

# Gregory Buchakjian

## Abandoned Dwellings: Display of Systems

9 November 2018 – 11 February 2019

**Karina El Helou** (b. 1984) is a contemporary art curator. She has an M.A. in Art History from Sorbonne University, and attended the École du Louvre and the Met Penninghen Art school. She worked at the Cartier Foundation of Contemporary Art as a collection manager and at Sotheby's Institute of Art (London) as a teaching assistant. In 2015, she founded the curatorial platform Studiocur/Art through which she curated several exhibitions in private and public spaces, including *The Silent Echo* (2016) at the Baalbek Museum and more recently, *Cycles of Collapsing Progress* (2018), produced in collaboration with Beirut Museum of Art, at the International Fair, designed by Oscar Niemeyer, and the citadel of Tripoli.

**The Sursock Museum and the artist would like to thank**

Marc Baroud, Zeina Bassil, Valérie Cachard, Marc Dibeh, Malek Hosni, Nour Salame, and Photo Paladium.

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*Abandoned Dwellings: Display of Systems* is the culmination of nearly a decade-long research and production process, during which Gregory Buchakjian took innumerable excursions to Beirut's desolate houses. What began as a personal undertaking born out of sheer curiosity became the subject of his doctoral research and book. Taking his research as an underpinning, this exhibition presents four bodies of work: a film, image-based architectural typologies, an inventory of the property records, and a photographic series.

Buchakjian first stepped into an abandoned house in Zokak el-Blat in 2009, unaware that this haphazard encounter would ultimately result in the creation of an inventory of 760 abandoned houses; an archive of 800 found objects; and typologies of 10,777 photographs taken on-site.

The *poetic act*, as defined by Alejandro Jodorowsky in his book *Psychomagic* (1995), – “is convulsive... a conscious process that aims at voluntarily introducing a fissure into the dead order that permeates society.” While Buchakjian followed a scholarly and rational approach to organize and map the city's urban fabric and its ruined architecture, poetry emerges from this meticulous and obsessive work. This peculiar practice, which included jumping over fences to negotiating with militia for access and taking photographs as resistance, was as important to Buchakjian as the act of conservation itself.

Through a series of documents, letters, and photographs, all left-behind, this *poetic act* revealed the other protagonists of this endeavor: the absent inhabitants of the houses. The found objects, such as fragments of a Palestinian driver's license, a British Rail card, amongst others such as a handwritten diary from 1979 with a manual on the art of regular and guerrilla warfare, revealed a life punctuated by acts of violence due to war, and other mundane gestures like traveling and domestic life. Though these historical buildings and worn objects are destined towards destruction, Buchakjian's work contributes towards an alternate memory of the city.

**Karina El Helou**  
Independent Curator

# Dwellers, passersby, beggars, and janitors: Dwellings in transition

Elena Sorokina

*Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body.*

Michel de Certeau<sup>1</sup>

Today, the act of walking in cities is connected to our newly-acquired digital gestures – scrolling and swiping, fixing our gaze on-screen and occasionally looking up to check the surroundings. In post-internet cities, physical markers that characterize the urban fabric no longer guide us. Google Maps has fundamentally transformed our ways of navigating and communicating with urban environments. As Hito Steyerl has stated, “Our sense of spatial and temporal orientation has changed dramatically in recent years, prompted by new technologies of surveillance, tracking, and targeting. One of the symptoms of this transformation is the growing importance of aerial views: overviews, Google Map views, satellite views. We are growing increasingly accustomed to what used to be called a God’s-eye view.”<sup>2</sup>

Be that as it may, a search for “abandoned houses in Beirut” via Google Earth’s God’s-eye view would not return any results. Besides, Gregory Buchakjian wouldn’t opt for such a view, anyway. The artist prefers a horizontal perspective: a view from the inside, and the logic of direct observation. In his project, *Abandoned Dwellings in Beirut*,

he embraces the “elementary form of the experience of the city”<sup>3</sup> – walking in the streets and talking to people. The city in his project is real, pulsating with insecurity, myth, destruction and reconstruction, populated by people who can show you the way. “When giving an address, most people don’t mention street names and numbers, but provide a path based on informal landmarks that might be public or religious monuments, banks, supermarkets, or even ‘the old dog sleeping on the sidewalk,’” writes the artist in one of his texts.<sup>4</sup>

Paradoxically enough, this very subjective observation style has produced very objective results. The project begins with a perfectly essentialist inventory and a comprehensive typology of abandoned buildings in Beirut. The inventory of the dwellings records their geographical distribution, documented from November 2009 to February 2016. Their typology is based on 10,777 photographs taken by Buchakjian, which together provide extensive documentation of the 760 abandoned buildings. This photographic archive is divided into six categories, which range from meticulous architectural descriptions of each building, to the presence or absence of organic life inside. Each category is subdivided into multiple subcategories, up to 21.

To illustrate Buchakjian’s obsessively-detailed approach, included below is a category from the typology, entitled “Conditions and Conservation.”

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1. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Volume 1, trans. Steven F. Rendall, University of California Press, 2011, p.108.

2. Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, Sternberg Press, 2012, p.14.

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3. Michel de Certeau, *op. cit.*, p.93.

4. Gregory Buchakjian, *Abandoned Dwellings: A History of Beirut*, Kaph Books, 2018, p.53.

### 3. Conditions and Conservation

#### 3.1. Accidental and Incidental Damage

- 3.1.1. Balcony, terrace, destroyed
- 3.1.2. Burnt ceiling, wall
- 3.1.3. Cracked wall
- 3.1.4. Floor destroyed
- 3.1.5. Impact of shooting and shelling
- 3.1.6. Melted material
- 3.1.7. Peeling paint
- 3.1.8. Railing missing from balcony, terrace
- 3.1.9. Roof destroyed
- 3.1.10. Rubble
- 3.1.11. Stair destroyed or interrupted
- 3.1.12. Tiling missing from façade
- 3.1.13. Wall destroyed
- 3.1.14. Window glass broken

#### 3.2. Demolition

- 3.2.1. Demolition in progress
- 3.2.2. Chambranle removed from door, window
- 3.2.3. Façadism
- 3.2.4. Floor destroyed
- 3.2.5. Partial Demolition
- 3.2.6. Stairs destroyed or interrupted
- 3.2.7. Slabs, parquet, removed from the floor
- 3.2.8. Railing missing from balcony, terrace
- 3.2.9. Roof destroyed
- 3.2.10. Rubble
- 3.2.11. Wall destroyed

This category, like all others, reads like a novel describing the life and death of abandoned dwellings in Beirut, in which the viewer immediately understands the meaning of items listed and classified including sandbags, bunkers, fortifications, and barbed wire. The headers also read like a typology of violence and its multiple, changing forms: economic violence, nationalistic violence, and linguistic violence. After the violence of the Lebanese civil war, the aftershocks have never really ceased and continue in these different forms.

Typology and inventory equally register the vanishing geography of the war. "After 1975, this spiraling factionalism transformed the collapsed state of Lebanon into a dense mosaic of heavily fortified neighborhoods and mini-fiefdoms," writes Alan Gilbert.<sup>5</sup> Today, the map of Beirut still carries traces of these divisions, or, technically speaking, former front lines. Abandoned buildings often stand along them.

Having survived the war, many abandoned buildings are currently on death row, waiting to be destroyed. The reasons for their destruction can produce another typology of violence, varying from war damage to real estate deals and speculations that affect the city.

However, and in spite of it all, these constructions remain part of urban life and the urban fabric. They have neighbors. They host beggars, looters, lunatics, or ghosts. They feed imagination and produce stories. In one of his records, Gregory Buchakjian writes, "What haunted one neighbor of the notorious

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5. Alan Gilbert, *Walid Raad's Spectral Archive, Part 1: Historiography as Process*. E-flux Journal #69, January 2016. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/69/60594/walid-raad-s-spectral-archive-part-i-historiography-as-process/>

‘H. building’ was the fact that, from time to time, she suddenly saw traces of human presence, such as lights on, or carpets on the balcony.”<sup>6</sup>

In fact, all of these structures can indisputably qualify as “haunted houses” – empty abandoned buildings over which humans no longer exercise full control. The degree of ghostliness might fluctuate considerably, but according to Michel de Certeau, every house is haunted: “There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can ‘invoke’ or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in...”<sup>7</sup>

Buchakjian invokes the many stories and spirits of the dwellings, and paradoxically enough, his contemplative typologies and inventories contribute to this task. Through the perfectly essentialist grid constructed by the artist, the buildings come across as living beings; as Arjun Appadurai proposed in his book, *The Social Life of Things*, things and people are not necessarily distinct categories. In his complex performative-archival constellation, Buchakjian follows this trajectory. In this project, he goes as far as to treat the abandoned buildings as characters, as emotional beings. The current forms of life of these dwellings are seen through the gestures of their visitors.

## Gestures of inhabiting

*Between 2009 and 2016, Gregory Buchakjian produced a photographic series of abandoned dwellings in Beirut in which he invited people to “inhabit” them.*

The second part of the project, *Abandoned Dwellings, Tableaux* (2009-2018), is related to the legendary documentary *Hamasat* [Whispers, 1980] directed by Maroun Bagdadi,

which translated the voice of a generation torn apart by the civil war. It depicts the first “return” after the peak of the conflict, the coming face to face with the destruction, and witnessing the ghostly city of ruins that Beirut had become. The film marks the first “end of violence,” to be followed by multiple others. “The Lebanese civil wars have never really ended,” claims Alan Gilbert. He continues, “The recent wars in Lebanon defy traditional narrative structures such as beginning and end, cause and effect, and suffering and redemption. At certain moments – in 1977, in 1983 – the wars seemed to be subsiding. Conferences were organized, rebuilding plans were developed, books were published – only to have the fighting flare up again even more brutally.”<sup>8</sup>

A masterpiece of ruinology and mourning, *Hamasat* follows the Lebanese poet Nadia Tueni (1935 - 1983) as she walks through the ruins, her body embraced by destruction and her poetic voice lamenting, questioning, and searching for hope.

Nadia Tueni’s iconic presence and her gestures of memory were to influence Buchakjian’s photographic series based on the staged encounters between bodies and buildings. Buchakjian invited women – his friends and acquaintances – to “inhabit” the houses again, to neither pose for pictures nor perform. “Inhabiting” here means to reclaim and revive, even if for a short moment.

The resulting photographs hide more than they reveal. The bodies of the women who collaborated with the artist are always in movement, dissolving in light or fading away. Their elusive presence turns the dwellings into the protagonists of the images, opening up to the “gesture of seeing.” And yet, they “occupy” the buildings fully, sitting in dining rooms, walking through doors, and glancing through windows. Some of them

6. Gregory Buchakjian, *op.cit.*, p.135.

7. Michel de Certeau, *op.cit.*, p.108.

8. Alan Gilbert, *op.cit.*

embrace Nadia Tueni's gestures of walking, seeing, and acknowledging, her "gestures of memory." Her "walk of Mnemosyne" is remembered and revisited by the next generation of women who lived through the succession of aftershocks of the war, and postwar violence.

Women didn't pose for the photographs taken by Gregory Buchakjian, but the dwellings did. They provided their spaces, ceilings, windows, remaining curtains, and rays of light to their guests or intruders who came with unclear intentions. Was it to say farewell, to steal their secrets, to document them for posterity, to simply talk to them, or to dance?

Every photograph from this series resembles a fraction of a choreography, of which

the spectator can guess the beginning or the end. We see the movement of the body as the movement of thought. Philosophers no longer consider the movement of thought as a purely intellectual activity. "You are not your brain," stated Alva Noë in his philosophy of dance.<sup>9</sup> The human body consciously performing a movement "strives to weave clear intelligence, deep feeling and strong desire into a harmoniously balanced yet interactively moving whole."<sup>10</sup> Or, as the pioneer of modern dance Rudolf von Laban stated, "dance itself is a kind of thought, a body-thought." Taken from this point of view, we could say that the photographs register body-thoughts of women talking to abandoned dwellings and exchanging with them through gestures.



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9. Alva Noë, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness*, Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2009.

10. <https://www.goethe.de/en/kul/tut/gen/tan/20509666.html>





## Gestures of archiving

*Approximately 700 objects collected in abandoned houses were brought to an empty gallery space and displayed on the floor, in their entirety, by Gregory Buchakjian and Valérie Cachard. This action served as a basis for the video *Abandoned Dwellings, Archive*.*

The video *Abandoned Dwellings, Archive* (2017-2018) begins with unhurried gestures. The camera looks at hands delicately holding up some unlikely treasures, decrepit objects, old photographs, and some handwritten letters. The hands hold them up against the light, consider their size and texture, and place them on the floor in a row, creating a kind of tapestry, an “archival carpet” of sorts. Item by item, this carpet of *objets trouvés* grows in size and complexity, taking time to fill the space.

In fact, we are speaking about two different times. Firstly, the soft grid of objects spread out on the floor gives visual form to the seven years that Gregory Buchakjian took to complete his project *Abandoned Dwellings in Beirut*. And it took the successive wars in Lebanon some twenty years to “produce” the sources of this project – the objects left behind and the abandoned buildings themselves. Their legitimate owners died or went into exile, changing their surroundings and affiliations, the views they saw out of their windows and the languages they spoke.

In “Notes on Gesture,” Giorgio Agamben speaks about gesture as a “crystal of historical memory,” and he further maintains that the gesture “is essentially always a gesture of not being able to figure something out in language...” In the context of Buchakjian’s project, the soft organizing gestures of care

can be traced back to the unspeakable and unrepresentable dimension of the Lebanese civil wars.

These gestures of care can also heal. Gesturing is not simply moving, doing or working; it also incorporates a “playful mimesis” – “mimesis that acts out the bitter realization of one’s finitude, for instance.”<sup>11</sup> Or, perhaps, a realization of one’s hope. Gestures of archiving used to be part of our practice of everyday life, people would manipulate objects and classify letters and documents, feeling their surfaces and textures.

Yet like mapping and navigating, archiving today is going digital, and requires different gestures. “Preservation and document management systems” reign in the public and private spheres. They signify the opposite of archiving – a constant technological update and conversion from old to new technologies. Digital archiving is defined as a combination of “policies, strategies and actions that ensure access to digital content over time.”<sup>12</sup> “Preserving,” here means clicking, typing and looking at the screen, afraid of the loss of data ever-present, ever-looming.

A fascinating description of what “archiving” meant in the 1990s can be found in a 2002 issue of the *Journal of Electronic Publishing*:

“Imagine a researcher compiling a longitudinal study. The researcher begins her study in 1988, using an IBM 286 computer. The hard drive soon becomes choked with data. The data are transferred to 5.25-inch diskettes and they are put in a box marked “1988.” Within a

*Previous spread*

**Gregory Buchakjian and Valérie Cachard**  
*Abandoned Dwellings, Archive* (film still), 2017-2018  
Video, 9’41

11. Giorgio Agamben, “Notes on Gesture” in *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Cezarino, University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

12. “Definitions of Digital Preservation,” American Library Association, February 21, 2008, <http://www.ala.org/alcts/resources/preserv/defdigpres0408>

few years, with periodic system upgrades, the researcher begins backing up data on 3.5-inch diskettes. Then, in the late-1990s, the researcher upgrades to an iMac, a computer with only a CD drive installed. While there is still hope for the 3.5-inch diskettes (many computers take both CDs and 3.5-inch diskettes, the researcher is alarmed to realise that she cannot find a drive that will read the archived 5.25-inch diskettes. The outcome: the data from the early years of the longitudinal study are effectively lost, rendered irretrievable by the relative rapidity of computer developments.”<sup>13</sup>

All these growing pains of early digitization led Karen Coyle, an expert in library technology, to enthusiastically exclaim: “Print is a marvelous storage medium; it is easily handled and requires no additional equipment...the only delivery system required is the ability to read.”<sup>14</sup>

As Félix Guattari stated, “New technologies foster efficiency and madness in the same flow.”<sup>15</sup>

We know that gestures can make the invisible visible. In his project, Buchakjian makes the gestures themselves visible. His “contemplative typology” tells us that today, once more, we are returning to the future and becoming fascinated by the materiality of gestures of

preservation, classification and examination, weighting, pondering, and deciding to which category a given object should belong. These gestures make things appear, and not disappear in some server or the Cloud. The video *Abandoned Dwellings*, *Archive* functions as a meta-reflection or meditation on gestures of archiving, performed by two artists and captured by the camera. In this way, the subtle trembling of a sheet of paper held against the light can amount to the reinvention of oneself in the face of the future. The project as a whole tells us that buildings are always in transition, inventories and archives are never complete, and wars never end, but what ultimately remains are vulnerable objects and delicate gestures of repair and preservation.

**Elena Sorokina** is the curator of the HISK Institute of Fine Arts. Prior to her appointment, she was a curatorial advisor for documenta 14 in Athens/Kassel. She is an alumna of the Whitney Museum of American Art’s Independent Study Program, New York, and has completed an M.A. in Art History from the Friedrich Wilhelm’s University in Bonn, Germany. Her curatorial projects include *Museum (Science) Fictions*, Centre Pompidou, Paris; *Forms of Togetherness (and Separation)*, WIELS, Brussels and the Academy of the Arts of the World, Cologne; *Spaces of Exception*, a special project for the Moscow Biennial; and *Agnes Varda: Temps Trituré*, LVMH Brussels; and the symposium *What is a Post-colonial Exhibition?*, De Nieuw Liefde, Amsterdam.

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13. Julia Martin and David Coleman “Change the Metaphor: The Archive as an Ecosystem” in *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, Volume 7, Issue 3: Models, April, 2002. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/jjep/3336451.0007.301?view=text;rgn=main>

14. K. Coyle, “Electronic Information: Some Implications for Libraries,” <http://www.kcoyle.net/carhart.html>, cited in Janet R. Cottrell, “Ethics in an age of changing technology: Familiar territory or new frontiers?” *Library Hi Tech*. 17, 1 (1999): 111.

15. Félix Guattari, “Towards a Post-Media Era,” in *Provocative Alloys: A Post-Media Anthology*, eds. Clemens Apprich, Josephine Berry Slater, Anthony Iles, and Oliver Lerone Schultz, Post Media Lab & Mute Books, 2013, p.27.

# Working notes and correspondence with Gregory Buchakjian (2009–2013)

Valérie Cachard

September 2009

“And so, faced with these periods of solitude, the topoanalyst starts to ask questions: Was the room a large one? Was the garret cluttered up? Was the nook warm? How was it lighted? How, too, in these fragments of space, did the human being achieve silence? How did he relish the very special silence of the various retreats of solitary daydreaming?” Gaston Bachelard<sup>1</sup>

What is a city? What is a dwelling, a living space?

In general terms, one can choose between the city as a place *to live*, or a place *to live in*.

One can be on the attack, or one can look, sometimes watching, staying or escaping, refusing or accepting to see it change. “The shape of a city, as we all know, changes more quickly than the mortal heart.” Julien Gracq<sup>2</sup>

There was destruction. There was construction, or reconstruction. Moments in wartime or postwar when the real estate market goes wild. Always. From one day to the next buildings and houses are made to fall, fall, fall and tower blocks pop up, up, up. Today, Gregory is conscient of the loss. He has seen so many things disappear, and done nothing.

December 2009

Gregory takes part in a walking tour in the Zokak el-Blat district. There’s a barricaded house that belongs to the family of one of his friends. They visit it by night, using a torch to light the way. They walk in shit,

literally. There are shoes lying everywhere. The presence of these shoes, the foul odor, and its source, are unexplainable. The space is neither lit nor secure. Gregory doesn’t literally descend into a hole, but he falls into the hole of the world. Thus begins the story of an entrance/exit, of a ritual visit to hell: an unknown hell, at times reassuring, onto which it is better to not look back if one is to avoid being carried off by a crane in the process. This vacant house could be a great architectural photo opportunity. What could they contribute, compared to those taken by his predecessors? The only thing he knows at that moment is that he must do something with It (unconscious, perhaps a pun on Id). Something impalpable. Inspired by *Last Year in Marienbad* – elegant characters who evolve in a sumptuous decor, outside of time, absence of narrative blended with something funeral-like – he hopes to make a living body appear in the ruins (EROS/THANATOS) and to see himself portrayed as a woman *I make appear that which I am not* (ANDROGYNOUS). He finds his model, buys a scarlet-red dress which he contrasts with the dirt and the odor, and so the man, the woman, and the dress inhabit the places on a cold, humid winter day. The ground resembles shifting sands, and the first floor, a lagoon. Gregory does not yet know what he is looking for.

Summer 2010

*It’s not an order, nor an obligation. It’s instinct. Visiting such places is inspiring.* Parallel with Fouad Elkoury: it was the city that decided.

Autumn 2010

The photo shoots become more regular. He is in constant research. He spends long hours

1. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, Penguin, 2014.

2. After Charles Baudelaire. Julien Gracq, *The Shape of a City*, trans. Ingeborg M. Kohn, Turtle Point Press, 2005

walking in the city, looking at it with fresh interest. His friends end up looking at the city from his perspective and pointing abandoned dwellings out to him. Access is practically impossible: chains with heavy padlocks, walls to climb over. Leaving the practical difficulties aside, some are threatened with imminent destruction. Photo shoots are promptly organized, friends agree to take part. (Let's not say to pose because it's never something rigid). The invitations are clear:

- *I want you in that dress.*
- *When?*
- *Tomorrow. By Monday, the house will be gone.*

Gregory chooses young women who are like him. Who have a similar understanding of the idea of beauty. They must have a presence that is at once strange and natural. The complexity for the model lies in understanding what Gregory wants, which he himself doesn't know.

- *None of them would be here without me. None of them knew this place. (BLUEBEARD)*

#### 14 November 2010

A search for houses sets in, and with it, *the project takes on a more and more erotic character*, the padlock recalling the lock of a chastity belt, protection from rape and temptation.

*The scene takes place at a war flashpoint. I am perched like a sniper ready to shoot a passerby. I shoot. The girl is very exposed but not conscious of it (she's listening to her iPod). We can hear the music. Sometimes I forget she's there. There is a boundary line between her and I. A wall separates us. What intrigues me the most is the ground. We can't understand what happened. At what moment did the ground find itself in that state? Visions of a mechanical digger, an explosion, a battlefield, a charnel house.*

#### Winter 2010-2011

In parallel to the need to photograph, a desire to map the city through its ruins takes hold. The idea is to establish a chronology and sociology of the territory according to the traces left by the inhabitants. Gregory combs area after area, street after street. Using images posted online by heritage protection groups, he tries to identify the object of desire. After getting past the wall or the padlock, he sometimes has to deal with individuals (often incorruptible) stationed so as to block the entrance to half-destroyed buildings. In Street 35 in Mar Elias, he finds two Cerberuses sitting in front of a house:

- *Can we take photos?*
- *No.*

Not an extravagant demand, given the state of the place. People buy to demolish and don't want us to document it. A non-negotiable no. Dwellings emptied of their inhabitants, more protected than the homes of the rich... Memory is priceless.

They are also secret places, time machines. Inhabited, they are dead, but also alive because they remain. They exist having lost their initial function. Gregory is very aware of the walls, which represent the foundations of the habitat. He likens them to the earthly body which protects from danger, from the cold and the heat: the walls in ruin, the wallpaper peeling off. The wallpaper in sometimes garish colors (green and pink) reflects the taste of an entire era.

- *Bullet hole. But where did the bullet come from?*

#### Summer 2011

Gregory reflects on the idea of saturated space and it becomes increasingly apparent to him that Beirut is central to the project. He tries to re-navigate it, returning to some

areas and discovering others. The task proves impossible. He keeps discovering new buildings. As the regularity of the demolitions increases, a historiographic and nostalgic diarrhea concerning the Beirut of old invades social networks.

*Many things have distorted/corrupted the situation. Today we know it's not only the war that "ruins."*

Every dwelling that resists, through its scars, its gaping openings, tells the story of our own scars and our own resistance, the refusal of those who didn't want to leave (closets full), our bits and pieces, our lives' debris, our way of withdrawing into ourselves. Gregory tells how, when his family returned to the apartment in West Beirut after the Israeli invasion, they found the Steinway piano that Alfred Cortot had played, placed as a fortification.

### 6 September 2011

Gregory asked Georges if he was planning to restore his family home. Answer: "Not for the moment, it's my private museum; from time to time, I go there to gather up my memories." Aristocratic approach: Georges has his very own ruin and does nothing with it. "Have you seen the carpet? It's new. It was laid and never used." Gregory points out that the place is a wreck. "What are you talking about?," George replies.

### 31 October 2011

Something that falls into ruin is no longer of a certain age. Like someone who grows old prematurely. In Madame Victoria's home there is the idea of decay, bathrooms with toothbrushes, towels. The toothbrush is one of the first things we take. Leaving a cumbersome buffet behind makes sense, but her whole wardrobe still being in place gives the impression that the scene has been staged. And the Christmas star hanging above the door of an empty apartment? Did the inhabitants leave over the New Year period? Of which year? 1975 or 2008?

### Autumn 2011

The big change has been the passing from an aesthetic approach to something else, with our archival research. Our approach is the opposite of that of the Arab Image Foundation. They've done artistic projects based on their collection, whilst we've accumulated a collection around an artistic project.

### 5 January 2012

It would be good to give the project a public presence in somewhere as far away as Singapore.

### 10 March 2013

Since enrolling as a doctoral candidate, he works at the library, and consults documents related to the war and the Ottoman era. His professor tells him that he can't do everything at once.

### Summer 2013

Ravel Building: Someone spends their time obstructing then opening the entrance to the building. As far as I'm concerned, we are spending our time writing this building's story.

"We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes."

Kafka<sup>3</sup>

**Valérie Cachard** is a novelist. She teaches at the Université Saint-Joseph and the Académie libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA), where she leads writing and theatre workshops. She received the Francophone Young Writer Award and the Etel Adnan Award for Women Playwrights. She completed a writing residency at the Théâtre du Tarmac in 2010.

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3. Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka*, trans. Goronwy Rees, New Directions, 1971, p. 117.

## Gregory Buchakjian

b. 1971, Beirut, Lebanon

Lives and works in Beirut, Lebanon

Gregory Buchakjian is an art historian, visual interdisciplinary artist, and Director of the School of Visual Arts at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA). He completed his Ph.D. at Université Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV). His visual practice began in the aftermath of the 2006 war with the series *Nighthawks*. Since then, he focused on cities and history(ies) with publications such as *Fouad Elkoury: Passing Time* (published by Kaph Books, 2017) and *Traversées Photographiques: Le journal du Docteur Cottard* (published by the Arab Image Foundation, 2017). His project, *Fragments from the Ridge Line* (2018), is part of *The Place that Remains*, the first Lebanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture, 2018. He is a member of the advisory committee of the Saradar Collection, and has taken part in multiple juries, including the Sursock Museum's Salon d'Automne (2009), the Boghossian Prize (2012), Beirut Art Center's Exposure (2013), and Beirut Art Residency (2017).

## Works on display

### Twin Gallery 1

#### Gregory Buchakjian and Valérie Cachard

Abandoned Dwellings, Archive, 2017 - 2018

Video, 9'41''

Directed, edited, and produced by: Malek Hosni

Music by: Sary Moussa

#### Gregory Buchakjian

Abandoned Dwellings, Typologies, Section 2. Architecture (interior), 2009 - 2018

956 digital photographs in 19 digital frames

### Twin Gallery 2

#### Gregory Buchakjian

Abandoned Dwellings, Tableaux, 2009 - 2018

8 ultrachrome prints on Hahnemühle photo rag paper, 7 printed texts, audio recording

#### Gregory Buchakjian

Abandoned Dwellings, Inventory, 2012 - 2018

760 data sheets

Table design: Marc Baroud and Marc Dibeh



*Gregory Buchakjian: Abandoned Dwellings. Display of Systems*  
is part of an ongoing series of exhibitions in the Twin Galleries,  
showcasing recent work by early-career artists.

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