

## GUIDED TOURS

May 6, 2021

## BEIRUT KAPUTT?

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by Anastasia Nysten

The installation *Beirut Kaputt?* is a reflection on the representation of violence. It consists of two juxtaposed works: a video montage of social media clips of the Beirut Port explosion and the painting *All That Remains* by Lebanese artist Ayman Baalbaki.

The project allows us to reflect on the constant recycling of traumatic news, imagery, headlines and captions and how this can add to, rather than appease, our traumatic experiences. How, rather than engaging in nuanced reflection, fast media often exploits traumatic events by triggering a most basic human emotion: fear.

Beirut – Lebanon

August 2020

In front of the explosion in Beirut, Lebanon. Are we once again, according to you, with the ad nauseum repetition of images of the blast, in front of the same apotheosis of the passion for the Real as during the collapse of the World Trade Center's towers? I don't know, but what I do know for certain when I arrive there, is that it is shit again. 12 seconds: 204 dead, more than 6,500 injured, 9 missing. That is the raw and brutal data.



All That Remains by Lebanese artist Ayman Baalbaki

The below text is an excerpt of a text written by the curator Stephane Sisco

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Beirut Kaputt?

There are events where the moment's geographic situation is vital. And everyone asks the question in the past tense, without even naming the event. *Where were you?* There are also events where words, so well-known in Beirut, don't reflect the reality at all: *explosion, blast – but like Hiroshima!* Because we can find nothing able to describe the

violence despite such immense local experience of violence. And then, *to understand it*, the home videos circulating around the entire globe, but only for a short while in the perpetual war for attention, the time it takes Donald Trump to come out with some bullshit: *"Looks like a Terrible Attack."* which means absolutely nothing but offers a caption to a disconcerting and incomprehensible image.

POTUS (President of the United States) and social network algorithms will propose thousands of captions. This multiplication of interpretation kills methodical thinking, as if we are all pretending to "know everything" and end up "knowing nothing" at all. Jacques Lacan argued that humanity's natural attitude is, "I don't want to know anything about it," a fundamental resistance to the idea of knowing too much. Thus any actual progress in knowledge is only acquired through a painful struggle against this propensity. But today, isn't any actual progress in knowledge prevented by the overabundance of pretensions to know and possess the truth? The declaration by Lebanon's president, Michel Aoun, on August 6, 2020, in which he "feels the people's pain," and tells us that he already knows "calls for an international investigation into the post incident are intended to drown the truth". For Michel Aoun, a kind of return to the old prosperity of "not wanting to know anything at all," or else to let those who claim to know fight over their uncertainties? Which, in both cases, amounts to a significant relativity to the truth.

Trump, Aoun, and so many others, thousands and others incapable of rational evaluation, overestimating their competence, and making their own interpretation, Rumors only give sense to everyone's anxiety (cognitive bias 1).

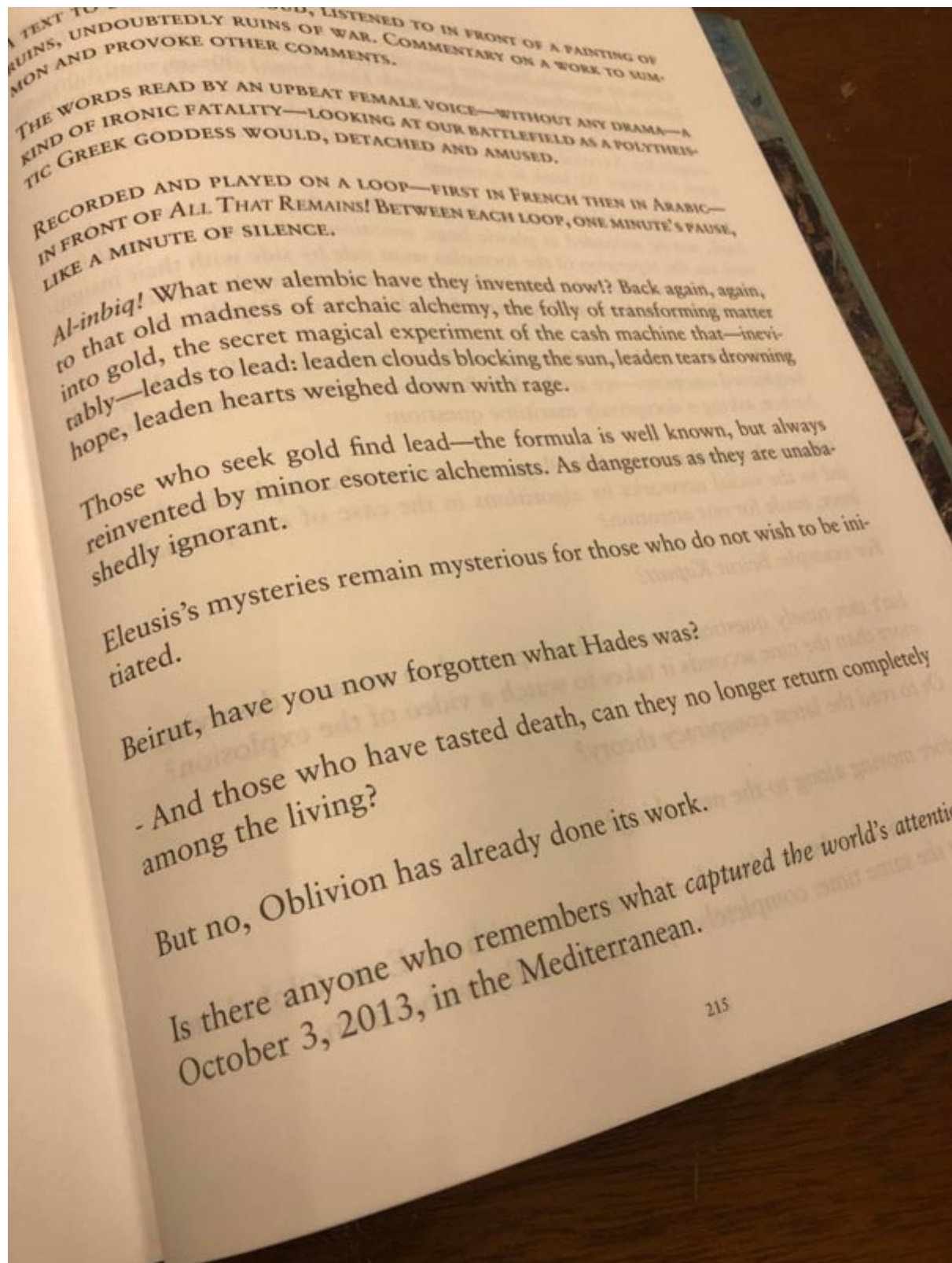
Extract from an article written by Stephane Sisco, curator of Beirut Kaputt?

They, and thousands of others, prefer information that confirms their preconceived ideas, and give no value to hypotheses that contradict their preconceptions (cognitive bias 2).

They, and thousands of others, isolate themselves with their cohorts in improbable conspiracies of followers comforting each other in their cognitive isolation (cognitive bias 3).

The term bias refers to a systematic deviation of analytical, logical, and rational thinking from reality. From my point of view: resisting is to not distort reality.

As the debris from the explosion in Beirut fell, as the shrapnel continued its deadly trajectories into metabolisms, on social networks the videos/rumors/conspiracies didn't stop confronting/confirming/commenting each other. At the same time, the reflexive refusal of the absurd, of chance, and even of apathetic idleness, of banal negligence, of institutional indolence, of corruption of the spirit and of everything that makes for stupidity is systematised. Because no one wants to lose a loved one because of generalised stupidity – *it is too stupid*.



Courtesy of Mina Image Centre

I share with the people of Beirut a long experience with violence, and I know that, when there in these extreme cases, the time required for methodical reflection seems too long, and besides, the distance becomes too great in front of the flat platitudes of the screens. I listened again to the message that Ayman Baalbaki left me while I was checking on him: "Life goes on, I'm working ... I have to work, that's for sure!" And I want to join him in Beirut.

How, when every individual in the world can presume to take part in a global simulacrum, can we return to the effective truth of the thing, that is to say, to the very thing that has no other truth than the effects that it produces. Crisis situations are fertile ground for the proliferation of the rumors, because the latter give meaning to anxiety, restore a certain comprehensibility to the future. The rumor is a possible version of the real that claims to be objective by those who transmit it. This version closely blends elements drawn from reality and elements drawn from the collective imagination. The rumor becomes true because it brings fears and anxieties to the surface, at once expressing and controlling them.

Follow the effective truth of the thing [*la verita effettuale della cosa of Machiavelli*] rather than the image that we have of it, because when faced with certain events, we become acquainted with what is unacceptable. So, it is a question of awakening the lived experience and of not taking one-self out of the game by taking refuge behind hypnotic hyperpresence of screens, nor behind biased idea of moral principles, or behind the context of the conflicts of the word capitalism.

I believe that since the abandonment of the old gnosis of Aristotelian truth the screen itself, as such, has replaced the phantasmatic screen of ideologies that you saw standing between the World Outside and the World of the Real. And as Stojan, whom I knew as editor in chief of the magazine *Ekran*, aptly reminded me, in cinema theory, there is a play on the words between “cadre” (frame) and “cache” (hide): every frame (which shows you = the world outside) also hides (everything else = the real world).

*Si Flectere si nequeo Superos, Acheronta movebo* (“If I cannot change the will of Heaven, I shall release Hell,” Virgil, *The Aeneid*, VII, 312). You cannot change the explicit system of ideological rules, you can try change the underlying system of the obscure unwritten rules. What systems are we talking about today, Slavoj?

Are the conspiracy theories expressed on social networks attempts to reveal and change the system of ideological rules? Or to reveal the underlying system of the unwritten obscure rules or to change nothing at all, or to create ever more obscure systems?

The art world enters the Maison Valentino universe for the newest chapter of its Advertising Campaign.

Looking to its community, Pierpaolo Piccioli continues to convey the values of authenticity and individuality by creating, and not imposing, a conversation with diverse communication channels and artists. A new method of delivering messages where the viewer is enriched by feelings and beliefs. Pierpaolo Piccioli believes art is a lens through which one can really touch the nature of the most intimate feelings.

For the artists chapter of Valentino Collezione Milano, Maison Valentino has worked with five international painters, giving them complete freedom to create a work of their choosing, which includes a Valentino Garavani accessory from the collection.

Each of the painters is an emerging talent in their area and on the global art scene. Louise Giovanelli, from the UK, created a hyper realistic painting of the Valentino Garavani Roman Stud Top Handle, while Alexis Ralaivao, from France, painted a cropped-in portrait of the same bag in a striking pink hue. Chinese painter Zhang Zihao opted to paint two subjects wearing the Valentino Garavani Crochet sneakers, while Korean artist Nahum Kim envisioned a surreal and otherworldly work featuring the Valentino Garavani Roman Stud Top Handle. Finally, Iori Nagashima, from Japan, created a work using the Valentino Garavani Roman Stud Crochet bag on a subject under rainfall. In all, each work is a testament to the freedom, voice and creativity of each artist.

### **Alexis Ralaivao (France)**

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©LGrivet AlexisRalaivao

“This project was a fantastic surprise! I always wanted to do this kind of project, doing it with one of the best Maison de Couture, I couldn’t be happier.

In my body of work you can see that I love painting clothes, specially shoes, moccasin. I’ve been wanting to paint a bag for a long time and this was the perfect opportunity ! Right away I had an idea about how the painting should look like. I was picturing it outside, in the deep countryside, with this woman reaching in her bag as she walks. I

wanted the bag kind of stuck, pressed between her arms. Not sure why I had this scenario in my head but I like the fact that it is full of mystery. You can easily make your own assumptions about what is happening here.

Where is she, what is she reaching in her bag, where does that path go?"



Alexis Ralaivao ©LGrivet  
AlexisRalaivao

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**Iori Nagashima (Japan)**

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青い雨, Iori Nagashima. Image credit Naoto Kobayashi

“The handbag was the main motif, I wanted to draw it in a sense of reality, and tried to express it naturally in the scene. I wanted to give a story to the drawing like a novel or movie, trying to capture a singular moment. The colour of the handbag is in beautiful ivory, it quite stands out in the dark.”



Iori Nagashima. Image credit  
Naoto Kobayashi

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**Louise Giovanelli (UK)**

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Dominion, Louise Giovanelli. Image credit: Michael Pollard

“I approached this project with Valentino in much the same way I do my day-to-day practice. This includes, as one method among many, responding to, re-imagining and re-configuring details of pre-existing art works.

“My process for ‘Dominion’ was to zoom in, isolate, crop and re-contextualise — elements of the Valentino bag that I found most visually interesting and that I considered to have further painterly potential.



I focussed on the sculptural volume of the bag, rotating and formally adjusting the indentation lines, connecting them corner-to-corner — delineating space.

The gold stud repeated motif divides and grids the canvas — suggesting something classical, ornamental and fetishistic.

The painting is built up in multiple transparent layers of single pigment colours, much like a printing process, arriving at a deep, rich, chromatic black.

Filtering the language of digital tools (cropping, rotating, zooming-in) through the analogue process of painting is an attempt to hone in my investigation of the bag, whilst also complicating the legibility of the source image. In this way narratives are suggested and the painting remains ultimately, in a way necessarily, undefined.

What I want this painting to relay, and my concern for painting more broadly, is to foreground ways of looking and perceiving, to encourage the possibility that the act of looking itself is content.

It was a privilege to be chosen by Valentino for this project and to participate in such a high profile campaign – to explore further and foreground the affect that fashion can have upon painting and vice-versa.”



Louise Giovanelli, Image credit:  
Michael Pollard

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## **Nahum Kim (Korea)**

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Roman Stud Space, Nahum Kim

“Recently, I’ve been very into nature. I live in Gangneung, Gangwon-do, which is located far from Seoul, and is full of natural elements that inspire me, such as trees, forests, seas, and lakes.

What I particularly like the most about living here is that I can always look at the stars at night. Looking at the stars makes me imagine the mystical universe and its infinite possibilities. In addition, each of those twinkling stars gives a feeling of neatness. When I first saw the Valentino Garavani Roman Stud Bag, I thought the stud details



evoked a variety of emotions as if I was staring at the stars. I wanted to express the mysterious, neat, but fancy stud detail as a star.”



Nahum Kim

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**Zhang Zihao (China)**

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Untitled, 2021, Zhang Zihao. Image credit: Hogan

“Vitality is a flow, don’t force it, and the rest will fall into place.”



Zhang Zihao. Image credit: Hogan

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