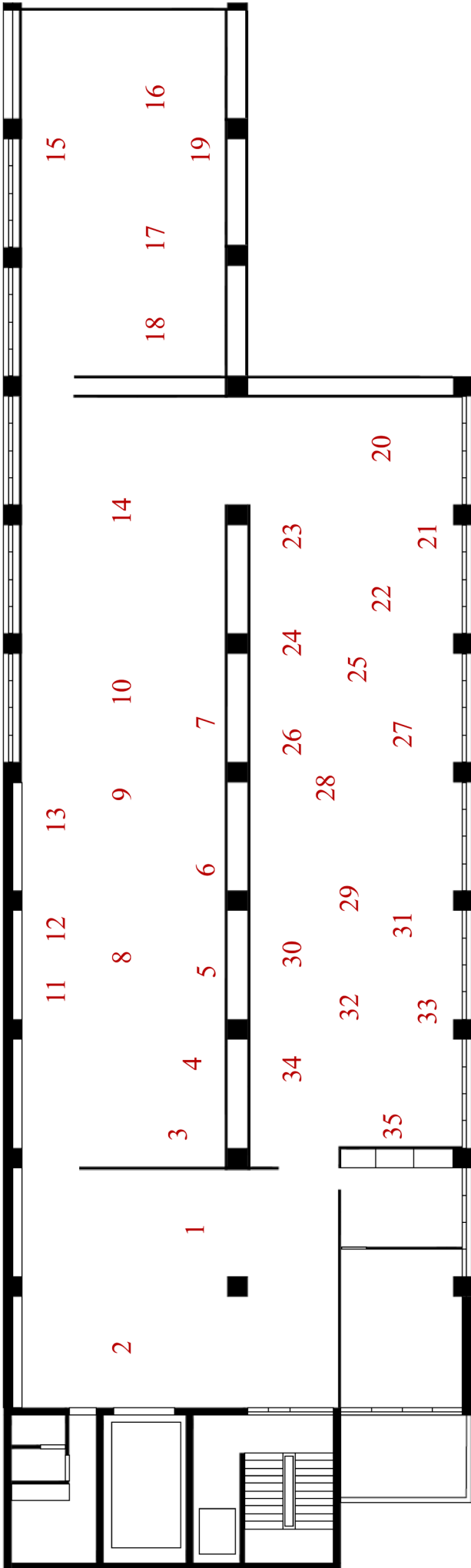


MARWAN RECHMAOUI

BUT THE TREES KEPT VOTING FOR THE AXE

صفير زمـلر غاليري
SFEIR-SEMLER GALLERY

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The forest was shrinking but the trees kept voting for the Axe, for the Axe was clever and convinced the trees that because its handle was made of wood, it was one of them.

Sfeir-Semler gallery is enormously proud to announce the reopening of its Beirut space with Marwan Rechmaoui's solo exhibition. Despite the severe economic and political crisis we are going through in Lebanon since October 2019, despite the August 4th, 2020 blast that destroyed hundreds of lives, and wrecked our space, despite the sanitary crisis that has brought the whole world to a halt, despite it all, we resist, in pursuit of our mission to promote the city's brilliant cultural scene and to offer the world a window to look through.

Marwan Rechmaoui is a conceptual sculptor who works predominantly with concrete, metal, found materials, textile, rubber and wax. Throughout his career he has produced work related to, or based on, the socio-geographies of cities, often focusing on Beirut. In the wake of last August's explosion, he started working in the rubbles of the gallery space, determined to preserve vanishing moments by embedding them into solid material. He produced works that reflect on a decaying political system, and on the thousands of disoriented desperate Lebanese that fill the streets of the city. This new body of works responds to the ongoing Pillars series which he started in 2014. While clearly referring to rotting foundations, or decaying abandoned structures, the roughness of the work is often lightened by a touch of humor or an unexpected poetic insert.

In a drawing cabinet, the artist presents his personal diary that chronicles on notebooks and drawing paper thoughts and images about daily news, events happening around him, music, his garden.

The exhibition also presents the most recent addition to the Buildings series, The Coop, reproduces to scale the abandoned Raouché Market, the steel and cement incomplete structure that still stands in the south of Beirut. It is the result of a joint venture started by 575 vendors who had to evacuate their stalls and kiosks on the waterfront in 1982, after the Israeli invasion. The construction of the 600-unit large indoors market was halted in 1986.

Beirut by the sea is one of Rechmaoui's wall sculptures showing an aerial view of the city's coast. Following the city's districts that he mapped multiple times, the work is composed of 13 pieces, each representing one of the 13 coastal boroughs in solid concrete, another reminder of the corruption that has robbed people of beachfront public spaces, invaded by landfills or private resorts.

Systematically cataloguing buildings, streets, sites and unfinished structures, Rechmaoui examines the traces of recent and ancient historical moments. His interest in the making and construction of cities brings forward complex questions around the formation of multi-cultural identities, and mirrors socio-political structures through themes of urbanization and contemporary demographics.

Marwan Rechmaoui (b.1964 in Beirut Lebanon) studied sculpture and painting in Boston and New York between 1987 and 1993.

His most recent solo exhibition was presented in 2019 at the Sharjah Art Foundation and the Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht. His work has been shown in exhibitions in Lebanon and abroad, including, Villa Empain, Brussels, (2020), Darat al Funun, Amman (2018); Ashkal Alwan, Homeworks 7; Beirut (2015); Istanbul Biennial 13 (2015); Here & Elsewhere, New Museum, New York (2014), Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence, France (2013); Sharjah Biennial (2013 & 2015); Serpentine Gallery, London, UK (2012); Saatchi Gallery, London (2009); Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland (2009); Musée d'art Contemporain de Nîmes, France (2008); and Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium (2008). He is the recipient of the 2019 Bonnefantenmuseum Award for Contemporary Art. His works are in the collections of MoMA, New York; Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi; The Sharjah Art Foundation; among other major private and public collections.

- 01 **BEIRUT BY THE SEA, 2017-2018**
Concrete, beeswax, brass on wood
over all dimensions: 267,9 x 569,6 cm

Marwan Rechmaoui's Beirut by the Sea maps the Beirut coastline, looking at the city's shores on the Mediterranean Sea.

Responding to his extensive research on the city of Beirut, which has informed some of his iconic works such as Beirut Caoutchouc, 2004; the artist looks at the boundaries of the city, the exact point where the land ends and where the sea begins.

Following the city's districts that he mapped multiples times, the work is composed of 13 pieces, each representing one of the 13 coastal boroughs. Ever reflecting on the harsh urban tissue of Beirut, Rechmaoui represents it with solid concrete, that stands against the natural fluidity of the beeswax sea.

In between these two contrasting elements, the shoreline is traced in brass, bent to follow the sinuous coast and solidify the natural border. The map created might be different from old maps of the Beirut coastline, and reflects on the expanding city that has slowly crept onto the waters. It also presents a city that has been robbed of its public spaces, as the vast majority of the natural waterfront has been either replaced with private upscale resorts, or polluted by landfills and sewers.

Beirut by the Sea embeds many historical, geographic, environmental, and socio-urban narratives that are central to Rechmaoui's work.

- 02 **GALLERY 6.08, 2020**
600 Kilograms of compressed metal, 34 elements
Approx. 45 x 68 x 25 cm each

On August 4, 2020 Lebanon was rocked by an explosion at the port of Beirut located 900 meters away from Sfeir-Semler gallery. The space was completely devastated by the blast. The artist recuperated around 600 Kilograms of metal from the destroyed walls structures, and compressed them into 34 elements; a memorial to crushed lives, futures and memories.

- 03 **THE DRAWING ON THE WALL, 2021**
Chalk and pastel on painted wall
350 x 592 cm

- 04-07 **GALLERY I-IV, 2020**
Recuperated aluminum bars mounted on wood

On August 4, 2020 Lebanon was rocked by an explosion at the port of Beirut located 900 meters away from Sfeir-Semler gallery. The space was completely devastated by the blast. The artist recovered destroyed window frames from a heap of aluminum debris, mounting them on wooden panels and assembling them into hanging mobiles.

- 04 - Gallery IV, 2020, 223x 114.5 cm
- 05 - Gallery III, 2020, 160 x 85 cm
- 06 - Gallery II, 2020, 110 x 220 cm
- 07 - Gallery I, 2020, 110 x 110 cm

08-10 **GALLERY V-VII, 2020**

Mobile, recuperated Aluminum bars

On August 4, 2020 Lebanon was rocked by an explosion at the port of Beirut located 900 meters away from Sfeir-Semler gallery. The space was completely devastated by the blast. The artist recovered destroyed window frames from a heap of aluminum debris, mounting them on wooden panels and assembling them into hanging mobiles.

08 - Gallery VII, 2020, 206 x 159 cm

09 - Gallery VI, 2020, 107.5 x 72 cm

10 - Gallery V, 2020, 107.5 x 72 cm

11-13 **CHECKERS, 2021**

Concrete, beeswax and color pigment

The Tapestries series is a recent body of work that sprung from Rechmaoui's interest in city grids. The wall pieces propose an abstract reading of pixelized aerial views of streets and building blocks, formed by experimentations with concrete, plaster, beeswax and color pigments.

11 - Horizon I, 2021, 20 x 120.4 x 4.5 cm

12 - Horizon II, 2021, 20 x 120.4 x 4.5 cm

13 - Horizon III, 2021, 20 x 120.4 x 4.5 cm

14 **THE COOP, 2019**

Concrete and metal

560 x 200 x 120 cm

Before 1975, the shop owners in the central Beirut markets would rent their shop windows and doors to street vendors who sold counterfeit jeans, cassettes and electronics. During the two-year civil war, the market was uprooted, and the street vendors relocated, setting up their tin kiosks along the waterfront of the corniche in Raouche. Later, during the Israeli invasion in 1982, the vendors had to evacuate the area, and in response, 575 of them formed a cooperative to raise money for the construction of Raouche Market at an inland location. They planned to build this market in a new residential and commercial neighbourhood in the south of the city. The newly designed building would have had 600 units and housed all the scattered shops and stalls. However, the construction was brought to a halt in 1986 with a campaign against the privatization of the market. With one façade slanted and the other two straight, the distinctive design of this building, particularly in relation to its current surroundings, renders it conspicuous and noticeably incomplete.

15-18 **DRAWINGS**

Rechmaoui has a longstanding practice of drawing. Nowadays, he keeps a stack of paper next to him and usually draws in the evenings, jotting down thoughts and images inspired by events happening around him, music, his garden or snippets of news.

15 - Mohammad Ali Class, 2021, Pastel on paper, 88 x 60.5 cm
The list of I'm so fuckin, 2019, Pastel on paper, 76 x 60 cm
True Colours of Life, 2018, Pastel on paper, 75.5 x 56.5 cm
Dubuffet, 2020, Pastel on paper, 57.5 x 75.5 cm
Equal, 2020, Pastel on paper, 51 x 82cm
Civil Society, 2021, Pastel on paper, 58.5 x 75 cm
Al bidwani beach, 2020, Pastel on paper, 58.5 x 75cm
Digital brain, 2021, Pastel on paper, 75cm x 59cm
Spine, 2021, Pastel on paper, 75.5 x 59 cm
Metals and bones, 2021, Pastel on paper, 75.5x 58.5 cm
Abraham, 2021, Pastel on paper, 75 x 60 cm
Abo Baker, 2021, Pastel and charcoal on paper, 93.5 x 64.4 cm

16 - Bauhaus, 2021

Pastel and pencil on cardboard, 25.8 x 37.5 cm
Pastel and pencil on cardboard, 41.5 x 56 cm
Sabil, 2021, Pencil and pastel on paper, 21 x 18.1 cm
Ramadan, 2021, Pastel, pencil and ink on paper, 22.5 x 18 cm
Art, 2021, Pencil and ink on paper, 18.5 x 21.4 cm
Fried Egg, 2021, Pastel, pencil, ink and beeswax on paper, 21.5 x 18 cm
Pan Am, 2021, Pencil and ink on paper, 21.5 x 18 cm
Moleskine, 2021, Pencil and ink on paper, 11.3 x 32 cm
Mom in California, 2021, Pencil and ink on paper, 21.5 x 18 cm
Adidas Moon, 2021, Pastel, pencil, ink and beeswax on paper, 21.5 x 18 cm
Trump, 2021, Pastel and pencil on cardboard, 21.5 x 18 cm
Oxygen, 2021, Pencil and pastel on paper, 21.5 x 18 cm
The Ass, 2021, Pencil and pastel on paper, 21.5 x 18 cm

17 - Petit Bateau, 2021

Ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm
Ink on paper, 29,7 x 21 cm
Pastel on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm
Ink on paper, 15 x 21 cm
Pen on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm
Ink on paper, 31 x 40.7 cm
To All the Beautiful People, 2021, Crayon on cardboard, 43.2 x 34.5 cm
Alserkal Book, 2020, Pastel and ink on paper, 31.1 x 46.6 cm
The Sea Book, 2019-2020, Watercolour on paper, 14 x 18 cm
The 2020 Book, 2020, Pastel and ink on paper, 38.5 x 57.5 cm

19 - **ROLL OF DAYS, 2020-2021**

Mixed Media, Pastel, Pencil and Ink on paper
38.7 x 1178 cm

Marwan Rechmaoui started this work on paper in February 2020. It is intended as a sequence of random scenes he encountered or experienced on certain days throughout one full year. The 10 meters long roll opens with a drawing of a guitar and includes several references to the uprising in Lebanon, a humoristic take on breakfast, an apology of the 60s, a rainbow flag, a tiger in a zoo mimicking artwork in a museum, verses by ancient Arab poets, and brings trees, pollution, missiles over Beirut and subsidized goods into an unfolding mix of news and events.

20-36 **PILLARS**, 2014-Ongoing

In general, pillars are equivalent to the foundation stone or the foundation of ideologies and religions – they are the basis to build on. The Middle East is in a period when those foundations are crumbling and cracking. The work Pillars is about decay and decomposition – materials from inside of these works, are being expelled and exposed to the outside – like a gutted animal.

- 20 - Pillar: Margaret, 2018, Concrete, metal, and plastic mesh, 235 x 55 x 65 cm
- 21 - Pillar: Angel, 2015, Concrete, metal and various materials, 270 x 100 x 65 cm
- 22 - Pillar: Patches, 2016, Concrete, metal, and various materials, 220 x 50 x 35 cm
- 23 - Pillar: Sunday's Laundry, 2015, Concrete, metal, ceramic tiles, 215 x 103 x 11 cm
- 24 - Pillar: Collapse IV, 2014, Concrete, metal, 200 x 60 x 40 cm
- 25 - Pillar: Leaping caterpillar, 2016, Concrete, metal, TV screen, 210 x 50 60 cm
- 26 - Pillar: Honeycomb 1, 2014, Concrete, metal and various materials, 210 x 40 x 60 cm
- 27 - Pillar: Bonne Nuit, 2014, Concrete, metal and various materials, 200 x 25 x 25 cm
- 28 - Pillar: Collapse I, 2014, Concrete, metal and various materials, 220 x 80 x 80 cm
- 29 - Pillar: Fissures, 2016, Concrete, metal, and various materials, 220 x 30 x 40 cm
- 30 - Pillar: Elephant Man, 2014, Concrete, metal, and various materials, 250 x 70 x 60 cm
- 31 - Pillar: Duchamps' Bride, 2015, Concrete, metal, 220 x 50 x 35 cm
- 32 - Pillar: Frankenstein, 2014, Concrete, metal, 220 x 40 x 70 cm
- 33 - Pillar: Honeycomb 2, 2014, Concrete, cinder blocks metal and various materials, 210 x 50 x 60 cm
- 34 - Pillar: Virilio's Quantity, 2014, Concrete, metal and various materials, 220 x 40 x 60 cm
- 35 - Pillar: Mille-feuille, 2016, Concrete, metal, 200 x 100 x 40 cm