

Beirut. The Eras of Design
Press kit
April 2023

BEYROUT

اوقات التصميم

les temps du design

mudac

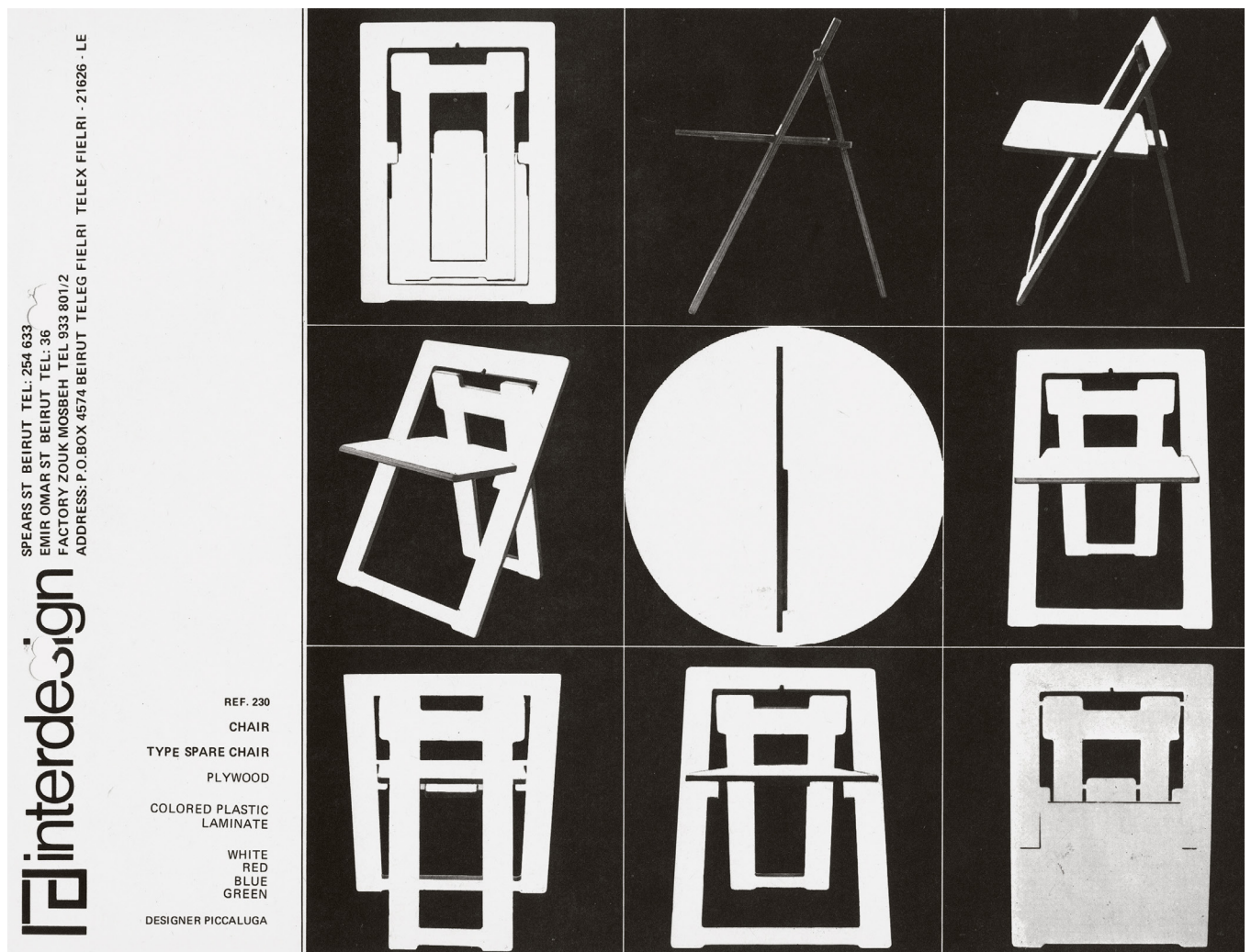
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Éditions: Mijegheul
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Cover
Chris Gautschi

Aldo et Francesco Piccaluga, Space Chair, 1970
Private collection © DR

Beirut. The Eras of Design

07.04.2023–06.08.2023

A pioneer of its kind, *Beirut. The Eras of Design* seeks to capture the dynamics that have enabled design to develop in Lebanon. In co-production with CID – Grand Hornu (Innovation and Design Centre), the exhibition will be held from 7 April to 6 August 2023 at mudac.

At the crossroads of the East and the West, Lebanon has been in artistic turmoil since the beginning of the 2000s. Design too has enjoyed this dynamic and is even one of its most significant indicators. The exhibition *Beirut. The Eras of Design* seeks to analyse this specific situation which simultaneously combines economic and architectural reconstruction with social awareness and international development. Design alone crystallizes this desire to take hold of one's destiny and image by offering objects and forms that are not only steeped in a multifaceted cultural heritage but also deeply rooted in a complex reality.

Until the elaboration of this exhibition project, no study has been conducted on the history of design in Lebanon, from the country's independence in 1943 to the present day. This colossal project aims to fill this gap by presenting an overview based on rich documentation, while accepting some shortcomings due in particular to the disappearance of whole sections of archives during and after the civil war.

In order to grasp the dynamic lines that have enabled design to develop in the country, the exhibition is structured in three parts: the first on the beginnings of the discipline in Lebanon between the 1950s and 1970s, the second on the period between the 1990s to the present day and the third on the Minjara project and its philosophy.

The exhibition is accompanied by the first publication to also address the different aspects of this emerging scene.

General curator

Marco Costantini

Scientific collaborators

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Dr Gregory Buchakjian

Set designers

GHAITH&JAD

Graphic design

Chris Gautschi

Sound installation

Christophe Fellay

Co-production

CID – Grand-Hornu

The History of Lebanese Design



Jack Matossian | Fontana, *Young Woman on the Phone in the Fontana Shop*, 1970
Fontana Archive, on deposit at Office Dada © Jack Matossian



Sami El Kazen, *The Torch of Culture*, after 1965
Private collection © Courtoisie Bonhams 2022

Under French rule (1918-1943), Beirut – proclaimed capital of Greater Lebanon in 1920 – restructured itself according to the Western model and thus distinguished itself from most of the cities of the Levant. Despite the significant development of its outskirts – due to major demographic growth – only the city centre benefited from these major works.

None of the proposed urban development plans (Danger and Michel Écochard) took into account the pre-existing urban fabric and a general tabula rasa was decided upon, a sign of complete denial of identity and of the prevalence of colonial urbanism. But it was from 1945 to 1975 – the duration of the First Lebanese Republic – that design was to emerge in Lebanon.

The exhibition starts by putting contemporary design in a historical perspective, from the 1940s to the 1990s. How was design born in Lebanon? Who were the main actors and what were the most emblematic works?

From the 1990's to the Present Day



Karen Chekerdjian, *Living Space III*, 2010
Studio Karen Chekerdjian © Nadim Asfar

When the civil war (1975-1990) came to an end, the reconstruction of Beirut and a new start for Lebanon appeared to be an absolute priority in order to strengthen its appeal and attract investors. Many Lebanese citizens returned to the country. In this particular context, design began reclaiming geographical, economic and creative spaces. Beirut became a creative hub where workshops, galleries, schools, architecture firms, bars and restaurants set up shop.

In the 1990's, the "Hariri-Solidere" plan, the result of private initiatives, involved the destruction of old districts in order to open up the view on the sea. The lack of respect for heritage (neither conservation nor restoration) was pointed out and, in this post-war context, the large building sites only accelerated the debt that impacted both citizens and companies.

NEW GEOGRAPHY OF A CREATIVE CITY

The specific urban development of the city was not without consequences for creators. Wastelands, off-centre and peripheral urban spaces were then requalified and gained new value simply because artists, designers and cultural institutions settled there. This urban gentrification spread at an extremely rapid rate due mainly to a complete lack of urban planning. In Beirut, politicians had no urban, economic or cultural vision.

Today, design appears to be a major player in creation and must be considered, both historically and from a contemporary point of view, as one of the driving forces behind the development of a micro-economy. Thus, it was at the end of the 1990s and during the first decade of the 2000s, when the Corniche al-Nahr, Quarantine, Gemmayze, Mar Mikhael and Badaro projects were taking shape, and with them the development of creative centres, that the desire for design re-emerged.

EMERGENCE OF GALLERIES AND SPECIALISED FAIRS

Several organisations were then created in the early 2000s and began to imagine, design and structure a new field of design. As early as 2002, the XX^e Siècle gallery offered vintage pieces (from the 1950s to the 1970s) and revealed a whole section of Jean Royère's career. The Carwan gallery, founded in 2010, aimed to convince the public of the interest of Lebanese design. The early 2010s were undoubtedly the high point of the positive dynamics of design in Lebanon and very quickly, alongside the galleries, several fairs were born, such as Beirut Art Fair and Beirut Design Week which unfortunately would draw the curtain after 2019.

In 2017, the first fair entirely dedicated to design in Beirut, Beirut Design Fair, was born. It was dedicated to modern and contemporary design furniture and objects in limited edition, defined under the term “collectibles.” All the major players – galleries, fairs, salons and patrons – contributed to the development and emergence of new art markets since the first decade of the new millennium, not only in the Middle East but also in what are commonly called “peripheral countries.” Beirut featured typologies of legitimating institutions, mostly linked to private initiatives and funds. Moreover, several major museum institutions such as the British Museum or the Guggenheim showed an interest in the creations of the Arab world. This was reflected in the acquisition of works for their collections.

TEACHING DESIGN

A Design department was created in 2012 within the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (Alba), becoming the first school in the Middle East to consider design as a discipline in its own right. Marc Baroud, a designer who had then recently graduated, taught there. The Design section had a twofold mission: to create new opportunities and to become a resource for companies seeking innovation.

The exhibition presents 14 designers, featuring a diverse range of their creations.



Carla Baz, *Minerals Series*, 2018
Studio Carla Baz © Elie Bekhazi

Minjara Tripoli

Minjara, which means “carpentry” in Arabic, was born from the desire to preserve Lebanon’s woodwork heritage and to foster dialogue between traditional craftspeople and contemporary designers in a spirit of innovation.

This project, implemented with the help of the European Union, aims to support the wood industry, which was in danger of disappearing in Tripoli due to the sectarian clashes that, until 2014, affected this region, which was once known as the basin of traditional Lebanese furniture and crafts.

Installed since 2018 in a spacious building designed by Oscar Niemeyer – a symbol of Lebanese architecture from the 1960s – the Minjara platform provides a place for creation, training and synergy. The aim is to bring together creators under a label – a guarantee of quality – in order to be recognised locally and internationally.

After the explosion on 4 August 2020, to show solidarity with Beirut, Minjara rallied together local craftspeople and trained volunteers to develop a temporary door system and allow Beirut residents to regain a minimum of security. The platform therefore also offers a form of direct intervention on private work sites. In a spirit of solidarity, Minjara acts both as a showcase of Lebanese know-how and a space to meet, discuss and research for different creators, constantly inviting people to reinvent themselves by mixing heritage and innovation.



Samer Alamen x Okajian, Nostalgia, 2019, screen and sidebar © Elie Bekhazi



Oscar Niemeyer, Rachid Karamah International Fair, Tripoli. Designed in 1992 and built between 1967 and 1975 (unfinished) © Elie Bekhazi

Publication

Alongside the exhibition, a book in French and English has been published by Kaph Books, a publishing house specialising in art books on Middle Eastern artists or artistic practices.

The first reference book on design in Lebanon, it consists of different parts dedicated to the history of design in Beirut, the emergence of contemporary design and the Minjara solidarity and creative project. The layout of the catalogue has been entrusted to Chris Gautschi.

Author-s

- Marco Costantini, Deputy Director of mudac and curator of the exhibition
- Gregory Buchakjian, art historian and artist, Director of the School of Visual Arts at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts in Beirut
- Charif Majdalani, writer, recipient of the 2020 Special Jury Prize for *Beirut 2020* (Actes Sud)
- Marc Baroud, designer and former Director of the Department of Design of the School of Decorative Arts at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts in Beirut
- Hala Abdel Malak, design critic, curator, educator, researcher at the New School Parsons in New York
- Cherine Magrabi, founder of the NGO House of Today
- Hala Moubarak, former Artistic Director of the Minjara project in Tripoli



Graphic design © Chris Gautschi
Calligraphy © Qasim Arif

Events & Activities

OPENING

Thursday 6 April 2023 from 18:00

GUIDED TOURS

Sunday 9 and 23 April, 7 and 21 May, 18 June, 2 and 16 July, from 14:30 to 15:30

GUIDED TOURS WITH MARCO COSTANTINI, CURATOR OF THE EXHIBITION

Thursday 4 May from 18:30 to 20:00, followed by drinks

Sunday 4 June from 14:30 to 15:30

FAMILY VISITS

Sunday 30 April, 25 June and 30 July from 14:00 to 15:00

Set off together to discover this magnificent country and its exceptional design scene.
From 6 to 12 years old.

CHILDREN'S CREATIVE WORKSHOPS WITH YUSUKE OFFHAUSE

Wednesday 26 April and 31 May from 15:00 to 16:00

What do we do when something we care about breaks ? Lebanese designers have used resin to bring artefacts back to life while embellishing them (Kintsugi method). Don't hesitate to bring a broken object with you! From 6 years old.

FAMILY WORKSHOPS

Saturday 27 May and 24 June from 14:30 to 16:30

With the collaboration of the Swiss Game Museum

Learn to play backgammon, a very popular game in Lebanon. From 8 years old.

Saturday 17 June from 14:30 to 16:30 with Norma Elzoghbi and Lana Abu Soufeh
(bilingual workshop in French and English)

Get into the beauty of oriental calligraphy with this workshop. From 8 years old.

NEW ! – WORKSHOP WITH BDFIL

Wednesday 10 May continuous from 14:00 to 16:30

With the collaboration of askip

The graphic novel, as an applied art form, has its place at mudac. Come and get a better understanding of publishing by experiencing all the stages in the creation of a book. All ages.

A children's route is available for the exhibition.

On mudac.ch

Find out about all the events and lectures in connection with the exhibition, as well as practical information, prices and registration.

Subscribe to our newsletter to keep up to date with all the latest news from the museum.

Partners

Main partner

Julius Bär

Exhibition partners

Fonds Culturel Sud
2023-2024



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**POUR
L'ÉCRITURE
ET LA
LITTÉRATURE**

Individual sponsors of the exhibition

Zaza et Philippe Jabre
Mimo Ousseimi

Co-production of the exhibition



mudac, museum of Contemporary Design and Applied Arts
is a museum of the Canton of Vaud managed by Fondation
Plateforme 10.



Practical Information

Exhibition dates

→ From Friday 7 April to Sunday 6 August 2023

Opening hours

- Monday : 10am-6pm
- Tuesday : closed (MCBA open)
- Wednesday : 10am-6pm
- Thursday : 10am-8pm
- Friday : 10am-6pm
- Saturday : 10am-6pm
- Sunday : 10am-6pm

Every first Saturday of the month, admission to all exhibitions is free for everyone.

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HD Visuals

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