

Lamia Joreige At The Conquest Of The Big Apple

By Sylviane Zehil, the New York Correspondent



Lamia Joreige, an artist "obsessed" with the war, its images and its "ruins." © 2015 Scott Rudd

EXHIBITION

The artist's first solo adventure in New York, with "Records for Uncertain Times." * After the Sharjah Biennial, the Pompidou Centre and a show in Beirut, the exhibition moved to the Taymour Grahne Gallery in Tribeca and runs through April 9.

Archival documents, video, installations, photography and fiction elements: through it all, the Lebanese visual artist and director Lamia Joreige incites a profound reflection on the history, the relationship between individual stories and collective memory of the Lebanese war and its consequences. It is soon understood that the city of Beirut is the backbone of her inspiration. *Records for Uncertain Times* is the story of several interwoven stories: *Under-Writing-Mathaf Beirut*, *180 Degree Garden View*, *Object of War*, *One Night of Sleep*, *Under-Writing-Nahr Beirut*: but the story does not end there.

Poetic Reformulation

Met in New York at the Taymour Grahne Gallery where she exhibits, Lamia Joreige states that *Under-Writing-Mathaf Beirut* is an installation of several editions, revolving around the National Museum of Beirut. It consists of various elements, among which primarily a concrete sculpture entitled *Object of War*, an imagined visualization of a hole created by a maverick in the so-called mosaic of the Good Shepherd, "one of the few works I was able to access on December 15th, 2012, during my research at the National Museum of Beirut," she said. The sculpture is accompanied by a photograph of the mosaic, which was taken during the war. "I restored, not a replica of the negative image, but a poetic reformulation of its dimensions," she added. "The work is a direct reference to the war, as the museum, a national symbol, is located on Mathaf-Barbir, the former dividing line and the most emblematic dam of the city," she noted.

"For the video, entitled *180 Degree View Garden*, which recreates the sights of sniper, I installed the camera in the place of the hole. The shots were taken from my window (note: Lamia Joreige lives in the Mathaf area) with a view of the National Museum," she added. "These are pinholes or pinhole camera shots, unique images made using a black box without setting the zoom or a lens. I used this old technique, simple and fun, because it gives a negative filmed landscape," she said.

"Maybe not ..."

Proceeding on her tour, Lamia Joreige lingered before an "archive text-image," from the daily newspaper, An-Nahar, depicting the Museum Square "mixed and merged" with a photograph taken by the artist; a superposition of the past and the present.

Unable to access the reserves of the building, the image-text allows her to "represent the National Museum, its policy and identity." Next, a Plexiglas display case houses a book entitled *Objects Missing From the National Museum*. In sealed leather, it "emphasizes the secrecy surrounding their disappearance and lack of access to all relevant information. It highlights the room for imagination around their history and missing stories, and culminates in an archive that may or may not have existed, and in another form, which may or may not exist in the future."

"A Night's Sleep"

In the central room of the gallery, Lamia Joreige juxtaposes seven of the fourteen frames that form the series *One Night of Sleep* (2013). Three of these works were shown for about ten days at the Armory Art Show in New York. "The process is interesting because it looks like a pinhole. The images show traces of my sleeping body," the artist said. In this series, "I slept twice a week on measured photosensitive paper and under the light of a programmed lamp over my bed, which turned every hour. These abstract images show the direct imprint of the body and head on the paper during the time of sleep. These copies are unique," she said.

Red "Scars"

The gallery's lower level houses the video installation *Under-Writing-Nahr Beirut*. "It's a series of research projects around different locations in Beirut," said Joreige. "The first Mathaf is the area I live in. The second, Nahr, is an industrial neighborhood that has undergone major changes, alongside the arrival of young architects and the building of new towers." It is in the same area, in Jisr al-Wati, that Lamia Joreige, with the collaboration of Sandra Dagher, co-founded the Beirut Art Center in 2009. *Under-Writing-Nahr Beirut* is accompanied by several pastel drawings, made from melted wax or crayons, which recall the maps of the river, moving towards a more abstract representation of the "geographical landscape, both real and imaginary. The red refers to the scars." The four-minute video installation, which is accompanied by a poetic text, was designed and created by the artist in 2013.

It is quickly understood that the artwork of Lamia Joreige is deeply imbued with reminiscences of the war. "I was born in 1972, so three years before the war. I have never known Beirut before the war. Although I had a very happy childhood in Lebanon, it seems difficult to talk about something else. For the war is still in me," she said. "Similar to the image ratio, there is a relationship between the still image and ambulant image and how they are used to describe the landscape. The river project speaks mostly to the concept of desolate urban landscape. It's sort of the reality in which we live. We are actually not finished with the war," said Lamia Joreige.

* The exhibition is accompanied by a beautiful 72-page catalog that includes texts in English by Rabih Mroué and Elias Chad, as well as a transcript from a conversation between Lamia Joreige and Adnan.

International Scope

The artist is acclaimed by both the international and American public. Lamia Joreige participated in numerous group exhibitions including *Here and Elsewhere*, at the New Museum in New York, and in the MoMA SF in the exhibit *Six Lines of Lights*, held in San Francisco in 2012. Her works and video installations are also included in two major international collections, the Sharjah Art Foundation and the permanent collection of the Centre Pompidou, as well as in The Tate Modern in London, the Mori Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo, the Venice Biennale, and in collections in Denmark, Berlin, France, Beirut and Egypt.