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## Washington's Middle East Institute hosts virtual exhibition on Lebanon



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📍 Maghie Ghal | The Daily Star

BEIRUT: "Lebanon Then and Now: Photography from 2006 to 2020," a virtual exhibition now online at Washington's Middle East Institute, puts Lebanon's social, political and economic woes into sharp focus.

The immersive 360° virtual exhibition is a collaboration among MEI, Institut du Monde Arabe and the Association for the Promotion and Exhibition of the Arts in Lebanon (APEAL). It leads visitors through the MEI art gallery to experience the works of 17 Lebanese photographers and one filmmaker.

Curated by Chantale Fahmi, the show is a hybrid that of two previous exhibitions. IMA's "Lebanon: Between Reality and Fiction" (Sept. 11-Nov. 24, 2019) explored the aftermath of Lebanon's Civil War; APEAL's "Revolt" (Nov. 14, 2019-Feb. 18, 2020), staged with the Beirut Center of Photography, was a response to the protests that began on Oct. 17.

"We developed the idea and decided to combine two different shows, one which represents art and documentary photography and the other which has journalistic photos," Fahmi told The Daily Star. "We wanted to link together what has happened in the last 15 years in the country and what led up to the current situation. What we experience here after the Civil War and how they manifested into the protests."

APEAL president Rita Nammour sees the show as a reminder of the Lebanese people's resilience and desire for change. The show is one of many precursor events to the eagerly awaited Beirut Museum of Art, which APEAL is planning to build, dedicated to modern and contemporary art.

"It's not the first time we've done things together with MEI and part of our mission is to collaborate with other intuitions through artistic programs that connect artists and communities, to enable people to add their voice to conversation on civic matters,"

Nammour told The Daily Star. "This is why we thought it was very timely to have this exhibition, to showcase the work of Lebanon's talented photographers and the situation that people are living in now.

"It shows all the suffering and pain from the people that pushed them into the protests," she added. "It also shows the hope, and that people believe that a better Lebanon can happen, and it shows the creative spirit of the Lebanese. We chose young photographers who have the talent to show what is happening better than words ever could."

The photo selection ranges from scenes of everyday life overshadowed by postwar melancholy and the destruction done to the urban landscape, to recent snaps of fiery highway blockades.

"Lebanon's photography scene has been developing in exciting ways over the past decade," Fahmi said. "Art photographers, like Dalia Khamissy and Myriam Boulos, have found a receptive environment and expansive arts infrastructure to nurture their work.

"At the same time, documentary photographers have benefited from Beirut's active and relatively free press sector, as well as the fact that the city has long hosted international news agencies that often rely upon local talent, like Marwan Tahtah and Emilie Madi, for insight and images."

The show was supposed to be a physical exhibition at Washington's MEI gallery, but plans had to be rethought in light of the global pandemic.

"Because of corona and the financial situation, it would have been very difficult to send the artists there, so we opted for the virtual show," Nammour said. "I hope it can reach more people this way and that people can really see what is happening in Lebanon, to remind the world that the Lebanese people have bigger aspirations for the country."

To see the virtual tour, visit: [cre8mania.com/babylon/v11/](https://cre8mania.com/babylon/v11/)

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