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"Beirut and the Golden Sixties" opens at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha

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DOHA.- [Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art](#), the world's leading institution in the field, opened *Beirut and the Golden Sixties: A Manifesto of Fragility* on 16 March. Curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Ferhat, the exhibition is the most comprehensive presentation to date about a fabled but turbulent era in the development of modern art and in the history of Beirut and the Arab world, from Lebanon's 1958 political crisis through the outbreak in 1975 of the Civil War. Presented as part of Qatar Creates, the year-round national cultural movement that curates, promotes, and celebrates the diversity of cultural activities in Qatar, the exhibition will be on view in Doha through 5 August 2023.

Featuring 230 artworks and 300 archival documents drawn from nearly 40 collections worldwide, *Beirut and the Golden Sixties: A Manifesto of Fragility* examines this often-romanticized era to highlight how collisions among art, culture, and polarised political ideologies turned the Beirut art scene into a microcosm for larger trans-regional tensions. The exhibition showcases the work of a diverse group of artists whose passion for innovation was matched

only by the tenacity of their political convictions. They include well-known figures such as Etel Adnan, Huguette Caland, Paul Guiragossian, Saloua Raouda Choucair, and Shafic Abboud, as well as artists who are equally important but lesser known outside the region, such as Adel Saghir, Cici Sursock, Nadia Saikali, and Rafic Charaf, among others. Most of the artists presented in the exhibition are part of Mathaf Collection. The exhibition features a newly commissioned multimedia installation by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige about the devastating 2020 explosion in Beirut, shedding new light on the transformative effects of violence on art and artistic production and the power of poetry in opposition to chaos.

Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Chairperson of Qatar Museums, said, "One of the many functions of art is to recollect or reimagine a home that has been lost. One of the many functions of an art museum is to create a new home, if only a temporary one, where people who are scattered can come together for a moment, pause, and reflect. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art is such a home. Its collection, exhibitions, and programs bring together the visions of artists, and the voices of thinkers, from the far-flung Arab world, many of whom have personally experienced the pangs of displacement and exile. Mathaf's exhibition Beirut and the Golden Sixties is another such ingathering. It is an extraordinary, moving, and deeply thoughtful assemblage of artworks and documents, many by artists who are represented in Mathaf's collection, about a place that was both fabled and troubled and that now, though lost forever, cannot be forgotten: the flourishing, cosmopolitan Beirut of 1958 through 1975."

Zeina Arida, Director of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, said, "It is only natural that Mathaf would present an exhibition on artistic production in cosmopolitan Beirut, a city of particular interest during the sixties when it comes to the development and expression of modernism within the Arab world. Mathaf's presentation of Beirut and the Golden Sixties: A Manifesto of Fragility adds to the exhibition 8 works from Mathaf's collection and a number of archival documents that bring additional understanding of the artist's practices. Four documentaries produced by the Dalloul Art Foundation will be screened in Mathaf atrium, inviting the visitors to delve into a deeper appreciation of the modern art scene in Lebanon.

Beirut in the Golden Sixties is organized in five parts:

- **Le Port de Beyrouth: The Place** explores the notion of belonging and the question of national identity following Lebanon's independence from French-mandated colonial rule in 1943, when Beirut became a destination for intellectuals and artists from the Middle East and Arabic-speaking North Africa. Works in this section highlight the disparities between those who benefited from Beirut's prosperity and onlookers waiting in anticipation of the fulfilment of its promise.
- **Lovers: The Body** examines how changing social values in Beirut and across the world influenced and inspired new artistic practices and illustrates how artists, many of them women, engaged with the politics of the body within the context of the liberation and student movements of the 1960s and 1970s.
- **Takween (Composition): The Form** introduces visitors to the multiple formal styles and schools of thought that artists adopted,

reflecting broader ideological affiliations that underscored identity politics. This section considers the local articulations of various modernist tendencies in Beirut, paying close attention to the predominance of abstraction from the 1950s to 1970s.

- **Monster and Child: The Politics** takes a close look at the relationship between art and politics in the years preceding the start in 1975 of the Lebanese Civil War, when the systemic problem of sectarianism in social and political institutions destabilised all aspects of life in the city.
- **Blood of the Phoenix: The War** reveals how the onset of the Lebanese Civil War took its toll on the Beirut arts scene, as galleries and independent art spaces shuttered and artists migrated to Europe, the United States, and the Persian Gulf.

Beirut and the Golden Sixties: A Manifesto of Fragility was first shown at Gropius Bau, Berlin (24 March - 12 June 2022) and was presented as a central part of the 16th Lyon Biennial of Contemporary Art, France (14 September - 31 December 2022). The exhibition is curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, Directors of Hamburger Bahnhof National Museum of Contemporary Art in Berlin — with assistant curator Natasha Gasparian.

The exhibited artworks come from more than 30 institutional and private collections from Lebanon, Europe, UK and the USA.