



# David Hury

## A Beirut all his Own

David Hury was born and raised in Paris but came to age in Beirut as he moved to Lebanon in 1997. In Beirut, Hury discovered a completely new and felt like life was full of possibilities. Hury was a young journalist and tried to discover Lebanon's reality by working for local newspapers and magazines. Hury began to learn ceramics with a very talented Lebanese ceramist who happened to be one of his father's students in Paris. That is where his interest in glazing and enameled plates finds its roots. Fond of Arabic calligraphy and modern typography, Hury worked hard to design his own fonts with clay and enamel.

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The 2006 July War was a turning point for Hury. He started to work as a correspondent for some daily newspapers in Europe, covering Lebanese and regional news. During the 2006 War, Hury launched a French speaking blog called *Chroniques Beyrouthines* with Nathalie Bontems, another French journalist. It was quite successful, and they did some live blogging, quite a while before Twitter. A Parisian publishing house called Riveneuve asked the pair to write a book based on their blog. It was Hury's first try as an author, and *Jours Tranquilles à Beyrouth* (*Quiet Days in Beirut*) contains more than one hundred chapters telling their perspective of Lebanese history from 2006 to 2008. The book was launched in 2009.

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Two years later, Hury published a bilingual book, *Beyrouth sur Ecoute* (*Wiretapping Beirut*) with Amers Editions. It contained forty-one short stories, each one illustrated with a photograph he selected from his archives. This book gave birth to another project: *Beirut Prints*. This collective brought together a group of Lebanese photographers in addition to a few photographers of other nationalities to present works on a seemingly simple idea: reveal the other faces of Beirut.

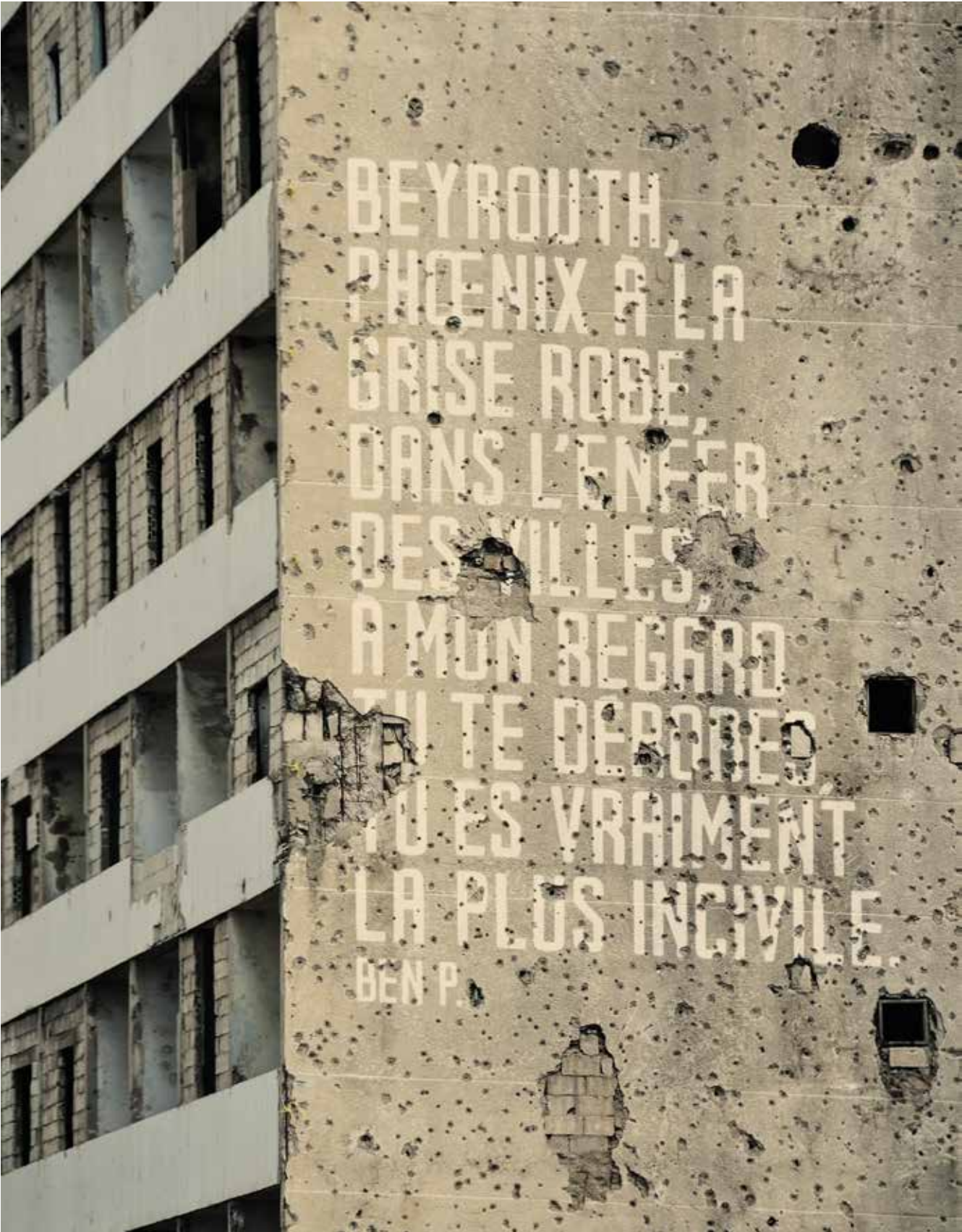
As a journalist, Hury was tired of write reports on violence in Lebanon. He needed to show something else, something more inspirational. In fact, Beirut can sometimes be violent and war-ridden, it is full of flaunt provocative singers and dubious politicians. But it's also a lovely place, and Hury felt the urge to reveal its poetry and mysteries. Around the same, he began to teach at the Lebanese Fine Arts Academy (ALBA) in Beirut. One of the projects he managed with his students lead him to write his third book about mentally and physically disabled children in Lebanon, *7 Jours Parmi les Anges* (*7 Days Among Angels*), in which stories were told through words and pictures.

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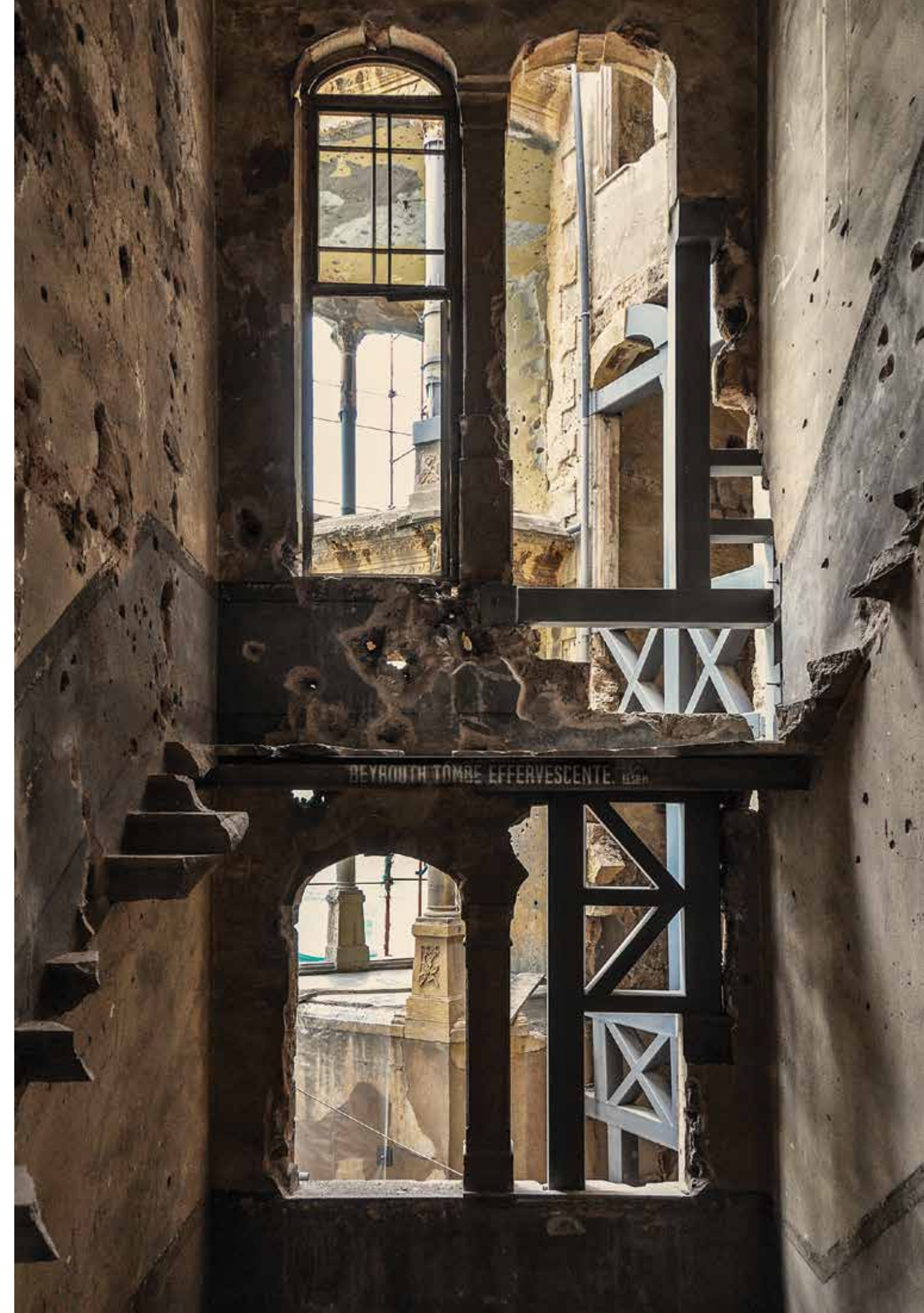
Later Hury began working on *The Beirut Book* project. It started when he stole a blue sign on a soon-to-be-demolished building, with the number thirteen on it. A self-professed lover of Beirut's graphic identity, this inspired a long creative process that included typography and photography. *The Beirut Book* was launched in November 2014. A last tribute of sorts to his adoptive city after eighteen years spent in Lebanon, it was time for Hury to move on.



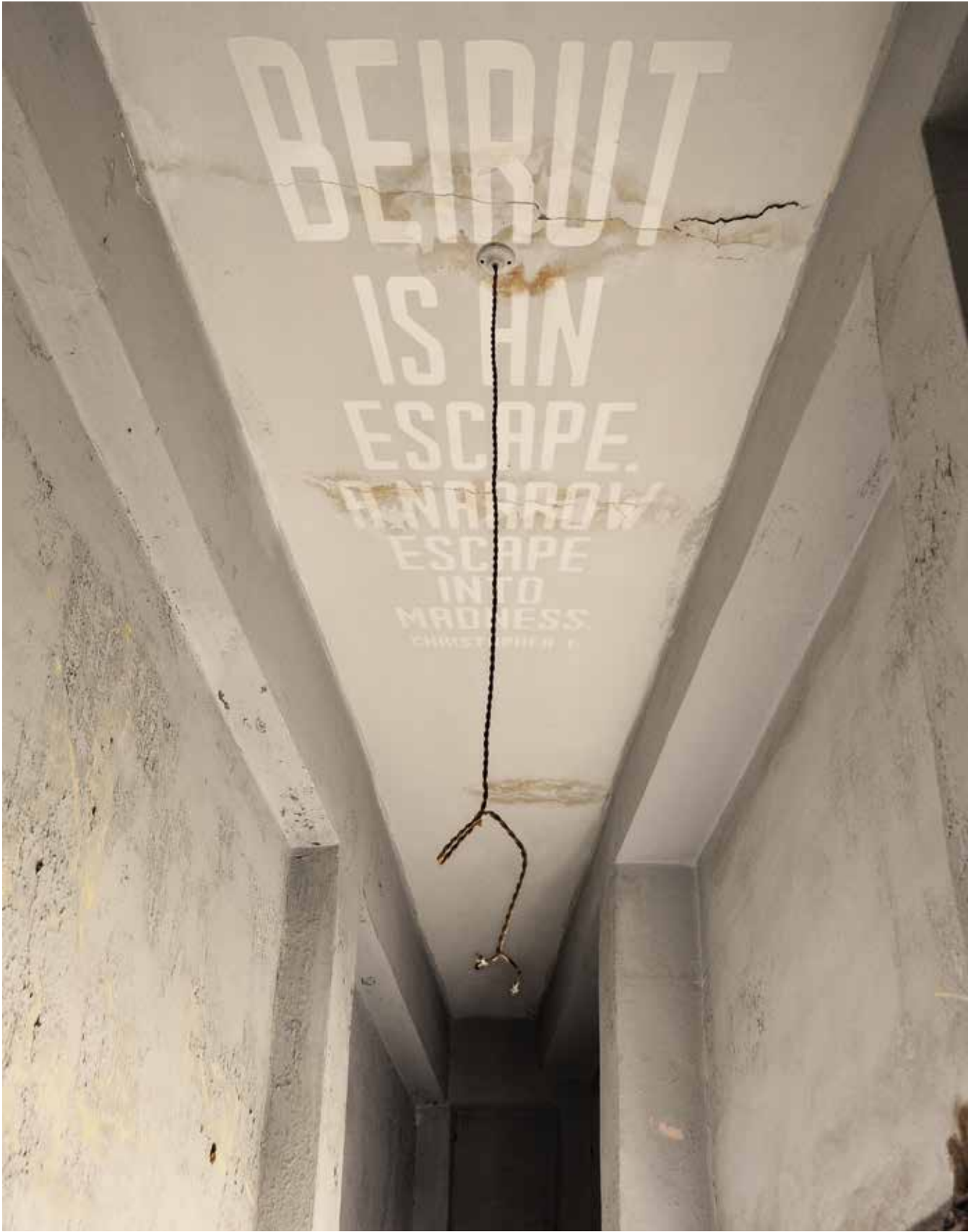




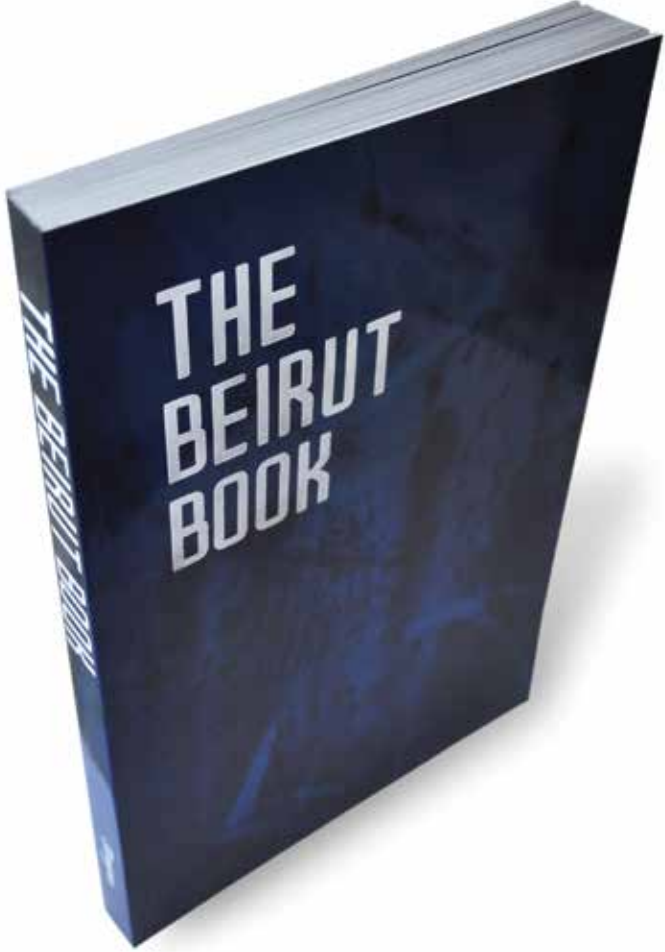
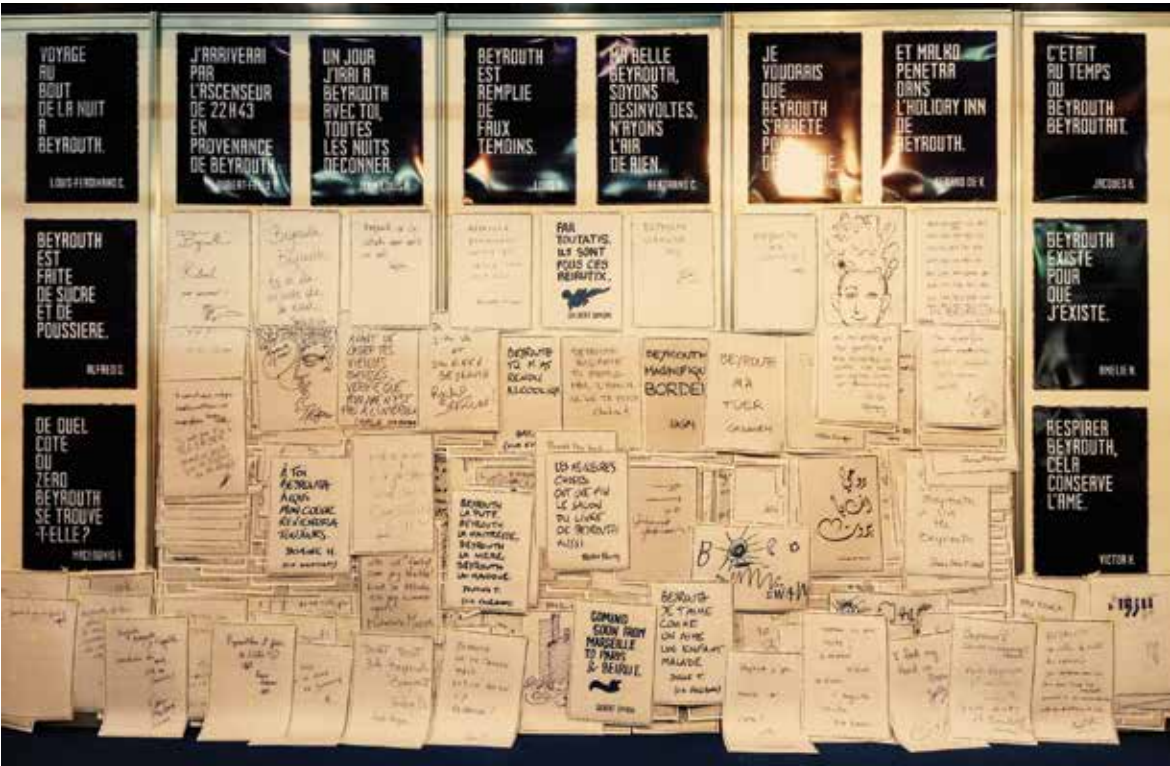












The Beirut Book

I will not make a lengthy speech about Beirut – *The Beirut Book* speaks for itself. All I wanted to do was give voice to those who either love or hate this city. *The Beirut Book* was born from a series of illustrations inspired by the enameled blue name plates found at the corner of Beirut’s streets, and created by Beirut Prints, a collective of photographers formed four years ago. Initially, these illustrations relied on a simple principle: rework the phrasing of well-known quotes to include the word ‘Beirut’. The very first one was inspired by the U2 song ‘Where The Streets Have No Name’. An observation that turned out to be false since the streets of Beirut actually have names even when its inhabitants are rarely aware of them.

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Later, this phrase spawned others, all drawn from the language of Shakespeare and pop culture: *Star Wars*, Nirvana, *Alien*, Orwell... In the fall of 2013, the idea was reshaped as an interactive activity during the book fair *Salon du Livre Francophone de Beyrouth*. First, the idea had to be transposed to the French language, reworking phrases or quotes from authors such as Victor Hugo, Amélie Nothomb, Gérard de Villiers, groups or singers such as Téléphone, Yves Montand and Noir Désir.

Visitors of the book fair were able to try their hand at the exercise. They wrote whatever they wished about the city. In ten days, more than three hundred people had taken part in the game: Lebanese visitors, foreigners, authors, Swedes, Frenchmen, Afghans, a *Goncourt* winner, a *Renaudot* winner, and other prominent figures. Later, more penmen such as composers, photographers, filmmakers, a prime minister, and an ambassador also took part. In this book, everyone has been treated equally and identified with a first name and an initial. Beyond these more or less known figures, it was mainly the words of children, who enjoyed passing by the wall several times to discover the strata of phrases in continuous proliferation.

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All these words were mixed with those of ordinary passers-by and with those that social media users contributed online. And naturally, languages followed suit. On the wall plastered with pieces of paper and blue ink, there was French, English and Arabic of course, but also Armenian, Croatian, German, Swedish, Russian, Dutch, Spanish, Italian. This diversity is in Beirut’s image. Difficult to reproduce faithfully.

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On the evening of the book fair closing, I took a photograph of this installation. It became clear that something had to be done with these spontaneous expressions. Stage them, engrave them in photographs, enrich them with new sentences, or set them free. *The Beirut Book* has neither page numbers nor chapters or theme classifications. Its pages reflect the way Beirutis (at heart or just stopping over, whatever their origins) perceive their city: chaotic, tender, full of hatred, libertarian, fettered, amorous, sexy, nostalgic, critical, unbearable, cynical.

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But *The Beirut Book* is only the first step of a more complex project. As I intend to leave a mark on this incredible city, I’m currently producing real enameled blue signs with the sentences picked in the book. If I virtually wrote on Beirut’s walls through my photographs, I planned to install real metallic plates in Beirut’ streets in 2015. Therefore I hope people will photograph them. In a way, it will loop the loop.

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