

## EXPOSURE 2009

Tamara Al Samerraei . Nadim Asfar . Sirine Fattouh . John Jurayj . Jennifer Maghzal .

Karine Wehbé . Raed Yassin

From April 22 to June 9, 2009

**TAMARA AL SAMERRAEI** (b. 1977, lives and works in Beirut)

**Before Dark**

**2009. Animation.**

She runs up the minaret, a 55 meter spiral known as the Malwiyya. It rises opposite the *qibla* of the Great Mosque of Al Mutawakkil, built in the 9th century in the city of Samarra, Iraq. At a point in time, this mosque was considered the largest in the Islamic world and the Malwiyya itself was one of the most impressive examples of Abbasid architecture. It is said that the Caliph Al Mutawakkil used to ride all the way to the top of the spiral on his Egyptian donkey to protect the *Muezzin*. No longer used as a place of prayer, the Malwiyya has become an organic icon, an appropriate sound vehicle through which to disseminate her cry before dark, "...where speech is extinct, a black hole, the exit of being".

**NADIM ASFAR** (b. 1976, lives and works in Beirut)

**Innenleben**

**2009. Photography.**

*Innenleben* is based on a digital macro-photography technique that I applied using my computer screen. Through it, I took pictures of webcam transmissions that had been posted on the websites of free and public amateur 'adult' channels. For 3 years and for long hours, I photographed the apartments of people who posted their live images on these sites. I captured my pictures as soon as they moved away from their cameras; leaving their displays momentarily vacant, or sometimes from what I could see of what surrounded their nude bodies. I initially wanted to record and materialize the floating and ephemeral image they were transmitting like a message "on air" dedicated to an undefined viewer, towards an undefined space.

Confronted to the complexity and immensity of the web and the existing distance between myself and my subject, the macro-photography technique gives the photographs a contradictory and paradoxical nature.

These images represent a 'fantastic' universe that lies on the border between the definite and the infinite, reality and fiction, the extremely close and extremely far, intimate and public, erotic and morbid, on the dividing line between dream and nightmare, fright and desire, possible and impossible.

These images are now my own – my own mental pictures, my own projections, the fruit of my imagination and fantasies, visualized through the light of the computer screen and its hypnotic effect.

**SIRINE FATTOUH** (b. 1980, lives and works in Paris)

**Lost and Won**

**2008. Video and photography installation.**

*Lost and Won* is a record of testimonies given by Lebanese women from all around Lebanon whom I interviewed last summer. For a month and a half, I traveled around the country and stayed in villages where I met the women I spoke to. I asked them only two questions: "What have you lost?" and "What have you won?" without specifying anything else. These are their answers.

**JOHN JURAYJ** (b. 1968, lives and works in New York)

**Untitled (I'll be Your Mirror)**

**2007-2009. 5 pieces. Oil on colored mirrored plexi-glass.**

Vision and reflection are one in *Untitled (I'll be Your Mirror)* which references the 1967 classic by The Velvet Underground. In this group of paintings, abstractions are mixed with scenes of destroyed buildings and night bombings culled from archival

images of the Lebanese conflict. By employing mediated imagery from the ongoing conflict of the past thirty years, the work navigates the space between representation and abstraction, subjectivity and the public sphere. The introduction of mirrored plexi-glass as “canvas” into the more traditional space of painting implicates the author and the viewer into historical events. References as disparate as Jack Goldstein’s paintings of WWII night bombings, Turner’s burning Houses of Parliament and Michelangelo Pistoletto’s Mirror Paintings are combined. The history of the Lebanese conflict is mirrored quite literally by the instability of the image. Each work is in a continuous alteration by the viewer, the gallery and the other pieces. Seeing and self become synonymous in this multilayered approach which embodies our splintered and fragmented world.

**JENNIFER MAGHZAL** (b. 1984, lives and works in London)

**Terminus (I can’t tell where I end and you begin)**

**2008. Installation.**

This installation of 16 second-hand doors hung on a wooden frame to create an enclosure takes its name from the Roman God of boundaries and references the noun that describes an end, an edge, or a border. By working within its interior surroundings to define a closed space through architectural devices designed to facilitate movement, it simultaneously touches on questions of limits and of opportunities. A permeable obstruction, the installation concurrently enforces and undermines the borders that it creates.

*Terminus* partly takes its inspiration from our binary understanding of the world (in/out, open/shut, me/you). We know what one thing is only in relation to what it is not and arguably we construct our identity in terms of who we are not as much as who we are. One could even say that we often build walls (physically or metaphorically) around us in order to distinguish between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The subtitle, “I can’t tell where I end and you begin”, represented by the malfunctioning border of doors, points to the falsity of the barriers that we construct to define ourselves and encourages the deconstruction of the idea of “the other” in our attempt to locate who we are.

**KARINE WEHBE** (b. 1972, lives and works in Beirut)

**Tabarja Beach 1**

**2008 – 2009. Photography**

*Tabarja Beach 1* is part of a series of works in which I revisit my adolescent memories of times spent at seaside resorts.

Already by the onset of the late 1960s, such resorts, places that represented a new cosmopolitanism, had begun to flourish in Lebanon. These beach resorts were made up of small seaside apartments – ‘chalets’ or cabins, as we call them, and were surrounded by a belt of night clubs, restaurants and pool houses, offering a Club Med-esque atmosphere that promised a “vacation” lifestyle much in demand by the country’s very recently growing consumer society.

The civil war only spurred the development of these enormous ‘utopias,’ which gradually became a cornerstone of Lebanese life. Perfect aquatic getaways for the weekend soon dotted the Jounieh Bay like Tabarja Beach, Aqua Marina, Rimal, Portemilio, and Les Residences de la Mer, while only a few kilometers away, Beirut was being torn apart.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, these resorts provided a retreat from the reality of war and were the meeting ground of expatriates who had come back to their homeland for the summer. In my memory, they are not only etched as the emblems of an epoch but as the living stage for my late teen years as well.

Today, these promises for a happy-go-lucky seaside life have faded away and become nothing but ghostly blocs of reinforced concrete and pools of chlorine. In the summertime, few subscribers or owners still venture there. Other beaches, restaurants and night clubs have sprung up in the heart of Beirut and its surroundings, replacing them.

In those vast empty spaces, I try to live out, one more time, even if for few seconds, my first night club experience or a long chat I had by the swimming pool on dreams that were still possible. In a country where the places from our memory are vanishing, I hold on to my adolescence...or is it maybe holding on to me?

**RAED YASSIN** (b. 1979, lives and works between Amsterdam and Beirut)

**The Best of Sammy Clark**

**2008. Installation**

My installation *The Best of Sammy Clark* explores my relationship to pop culture through fiction and archives. It is based on a fictional text that I wrote about a Lebanese pop star from the civil war period. As an artist who grew up in Lebanon in the 1980’s, I was influenced by the war, yet I was never interested in its direct effects. Instead, I was fascinated by pop production during that period and how the brutal circumstances of the war affected popular culture in both image and sound.

## Biographies

### TAMARA AL SAMERRAEI

Born in Kuwait in 1977, Tamara al Samerraei lives and works in Beirut. She received a BA in Fine Arts from the Lebanese American University in Beirut in 2002. In 2008, she had a solo exhibition at Agial Gallery entitled *Something White*. Tamara al Samerraei has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including MidEast Cut: International festival for alternative film and video, Denmark and Finland (2009); Radius of Art project, Fladern Bunker, Kiel, Germany (2008); Dar Al Funoon, Kuwait (2007); *His Life is Full of Miracles*, Site Gallery, Sheffield, UK (2006); Kent Explora, Strange Fruit, Lebanon (2002). She has also taken part in the Braziers International Artists Workshop, UK (2003) and AIW:A, Artists' International Workshop, Aley (2005). "In Samerraei's work we are always in front of the borderline between twin realms. The prevalent ambiguity of her spaces and what inhabits them stands between the familiar and the improbable. Her work takes us into a world of childhood, but is it? Or it is an adult who is reminiscing?... She poses difficult questions with a lightness and playfulness that leave her scenes seeping into our visual world with ease, and yet, unsettling." (Abdallah Kahil)

### NADIM ASFAR

Born in Beirut in 1976, Nadim Asfar is a photographer and filmmaker. Asfar received a BA in Cinema Studies from the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA) in 2001 and completed a postgraduate study in photography at the École Nationale Supérieure Louis Lumière in Paris in 2003. He had his first solo exhibition, *Juin*, at Fadi Mogabgab Gallery in Beirut in 2004 and another, in 2008, organized by Naila Kettaneh Kunigk and Sandra Dagher, entitled *Immaterial World*. Asfar's work has been shown in a number of group exhibitions, including *Presence*, an exhibition of photography that toured to the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; GLstrand, Copenhagen, Denmark; Centro de Arte Contemporaneo, Seville, Spain; and the Museum of Modern Art, Algiers, Algeria between 2006 and 2007. His short movie *Print 1* was screened at Videoavril, a festival organized by Askhal Alwan in Beirut, Paris Cinema Festival, the Cinemaeast Film Festival at the Independent Film Center in New York, and Festival de Douarnenez in France. Of photography, Nadim Asfar says: "Beyond seeing, it is about imagining, moving, assembling and transporting. It is about folding and unfolding images... Images contain what one shows, and what one hides. Statements and secrets. Fictions." Since 2004, he has taught theory and practice of photography at ALBA. Nadim Asfar lives and works in Beirut.

### SIRINE FATTOUH

Born in Beirut in 1980, Sirine Fattouh lives and works in Paris. Far from aiming at making any denunciations, her work tackles the issue of the artist's responsibility towards social and political situations. She is interested in rethinking political art and using artistic processes to elaborate on memory. Fattouh received a diploma (DNSEP) from l'École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts of Paris Cergy in 2006. She is currently enrolled in the doctorate program in Fine Arts and Sciences of Art at Université Paris 1, Pantheon-Sorbonne, where she has been studying since 2000. Fattouh is also a researcher at the Centre d'Études et de Recherches en Arts Plastiques (CERAP). Her work has been exhibited in several venues, including: Michel Journiac Gallery (Paris, France, 2009), Festival Photography and Legends (Pantin, France, 2008), Cinemed Mediterranean Film Festival of Montpellier (Montpellier, France, 2008), Villa of Tourelles Gallery (Nanterre, France, 2008), Al-Madina Theatre (Beirut, Lebanon, 2008), Villa Savoye of Le Corbusier (Poissy, France, 2007), Paris Cinema Festival (Paris, France, 2007), Né à Beyrouth (Beirut, Lebanon, 2007), The Trianon (Paris, France, 2006), and Zico House (Beirut, Lebanon, 2001).

### JOHN JURAYJ

Born in Illinois in 1968, John Jurayj lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, and currently teaches at The School of Visual Art in New York City. He received his MFA from Bard College in 2005. Recent solo shows include *Untitled (Not Here)* at Alberto Peola Gallery in Torino, Italy in 2008 and *Untitled (We Could Be Heroes)* at Walter Maciel Gallery in Los Angeles, California in 2008. In 2007 Jurayj had a solo show titled *Not Here* at Massimo Audiello Gallery in New York City. He has taken part in numerous group shows including, most recently, *New Acquisitions* at the Hirshhorn Museum of Art in D.C. in 2008 and *Political Draw* at Walter Maciel Gallery in 2009. Jurayj is represented in a variety of public and private collections including the Hirshhorn Museum of Art, the British Museum of Art, and the Schwartz Collection at Harvard University. His work will be featured in the upcoming show *Translation/Tarjama*, curated by Leeza Ahmady and Iftikhar Dadi at the Queens Museum of Art in New York.

## **JENNIFER MAGHZAL**

Born in Beirut in 1984, Jennifer Maghzal's life has been punctuated by a series of immigrations, first to Christchurch, New Zealand at the age of 4, then to the Sunshine Coast of Australia in 1998, and, most recently, to London in 1999. Maghzal studied at Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design, London from 2003-2004 and received her BA in Art from the University of Reading in England in 2008. Largely informed by her nomadic history and contextualised within the present-day landscape of globalization and transnationalism, much of Maghzal's work stems from the complexities inherent in the construction of identity as a result of our multi-centered existence. Thematically, her practice investigates our relationship with geography and architecture, in particular, questioning how a 'space' becomes a 'place', such as when a 'house' gains such profound meaning that it evokes a sense of belonging and becomes a 'home'. By extension, Maghzal's work considers the potential evolution in the concepts of belonging and home in our current state of constant mobility and the effect of this state on our understanding of ourselves. Maghzal currently lives and works in London.

## **KARINE WEHBÉ**

Born in Beirut in 1972, Karine Wehbé graduated from the Ecole Supérieure des Arts Graphiques (ESAG) Penninghen, Paris. Wehbé's work spans a wide range of media including painting, drawing, photography, and film. In her works, she often reinterprets things past, particularly those that relate to her own experiences. Her video with Philippe Azoury *Suspendue* was shown at the 6th edition of the Né à Beyrouth Festival and at the Jeu de Paume for the 36th edition of the Festival d'Automne à Paris. She has had two solo exhibitions at Espace SD (2006, 2003). Karine Wehbé has contributed illustrations to several Lebanese newspapers such as *An-Nahar*, as well as to the book *La Rue Gouraud*, a collaboration with Arnaud Rouéche. She has participated in the workshops *as long as I'm walking* led by Francys Alys and *The ruin in the city* by Lara Almarcegui and Cecilia Andersson, both of which were part of the project *98 weeks*. In addition to being an artist, Karine Wehbé works as a graphic designer. Wehbé lives and works in Beirut.

## **RAED YASSIN**

Born in Beirut in 1979, Raed Yassin is a video, sound and visual artist, as well as a musician (double bass, tapes and electronic) and a part-time curator. He graduated from the Theatre Department of the Lebanese University in Beirut. In his work, Yassin uses images, music, and text to deal with themes relating to mass media, pop culture, pornography, the city, Arab cinema, the history of contemporary art, disasters, and archives. He has exhibited across Europe, the Middle East, the United States, and Japan. Currently, Yassin lives and works between Amsterdam and Beirut.