantly call us home? Places unknown before we stepped into them, suddenly become as familiar as our own face. I had never been to Lebanon, never even considered it beyond what I heard on the news. It seemed sad, remote. But fate spins its own thread, and circumstances landed me upon its shores. And, subtly and unconsciously, I found a sense of belonging. A place where *I* felt at home.

I watch the events unfold there and that sadness comes back. History on repeat. An endless cycle of powerlessness and power wrapped in sectarian clothing. I wonder will it ever find peace, ever come to terms with itself?





Where we are from is not always where we were born or raised. We find ourselves in a place we connect with, that reaches out and roots us. Sometimes it will be the place that we live, and work, and breathe. Sometimes we will form a complex relationship with it, not able to stay, yet not able to stay away. Thus, is my relationship with Beirut. Twice I have lived there. Twice I have been loathe to leave, and twice circumstances have dragged me away. But it is there that my heart lies. It beats in my chest, and I feel a sense of loss being so far away. It is my muse, where my work finally crystallized into form. Stories grew from dirty streets and broken bricks. Paintings emerged from watching from windows. Poems danced into being from conversations overheard over cups of coffee drunk on lazy days.

I miss it. Looking through the work I have collected over the years I feel my heart hurt. Remembering the places, the faces, hearing the voices, recalling the smells and the feeling of the hot air on my skin. I am transported in my mind, back to a place where, for all its instabilities and chaos, I felt safe.

My internal landscape mirrored my external one, and perhaps that is why Beirut took such a hold over me. There I wrestled with mortality and loss, change and acceptance. There I lost and found myself. I wrote my memories into its stones. Nighttime wanderings deep in thought. Watching the moon set and the sun rise, hearing the sea break over the rocks. Rain drizzling on my skin, mingled with the spray of the surf as stories spin in my mind. And everything so layered with time. War and death, destruction and rebirth. A phoenix.

The photographs and writings in this book were taken and written over a period of five years. They are the result of my wanderings, my confusion, my own seeking of meaning. They are my ode to my muse.



SAI

7

DESIGNER & DEVELOPER  
1477

# Beirut

a brief history



Writing a brief history of a city is never an easy task. How do you condense millennia into a few pages? The reader should keep in mind that a city is not just a place, or architecture; it is the sum of its history and its future, of all the people who have lived, live, and will live there.

Beirut, Beyrouth, بيروت, is a city of the sea. Built on two hills, Achrafieh and Mosaitbeh, it is a peninsula surrounded on three sides by the sea. The history of Beirut can be traced to prehistoric times - flint tools have been found near the cliffs overlooking "Raoucher" - yet most historians agree that the origins of Beirut date from around 5000 BCE. Beirut's name is derived from beir, "well", with Beirut being the plural in Semitic languages, thus a town with many wells became "Be'erōt" or, Beirut.

The first mention of Beirut in historical texts comes from the 14<sup>th</sup> century BCE, in the "Amarna Letters" found in Egypt. These were a series of correspondence between the city-states of Phoenicia asking the Pharaoh for help against the "sea people", but, for the most part, the city lay hidden in history, lying in the shadows of its two hills, facing the north, until 140 BCE., Diodotus Tryphon seized and destroyed the city, causing it to be rebuilt in a Hellenistic manner, the resulting city being renamed Laodicea in honor of a Seleucid Laodice. Numismatic finds from that era shows the goddess of fortune on one side and a dolphin on the other side of the coins.

The Romans conquered Beirut in 64 BCE. Agrippa and his legions, in the same tradition as the Greeks, renamed the city, "Colonia Julia Augusta Felix" in honor of the emperor's daughter, Julia. The city became Romanized with large public buildings. In 14 BCE, the "Beirut school of law" came to fame. The School of Law became widely known thanks to the work of two of Rome's most famous jurists, Papinian and Ulpian, who taught there under the Severan emperors. The city was a quintessential roman city; it had its temples, thermae and aqueduct, and their ruins are still visible in archeological digs that can be seen in modern downtown Beirut, as well as a complex aqueduct known as "Qanater zubeidah" east of Beirut over the Beirut river.



In 551 CE, a triple catastrophe hit the city: earthquake, tidal wave and fire. About 30,000 people were killed in Berytus alone and, along the Phoenician coast the total casualties were close to 250,000. In ruins, the city slipped into obscurity again, becoming a quiet town by the sea. Long years of wars between the Byzantine empire and the Persian empire had left the region in ruins.

However, a new era was coming to the Middle east; the Arabs were coming. In 635CE the Arab conquest reached Beirut, which still lay in ruins. The Arabs reconstructed Beirut, making it a small, walled town that was part of the Damascus province. At the time it was overshadowed by other cities to the south and north, until the Fatimide state from Egypt came into existence in 977 CE. Then Beirut evolved a new role, and became the port to Damascus, and it regained some of its earlier status.

As the middle ages unfolded, the first Crusade reached Beirut in 1110CE, which, along with its coastal suburbs, was organized as a fief of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. Beirut developed flourishing trade with Genoa and other Italian cities, which further consolidated its growing importance in the region. This was disrupted when Saladin reconquered Beirut from the Crusaders in 1187, but his successors lost the city to them again 10 years later. In 1291 the Mamlūks finally drove the Crusaders. Under the Mamlūks rule, Beirut returned to its role as the port of Syria for the spice merchants from Venice.

1516 was the year when the Mamlūks lost their empire to the Ottomans, and Beirut again changed hands, but this time it was placed under the control of the local mountain emirs, Fakr ed-Din of Maan family, as a semi-autonomous state. The emir's son and successor, Fakr ed-Din Maan II (1572-1635), made Beirut the state's winter capital, and encouraged silk trading with Europe through the port. With wealth the trade ambitions of local emirs grew thus triggering the Ottoman rulers to subdue secessionist movements which sought to break away from the empire. As the rulers of the adjacent Ottoman provinces fought for dominance, Beirut and Mount Lebanon fell victim to the power struggle, changing hands from Damascus province to Sidon province. After a tormented era, between local emirs fighting to take power and natural disaster, the Ottomans retook Beirut in 1763, and it regained a share of the maritime trade. For a few years it was the main trading center in the region. During the following epoch of rebellion against Ottoman rule in Akka and by the ruling pashas in Damascus, Beirut declined again into being a small town (population 10,000), constantly changing hands between the Druze, the Turks, and the pashas.



After Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt and the rise of Mohammad Ali, Ali's son Ibrahim Pasha marched to the Levant (1832-1840), this was a turning point for Beirut; commercial activity grew, foreign consuls and missionaries settled. After the civil unrest in the mountains, many families fled to Beirut, driving the population to 15000, and it soon outgrew its walls. In 1866, American Protestant missionaries established the Syrian Protestant College, which later became the American University of Beirut, and French Jesuit missionaries established St. Joseph University in 1881. By 1888 Beirut became capital of coastal Syria and Palestine, and as peace reigned over the mountain after 1860 war, Beirut began becoming a cosmopolitan center of the region. The modern harbor was built by the French in 1894, and a railway was established in 1907 linking Beirut to Damascus and Aleppo. Beirut's architecture started to adopt an extraverted structure in concordance with the transformation of wider cultural values. Along with old collective habitat "Beiruti" residences, there appeared high constructions with three-arch windows and red-tiled roofs. Beirut, the Arab city, became what now referred to as a "Mediterranean bourgeoisie city. The project to modernize Beirut that started in 1880 ended in 1900, creating a separate space between the administrative public spaces and residential areas. The new bourgeoisie started to move outside the city walls, and in 1915 the wall was removed altogether.

After the Great War of 1914-1918, Beirut again changed rulers. The Ottoman empire had crumbled, and now the city belonged to the French mandate, which was to last from 1920 to 1943. During this period, Beirut expanded toward the west as new districts were built, like Hamra, the south with Mosaitbeh, and the east by Achrafieh. During the 1950s and the boycott to Haifa port, Beirut port became the main hub for regional maritime transport supplying Iraq, Syria and the Gulf. Old Beirut spilled into Hamra Street, turning it into a major commercial district. The economic boom of Beirut brought hospitals, universities, schools, printing services, newspapers and banks, making Beirut a center for services not only to Lebanon but to the whole Levant and the Gulf. The booming economy attracted an internal exodus from all the Lebanese regions which created in developing slums which surrounded the city at the expense of fertile fields and farmland. During the 1960s and early 1970s, the economic boom created an active middle class who inhabited Beirut and its suburbs, like Furn el Cheback, Chiyah. The burgeoning slums grew mainly to east like Quarantina, Karm el Zeitoun and Borj Hamoud, as well as Ouzaii to the south.



In 1975, civil war started in one of Beirut's suburbs, spreading like wildfire along the iconic Damascus Road and splitting the city between east and west. It resulted in the destruction of the historical city center, so that services migrated to the suburbs, participating the decentralization of services toward the suburbs. In 1990 the war officially ended, and in 1992 the reconstruction of Beirut started.

Beirut today, for older residents the city is not the same; physically it has changed so much in their lifetime. For younger generations, it is a flamboyant, modern place. Beirut is a city which possesses many faces. From the sanctity of its religious places to the flowing river of pleasure in its night life, from the scholarly achievements of its universities to the darkest corners of fanaticism. But above all it is a city that is alive, with faces to amaze and bewilder all who gaze upon them.











dereliction

the beauty of the broken



## There is beauty in dereliction...

History carves its mark. Waves of development wrought clearly in stone and brick, glass and steel. The old city is dying now, its elegant facades swept away by looming hulks of soulless edifices.

But look, and you see them. Sagging shutters that once opened and closed on many paned windows; rusty iron railings guarding weed grown gardens. Gaping holes where once were sturdy doors. Cross the threshold into their dust choked hearts and feel the ghosts of the past still breathing.



عدم رمي  
القنابل  
طائرة  
القنابل  
القنابل







Hiding in plain sight, wearing their crumbling stones like a disguise. Yet I see them. They shine more brightly than the polished glass and steel of their glamorous companions. Each worn brick or tile has felt history, each broken pane of glass shattered from seeing too much. I peer inside, all means of blocking ingress long gone. The shadows are pierced by light filtering through a thousand rents. Stars in the darkness.





Dutch Boy

أخوان الريشاني شركة  
للادوات الصحية و الدهانات و  
03/750925  
03/890950  
329042

Demarcation Line.

Shifting, like sand,  
it runs across the heart of  
the city like a scar.

And while we can wear our scars with pride,  
badges of courage and strength,  
this lies  
like a cancer.

An illness never healed,  
with wounds never mended.





































# portals

the interstices of spaces



Doors and windows that had seen turmoil and conflict, had watched violence unfold around them with their unblinking gaze. They also held the hidden memories of ordinary lives lived. Many do not now exist, destroyed by developers or the explosion which devastated part of the city. In these buildings I saw the city's soul, a soul which, although the city may clothe itself in new raiments to reinvent itself, cannot hide its truth. The truth is there, hidden in plain sight, bleeding out into the light, through boarded windows and barbed wire doors.



*It looms, dark and forbidding, wide and inviting. What lurks inside? I can't see beyond the gloom. No barrier repels my advance, no wire bars my way, yet there is a tacit understanding between us that I am not to enter. But despite this, I am pulled towards the gaping void, a siren call of the unknown and unknowable; curiosity compelling me, pushing me. I stand on the threshold, framed by its physicality; neither outside nor inside. I exist in the space in between. I am nowhere, but I am everywhere.*

Doorways and windows obsess me. These portals, leading from the outside in, and the inside out; open, exposed, voids straddling the cusp. They welcome and repel. The delineation of spaces, existing in two worlds yet, in neither. They are gate ways, the thresholds of which we must pass on our constant journeys between the interior and exterior, and in doing so portals create a realm of their own, a realm of transition.



*The gate writhes with wrought iron snakes which guard the secrets lying behind the closed green door. Glass frosted like ice. No trespassing. I can only look but cannot enter.*



In mythology this otherness, this thing existing between two oppositional forces, has traditionally held great power. It is where the laws of physics cease to matter. Sunrise – sunset. Dawn – dusk. Both yet neither. All yet nothing. It is in this transcendental space that portals exist. Not only moving us between two states of being, but as a state of being themselves.



*Wire wraps it, trying to bind the walls together to hide the wound. Yet the darkness behind peeps out; escaping, retreating. Windows boarded shut, only the door remains. Small gaps through which space passes, passes from one to the other, afraid to wait in the jagged embrace of iron barbs. I want to cut those bindings, break the darkness free so that I can feel it.*

When portals exist in derelict buildings, their sense of existing in a transitional world is heightened. The boundaries between the interior and the exterior have physically disappeared, yet they still exist. Their role as entryways remains.



*No traces remain of glass in the frame. Long disappeared, forever holding the sights its glassy eyes have seen secret. Wood, warped by weather, worn by time, still valiantly keeps the wall from claiming it as the algae covered concrete sags slowly to the ground. I am looking in...who once looked out? What did they see as they gazed through this window at the street below?*

Decay is part of the natural order of cities. Eventually everything built will crumble, leaving only fragments, traces. As they fall back into the earth they are like ghosts, shadows of what they once were, holding the city's soul in their stones and ashes.

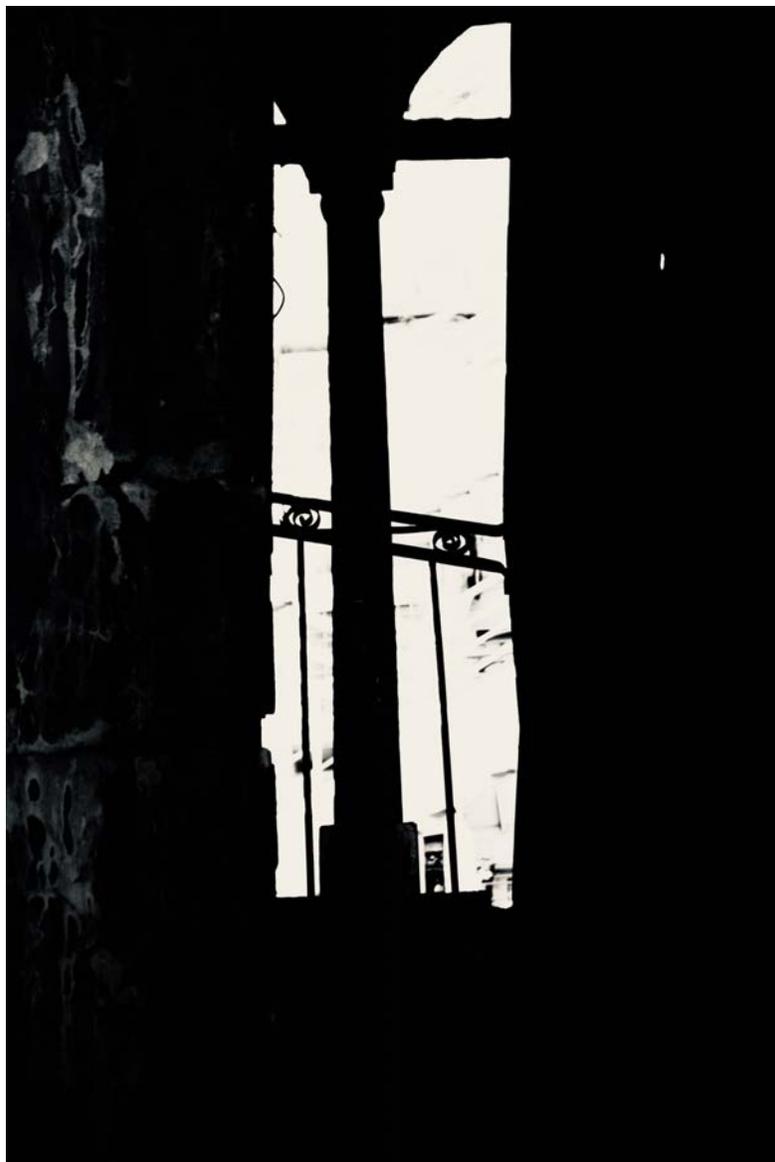


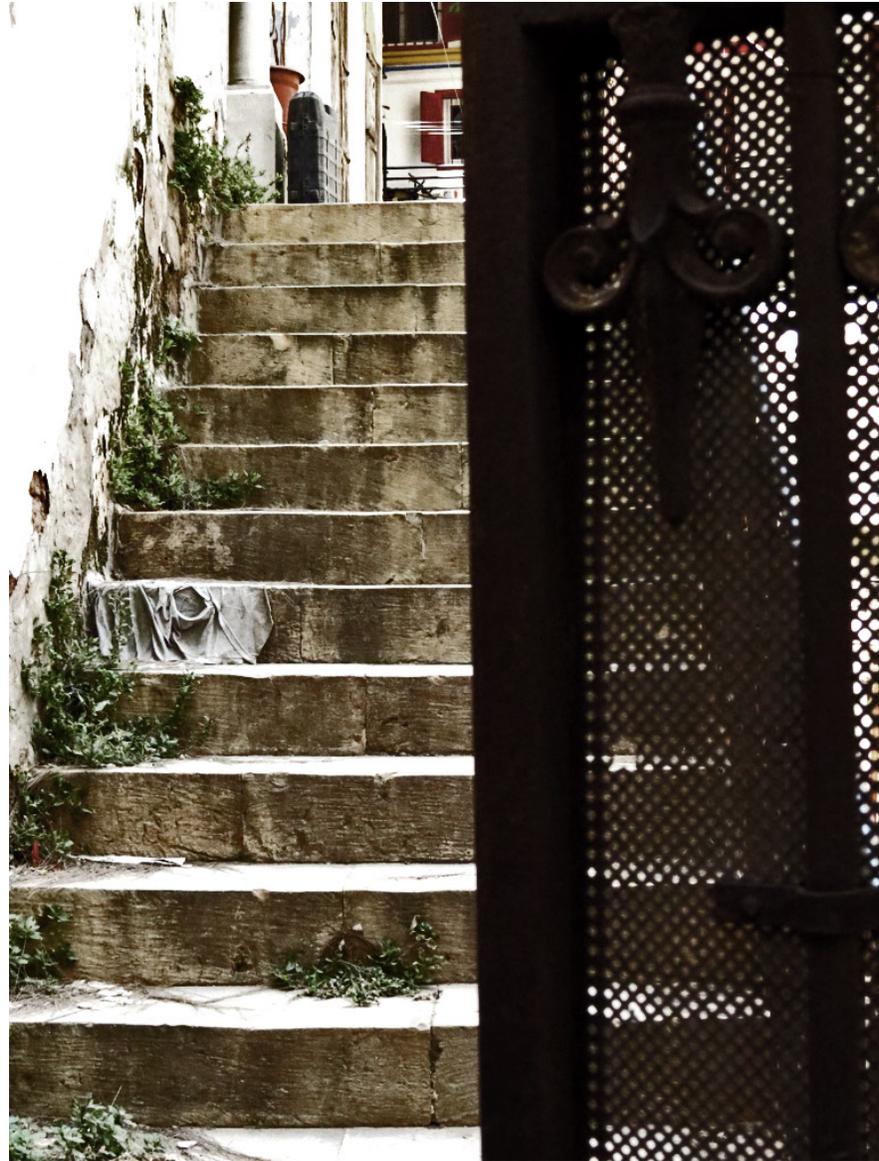
*Nature is reclaiming its ground here. Bushes push themselves through the urban soil and crowd the doorway as if to say, “keep out!” Thorns tear at my skin as I squeeze myself past, trying not to invade their space. Inside it is cool, the air is trying to escape into the heat of the day. It stops at the doorway, as if it is afraid, and seems to race again inside. Light dances on the walls, the rubbish strewn floor, from a multitude of empty windows. But the bushes darken the door, as if forming a demarcation line between it and them. Maybe they want to hide it, to make it disappear.*





















# reflections

views from many windows



An image is a snapshot in time and space and becomes, as soon as it is created, history. I deliberately evoke vintage photographs, making their position in time vague. Their unspecificity is deliberate, part of the process of a discursive narrative of the city and its history which pre and post dates their creation.



Windows are my inspiration. To sit, and watch the world, stirs my imagination. The writings in this chapter were penned while gazing out of various windows. Feeling disconnected, apart, they are a lens through which I see.



The city is spread before me....a tapestry of lives, stitched together with thread so dense, yet so fragile. Each window, a portal to a secret world whose lights, at night, spark the imagination with a thousand stories.



كهرباء









The past never leaves us  
It stays,  
Haunting the ruins of what was once  
Echoing through the walls of what is now

Your past is etched on your skin  
Tattooed memory  
Which only you cannot see  
But I can read you like a map  
Though I keep losing myself  
Tripping over the landmines you planted long ago.

It echoes through the corridors of the present  
Ghosts from the ruins of the past  
Haunting us  
Tethering us to history.



I have a friend.

He is a man with stories.

Stories that, though I yearn to hear,

I dare not ask to be told.

A hard husk clothes his fragile soul,  
protecting a place I can sometimes see...

but I do not pry or delve.

Despite my desire to fix and mend,

I know all I can do is simply be,

And that is all he asks.











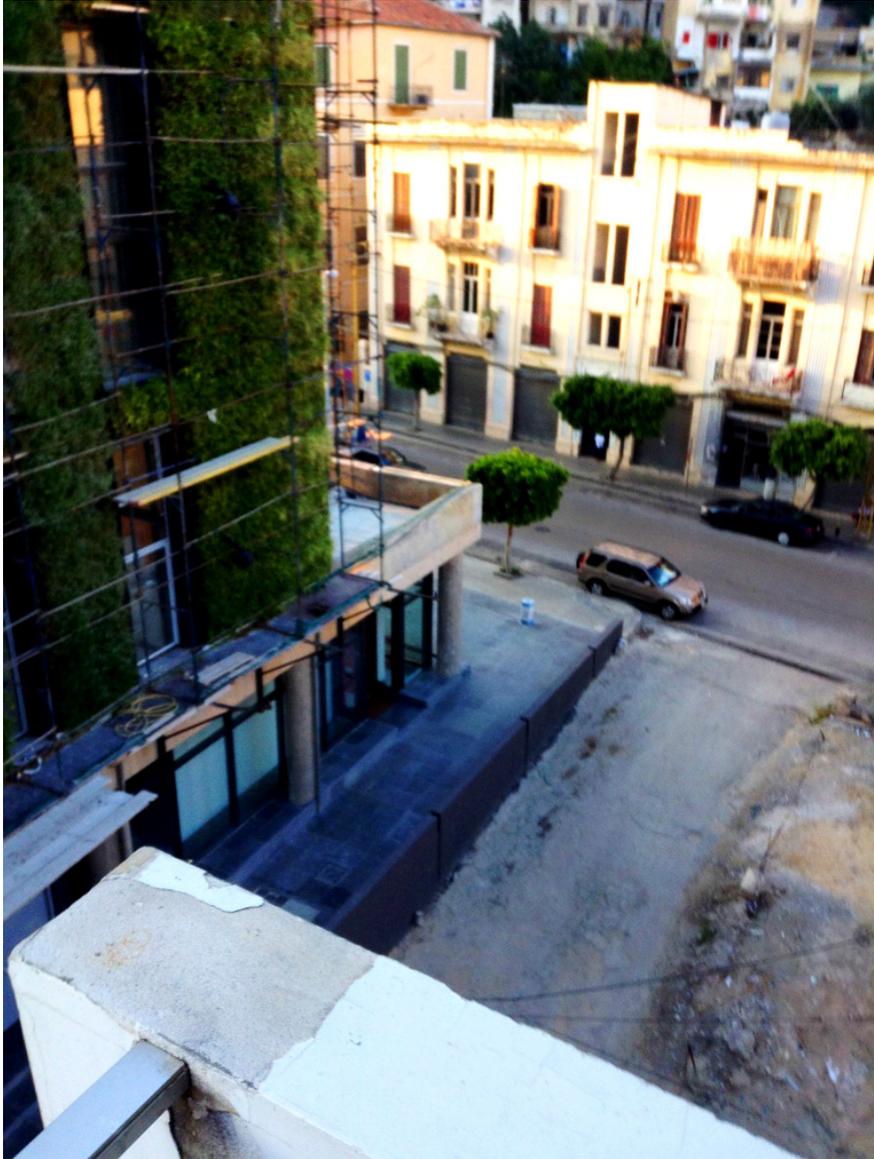








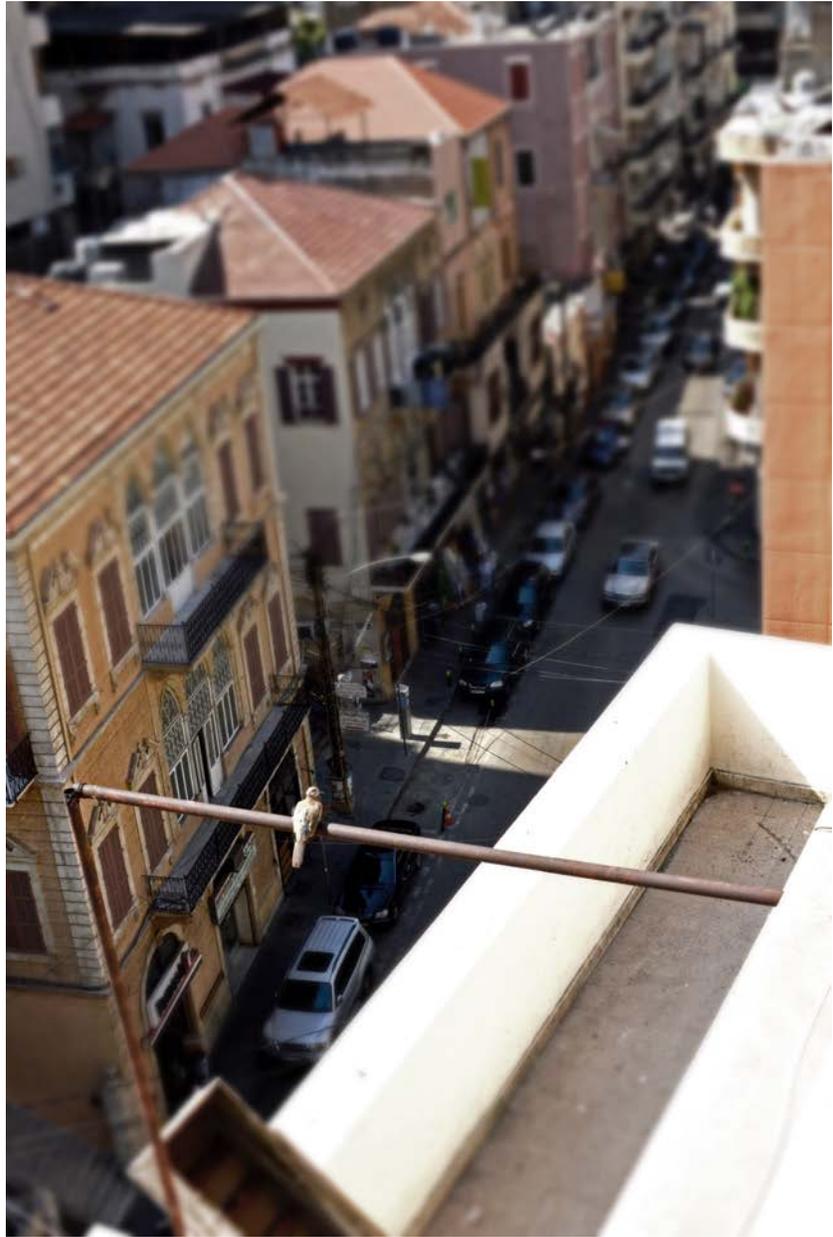






















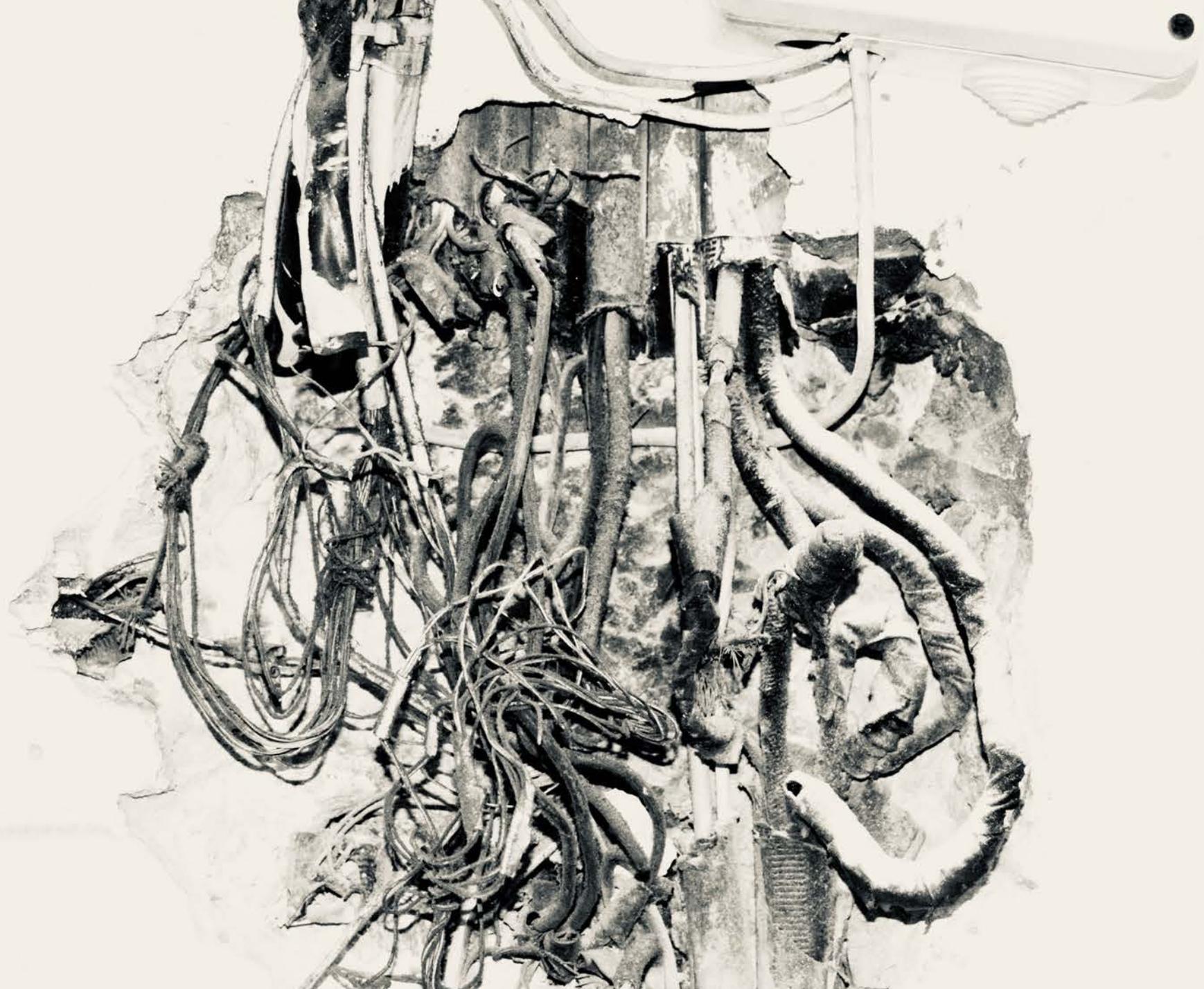


# abstractions

perceptions are not absolutes



fragments  
a series of disconnected things  
insignificant  
small  
held together by slender threads  
a narrative of memories  
no diegesis,  
no rhyme,  
no reason  
just snippets of things  
once remembered  
now dead.  
errant thoughts  
floating on fragile tethers to memory  
stories with endings  
that can never be writ.



This is a city of contradictions

truth...lies

victory...defeat

love...hate

joy...sadness

clarity...confusion

strength...weakness

life...death

sanity...madness

bravery...cowardice

warmth...coldness

empathy...apathy























قهوة

qahwa/coffee



Coffee. Timeless. Sensual. dark, bitter brew which sustains us through the hours. It assails our senses, awakens our brains. The taste on our tongue, the aroma breathed deep. Prisms dance on the surface; colors beyond the rainbow, escaping from the dark depths of its flavor.

In Lebanon coffee is an integral part of the fabric of life. From the dawn of day until the waning of the moon it is the symphony of the hours. Drunk slowly, never gulped, words said - or not - between the sips, it transcends time. Race, religion, social status – all fade into the eternal pool of a pot of coffee.







Coffee for every taste and every mood



**NESCAFÉ**  
*Alegria*

DAILY FRESH CROISSANTS















RICHES TEA

RICHES TEA

شاي الأخضر  
Green Tea  
Zhourat Si  
الجزائر

شاي الخبز

الجزائر  
Zhourat Si

## How to brew Lebanese coffee:

Boil water in the pot.

Add finely ground coffee to the boiling water (the amount depends on the size of pot; this one takes 4 teaspoons).

Boil until the foam disappears.

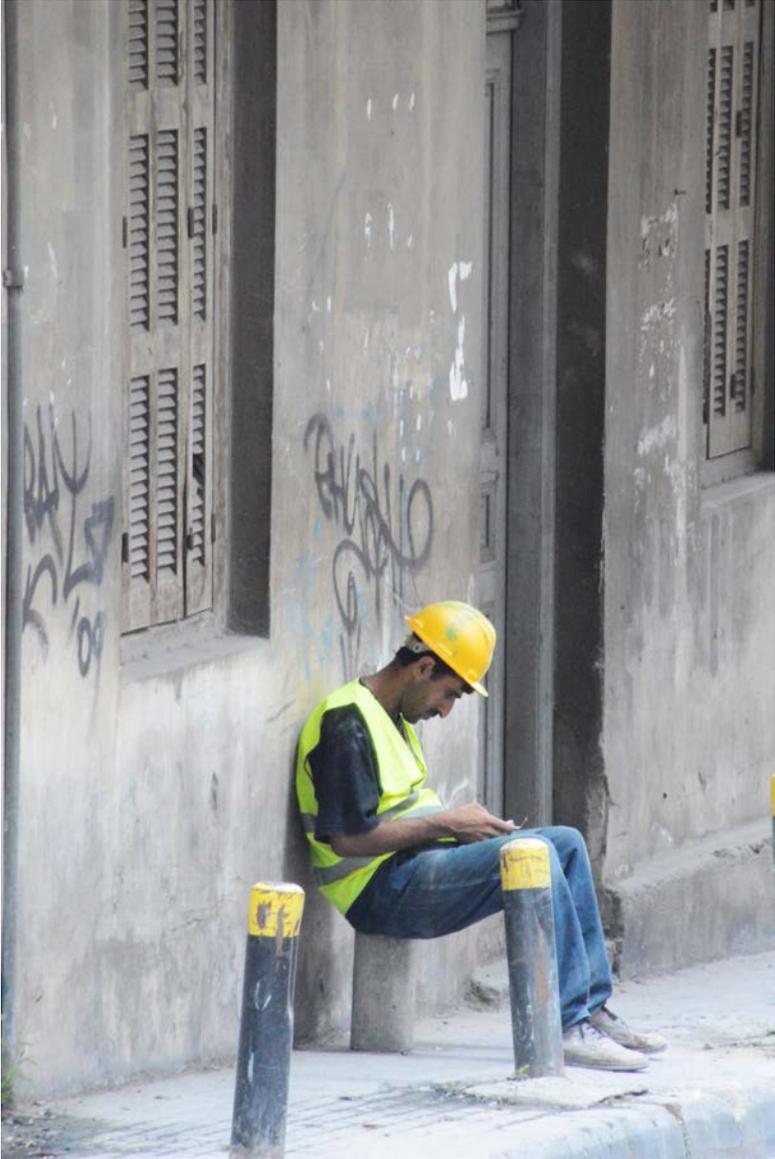
Repeat.

Let sit until the grounds settle.

Pour and serve.

Not to hurried.





# footsteps

on the streets of Beirut













There is more than one city. Cities within cities, like Russian dolls, existing within themselves. The gleaming towers of the rich overshadow the slums of the poor. Glamorous urbanites in designer clothes rub shoulders with refugees in rags. Old wounds fester under the bandages of 21st century modernity.





The children are everywhere. Dirty faced urchins with souls far too old for their years.

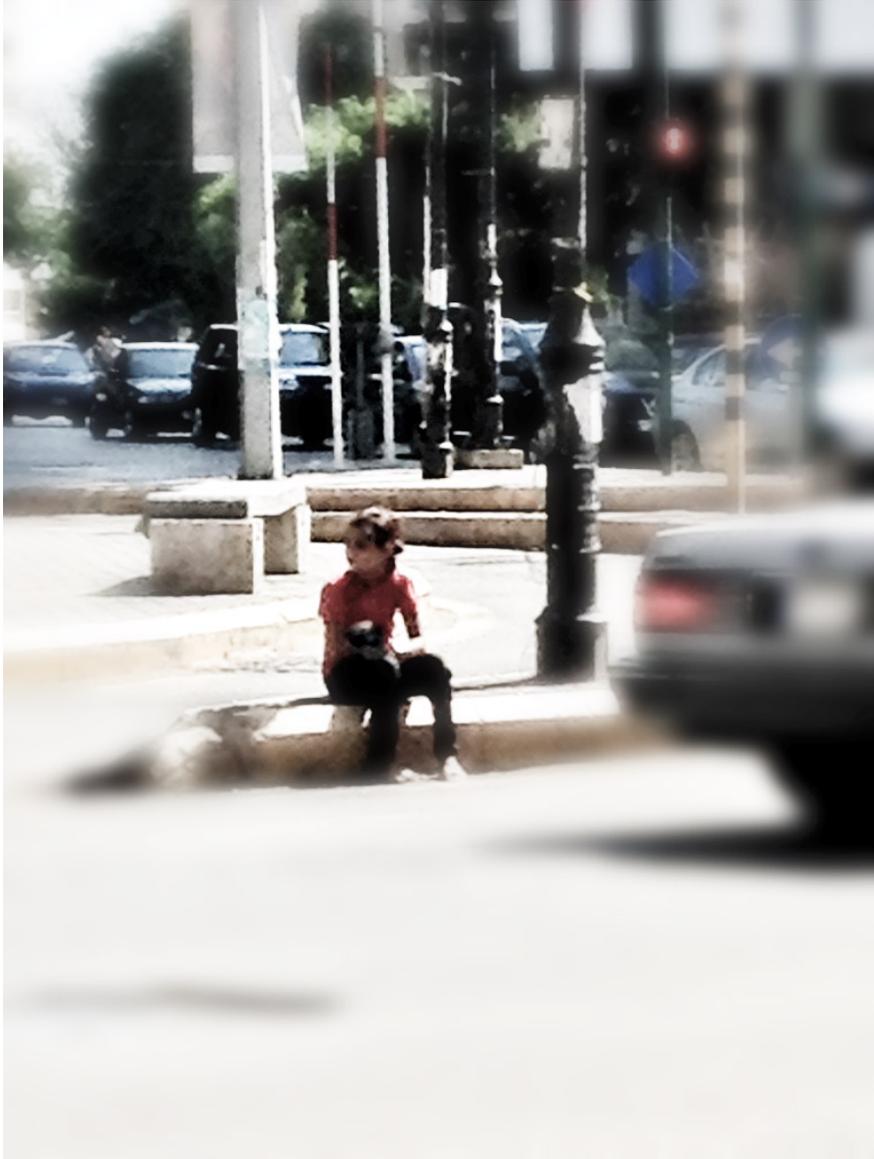
“Ignore them,” I am told.

And I try.

But I see my child.

I see myself in years now long gone by.

Refugees and home-grown poverty fill the streets with the poor. Children denied childhood, set out on the street by adults on whom they should be able to depend. Their faces haunted me. Sitting for a coffee, or walking by the sea long after midnight, they were there. Dirty, ragged, with eyes which had seen far too much. Sadness and anger swim together inside of me, and that terrible feeling of powerlessness, knowing that there is nothing I can do to change anything.





Do you know

why you're alive?





ممنوع

**A city**  
*within*  
**the city.**





PLUS PROPERTIES

بنك بيروت  
Bank of Beirut

TOTAL

BBR

Liban





ONE  
LIBAN

Questionner  
c'est  
désobéir





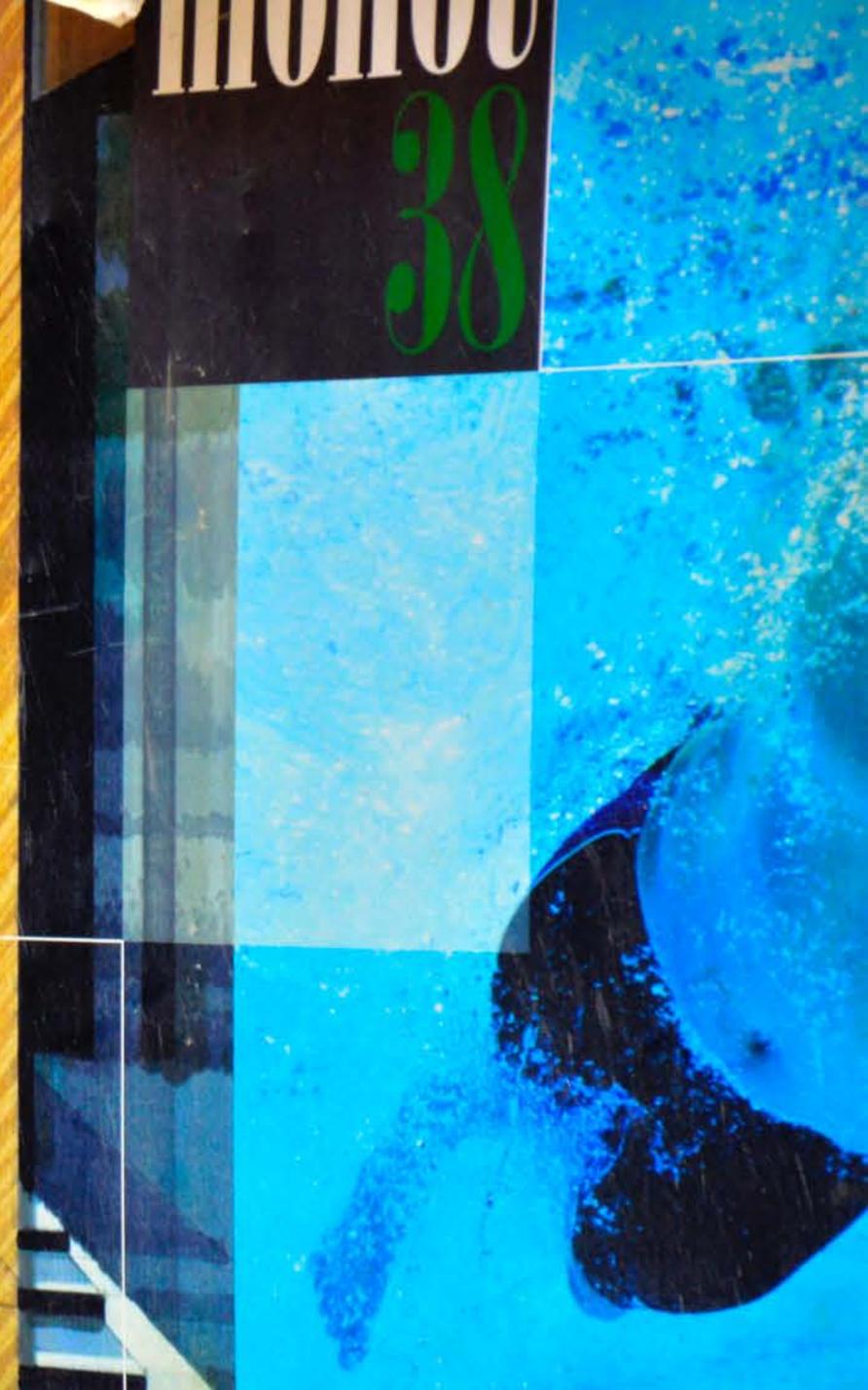




# THE URBAN DREAM



MONROE  
38

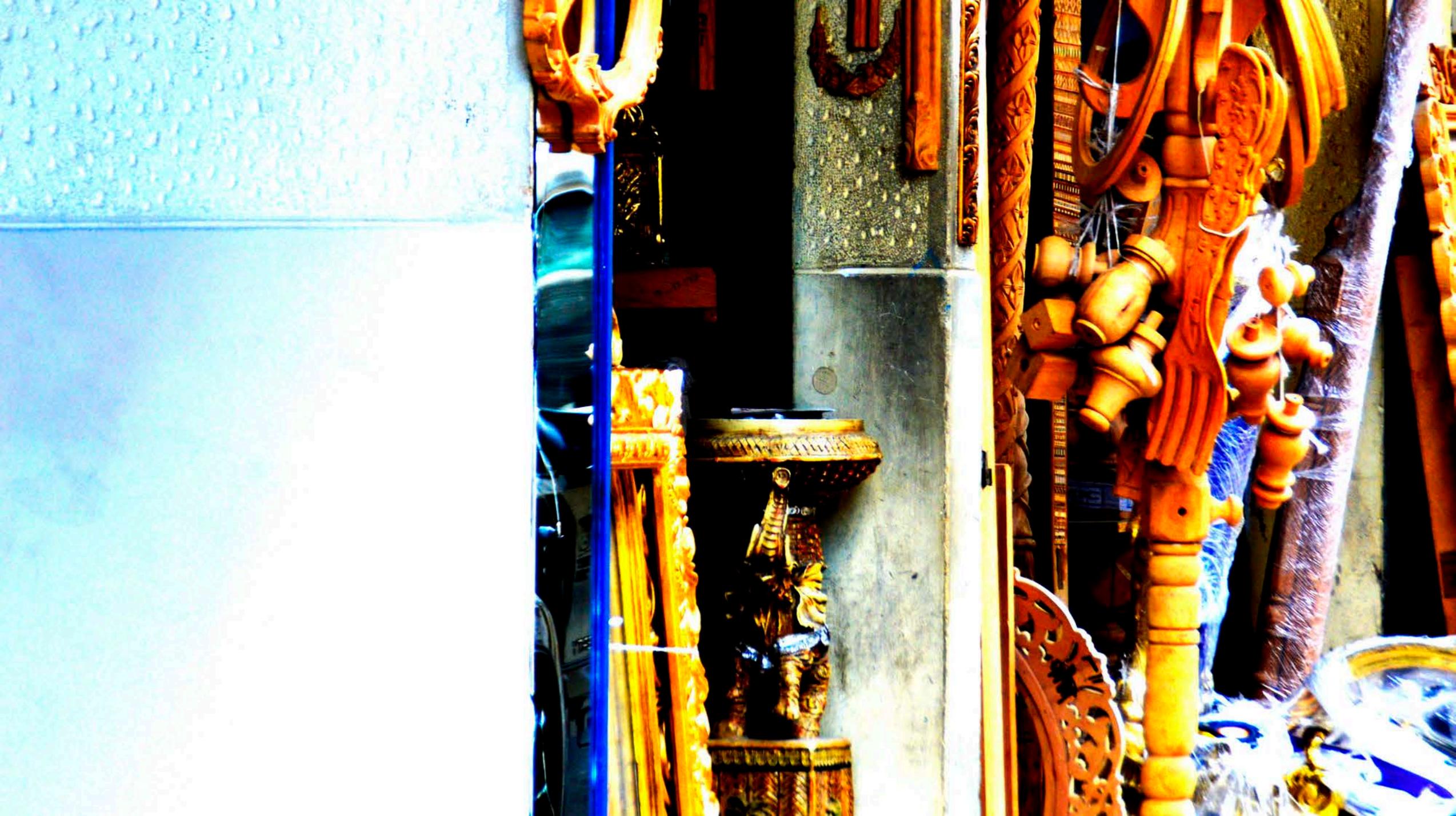


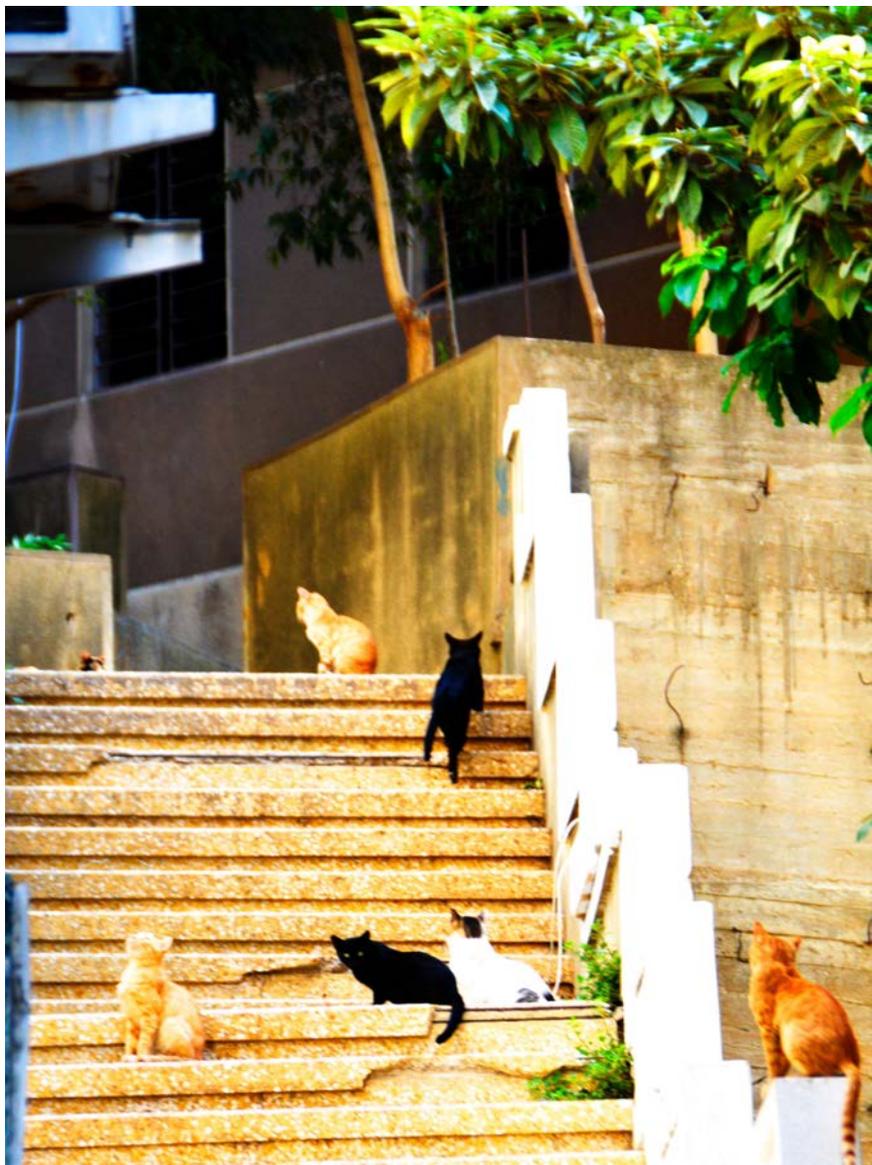
MONROE  
38













*Dream a little dream*

Inspiration springs from everywhere...words writ on walls, a face, or simply a sound or sensation. From these insignificant things are born marvelous things.

BUSINESS OF FEAR









to the sea

beginning and end



It was the sea that I first saw, touching down in Lebanon in the dead of a February night, and it was the sea that was my last glimpse of it. In that space – an eternity had passed. I dream of it still; the sea glittering as if strewn with diamonds. Memories wrapped up in place and time. Thoughts of what could have been, of loss and hope, of a home never truly gained. Of belonging and alienation. Of all that once was and cannot be.





netlogistics

BGG

ABL

BGG















C

3CC

CO

## Memories of Hope: thoughts on a city in crisis

*February 2014. The first time I saw Beirut. I was there to research an ongoing art project about migration and was full of excitement. Months of research had preceded this; cramming my head full of history and the socio-economic situation in the country. The reality of it was far from what I was prepared for, nor did I know that it would be such a major part of my life from that day forward.*

It was three weeks ago, a few moments now receded into the shadows. An explosion which lit the tinder of frustration, igniting the fireworks of the city again. But as quickly as it flared, it died down, its sparks extinguished by apathy, despair, and more enforced confinement in the face of a pandemic which defies politics and religion. The ghosts and the dust have settled. But the city will survive. It will rebuild itself as it always has and, as before, tragedy will be used as an excuse to turf out the undesirables as it erects more shining empty pantheons to greed. Another neighborhood's soul will die. Such is life everywhere, but life is cheap.



We encounter places along life's journey which we love despite ourselves. No words, no reason, can answer the "why", yet our hearts are forever doomed to dwell in their crumbling walls, belonging yet not belonging, occupying a strange limbo of being. For me, the city's flaws are its beauty, its weaknesses its strengths. When people talk of the glittering places of Beirut, bland and stinking of a sameness seen in a million others around the globe, I don't recognize the place I love. The place I love is dirty and rundown, wild and untamed. Derelict doorways open onto forgotten rooms. Elegant windows hide lives quietly lived. Ordinary yet extraordinary lives. For it is the people who make a place. Not the great and the famous, but the ones whose names are not heard, whose faces we do not recognize. People like the ones whose lives were ripped from their loved ones by a sudden blast on that August day.

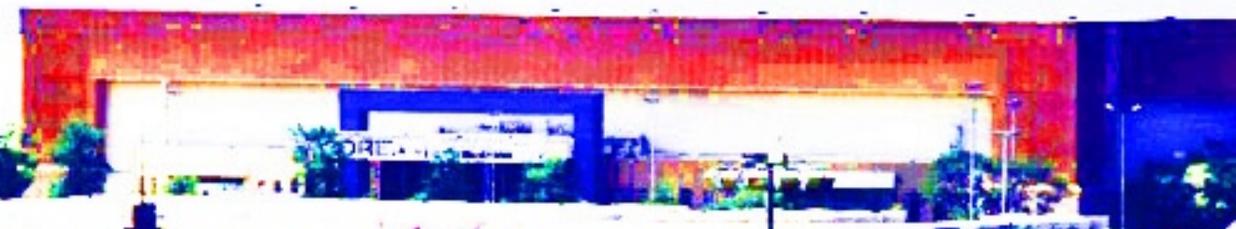


The port always features in my memories, haunts my dreams. My first apartment; one side looking out over the water, the other to the busy streets of Gemmayze. Even at the height of summer, a cool breeze blew through it, as if the sea was trying to escape into the city. My first kiss with the man I did not know would one day be my partner; the port looming outside, its sounds floating up like steel winged butterflies echoing at the window. Even when I ran to try and find peace after my own tragedy, high into the hills looking imperviously down at the city below, the port was there. Each night I watched it recede into darkness, every morning it reemerged in the dawning light of the new day. It was my muse. I gazed upon it as I tried to turn my jumbled thoughts into words. Now, as I look at the pictures of the destruction, it seems to have simply decayed, rapidly as if time sped up. It seems heartbreaking but inevitable. These ruins have become the symbol of a battered and lost Lebanon, exemplifying everything that is wrong with the country, but it could be the symbol of hope. It is in ashes and from those ashes the phoenix can rise.



Hope is fragile and so easily lost. I see Lebanon like a battered spouse; hating its abuser but feeling powerless. Afraid of what lies outside, afraid of the alternative. Afraid to leave, instead living on in quiet acceptance. The reinvented warlords have kept the people cowed for so long, spinning lies like gold as they connive like thieves. No matter what, they will be fine, running like rats to whatever tax haven holds their ill-gotten gains, cloaking themselves in gaudy finery to disguise the ugliness of their truth. And the people who quietly live their ordinary lives will keep trying, not believing the lies but too tired to tell a new story. Yet that story is there, just waiting to be told, and can only be told by them. History, they say, remember our history. But history has gone. It is the past and the past is now a vampire, feeding on the living so that it would not die. It does not have to define us. Are we every mistake we ever made? Every regretted decision, every youthful indiscretion? So too can a country transcend its history, recreate itself from its memories and dreams. This future is the only place where we can find freedom. And just as dreams can become memories and flee from an airport gate, so too can memories become dreams, renewed hope in that future where power is reclaimed by the people and the city – in all its flawed yet beautiful glory – will rise from those ashes with gleaming wings, reborn again.







The end is never the end, just a new beginning. Seven years have passed since I first set foot in the city. I know I will go there again, at some time, now unknown. For now, it lives on inside of me, continuing to inspire and fascinate me. It lives in stories that are, are being, or are yet to be written. It breathes through images captured through a lens or my eye. It is eternal and I am only mortal. And that is what makes something magical.

