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ART AND POLITICAL DISSENT IN POSTWAR  
LEBANON: WALID SADEK'S *FI ANNANI AKBAR  
MIN BIKASU* [*BIGGER THAN PICASSO*]

**Abstract**

Taking Walid Sadek's *fi annani akbar min bikasu* [*bigger than picasso*] as its starting point, this article examines relations of art and politics in post-civil war Lebanon. A tiny and inexpensive paperback related to Picasso unfolds into a work of art that raises questions about the place of art and political dissent. After situating *bigger than picasso* in the context of contemporary book art and artistic practices of the postwar generation in Lebanon, the article focuses on the juxtaposition of text and image. By placing narratives of art vandalism next to the image of a monument dedicated to the late Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad, *bigger than picasso* playfully and provocatively breaks with political taboos at a time when the silence about the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90) and about Lebanese-Syrian relations was met with increasing anxiety. At the same time, the work makes room for aesthetic inquiries, exploring new possibilities of art at the margins of cultural production. The article concludes that *bigger than picasso* brings to the fore the discrepancy between public monumentality and artistic practices, which in finding ways around political violence and censorship have recourse to ephemeral and private spheres, and holds unexpected meanings in ever-changing political circumstances.

Unlike paintings, or sculptures, or films, books are created for one-on-one interactions. They are, by nature, zones of privacy. There is no way, short of censorship, for an outside observer to monitor or control the intimate encounters they offer.

—Johanna Drucker<sup>1</sup>

Walid Sadek's *fi annani akbar min bikasu* [*bigger than picasso*] was launched in 1999 at the Ayloul Festival in Beirut, a festival for contemporary artistic practices directed by the renowned Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury and by Pascale Feghali that took place from 1997 to 2001.<sup>2</sup> An article published in the Lebanese daily *L'Orient Le Jour* on 8 September 1999 foregrounds the “apparently inoffensive” character of the book and features a picture of Walid Sadek seated behind a table on which he had carefully arranged copies of his book selling for only LL 5000 (c. US \$3.00).<sup>3</sup> The picture documents well the performative character of the book launch (see Figure 1). Similar to

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**L'Orient LE JOUR**

mercredi 8 septembre 1999

**INFORMATIONS LOCALES**

FESTIVAL AYLOUL - Présentation du dernier travail de Walid Sadek

## « Bigger than Picasso », apparemment inoffensif

Dans le cadre du festival Ayoul, Walid Sadek présente son dernier travail. Il s'agit d'un (très) petit livre (7x11 cm), à couverture noire, intitulé *Bigger than Picasso*. (\*)

Apparemment inoffensif, quand on ne connaît pas le parcours de ce jeune artiste libanais. Il suffit de l'ouvrir pour comprendre : les 60 pages de gauche sont illustrées par la même image en noir et blanc (sauf, étonnamment, à deux reprises, où elle apparaît en couleur...). Les 60 pages de droite proposent des extraits de textes relatant des actes iconoclastes. « J'ai choisi ces textes pour leur ambiguïté », explique Walid Sadek. Le ton est étonné.

« Entre 1992 et 1997, j'ai travaillé sur un héritage chrétien (Walid Sadek est maronite) », les travaux de l'artiste sont toujours polémiques, comme l'installation de 1995 dans le jardin de Sanayeh, qui rendait hommage à Tarrat Ibrahim Tarrat, pendu en public, en 1982 à cet endroit. Fondée sur le thème de l'exclusion, cette œuvre (un pendu...) était couverte de textes parlant d'érosisme et de culture.

La même année, il participe au Salon des architectes décorateurs, présenté dans le contre-vitrail.

Walid Sadek a créé son installation à partir d'un de ses rêves. Le mythe du phénix en était le thème central, mêlé à celui du suicide (un homme se jetant d'un balcon) : « Ce mythe du renouvellement perpétuel est pour moi la l'image de ce centre-ville qui veut faire oublier le passé, celui de la guerre ».

En 1998, il s'installe au Liban-Sud occupé, et propose un cylindre en carton, sur lequel une écrivaine mentionne le mot « bolche », qui veut aussi dire « bombe » (abouci en arabe). À l'intérieur, trois papiers, écrits l'un à côté de l'autre, l'un indiquant le nom des milices et la couleur de leur tenue, l'autre représentant une sorte de mètre précisant la distance séparant la zone occupée du théâtre de Beyrouth, lieu de l'exposition. Enfin, un exemplaire photocopié du laissez-passer nécessaire à celui qui veut se rendre dans cette région.

Walid Sadek est sans aucun doute un artiste engagé, qui n'hésite pas à créer des œuvres polémiques : « Sans la guerre, je ne sais rien, affirme-t-il. C'est par elle que j'ai trouvé un certain langage artistique ».

Ses installations, qui ont été parmi les premières au Liban, prenaient le contre-pied de ce qui se faisait « dans un pays qui est comme une toile dans une galerie ». Estimant que cette forme d'expression n'a pas connu, à son époque (avant 1998), suffisamment d'impact et que lui-même ne trouve pas sa place en tant que citoyen, l'artiste exprime à présent « une opinion très personnelle », dans la droite ligne de la conférence qu'il a donnée à Liverpool, qu'il a éditée dans un format moitie plus petit que *Bigger than Picasso*.

Intitulé « Karakol », il étudie le comportement éphémère de « stars » qui peut ressembler à l'instinct de Karakol et la double identité qu'il en résulte...

Les textes « ambigus » de ce petit fascicule, Walid Sadek voudrait qu'ils « poussent les gens à penser ». Il ajoute : « Ces autres iconoclastes évoquent la possibilité de la destruction, qui remet tout en cause ». L'artiste a été inspiré pour ce travail par une phrase de Paul Weyne : « Les monuments appartiennent à un art sans spectateurs ».

Quant au monument dont il est question dans *Bigger than Picasso*, titre pour le moins ironique, c'est aux curieux de le découvrir.

D.G.

(\*) En vente à 5 000 L.L. au Lycée Abdulkader, rue Abdulkader, Karakol « Droua », Beyrouth. Tél. : 01 365 429.

Walid Sadek présentant «Bigger Than Picasso».

(Photos Michel Scymph)

Un petit livre qui donne à réfléchir.

FIGURE 1. D.G., ««Bigger than Picasso», apparemment inoffensif,” *L’Orient Le Jour*, 8 September 1999, 6.

the book itself, the setting is minimalistic. Sadek, wearing a simple white shirt, his hair cut short, his hands folded, looks at his audience sternly. His ordinary, inconspicuous appearance clashes with any romantic notion of the artist as creative and rebellious spirit that the name Picasso continues to evoke. In his capacity as artist, Sadek virtually disappears in his white shirt and behind the white table, and is reduced to selling the book, neatly displayed on the table, next to an enlarged photograph of a monument in the form of an obelisk.

The book was introduced in the festival's brochure with the words “Monuments are born, live, and die,” but from the outside the book seems to have little to do with monuments (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). Already its very size seems to mock the idea of monumentality. *Bigger than picasso* measures 7 × 11 cm, a miniature paperback so tiny that it can easily be slipped into a shirt's pocket. The book cover is black; its title is printed in small, off-white letters as centered text in Arabic, with the English text “[bigger than picasso]” below it. The back cover shows a used eraser, also in off-white, upon which is printed a color reproduction of Picasso's *Bust of a Woman in a Hat* (1962). The image on the back and the title on the front suggest that the book is related to Picasso. However, as the book unfolds, different readings come into view that relate more closely to how the book was introduced in the festival's brochure. A typed text in Arabic and English on each recto page is juxtaposed to an image on the verso page. The sixty-two-page text consists of sixteen numbered narratives, which recount stories of art vandalism in various countries. The same image is reproduced on every verso page of the book; it is the photograph of the monument, the enlarged version of which displays on

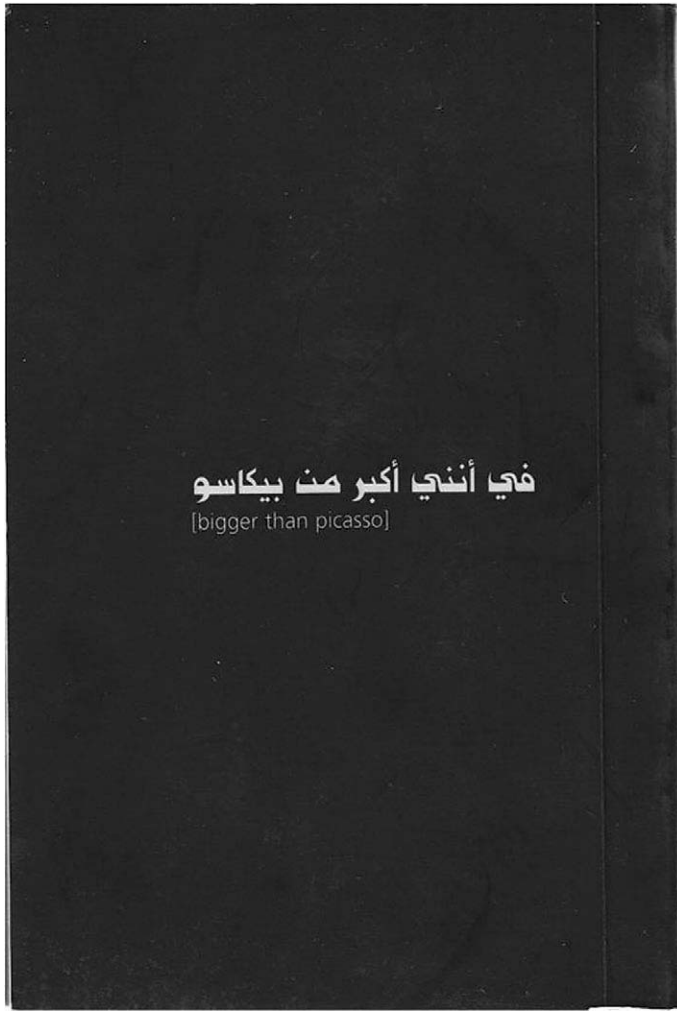


FIGURE 2. Walid Sadek, *fi annani akbar min bikasu* [bigger than picasso] (Beirut: Ayloul Festival, 1999), front book cover (7 × 11 cm).

the table (see Figure 4). The image does not have a caption. Its background is engulfed in blackness. There are no indications that automatically give way to its location, identity, or (hi)story. It looks like any monument in any city. The local reader, however, can easily identify it. Unveiled to the public in 1998—one year prior to the publication of *bigger than picasso*—the monument was part of a major road construction project in Beirut. Dedicated to the late Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad, it stands at the center of a busy roundabout on the newly constructed Boulevard Hafiz al-Asad, a main road for Beirut's southern entrance, as the flyer distributed at the opening of the road explains (see Figure 5). It marks the beginning of Beirut's southern suburbs, known as Dahiya, and connects them to downtown Beirut in the north and the airport and the highway in

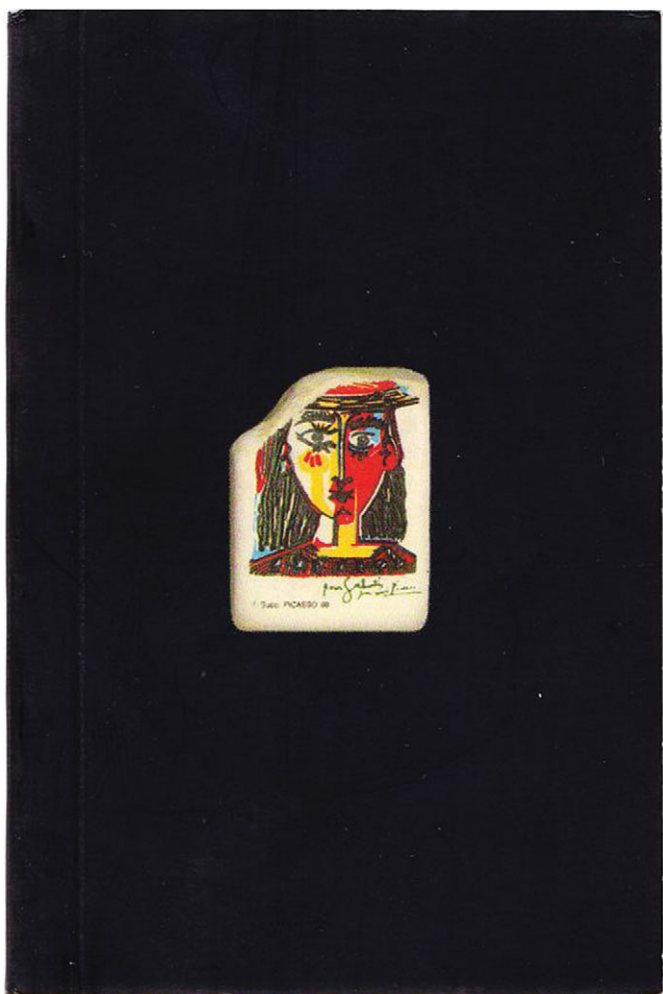


FIGURE 3. Walid Sadek, *fī annani akbar min bikasu* [*bigger than picasso*] (Beirut: Ayloul Festival, 1999), back book cover (7 × 11 cm). [A color version of this figure can be viewed online at <http://journals.cambridge.org/mes>]

the south. To the east are the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, the site of the horrific massacres of Palestinian and Lebanese civilians in 1982 committed by Lebanese forces under the auspices of the Israeli army.<sup>4</sup>

Enclosed between two covers that speak of Picasso, the image of the monument and the narratives of art vandalism to which it is juxtaposed remain confined in “zones of privacy.” Keeping in mind the miniature size of *bigger than picasso*, we may also say “zones of secrecy,” since the juxtaposition of the monument to verbal representations of art vandalism seems to suggest a new act of vandalism, this time directed against the monument. *Bigger than picasso* thus evades censorship but, in order to unfold meaning, it depends on the engagement of the reader. Most of the audience members

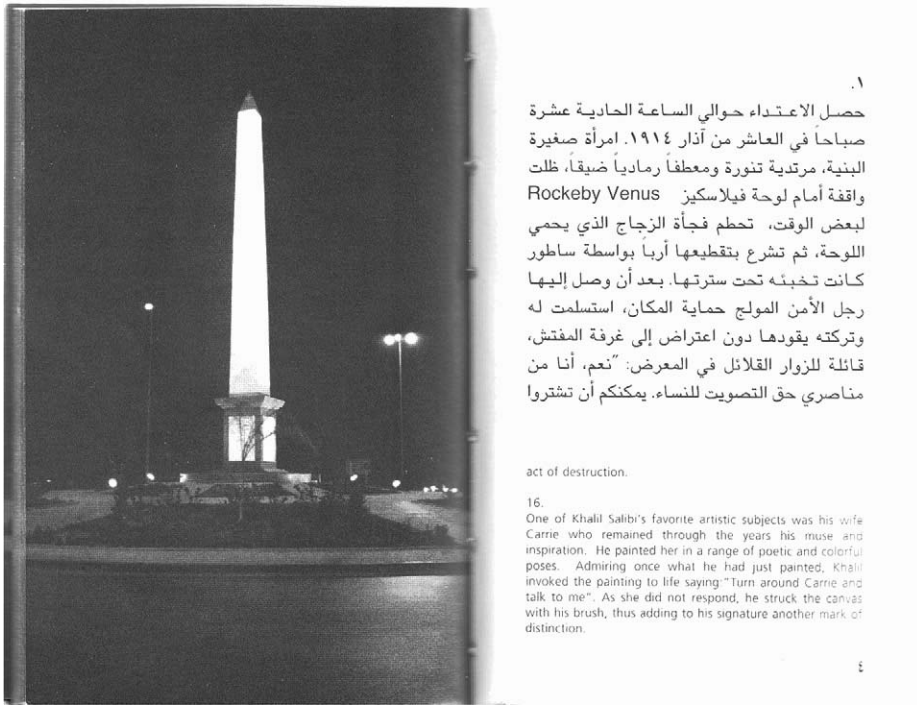


FIGURE 4. Walid Sadek, *fī annani akbar min bikasu [bigger than picasso]* (Beirut: Ayloul Festival, 1999), open page 4–5.

at the Ayloul Festival came to see a play, a film, or an installation; they were not really interested in *bigger than picasso* and today many have forgotten the book. This article aims at bringing it back into discourse, doing justice to the “one-on-one interactions” and “intimate encounters” it offers, when taken home and opened. Reading *bigger than picasso* against changing political circumstances holds unexpected perspectives on the place of art and politics in postwar Lebanon. It also sheds light on the complex relationship between creation and destruction, on the social life of things,<sup>5</sup> and on the fate of all artifacts to eventually disappear.<sup>6</sup> The objects under examination in this article are the monument reproduced in *bigger than picasso* and the book itself, which is viewed here as both a subversive intervention in the life of the monument—paper unraveling stone, as in the popular children’s game “scissors, paper, stone”—and an artifact in its own right. Before turning to *bigger than picasso* as an intervention in the life of the monument, the book needs to be situated within the context of book art and artistic practices of the postwar generation in Lebanon.

#### BOOK ART

As Johanna Drucker explains in *The Century of Artists’ Books*, it is often the fate of artists’ books to be overlooked, since they do not fall into neat categories but are



FIGURE 5. Flyer distributed at the monument's inauguration, 1998. [A color version of this figure can be viewed online at <http://journals.cambridge.org/mes>]

hybrid, highly intermedia in character, and demand engagement on the part of the reader.<sup>7</sup> Having developed out of the illustrated book, the *livre d'artiste*, which was a phenomenon of elite culture in *fin-de-siècle* France,<sup>8</sup> the definition of book art has aroused much scrutiny, especially since the 1960s and 1970s, when new forms of artists' books started to emerge that were closely linked to political activism.<sup>9</sup> As Hubert and Hubert write in *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' Books*:

The artist book, whether an offset multiple, a signed limited edition or one-of-a-kind volume, becomes the thing itself. Indeed, the object produced no longer functions as the conveyor of a privileged text, but as the only artifact worthy of consideration and, as such, the sole focus of attention and the treasure itself.<sup>10</sup>

Having turned into "the treasure itself," artists' books have maintained an existence as an "alternative artform," Drucker explains; "outside of gallery or museum structures," they have "become a self-sustaining, even self-defining, realm of activity."<sup>11</sup> Drucker, like Hubert and Hubert, is referring to artists' books in Western art historical contexts. The institutional frameworks within or without which artists' books have operated in the Arab world are different.<sup>12</sup> However, many artists' books in the Arab world are interconnected with political activism. Book art has been a compelling means for Arab artists to assert their identities and to establish a link to the rich heritage of the book in Arabic-Islamic culture, while taking part in contemporary artistic practices worldwide.<sup>13</sup> It has often been associated with an artistic trend known as *al-ḥurūfiyya* (from *ḥurūf*:

letters), the use of Arabic letters in modern art.<sup>14</sup> *Al-ḥurūfiyya* has lent itself easily to notions of authenticity (*aṣāla*), especially starting in the second half of the 20th century, due in part to political factors such as the Arab defeat to Israel in the 1967 war, which triggered a profound identity crisis among many Arab intellectuals.<sup>15</sup>

The internationally acclaimed Iraqi artist Dia Azzawi (b. 1936)—who is interested in the Arabic-Islamic heritage and beyond it the ancient Mesopotamian past, to which he refers through content (subject matter) and form (the flat surface, for instance)—can rightly be called one of the foremost practitioners of book art in the region. He has encouraged a younger generation of artists to work in book art and has built an exceptional collection of contemporary book art in Iraq.<sup>16</sup> His own books range from signed limited editions, reminiscent of the traditional *livre d'artiste*, to valuable one-of-a-kind objects and offset multiples. His multiples fit smoothly into the context of heightened political activism worldwide in the 1960s and 1970s and the new forms of book art that emerged globally during these years. They speak of direct political engagement at a time when grand narratives of resistance and revolution still met with hope of fulfillment and were closely linked to the Palestinian cause. An example is *al-Nashid al-Jasadi: Qasa'id Marsuma li-Tal al-Za'tar* (The Body's Anthem: Illustrated Poems for Tel al-Zaatar), published in Beirut in 1980 (see Figure 6). Illustrating poems by such well-known authors as Mahmoud Darwish, Tahar ben Jelloun, and Yousef Sayegh, it pays tribute to the Palestinian civilians killed in Tel al-Zataar refugee camp in Beirut in August 1976, after a siege of several months, by Christian militias with the support of the Syrian army.<sup>17</sup> Directly referring to Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) with the horse on the book cover's right side, which directs the reader's attention from right to left, following the direction of Arabic script,<sup>18</sup> the book documents artistically what happened in Tel al-Zaatar—not in a newspaper style of numbering the dead, but by giving testimony of the human suffering. An outcry against war, from the Spanish to the Lebanese civil wars, it inscribes the Palestinian tragedy into world history.

An exhibition at the Beirut Art Center entitled *The Road to Peace: Painting in Times of War 1975–1991*, curated by Saleh Barakat in 2009, included a number of other artists' books produced during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90). Some take the form of personal collage-like diaries, such as Ginane Basho's untitled artist book dated 1985, which incorporates private letters, cut-out newspaper clippings, and the map of Beirut divided by the so-called Green Line, here drenched in blood like red, a schizophrenic situation, as the superimposed photographs suggest (see Figure 7). Other books give witness to the civil war by means of vivid depictions of political events, such as Jamil Molaeb's 1978 *Notes from the Civil War* (see Figure 8). The open page here shows a drawing of the attack by a Christian militia on a bus carrying Palestinian civilians in Beirut on 13 April 1975, an "event" which came to mark the beginning of the civil war.<sup>19</sup>

As Sadek critically writes in the epilogue to Barakat's exhibition catalogue, he does not believe in "an aesthetic of witnessing" that "indicate[s] the overwhelming as there to see but rather as over here, a here awash."<sup>20</sup> His book was produced in a very different context from the books displayed in the 1978 catalogue: that of postmodern disillusionment. His interest is not in the creation of original works of art similar to those of Picasso; just like Art with a capital "A" has come to an end, so Picasso's





FIGURE 6. Dia Azzawi, *al-Nashid al-Jasadi: Qasa'id Marsuma li-Tal al-Za'tar* (The Body's Anthem: Illustrated Poems for Tel el-Zaatar) (Beirut: Dar al-Muthallath, 1980), book cover (30 × 30 cm). [A color version of this figure can be viewed online at <http://journals.cambridge.org/mes>]

name in *bigger than picasso* is spelled in lowercase. Far from claims of originality and authenticity, the minimalist layout of Sadek's book brings to the fore neoconceptual concerns that question the very place and possibility of art and visual representation in postwar Lebanon. Its miniature format comes in handy in finding ways around state violence and censorship, given that it addresses taboo issues, but it also relates to the abovementioned dichotomy of creation and destruction. The miniature is by definition opposed to the idea of originality and harbors ideas of disappearance and erasure. It is always already at a remove, as Susan Stewart points out:

Even to speak of the miniature is to begin with imitation, with the second-handedness and distance of the model. The miniature comes into the chain of signification at a remove: there is no original miniature; there is only the thing in "itself," which has already been erased, which has disappeared from this scene of arriving-too-late.<sup>21</sup>





FIGURE 7. Ginane Basho, *Map of Beirut* (Beirut, 1985) (28.5 × 38.5 cm), in *The Road to Peace: Painting in Times of War 1975–1991*, ed. Saleh Barakat (Beirut: Alarm Editions, 2009), 15. [A color version of this figure can be viewed online at <http://journals.cambridge.org/mes>]

#### POSTWAR LEBANON

Born in 1966, Sadek has played an important role in a group of artists often labeled the postwar generation in Lebanon.<sup>22</sup> He grew up in Beirut during the civil war, then studied in the United States before returning to Lebanon in 1992, working as an artist and pursuing an academic career in the Department of Architecture and Design at the American University of Beirut. Like many artists of his generation, Sadek has taken a distance from painting, whether figurative or abstract, and ventured into installation art, which was a new means of expression in the burgeoning art scene of 1990s Lebanon and one increasingly in demand by art festivals and biennales abroad.<sup>23</sup> Foreign interest in and funding of contemporary art in the Arab world, and especially work that introduces Western media art, has grown steadily, first with the turn toward multiculturalism and globalism in Western art markets, then with the emerging role of the Gulf states as powerful brokers in the arts, the opening of the private sector in Egypt, and, as some argue, a renewed focus on the Middle East worldwide since 9/11.<sup>24</sup> In the 1990s, the local art market in Lebanon was marked by the lack of a strong institutional infrastructure and largely dominated by small-scale art galleries dealing in paintings. The Ayloul festival, succeeded by Ashkal Alwan's homework forums, was one of the first platforms to challenge this situation. Only since the mid-2000s have new art venues—large-scale white cube exhibition spaces catering primarily to installation and video art, such as the non-for-profit Beirut Art Center and the commercial Sfeir Semler gallery—opened



FIGURE 8. Jamil Molaeb, *Notes from the Civil War* (Beirut, 1978) (34 × 24 cm), in *The Road to Peace: Painting in Times of War 1975–1991*, ed. Saleh Barakat (Beirut: Alarm Editions, 2009), 42.

their doors. The bilingual character of *bigger than picasso* reflects on the transnational orientation and multiple audiences of artists of Sadek's generation in Lebanon, and of those in other countries in the region. As Sadek says, he wanted to make a book that would be accessible to a local public as well as to the increasing number of foreign curators visiting art festivals in the region.<sup>25</sup>

Grounded in transnational networks and often refraining from references to local art historical contexts dating from before the civil war, the postwar generation in Lebanon has enforced the idea of a rupture with previous artistic practices and has managed to carve out a space for itself in the global and local art markets.<sup>26</sup> Taking a distance from the preceding generation of artists in Lebanon is programmatic as much as it is entrenched in Western artistic practices. As Gamboni notes, modern art from Marcel Duchamp to Daniel Spoerri, Lucio Fontana, Robert Rauschenberg, and Hans Haacke has been characterized by a subversive and iconoclastic character, a conscious attempt at breaking with artistic traditions.<sup>27</sup> What makes the postwar generation in Lebanon stand out, concludes Sarah Rogers, are its mixed-media practices that critically investigate history in ways far removed from the grand narratives of the past.<sup>28</sup> The idea of the archive features prominently. Examining artistic practices by Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari, Suzanne Cotter, who in 2006 curated the exhibition *Out of Beirut* at Modern Art Oxford, even speaks of a “documentary turn.”<sup>29</sup> This turn can be explained in part by local concerns, the absence of any official coming to terms with the past (*travail*

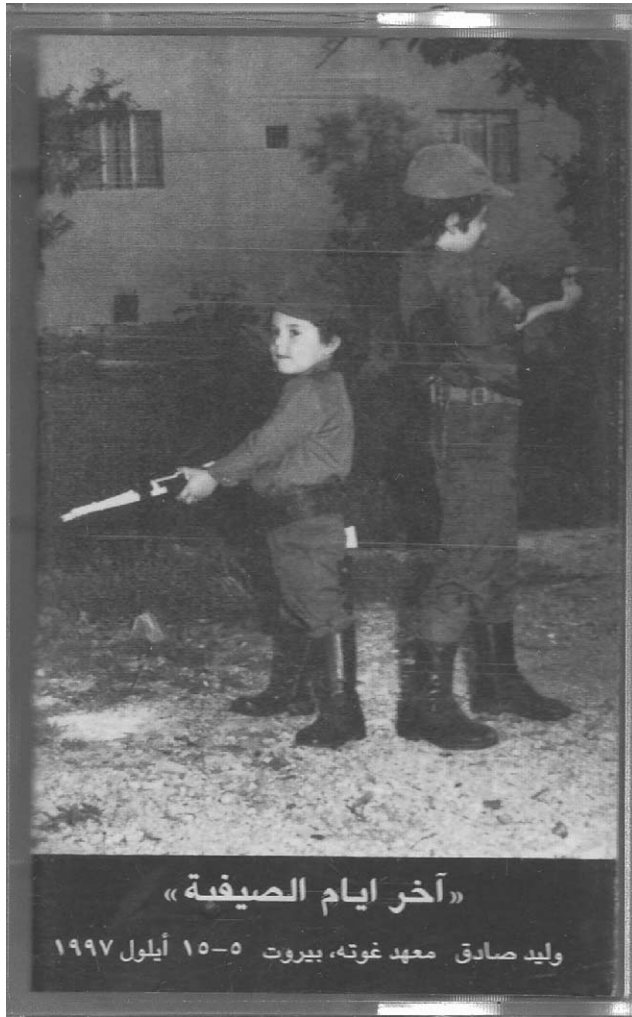


FIGURE 9. Walid Sadek, *Akhir Ayyam al-Saifiyya* (Last Days of Summer) (Beirut, 1997), cassette tape cover (7 × 11 cm).

*de memoire*) in Lebanon, on which more will be said later, and in part by international trends.<sup>30</sup>

Sadek's artistic practices clearly partake of this turn. An early attempt to critically investigate the civil war in addition to his own sociopolitical and confessional background, his 1997 installation came with a booklet and a tape entitled *Akhir Ayyam al-Saifiyya* (Last Days of Summer) (see Figure 9). The cassette box features a photograph of Sadek and his younger brother as children dressed in militia clothes and carrying guns, Sadek a real one and his brother a toy. The tape is empty but its booklet contains the lyrics of well-known songs by the Lebanese musical diva Fairuz as modified by Christian militias

during the civil war to defame their political adversaries, the Palestinians. The nostalgic tone of Fairuz's *Last Days of Summer* turned into a bloody reference to the 1976 siege and massacre of Tel al-Zaatar. Evoked by Sadek's tape, the lyrics resume in our ears, no matter how much we might have tried to erase them from memory. For Sadek, memory is collective and personal at once, as the photograph documents. His father, Pierre Sadek, a renowned political cartoonist who worked for a number of Lebanese dailies as well as the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation, was an ardent supporter of Bashir Gemayel and produced a number of political posters for the Kata'ib Party and its military organization, the Lebanese Forces.<sup>31</sup> Compared to Azzawi's direct artistic response to the 1976 massacre of Tel al-Zaatar—his illustrated poems issued as an artist's book—Sadek's reworking of the already modified lyrics comes at a remove, about thirty years later, almost like childhood memories, so close and yet so far, suppressed by accumulated silences in postwar Lebanon.

Despite generational and conceptual differences, Azzawi's and Sadek's artistic practices share some characteristics, including ideas related to publication, distribution, and the incorporation of text. Sadek has turned repeatedly to the idea of the book, or, to put it in broader terms, of publication, which he deliberately ties to installation art. Installation, says Sadek, is opening up to lighter but more precise media, associated with text, media networks, and distribution.<sup>32</sup> Similar to installation art, the reading process is of temporary character and breaks with artistic traditions that aim at placing a work of art in an institutional frame, such as a museum; it evades public control and collection. Sadek has published a number of artist's books, including *Karaoke* (1998) and *Jane-Loyse Tissier* (2003), which similar to *bigger than picasso* take the form of miniature books, and *al-Kasal* (Indolence, 1999), which he issued together with Lebanese artist and journalist Bilal Khbeiz as a newspaper. Another publication is *Milaff: al-Zaman al-'Am* (File: Public Time, 2005), which he worked on with Lebanese artists and journalists Bilal Khbeiz and Fadi Abdullah. It refers to the United Nations' investigation into the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri on 14 February 2005 and comes in the form of a file. Writing about Sadek's text-based interventions, Kaelen Wilson-Goldie concludes that "Sadek seems to be searching for ever-newer forms of active and productive engagement in an increasingly passive world."<sup>33</sup> This is again the case in his installation "The Labour of Missing," shown in the Sharjah Biennial in 2011 and in the newly opened 500 square meter Tanit Gallery in Beirut in 2012. While partaking in "the documentary turn" that characterizes artistic practices in postwar Lebanon, Sadek here is preoccupied with absence, or the missing, not as something that has the potential to reappear but as something that comes with labor and "cohabits" what he refers to as "a protracted civil war."<sup>34</sup>

Few artists of the postwar generation in Lebanon have chosen to work in book art, which, as mentioned above, defies categorization and demands more engagement on the part of the reader than the art market usually provides. Raad, an internationally acclaimed installation and video artist as well as an academic who lives and works in New York, published three volumes of *The Atlas Group* as part of his Atlas Group project "to research and document the contemporary history of Lebanon with particular emphasis on the wars of 1975 to 1990."<sup>35</sup> The publications are veritable storehouses of factious as well as fictitious material, and are close in layout to white cube exhibition

spaces, but they remain bookwork, expensive if avant-garde exhibition catalogues; each volume costs about US \$80. The form of the book here houses reproductions of Raad's artistic practices, which figure as "the privileged text." Sadek's book is different. *Bigger than picasso* does not refer to any artistic practices by Sadek that exist outside its pages. The book itself is Sadek's artistic intervention. To put it in Hubert and Hubert's words quoted above, the book is the "sole focus of attention and the treasure itself."<sup>36</sup>

As book art, *bigger than picasso* partakes in global neoconceptual concerns but incorporates local histories in complex ways. As pointed out above, *bigger than picasso* comes in the guise of a publication related to Picasso. Why this ambiguity? Who is the personal pronoun speaking in its title? The Arabic part of the title is slightly different; *fī annani akbar min bikasu* translates literally into English as "in that I am bigger than picasso" and holds an affirmative stance. Either way, the title is sparked with irony. The English part of the title, written in all lowercase letters, breaks with Picasso's apotheosis in art history. Who or what is bigger than Picasso? The giant monument reproduced on every other page of the book? Hafiz al-Asad, who is immortalized in the obelisk, an aestheticization of politics that obliges art into its service? The book whose miniature form is in stark contrast to the gigantic nature of the monument and seems to poke fun at the very use of the comparative adjective bigger? The artist, a young, relatively unknown, and inconspicuous man from the Arab world, Lebanon, a country associated in Western media and public opinion with war, violence, and terrorism? Is he creating or destroying art? Is he committing an act of violence or calling for violent action? Is he or the book he sells offensive? Is selling art at US \$3.00 offensive? Is he (claiming to be) bigger than Picasso? Is claiming to be bigger than Picasso—a role model for many artists of the sixties generations, such as Azzawi—tantamount to mocking modernist regimes of evaluations, hierarchies, and values from a postmodern and postcolonial perspective? Is he reversing center-periphery relations, which relegate art from the Arab world, or the Third World, to the margins?

As Jessica Winegar argues, the Middle Eastern artist has turned into the counterimage of the terrorist in Western perceptions of the region, especially since 9/11.<sup>37</sup> Artist or terrorist, Sadek playfully deconstructs notions of art and politics, creativity and destruction, center and periphery. His artistic practices are at once engulfed in neoconceptual concerns and local politics. In the Ayloul festival in 2000, Sadek intervened with a gigantic poster entitled *Better Left Untitled*, featuring a large image of Hizbullah's leader Hassan Nasrallah next to a Polaroid image of himself, smaller-than-life, smiling at the onlooker from under Nasrallah's arms (see Figure 10). Nasrallah had just emerged as a hero, following the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000, capturing people's fascination across the region in much the same way he is holding on to Sadek, it being unclear whether he is hugging or strangling him, as Raad points out.<sup>38</sup>

A closer look at the juxtaposition of word and image in *bigger than picasso* reveals that the book is closely related to Lebanon's recent history of civil war encroaching on current affairs and, more precisely, Syrian-Lebanese relations. An artistic intervention in the life of the monument it reproduces thirty-two times on every other page, it brings to the fore subtle political criticism, at a time when such criticism was a taboo, and makes room for critically exploring the place and relation of art and politics in postwar Lebanon.



FIGURE 10. Walid Sadek, *Better Left Untitled* (Beirut, 2000), poster photo-collage (210 × 300 cm).

#### TEXT AND IMAGE

Culled, as stated in the book's front matter, from a number of sources, all rights "not reserved,"<sup>39</sup> the sixteen numbered narratives that run through *bigger than picasso* tell the stories of different acts of art vandalism. One of the sources is Dario Gamboni's *The Destruction of Art*, quoted above, in which Gamboni distinguishes between two terms: iconoclasm and vandalism. Whereas the first denotes the "willful destruction of art," implying an "intention, sometimes a doctrine," and historically has often been used in the context of Byzantium, the Reformation, and the French Revolution, the latter is of stigmatizing quality and associated with "blindness, ignorance, stupidity, baseness or lack of taste."<sup>40</sup> Diverse in character, the narratives in *bigger than picasso* move back and forth between vandalism and iconoclasm and bring to the fore the sometimes thin line that sets them apart, based on different perceptions. The narratives include Mary Richardson's famous attack on Velasquez' *Rockeby Venus* at the National Gallery in



London in 1914; the dismantling of Tmsky's statue of Lenin from Leninplatz, later renamed United Nations Square, in Berlin in 1992; Tony Shafrazi's spray-painting of the words "Kill Lies All" over Picasso's *Guernica* in the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1974; and the act of Lebanese artist Khalil Salibi, who is said to have struck the canvas on which he had just completed a painting of his wife Carrie with a brush, after her image failed to respond to him. Some thus relate to attacks on art carried out by individuals, as in the case of Mary Richardson, who subsequently was nicknamed in the press "Slasher Mary" or "The Ripper," and others with court decisions to dismantle art, as in the case of the Lenin statue whose dismantlement triggered public protest. Shafrazi, the owner of a well-known art gallery in New York, considered his act innovative art. Making use of popular art, namely graffiti, he wanted to render visible in the present what had been stored as a masterpiece of art history in the museum. As this example shows, what some disapprove of as the destruction of art through blind or distasteful vandalism, others consider a creative awakening to life of dead objects.

The story about Salibi is the only reference to Lebanese art history in the sixteen narratives. Salibi (1870–1928) studied at the Syrian Protestant College, which later became the American University of Beirut (AUB), then in Edinburgh, London, and Paris, before returning to Lebanon. He was an acclaimed portrait painter, one of the first to open a studio in Beirut, and hailed as "the Father of the Lebanese Artistic Renaissance."<sup>41</sup> A large donation of his paintings was recently made by his grandson to AUB, which put them on public display for the first time. A few of his nude paintings were also loaned to the Institut du monde arabe in Paris for its exhibition *Le corps découvert* (27 March to 15 July 2012), where they received significant international attention.<sup>42</sup> The story of Salibi striking the canvas brings to the fore the close relationship between art and life that is at the heart of vandalism and iconoclasm alike. It also allows Sadek to situate himself and refer back to the beginnings of modern art in Lebanon.<sup>43</sup> The seemingly unbroken representation of reality, as practiced by Salibi, is at once intriguing and impossible to repeat from a contemporary perspective. By referring to Salibi, Sadek not only situates himself geopolitically as an Arab and, more specifically, a Lebanese artist, but also underlines the gap that sets him and the postwar generation apart from Salibi and the beginnings of modern art in the region.

Sadek again refers to the pioneer generation of modern art in Lebanon, namely to Mustapha Farroukh (1901–57), in his 2006 installation *Love Is Blind* shown in *Out of Beirut* at Modern Art Oxford and in his 2010 first solo exhibition, *Place at Last* at the Beirut Art Center.<sup>44</sup> In both cases, captions and brief descriptions of Farroukh's paintings, mostly landscapes and portraits but also nudes, are given as traces of visual representation though the paintings themselves are absent, their places left empty. These blank spots, the absence of reference to the pioneer generation, is also a central theme in Raad's artistic practices, such as in his 2008 exhibition "A History of Modern and Contemporary Arab Art: Part I Chapter 1: Beirut (1992–2005)" and his 2012 *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow*, staged at Sfeir Semler gallery in Beirut. In the 2008 exhibition, Raad directly referred to Sadek's *Love Is Blind*. He commissioned the Lebanese painter Rita Adiamy to reproduce an installation shot, which Sadek had provided him with, but he effaced Sadek's descriptions in addition to Farroukh's paintings, leaving his public with the captions—name, title, and date—only.<sup>45</sup> Here, the public is even further set apart from the beginnings of modern art in the region; even the verbal representation of

visual representation—the definition A. W. Heffernan gives of *ekphrasis*<sup>46</sup>—is deemed impossible. However, just as in *Love Is Blind*, Sadek in *bigger than picasso* holds on to the idea of *ekphrasis*. The book presents the reader with different narratives of vandalism but the works of art themselves as well as their destruction—or, better, the action/violence exercised on them—are left to the visualization of the reader, who is confronted again and again with the image of the monument.

As pointed out above, this image comes without caption. The obelisk's enduring power as a political marker brings to mind colonial encounters, the Western appropriation and integration of Middle Eastern archaeology into Western historical narratives.<sup>47</sup> The legacy of the French Mandate hovers over Lebanon, as its politicians have alternately sought the approval of the French and Syrian governments, and as the urban landscape has been dominated by Western models. The obelisk represented in *bigger than picasso* is not old; it is a new monument taking the shape of the age-old obelisk. It is fashioned after Western models, such as the Luxor obelisk at the Place de la Concorde in Paris. Presented as a gift by the Khedive Muhammad 'Ali Pasha to France in 1829, thirty years after the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt, which set the stage for "re-order[ing] Egypt to appear as a world enframed," "something object-like," "picture-like," "readable like a book," as Timothy Mitchell writes,<sup>48</sup> it rendered Egypt visible and tangible in the heart of Paris: an Egypt that spoke of the Pharaonic past, set apart from modernity and delegated into history. As readers flip through *bigger than picasso*, their attention is caught by two images that stand out as they are in color rather than black and white like all the others (see Figure 11). They cause an interruption in the reading process for no obvious reason, inspired by the idea of disturbance pronounced so well by the American conceptual artist John Baldessari.<sup>49</sup> Prevented from falling into the familiar, the reader looks at the monument anew. The yellowish light of the surrounding lanterns illuminates the site, putting even more emphasis on the night scene and the obelisk's phallic structure. Erected at a busy intersection in Beirut, the monument is a display of power in the highly contested urban space of politically tense postwar Lebanon, rendering Syria visible and tangible in the heart of Beirut: a Syria that speaks of the enduring reign of Hafiz al-Asad. Unveiled to the public at the opening of the Boulevard Hafiz al-Asad in an inauguration led by the late Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri in 1998, its inscription reads: *min lubnān ilā siyādat al-ra'is ḥāfiẓ al-asad taḥiyyat wafā' wa-ukhuwwa ilā sūriyā wa-sha'bihā wa-jaishihā* (From Lebanon to His Excellency the President Hafiz al-Asad, a salute of fidelity and fraternity to Syria, its people, and its army). The inscription affirms Lebanon's close ties with Syria, for which al-Asad coined the expression *sha'b wāḥid fī dawlatain* (one people in two states). The inscription does not read "From Lebanon to Syria"; al-Asad comes first, rendering Syria without al-Asad unthinkable. Al-Asad here stands for Syria, its people, and its army, carved into the seemingly timeless nature of the obelisk for all eternity. The monument resonates with political slogans that celebrated Syria as *sūriyā al-asad* (Syria of Asad) and al-Asad as *qā'id li-l-abad* (the leader forever), *al-ab al-qā'id* (the father the leader), *al-qā'id al-munāḍil* (the combatant leader), and *munqidh lubnān* (the savior of Lebanon), which were widespread in Syria as well as in Lebanon from the time the Syrian regime intervened militarily in Lebanon.<sup>50</sup>

The Syrian army entered the Lebanese Civil War in 1976; after the Taif Accords that officially ended the war in 1989, it remained in Lebanon, partly as a counterweight to the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon (1978–2000).<sup>51</sup> Openly discussing the presence

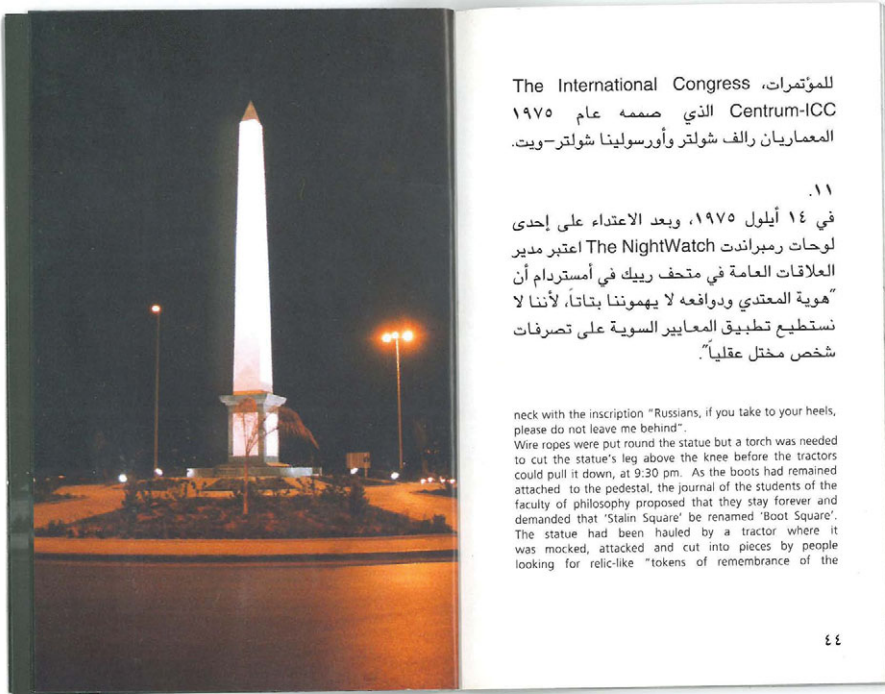


FIGURE 11. Walid Sadek, *fi annani akbar min bikasu* [bigger than picasso] (Beirut: Ayloul Festival, 1999), open page 44–45. [A color version of this figure can be viewed online at <http://journals.cambridge.org/mes>]

of the Syrian army, its security apparatus in Lebanon, as well as the flood of images glorifying Hafiz al-Asad was taboo. *Bigger than picasso* was published at a time when the increasingly burdening public silence about the civil war was beginning to crumble, as civil society activists and artists attempted to critically rethink the past, including through an opposition movement to the 1991 general amnesty for war crimes that made it possible for former warlords to take on government positions.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, dissident voices within Syria, including a number of former political prisoners,<sup>53</sup> calling for their country's democratization started to be more widely heard, especially through the Lebanese press. When Hafiz al-Asad passed away in June 2000, an opposition movement that called for political reform and saw the foundation of numerous political salons as well as the publication of political declarations, known as the Damascene Spring, briefly contributed to this atmosphere of relative freedom, but it was soon to be crushed by Syrian authorities.<sup>54</sup> The Ayloul Festival in which Sadek's book was launched was born out of this historical context.

In juxtaposing the monument to verbal representations of art vandalism, *bigger than picasso* critically sheds light on the political alliances that supported al-Asad's glorification and personality cult from within Lebanon. Questioning the Syrian military presence directly was impossible. The political constraints generated an aesthetic that explains the

ambiguity of *bigger than picasso*. As pointed out above, the comparative *bigger* is further emphasized through contrast with the book's very format, its miniature size, which brings to the fore notions of intimacy, privacy, and secrecy in the reading process that oppose the public demonstration of power represented in the monument and allow a moment of truth. Hafiz al-Asad was known internationally for his employment of a personality cult in the consolidation of power, carefully built after Soviet models, supported by the one-party system of Ba'athist ideology, and in its omnipresent manifestations surpassing that of many other countries in recent history.<sup>55</sup> The personality cult around al-Asad, argues Lisa Wedeen, contributed to a politics of dissimulation in which complicity was enforced not by requiring people "to believe the 'mystifications' the regime puts forth" but rather by requiring them "to act as if they did, and by so acting, to live 'within the lie.'"<sup>56</sup> Quoting the late Czech dissident turned president Václav Havel, Wedeen adds that in this case "everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system."<sup>57</sup> In 1997, the Lebanese video artist and filmmaker Akram Zaatari, a founding member of the Arab Image Foundation,<sup>58</sup> made a short film entitled *Hubb* (Love), which until today has not been shown publically in any art event in Lebanon or abroad. Shot in Syria clandestinely, it shows portrait painters of al-Asad at work in their storehouses, speaking about their love for "the leader forever," while walking over the head, nose, or feet of his larger-than-life images to finish or dust their oeuvres. Their declarations of love appear as tragicomic reflections of their own situation, acting "as if" and living "within the lie."

"Monuments are born, live and die," reads the introduction to Sadek's book launch at the Ayloul festival. Their lives, as those of any object, depend not only on the material, which is chosen to last for eternity, but also on "the physical context in which they are placed and its changes, as well as the uses to which they are submitted and the way they are considered,"<sup>59</sup> as Gamboni writes.

Since the publication of Sadek's book in 1999, a number of changes have taken place in the life of the monument reproduced on its pages. Hafiz al-Asad is dead, though the Syrian regime as well as its military presence and security apparatus in Lebanon has lived on under his son Bashar al-Asad. The son's ascent to power was made possible by a swift change in the Syrian constitution, which reduced the required age for candidacy to president from forty to thirty-four, Bashar's age in 2000, and turned Syria into a "hereditary republic" within one month of Hafiz al-Asad's death, as Syrian dissident Riad Turk pointed out at the time.<sup>60</sup> Since 9/11, in the context of the U.S. government's war on terror and Syria's firm stance against the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the U.S. has declared Syria a rogue state and considered it an important player in "the axis of evil."<sup>61</sup> In February 2005, Hariri, then in his second term as Lebanese prime minister, was killed in a massive car blast in downtown Beirut, an "event" that was followed by a series of additional political assassinations. The United Nations' investigative commission into the assassination set out by accusing high-ranking Lebanese and Syrian officials of direct involvement.<sup>62</sup> In 2011, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon submitted to the Lebanese authorities arrest warrants for four senior Hizbullah members.<sup>63</sup> The demonstrations triggered by Hariri's assassination saw the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon in April 2005.<sup>64</sup> With the Syrian army went the forceful destruction, carried out by protestors, as well as the cautious dismantling, completed by the Syrian army, of numerous monuments dedicated to al-Asad, father and son, in Lebanon.

However, the monument inaugurated by Hariri and reproduced thirty-one times in *bigger than picasso* has remained. There are a number of reasons for this. First, it differs from the lifelike representations of the “leader forever” in that it takes on the abstract and seemingly timeless form of the obelisk; only its inscription refers directly to al-Asad. Second, it was inaugurated by Hariri, a prominent Lebanese Sunni political leader, who himself has become larger-than-life, already in his lifetime but especially since his assassination.<sup>65</sup> Third, it is placed in Beirut’s Dahiya, a stronghold of Amal and Hizbullah, Shi‘i militias turned political parties after the civil war that are now the Syrian regime’s strongest allies in Lebanon. Today, the monument has taken on a new life (see Figure 12 and Figure 13). It figures posters of Hafiz and Bashar al-Asad in addition to their Lebanese supporters: Amal’s Nabih Berri and Hizbullah’s Hassan Nasrallah, another political leader who has become larger-than-life, especially since the 2000 Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon and the 2006 Lebanon war in which Beirut’s southern suburbs were severely shelled by Israel. The obelisk has clearly lost its power as a national monument, but it has acquired new meaning as a communitarian monument, now fitting in smoothly with the sectarian character of most postwar monuments in Lebanon.<sup>66</sup> As Lucia Volk points out in *Memorials and Martyrs in Modern Lebanon*, monuments are meant to remain the same; however, in Lebanon they “need to be considered as ‘events’ with a life of their own. They keep changing along with the physical and cognitive landscape around them.”<sup>67</sup>

The Arab Spring and the uprising in Syria have again changed the picture. Breaking down the “wall of fear,” the events have brought to the fore a political player far from the political leaders turned larger-than-life: the people.<sup>68</sup> Their hopeful slogan *al-sha‘b yurid* . . . (the people want . . .) has traveled from the Tunisian revolution to Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria, and continues to make itself heard despite the setbacks and forceful attempts at crushing people’s demands across the region, which in Syria have turned large parts of the country into a war zone. The slogan is based on the opening lines *idhā al-sha‘b yauman arāda al-ḥayāt / fa-lā budd ‘an yastajīb al-qadar* (If, one day, the people wills to live / Then fate must obey) of “Iradat al-Hayat” (The Will to Life), a famous poem by the Tunisian writer Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi (1909–34), whose poetry played a major role in the Tunisian and other Arab independence movements in the first half of the 20th century.<sup>69</sup>

From the very outset of the Syrian revolution, a number of monuments devoted to Hafiz al-Asad across Syria have been destroyed by protestors, risking their lives, for instance in Daraa on 25 March 2011 and in Rastan on 15 April 2011.<sup>70</sup> But some have been removed by the regime in an effort to forestall their fall, metaphorically tantamount to the fall of the regime that erected them. This was the case with the gigantic statue of Hafiz al-Asad in Hama, which was carefully dismantled and carried off on 10 June 2011 in a truck designed to transport missiles, to guarantee that the body of al-Asad and the regime alike remained intact.<sup>71</sup> In light of these “events,” the monument reproduced in *bigger than picasso* today seems rather out of touch with reality, almost like a relic of former times, still featuring a poster of Hafiz al-Asad long after such posters had been replaced in Syria by those of his son. Read against these changed “physical and cognitive landscape[s],” a new question arises that is less about the destruction of art, the monument’s death, and more about its afterlife: what happens to monuments, once they are destroyed, removed, or left to live on in changed political circumstances?



FIGURE 12. The monument today, 26 February 2012, author's photo. [A color version of this figure can be viewed online at <http://journals.cambridge.org/mes>]

Where do they disappear to? What kind of narratives, or new images, as W.J.T. Mitchell suggests,<sup>72</sup> does their destruction, removal, or the changed political contexts they are placed in engender?

As new artistic practices closely linked to political activism in Syria—ranging from video and performance art to graffiti, caricature, comics, and installation-like happenings such as the dyeing of Damascus's fountains in red—suggest,<sup>73</sup> the destruction of political markers, including monuments, takes place first and foremost in people's minds. The actual monument becomes less of an issue, may be forgotten; it loses its spell. The monument's symbolic function that seeks reaffirmation of power and obliges us to live





FIGURE 13. The monument today, 26 February 2012, author's photo. [A color version of this figure can be viewed online at <http://journals.cambridge.org/mes>]

“within the lie” is broken. The monument turns into a mere thing, an object whose value lies in documenting history,<sup>74</sup> crumbling political alliances, no matter how fast some political players may try to hold on to them.

#### CONCLUSION

More than a decade after its launch, *bigger than picasso* opens unlikely perspectives on the recent history of Lebanon, Syria, and Syrian–Lebanese relations. As the narratives juxtaposed with the monument in the book suggest, an object is never really destroyed

by an act of vandalism; rather, it changes its meaning, lives on in a different context, or engenders new narratives, as was Tony Shafrazi's declared objective, when spray-painting "Kill Lies All" over Picasso's *Guernica*. Picasso's *Bust of a Woman in a Hat* reproduced on an eraser that figures on *bigger than picasso*'s back cover is another example. As is the fate of so many works of art in Western consumer societies, it slowly disappears as the eraser is put to use—the eraser figuring as an instrument of erasure/destruction engendering another form of vandalism but also rendering possible the beginning of a new life, reminiscent of Robert Rauschenberg's "Erased de Kooning Drawing" of 1953, which is one of Sadek's declared favorites.<sup>75</sup> In this light, the book's back cover can be seen as programmatic: *bigger than picasso* is about erasure. At the same time, it allows ever-new readings in continuously changing political circumstances. As Stewart writes, "the closure of the book is an illusion largely created by its materiality, its cover. Once the book is considered on the plane of its significance, it threatens infinity."<sup>76</sup>

*Bigger than picasso* does not call for an act of vandalism, the destruction of the monument. Rather, it is itself of iconoclastic character, breaking with previous artistic traditions and metaphorically unraveling the monument by juxtaposing its image to text and, more precisely, to verbal representations of vandalism. The monument is not destroyed. Its image remains intact and ripe for multiplication, if deprived of what Walter Benjamin identifies as its aura, permanence, and cult value.<sup>77</sup> Having become part of an artistic intervention, exhibited at an art festival, the monument is left to unravel itself. Due to the political situation in postwar Lebanon, its unraveling takes place not in real time and space but within the pages of a tiny book. *Bigger than picasso* powerfully dismantles the politics of public monumentality—in Benjamin's words, "the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic"<sup>78</sup>—through the temporal and spatial unfolding of its pages, in artistic practices that are highly politicized while resorting to ephemeral and private reading processes. Art and politics, assumed to occupy different spheres since the Enlightenment, are closely intertwined; *bigger than picasso* slyly acknowledges this ideologically inflected conception of artistic practices. The miniature size of the book compared to the gigantic structure of the monument reveals the place of art and political dissent alike in postwar Lebanon. It reflects the situation of book art at the margins of cultural production, far from public display of power in "zones of privacy."

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary, 2004), xii.

<sup>2</sup> Walid Sadek, *fi annani akbar min bikasu [bigger than picasso]* (Beirut: Ayloul Festival, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> D.G., "«Bigger than Picasso», apparemment inoffensif," *L'Orient Le Jour*, 8 September 1999, 6.

<sup>4</sup>The massacre triggered an international outcry and two major investigations, one led by a group of Western jurists, academics, and public figures, the other by the Israeli government. See *Israel in Lebanon: The Report of the International Commission to Enquire into Reported Violations of International Law by Israel during Its Invasion of the Lebanon* (London: Ithaca, 1983); and *The Beirut Massacre: The Complete Kahan Commission Report* (Princeton, N.J.: Karz-Cohl, 1983). For a more humane testimony, see Jean Genet, "Four Hours in Shatila," trans. Daniel R. Dupecher and Martha Perrigaud, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 12 (1983): 3–22; and Zahra A. Husein Ali, "Aesthetics of Memorialization: The Sabra and Shatila Genocide in the Work of Sami Mohammad, Jean Genet, and June Jordan," *Criticism* 51 (2010): 589–621.

<sup>5</sup>Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>6</sup>Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 25–26.

<sup>7</sup>Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, xvii, 1–19.

<sup>8</sup>See *ibid.*, 21–24; and W.J. Strachan, *The Artist and the Book in France: The 20th Century Livre d'Artiste* (London: Peter Owen, 1969).

<sup>9</sup>See Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, 72.

<sup>10</sup>Renée Riese Hubert and Judd D. Hubert, *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' Books* (New York: Granary, 1999), 8.

<sup>11</sup>Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, 70.

<sup>12</sup>On art institutional frameworks in the region, see Sonja Mejcher-Atassi and John Pedro Schwartz, eds., *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>13</sup>See, for example, Venetia Porter, ed., *Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East* (London: British Museum Press, 1996; Dubai: Dubai Holding LLC, 2008); and Marie-Geneviève Guesdon and Annie Vernay-Nouri, eds., *L'art du livre arabe: Du manuscrit au livre d'artiste* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 2002), 177–99.

<sup>14</sup>On *al-hurūfiyya*, see Sharbil Dagher, *al-Hurufiyya al-'Arabiyya: al-Fann wa-l-Huwiyya* (Beirut: Shirkat al-Matbu'at, 1990); and Silvia Naef, *L'art de l'écriture arabe: Passé et présent* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1992).

<sup>15</sup>On authenticity in modern art in the Arab world, see Silvia Naef, "L'expression iconographique de l'authenticité (*aṣāla*) dans la peinture arabe moderne," in *L'image dans le monde arabe*, ed. G. Beaugé and J.-F. Clément (Paris: CRNS, 1995), 139–49.

<sup>16</sup>See Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, "Contemporary Book Art in the Middle East: The Book as Document in Iraq," *Art History* 35 (2012): 816–39.

<sup>17</sup>Hafiz al-Asad was heavily criticized for the Syrian army's involvement in Tel al-Zaatar. On the Syrian intervention in Lebanon in 1976, see Caroline Donati, *L'Exception Syrienne: Entre modernization et résistance* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), 109–26; Samir Kassir, *La Guerre du Liban: De la dissension national au conflit régional* (Paris: CERMOC/Khartala, 1994), 218–28; Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation* (London: The Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with I. B. Tauris), 210–26, 231–34, 237–40; and Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988), 267–89. A number of Syrian intellectuals and artists, among them Farouk Mardam Bey, Saadallah Wannous, and Youssef Abdelke, signed a petition in 1976 to voice their opposition to the Syrian intervention, published in the Arabic daily *al-Hayat*.

<sup>18</sup>Azzawi may have been inspired by the late Iraqi artist Jawad Salim, who was a major influence on Iraqi artists. His Monument of Freedom (*Nash al-Hurriyya*), unveiled to the public in Tahrir Square Baghdad in 1961, where it remains today, celebrates the Iraqi Revolution of 1958. It reads like a line of Arabic text from right to left, consisting of fourteen bronze sculptures inserted onto a travertine wall. While referring back to Mesopotamian bas-relief, it is steeped in modern artistic practices worldwide, quoting Picasso's *Guernica* in many of its figures, including the horse on the far right.

<sup>19</sup>It is common practice in Lebanon to refer to the civil war as "the events," without attributing responsibility or pointing to internal or external players.

<sup>20</sup>Walid Sadek, "The Impregnated Witness; Notes on the Event Within," in *The Road to Peace: Painting in Times of War 1975–1991*, ed. Saleh Barakat (Beirut: Alarm Editions, 2009), 57.

<sup>21</sup>Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (London: Duke University Press, 1993), 171.

<sup>22</sup>See Sarah Rogers, "Out of History: Postwar Art in Beirut," *Art Journal* 66 (2007): 8–20.

<sup>23</sup> Some criticism has been voiced regarding this “new” interest in installation art. See esp. Youssef Abdelke, “‘Aqd min al-Qarn al-Jadid fi Thaqaḥatīna: Fann bila Hudud,” *al-Safir*, no. 11480, 29 December 2009; and Yves Gonzales, “Un art sans frontières? L’art arabe face au marché global,” <http://cpa.hypotheses.org/2037> and <http://cpa.hypotheses.org/2052> (accessed 28 November 2012).

<sup>24</sup> On the growing interest in contemporary art in the Middle East, especially since 9/11, see Jessica Winegar, “The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 81 (2008): 651–81.

<sup>25</sup> Sadek, conversation with the author, Beirut, 29 June 2010.

<sup>26</sup> See Rogers, “Out of History,” 11; Hanan Toukan, “On Being the Other in Post-Civil War Lebanon: Aid and the Politics of Art in Processes of Contemporary Cultural Production,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 18 (2010): 118–60.

<sup>27</sup> Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, 255–86.

<sup>28</sup> Rogers, “Out of History,” 11.

<sup>29</sup> Suzanne Cotter, “The Documentary Turn: Surpassing Tradition in the Work of Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari,” in *Contemporary Art in the Middle East*, ed. Paul Sloman (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009), 50–51.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: Steidl/ICP, 2008); and Charles Merewether, ed., *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> On Pierre Sadek, see Zeina Maasri, *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 46.

<sup>32</sup> Walid Sadek, “Min al-Tanqib ila al-‘Ahan: Fi Tartibat Fann al-Tajhiz,” *al-Adab* 49 (2001): 112–16.

<sup>33</sup> Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, “Walid Sadek,” *Artforum* 48 (2010): 270–71.

<sup>34</sup> See <http://www.lebtivity.com/event/opening-of-the-new-space-of-galerie-tanit-with-walid-sadek-exhibition> (accessed 28 November 2012). See also Walid Sadek and Mayysa Fattouh, “Tranquility Is Made in Pictures,” *FILLIP* 17 (2012): 56–63, 151.

<sup>35</sup> Walid Raad, *The Atlas Group* (Berlin/Seattle/Arles: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König/Henry Art Gallery/Les Rencontres d’Arles, 2007), 3:9.

<sup>36</sup> Hubert and Hubert, *The Cutting Edge of Reading*, 8.

<sup>37</sup> Winegar, “The Humanity Game,” 674, 677.

<sup>38</sup> Walid Raad, “‘Oh God,’ He Said, Talking to a Tree: A Fresh-Off-the-Boat, Throat-Clearing Preamble about the Recent Events in Lebanon. And a Question to Walid Sadek,” *Artforum* 45 (2006): 244.

<sup>39</sup> The listed sources are “1 - Dr. Sameer Saleebi, *Khalil Saleebi* (Publications of the Lebanese University, 1986). 2 - Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art* (Yale University Press, 1997). 3 - James H. Rubin, *Courbet* (Phaidon Press Limited, 1997). 4 - Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *Piero Della Francesca* (1992).”

<sup>40</sup> Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, 17–18.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in The British Lebanese Association, ed., *Lebanon—The Artist’s View: 200 Years of Lebanese Painting* (London: Quartet Books, 1989), 157. See also Michel Fani, *Dictionnaire de la peinture au Liban* (Beirut: Éditions de l’Escalier, 1998), 237.

<sup>42</sup> See Philippe Cardinal and Hoda Makram-Ebeid, eds., *Le Corps découvert* (Paris: HAZAN/Institut du monde arabe, 2012). See also <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00q86xn#-> (accessed 28 November 2012).

<sup>43</sup> Whereas the beginnings of modern art in the region have long been looked at as a phase of adaptation, following Western models, more recent studies have questioned this assumption, drawing attention instead to local experiences and representations of modernity and their interconnectedness with Western, and indeed colonial, practices of cultural production, or as Kirsten Scheid writes, “the agencies that have produced ‘modernity’ as a universal force.” Kirsten Scheid, “Necessary Nudes: *Hadātha* and *Mu‘āsira* in the Lives of Modern Lebanese,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010): 226. See also Nada Shabout and Zainab Bahrani, eds., *Modernism and Iraq* (New York: Columbia University/Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, exhibition catalogue, 2009). On the idea of adaptation, see, for example, Silvia Naef, *À la recherche d’une modernité arabe: L’évolution des arts plastiques en Égypte, au Liban et en Irak* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1996), 111–73.

<sup>44</sup> For reviews of these exhibitions, see T. J. Demos, “Living Contradictions,” *Artforum* 45 (2006): 235–38; and Wilson-Goldie, “Walid Sadek,” 270–71.

<sup>45</sup> See <http://www.sfeir-semmler.com/beirut/exhibitions-beirut/2008/2008-10-07-walid-raad.html> (accessed 28 November 2012).

<sup>46</sup>James A. W. Heffernan, *Museums of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3. Heffernan's definition is also applied by W. J. T. Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other," in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 151–81.

<sup>47</sup>See, for example, Donald Malcom Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (London: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>48</sup>Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (London: University of California Press), 33.

<sup>49</sup>Sadek, conversation with the author, Beirut, 29 June 2010.

<sup>50</sup>See Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (London: University of Chicago Press), 1.

<sup>51</sup>Israel withdrew from South Lebanon in May 2000. However, the Shebaa Farms—which Israel claims as part of the Golan Heights, Syrian territory it occupied in the 1967 war, but Lebanon and Syria regard as Lebanese territory—remain occupied.

<sup>52</sup>See Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 64–95; and Amal Makarem, ed., *Mémoire pour l'avenir, Dhākira lil-ghad, Memory for the Future: actes du colloques tenu à la maison des Nations Unies, ESCWA (Beyrouth)* (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 2002). On the larger political context of more or less successful postwar recovery, see Reinoud Leenders, *Spoils of Truth: Corruption and State Building in Postwar Lebanon* (London: Cornell University Press, 2012).

<sup>53</sup>See Yassin al-Haj Saleh, "L'univers des anciens prisonniers politiques en Syrie," in *La Syrie au quotidien: cultures et pratiques du changement*, ed. Sylvia Chiffolleau, REMM (*Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*) 115–16 (2006): 249–65; and Sune Haugbolle, "The Victim's Tale in Syria: Imprisonment, Individualism and Liberalism," in *Policing and Prisons in the Middle East: Formations of Coercion*, ed. Laleh Khalili and Jilian Schwedler (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 223–40.

<sup>54</sup>See miriam cooke, *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official* (London: Duke University Press, 2007); Alain George, *Syria: Neither Bread nor Freedom* (London: Zed Books, 2003); and Burhan Ghaliboun and Farouk Mardam-Bey, eds., "Un printemps syrien," *Confluences Méditerranée* 44 (2002–2003), special issue.

<sup>55</sup>See esp. Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*. See also Élisabeth Picard, "Construire un État, dominer une nation," in *Damas: Miroir brisé d'un Orient arabe*, ed. Anne-Marie Bianquis and Élisabeth Picard (Paris: Editions Autrement, 1993), 146–53; Seale, *Asad*, 339–40, 350; and Moshe Ma'oz, *Asad: The Sphinx of Damascus: A Political Biography* (New York: Grove Weidenfels, 1988), 42–45.

<sup>56</sup>Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*, 76.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>58</sup>On the Arab Image Foundation, see <http://www.fai.org.lb/home.aspx> (accessed 28 November 2012).

<sup>59</sup>Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, 25–26.

<sup>60</sup>See Donati, *L'Exception Syrienne*, 130–37; and Riad Turk, "Je n'irai pas voter pour Bachar El Assad," interview by Gilles Paris, *Le Monde*, 28 June 2000.

<sup>61</sup>See cooke, *Dissident Syria*, 142–44. For a firsthand journalistic account of this change in U.S. policy toward Syria, see Andrew Tabler, *In the Lion's Den: An Eyewitness Account of Washington's Battle with Syria* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2011).

<sup>62</sup>See <http://www.un.org/News/dh/docs/mehlisreport/> (accessed 28 November 2012).

<sup>63</sup>See <http://www.stl-tsl.org/en/the-cases> (accessed 28 November 2012).

<sup>64</sup>The 14 March alliance led by Hariri's son Saad al-Hariri referred to the demonstrations as the "Cedar Revolution" or the "Lebanese Independence Intifada," controversial terms that the pro-Syrian 8 March alliance, among others, calls into question. The split into these alliances, named after their respective mass demonstrations in downtown Beirut in 2005, has marked the political and social life in Lebanon since then, as Wissam Charaf's documentary *It's All In Lebanon* (.né.a Beyrouth/UMAM Productions, 2012) critically and humorously brings to the fore.

<sup>65</sup>This is well expressed in the documentary *Rajul al-Hidha' al-Dhahabi* (The Man with the Golden Soles) (ARTE France—AMIP, 2000) by the Syrian filmmaker Omar Amiralay (1944–2011). On Amiralay, see Rasha Salti, ed., *Insights into Syrian Cinema: Essays and Conversations with Contemporary Filmmakers* (New York: ArteEast, 2006), 95–117, 182–83.

<sup>66</sup>Relatively little has been written on public monuments in Beirut. Cf. Craig Larkin, *Memory and Conflict in Lebanon: Remaking and Forgetting the Past* (London: Routledge, 2012); Lucia Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs in Modern Lebanon* (London: Routledge, 2010); and Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon*,

161–93. However, none of these mention the monument under consideration. Whereas Haugbolle points to the sectarian character of postwar monuments (p. 162), Volk, focusing her study on memorials of martyrdom, shows how such memorials are “creating narratives of Muslim and Christian parity” (p. 23). A greater number of studies can be found on Iraq, which allow for comparison of the Ba’th parties’ rule as well as the personality cults of Saddam Husayn and Hafiz al-Asad in Iraq and Syria. See esp. Samir al-Khalil [Kanan Makiya], *The Monument: Art, Vulgarly and Responsibility in Iraq* (London: University of California Press, 1991), to which Gamboni refers in his chapter “Outside the First World,” in *The Destruction of Art*, 107–16.

<sup>67</sup>Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs in Modern Lebanon*, 2.

<sup>68</sup>See Mohammad Ali Atassi, “What the People Want . . .,” *Perspectives: Political Analysis and Commentary from the Middle East* 2 (2011): 28–34.

<sup>69</sup>See Ronak Husni, “The Role of the Poet and Poetry in the Arab Spring,” paper presented at the BRISMES annual conference, LSE, 26–28 March 2012; and Gaele Raphael, “Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi,” *jadaliyya*, 2 May 2011, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1381/al-shabbis-the-will-to-life>. On al-Shabbi, see also Ronak Husni, “al-Shābbī and His Nature Poetry: Romantic or Revolutionary?,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 22 (1995): 81–92; and R. Marston Speight, “A Modern Tunisian Poet: Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī (1909–1934),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (1973): 178–89.

<sup>70</sup>See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4f2XHZO\\_ohk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4f2XHZO_ohk) and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlmvktnkQ70> (accessed 28 November 2012).

<sup>71</sup>See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGJpZj1Tlhw> (accessed 28 November 2012).

<sup>72</sup>Taking the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, the Taliban’s destruction of Buddhist monuments in Afghanistan, and the televised spectacle of the fall of Saddam Husayn’s statue in Baghdad brought about by U.S. soldiers as examples, Mitchell argues that “iconoclasm is more than just the destruction of images; it is a ‘creative destruction,’ in which a secondary image of defacement or annihilation is created at the same moment that the ‘target’ image is attacked.” W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 18.

<sup>73</sup>These are gaining increased interest, especially in Western media. See, for example, Tahira Yaqoob, “The Syrian Artists Using Their Medium as a Weapon,” *The National*, 7 March 2013, <http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/art/the-syrian-artists-using-their-medium-as-a-weapon?>; Ian Black, “Smuggled Out of Syria to Show London, the Art of War,” *The Guardian*, 23 November 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/nov/23/smuggled-syria-london-art-war>; Donatella Della Ratta, “Syrian Hands Raised: User Generated Creativity between Citizenship and Dissent,” *jadaliyya*, 31 October 2012, [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8125/syrian-hands-raised\\_user-generated-creativity-betw](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8125/syrian-hands-raised_user-generated-creativity-betw); Layla Al-Zubaidi, “Syria’s Creative Resistance,” *jadaliyya*, 8 June 2012, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/5920/syrias-creative-resistance>; Jacques Mandelbaum, “Syrie, l’art en armes,” *Le Monde*, 21 February 2012, [http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2012/02/21/syrie-l-art-en-armes\\_1644497\\_3210.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2012/02/21/syrie-l-art-en-armes_1644497_3210.html); and Neil MacFarquhar, “In Up-rising, Syrians Find Spark of Creativity,” *New York Times*, 16 December 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/20/world/middleeast/in-uprising-syrians-find-spark-of-creativity.html?\\_r=1&ref=neilmacfarquhar](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/20/world/middleeast/in-uprising-syrians-find-spark-of-creativity.html?_r=1&ref=neilmacfarquhar).

<sup>74</sup>This has been the case of many monuments in Germany after the fall of the wall. As Gamboni points out, their “elimination” in most cases was out of the question; rather, heated debates took place as to what to do with them, and in addition to destroying them there were many options, such as selling, storing, studying, or exhibiting them. Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, 69.

<sup>75</sup>Sadek, conversation with the author, Beirut, 29 June 2010.

<sup>76</sup>Stewart, *On Longing*, 38.

<sup>77</sup>Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 211–44.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 235.