

been made even richer (and arguably more fruitful at times) if they were done in conversation with the Arabic scholarship on these poems. This is a missed opportunity.

That said, *City of Beginnings* is an ambitious and impressive study that will be invaluable to anyone interested in modernism's multiple legacies. The book is written in inviting, economical prose that matches Creswell's erudition. It is an original work that will certainly change the way we think about—and teach—literary production during Beirut's belle époque. Robyn Creswell has done the discipline a great service with this outstanding book.

CHAD ELIAS, *Posthumous Images: Contemporary Art and Memory Politics in Post-Civil War Lebanon* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018). Pp. 258. \$26.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822347668

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For once a story of contemporary Lebanon features not warlords, politicians, or militants, but daydreamers and creators. With few exceptions, studies of the country's cultural and artistic production have remained confined within disciplinary boundaries of literature or music. In *Posthumous Images*, Chad Elias makes a sociological claim for his analysis of two dozen globally renowned artworks dating between 1997 and 2014, from the era of Lebanese reconstruction to that of the Arab revolutions: their study highlights “the fundamental conflicts and contradictions within Lebanese society that continually undermine notions of citizenship, territorial sovereignty, and national culture” (p. 18). The artists Elias examines embody a curious paradox: they constitute the war generation, but their art defines postwar Lebanon internationally. How did a set of highly educated, globally mobile, polylingual Lebanese citizens respond to issues of incomplete peace, corrupt reconstruction, deferred national heritage and history, unclear civic obligations, and overwhelming personal and collective memory? The conjuncture of temporalities and spatialities lying at the core of their aesthetic corpus suggests that art might inspire, as Elias claims, not only recognitions of the yet “unactualized” nation (p. 167), but also strategies forward (pp. 10, 57–58). The imaginative processes and techniques they deploy could further elucidate societies undergoing similar arrested reconstruction processes in the Middle East or elsewhere. For these reasons, *Posthumous Images* is a needed book and could be read by scholars of Lebanon, the Middle East, imagination, identity, memory, postwar subjectivity, conflict resolution, and contemporary global art. Provided, that is, the reader bear in mind the book's theoretical and factual limitations.

Contrary to many studies that assume creative expressions either reflect given cultural conditions or soothe their ache, *Posthumous Images* proposes that art media pique awareness of socio-political contradictions and thus enmesh audiences in unresolved political processes. Building on Marxist art historians who have shown that “relations of force establish themselves first and foremost through symbolic practices” (pp. 28–29, 55), Elias directs readers to specific Beirut arenas where images are the grounds of identity formations, including government-issued identity documents, party-produced hostage and martyr videos, postage stamps, monuments, and the city center. Each of these

elements has been inventively repurposed by artists to intervene in different conceptual practices that produce senses of history, identity, or subjectivity. Elias argues that attention to their activity alerts readers to alternative, unofficial but vibrant practices. For example, in his chapter on “counter-monuments”—sites that “engage the city’s loaded memory” without taking a stance on it (p. 149)—which include architectural maquettes and even entertainment venues, Elias explains that “while acknowledg[ing] the amnesia imposed by reconstruction [my analysis] attempts to go beyond the critiques of Solidere [Lebanon’s government-appointed reconstruction company], which leave no room for a discussion of artists, architects, and residents of the city who have resisted the eradication of urban memory” (p. 157). Indeed, Elias demonstrates that an approach to professional art can better attune analysts (whether onlookers or residents) to the centrality of competing media representations in war (p. 16). Consequently, he allows readers to explore how images structure political subjectivity (Chapter 1) and how action on images might open cracks for new subjectivity formations (Chapters 2 and 3).

However, the strengths of Elias’ text are vitiated by a narrowness of his scholarly lens, both in terms of what he looks at and what he looks with. This, in turn, leads to an extreme dependence on his sources that undermines the theoretical framework. I focus the remainder of my review on a single chapter, that a detailed discussion address fairly the merits and faults of *Posthumous Images*. In Chapter 1, Elias attends to Walid Raad’s 1999 video artwork, *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (#17 and #31)*, providing a richly descriptive account of the work that will enable a reader without much experience in art studies to envision it and glimpse its effects. Elias probes into the gaps between the subtitled Arabic narration and the voiced English translation, finding in them that the artwork neither speaks for the subaltern nor homogenizes the world as speaking in one tongue. Having shown translation to be performative, he then lingers on the moments it “breaks down” (p. 29). He calls attention to the artist’s having marked his selection and excision tactics, to convey that the private cannot simply communicate to the public, that people are not exchangeable, even in war (p. 53). Elias thus credits Raad with setting limits to the directionality of translation, an act he finds politically valuable for demonstrating that the performed truth is a kind of social truth which, also, behooves accounting (p. 43).

Here one begins to wonder how this art relates to cultural production from similar societies (Palestine, Post-Soviet lands, Latin America) or the transnational circuits on which it travels. Such contextualization would have been salutary for expanding the sense of the resources the artists have drawn on to fashion their resistant perspectives. Yet, Elias draws no connections to other art worlds, and indeed his contextualization of the artworks relies almost exclusively on that provided by the artists themselves. This takes the reader to another, deeper problem. One cannot appreciate the assertions Elias makes for the artists and their work without questioning who is speaking. In some cases, the prose blurs between the artists’ description of their setting and the author’s accounting. For example, Elias accepts as social truth Raad’s assertion that the scale of violence and belligerence in Lebanon has cast experience itself in question (p. 13–14). Is this not a space-clearing gesture from an artist whose practice puts it in question and launches it at others who were not asking it? Is it helpful, or even ethical, simply to repeat Khalil Joreige and Joana Hadjithomas’s connection of the 1967 defeat, the abandonment of Pan-Arabism, and the “shatter[ing of] an alternative vision, a progressive and modernist utopia. . .”

(p. 165)? How do these two artists' perspectives relate to those of other actors? What does their producing transnationally circulating art afford their analysis, and what does it prevent them from considering? Swallowing such generalizations of Lebanese society ("amnesic," "postcommunist," "hedonistic playground" join in) allows that the artists are simply "haunted" by nostalgia and idealism rather than taking on a more agentic role. Elias relieves himself of the work of situating them—why are there no histories of their training to complement the history of Lebanon's coming into being?—and diminishes an appreciation of the politics and effort of their art.

In other cases, the text seems to arise straight from an artist's statement in a catalogue. Here the author's voice adopts the artist's intentions to explain the artwork's functions. For example, commenting on Rabih Mroué's *Three Posters*, Elias writes, "as my reading of this extraordinary video will show, [the martyr-to-be] al-Sati's imperfect performance complicates any simple distinction. . ." (p. 57). Whose reading? Elias reads Mroué's artwork, not al-Sati's performance separately from the former. By adopting artists' own reporting of their inspiration, he blurs events' (possible) meanings with the artists' creative act of registering the world a certain way. What has the art historian added?

In the most jarring cases of blurring, Elias presents the artists' philosophical reflections on their source material as his own. His discussion of Akram Zaatar's *All Is Well on the Border* relates the video's materiality to an earlier French production (p. 74–75), but the connections that Elias presents as his were communicated to him by Zaatar in a (published) conversation they held in 2013 which he cites elsewhere but not as the source of his insights. Similarly, while Elias chides other art writers for failing to explore the primary documents upon which Raad bases *Hostage* (p. 15), he fails to cite Raad's 1996 University of Rochester doctoral dissertation "Beirut . . . (à la folie)" which discusses at length the captivity narratives he cites, in the same order and with the same references, to make the same arguments about the interracial homoerotics of captivity.

Posthumous Images heralds a new era in writing about contemporary Lebanese art—no longer confined to newspapers or gallery catalogues. Lebanese artists often like to say they must write about themselves because there is no one to write about them. They are a prolific and eloquent group. Several hold PhDs. Many have edited volumes on their own work. What is the boundary between the artwork and the artists' articulations? It may be unclear; yet in not citing key philosophical sources authored by these artists, *Posthumous Images* ultimately draws a kind of boundary between scholar and artist in an ironical and unfortunate, primitivizing move.

SHAHROKH MESKOOB, *In the Alley of the Friend: On the Poetry of Hafez*, trans. M. R. GHANOONPARVAR (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2018.) Pp. 298. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780815636175

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Meskoob's work is not an easy read. But it will be very rewarding for anyone fascinated by the ties between Iranians and their amazing poetry. The reader looking