

## gregory buchakjian ●

LOBBY  
PHOTO  
INSTALLATION  
FILM/SCENE  
PUBLICATION  
BIO  
MEDIA  
CONTACT



[Excerpt]

In 2009, Saleh Barakat curated an art exhibition titled, *The Road to Peace*, at the then newly opened Beirut Art Center. Barakat, founder of Agial Art Gallery, wanted to showcase the Lebanese civil war through the eyes of artists who had experienced it. His intention was to dispel the notion that doubted the existence of an artistic scene during the 15 years of the conflict, and maintained that the few artists, who were active at the time, had turned their eyes away from the disaster to paint either abstractions or bucolic landscapes consisting of traditional houses. Barakat wanted also to establish a dialogue between that generation of artists, often called "the modern" generation, and that of younger ones, known as "the contemporary," or "post-conceptual" generation, whose work began to emerge in the 1990s. Lamia Joreige, one of the co-founders of Beirut Art Center, and Walid Sadek, author of a critical essay that introduced the exhibition's catalogue, both belonged to that latter generation. The Road to Peace featured a group of painters and sculptors, in addition to one photographer, Fouad Elkoury. The list included names such as Rafic Charaf, Paul Guiragossian and Aref Rayess, all of whom had been known for their political affiliations. The centerpiece of the show, however, was perhaps the large-scale composition, created by Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki, that turned an unflinching eye on the devastation caused by the war. Painted in 1977, Baalbaki's composition became an iconic representation of those tormented times, to the extent that people began referring to it as 'the Lebanese Guernica'.

Titled *War*, the painting came to be known as Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki's most influential work, overshadowing his entire oeuvre, perhaps the same way *The Raft of the Medusa* appeared to exemplify Theodore Gericault's legacy. This monumental artwork and its re-emergence within public sphere shed light on a rather untypical figure in the story of Lebanese art. Baalbaki, who practiced painting alongside sculpture, writing and poetry, sought to address masses through large-scale murals depicting epic historical subjects. Aside from *War*, Baalbaki produced *Ashura*, *The Fall of Al-Nassar* and *Al-Hattab*. Painted in Paris in the early 1970s, *The Fall of Al-Nassar* was deemed too large to be transported, and accordingly it was kept in the French capital, where its fate is still unknown. *Ashura*, Baalbaki's thesis project at the Lebanese University, was displayed inside the National Institute of Fine Arts until the building was looted during the war. Hence Baalbaki's oeuvre was marked by two considerable losses.

#### Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki

Essay by Gregory Buchakjian  
in *Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki* monograph  
Published by Saleh Barakat Gallery,  
Beirut, 2017  
Bilingual: English/Arabic  
ISBN 978-9953-0-4254-1

#### Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki

Texte de Grégory Buchakjian  
in *Abdel-Hamid Baalbaki*  
Ouvrage monographique publié par la  
Saleh Barakat Gallery, Beyrouth, 2017  
Bilingue: Anglais / Arabe  
ISBN 978-9953-0-4254-1

>> related projects:  
[War and other \(Impossible\) Possibilities](#)

>> links  
[Saleh Barakat Gallery](#)

>> selected articles  
[Zeina Zalzal, L'Orient-Le Jour, 27/11/2017](#)

<< details