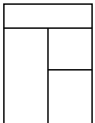


مُمتَلَكات

MUMTALAKAT



ABOUT MUMTALAKAT

Meaning “belongings” in Arabic, the word *mumtalakat* is derived from the Arabic root to own, to govern. Thus, *Mumtalakat* has to do not only with the materiality of objects, but also with a phenomenology of dominance, of power. As a title, it considers the ways in which objects shape interaction, inviting reflection on their ability to hold multiple meanings and perform personal and cultural functions. It also engages various understandings of objects as conceptual entities that carry affective memories of the migration experience.

With an emphasis on process, each iteration of this multi-part oral history project functions as a site of encounter where new discourses can be articulated. The project as a whole considers the complexities of collaborative processes, questioning conventions of the researcher/educator as main author, prioritizing participants’ perspectives, and investigating how to negotiate these relations and viewpoints through an exhibition and public events.

This installment in the Gallery’s vestibule features personal objects belonging to five Arabic-speaking immigrants: an icon, teddy bear, identity cards, rescue tools, diaries, sewing notebooks, house key, rosary, book, Keffiyeh, school note, postcard, and travel souvenirs. As remnants of remote oversea experiences, these objects open a space in the here and now for looking and reflecting on notions of home, identity and belonging.

By placing personal objects and narratives under the category of the aesthetic, *Mumtalakat* considers visibility and its constraints. Prompting encounters between the public and the private, it questions how different forms and strategies of representation test the limits of the personal and how these approaches can extend the interpretive potential of oral narratives and embed objects in their larger cultural contexts.

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Interview with Maher Kouraytem

Interviewer: Emma Haraké

Date of Interview: August 11, 2017

Length of Interview: 60 min. 30 sec.

Place of interview: Interviewee's home

Language of interview: Arabic (Lebanese Dialect)

Objects: Framed photographs and house key, school bag, school absence notebook, Billie Holiday by Greta Naufal

Transcription in Arabic: Emma Haraké

Translation into French: Chirine Chamsine

Translation into English: Emma Haraké

Comments

The *italic* text indicates when the interviewer or interviewee communicated in English or French during the interview. Text in square brackets [] is used to identify non-verbal communication or add context.

Biographical details

Maher Kouraytem was born in 1976 in Lebanon, one year after the start of the Lebanese civil war. He grew up in Ras Beirut with his two older sisters and parents. Kouraytem lost several family members during the civil war. He worked as an accountant in Lebanon and Abidjan. He also has a career as a self-taught artist since 2007. Maher immigrated to Montreal in September 2014.

What is your name?

My name is Maher Kouraytem.

How old are you?

41 years.

When did you arrive in Montreal?

It's been three years. I arrived in September 2014.

Why did you decide to immigrate to Montreal?

The situation in Lebanon is not stable, there are problems during every period and the general security situation is not very good. This, in addition to some events that took place in 2008 when Beirut was occupied in 2008 by Hezbollah militias. In 2007, I was abducted and interrogated, also by Hezbollah operatives. So, these events in addition to the culmination of the past civil war, and then the events of 2007, 2008 and 2006, all together reopened the war wounds. I said, "This seems so useless; we have to change. I should leave the country." Why did I specifically choose Montreal? Well, because I speak French.

[1:53]

Which object would you like to start talking about?

There is more than one object that I could not leave behind. There is a photograph of the old house, my childhood house, as it was dismantled, I believe in 1981.

Ok.

I framed it. I framed the 1981 photograph along with the house key. This house no longer exists, it was destroyed in the 1980s. The frame also has a *postcard* of the neighborhood in one thousand and nine hundred something... in the twenties I mean. [The postcard] depicts the old house and a French [military] camp. The French camp facing the house became the school where I studied afterwards, the *College Protestant Français*.

[3:00]

***Ok.* So, the object is the house photograph or is it the three objects all together: the photograph along with the *postcard* and the house key?**

It is one object. The frame holding these three objects. The postcard depicts my grandfather's home where I lived during my childhood and it also has the region's history because you can read "*Armée française du levant - Ras Beyrouth - Syrie*". The photograph in the frame is the one I remember the most from my childhood; [the home] where I lived, the garden where I used to play. There were cacti, pomegranates, jasmine, turtles... I used to play in the sand on the rooftop. There was a lot of greenery. The thing I am most *nostalgic* about in Beirut is this childhood home that no longer exists. Likewise, [I kept] the key for its symbolism. It used to open the doors to this house, but now it's the only thing that remains.

You mentioned something about it [postcard] containing the region's history and you read what is written...?

Yes, the region's history because the house where I lived, the house built by my grandfather, actually appears in the *postcard* by accident. The image was originally taken... they weren't photographing the house; they were photographing the French camp.

The one...?

The one facing the house, The French camp in Ras Beirut. It has the following written on it: "*Beyrouth-Syrie, Camp de la Mosquée, Armée française (Ouest)*". The camp's location is the same where *College Protestant Français* [was later built], the school where I studied. The sea appears as well, and you can tell how different the neighborhood used to be; there were no tall buildings. There used to be more greenery. On the back of the *postcard*, a French soldier wrote to his friends that he couldn't spend Easter holiday with them.

In France?

In France. And that he prefers French women, prefers to sleep with French women instead of the Bedouins who were... the gypsies. So, it is interesting! I mean on one hand it is a memory for me and on the other, on the *postcard's* back are memories of a French soldier who lived in the same place around one hundred years ago, expressing nostalgia for his homeland, for France, because he's away from his family. And the photograph...

The photograph under the *postcard*?

[points his finger] This one.

[7:02]

Do you have an idea which year [was it taken]?

This was taken in 1981 as they were dismantling the old house's [bricks]. Behind it, there is what looks like a lighthouse, but this was actually the French army radio building. And you can see how dense the greenery behind the house is. This is what I remember the most: there were pomegranates, cacti, and we had dogs and turtles. It is mostly a 'nostalgia' for this Ras Beirut that no longer exists nowadays, because it is very different nowadays.

Different, how?

Currently, all of it is packed with skyscrapers, ugly buildings. There is no place left for any greenery, no trees left. I mean, even the society changed, how people interact. Nature has changed. I mean, now, the sea is barely visible from the building that replaced the house. Previously, it was like full of greenery and trees and all this beautiful nature turned into blocks of concrete, with no outlet—like, it's become a city that suffocates its inhabitants.

Ok. When you look at the photograph, the photograph of the house, what do you remember the most?

I remember the most all the details of where I used to spend my time as a kid. There was a space where I used to play on the rooftop. Even with all vegetation below, the rooftop was filled with potted plants. When I look at the roof tiles, I remember a wide wooden staircase leading from the kitchen into the attic. The attic is located behind the roof tiles. It was also like box of wonders for me because of all of the ancient objects and photographs of old people. I used to peek out of the brick windows into the French radio—lighthouse... So, it was kind of like a play area as well, a place to explore, a hiding place. The tiles inside the house were so beautiful; they stopped making tiles like that. All tiles look alike nowadays. Earlier, it had character, every house had character. I mean, the tiles had character, the windows had character, the doors had character, even the key had a character. All keys look alike, nowadays. This is the most, I mean, it's like, I wanted to take it and hang in my home, because I look at it daily to remember. I didn't forget, but what I mean is that I put the photograph in front of me, to hold on to the beautiful image of Ras Beirut that I loved, not the one I left behind. I mean when I left, it wasn't the Ras Beirut [I loved]. This is probably why it might have been easier to leave, because I am more closely attached to something that doesn't exist anymore, I mean, compared to what exists now, ugly buildings and overcrowding...

And did you hang the photo, the frame in Lebanon, in Beirut as well? The two images and the key?

No. I decided to frame the postcard, the old photograph and the key when I got the news about my immigration. So, I decided that, "No, this is something I want to keep. I want to take with me because this is the only object left from all the beautiful things I

loved in my childhood in Ras Beirut." Besides, the photograph was captured by someone... It is someone very dear to me, the one who took the photograph.

[12:15]

Do you want to talk about who took the photograph and your relationship to that person?

The man who took the photograph is named Ghazy Toghlob. His mother was the nanny who cared for me growing up. I remember her. There is a strong relationship there and affection. The photograph also reminds me of Dada [nanny] Marya. Dada Marya is from Lebanon's eastern mountains and she and her son have Syrian passports because it [the village] is on the border between Lebanon and Syria.

Ok.

So, this is it.

You spoke briefly about the *camp militaire* when talking about the *postcard*...

The *Camp Militaire de la Mosquée*.

Yes. Do you remember it? Or there wasn't a *camp militaire* when...

No... it didn't exist in my time; my father remembers it. The *Camp Militaire de la Mosquée* was named after *Mosquée Kouraytem*, which was built by my grandfather, the same grandfather who built the house. It was called *Camp Militaire de la Mosquée*. There weren't many... Because [at the time], Ras Beirut was considered outside the city walls, there weren't many landmarks. There was the mosque and few houses. Hence, they saw the mosque and named the camp *Camp Militaire de la Mosquée*.

Do you know what they used to do in the camp?

I don't have many details on what they used to do, but [I have some] from the stories told by my father about the Second World War. There was a battle between the Germans and the French army of *Vichy*...

True, yes.

The *legions étrangères* were among the French troops and [my father] always told me that the Senegalese snipers were the best. There was a time when that's it, the Vichy army, following Nazi Germany, were about to occupy [the camp]. Three quarters of the camp were empty; the French soldiers abandoned it. One Senegalese sniper stayed

and withstood them for three days. When they arrived, they thought the number must be higher, and they were shocked that it was only one or two Senegalese holding off and terrifying this whole army. But because they were accurate snipers, they lasted that long. Around the same period, some of [the soldiers] stayed in the camp, and another part hid in my grandfather's house. This is a small part of what my father told me.

[15:53]

Is there anything that you'd like to tell me about...

There is, for example, I know about the history of the neighborhood. Since the neighborhood had plenty of palm trees, it was called Jibb Al-Nakhel (The palm colony) before Kouraytem, because it had plenty of palm trees.

And there are palm trees in the two images...

Yes, it is obvious. It had plenty of palm trees, it was named Jibb Al-Nakhel but was later renamed into Kouraytem because my father's grandfather, Mosbah Kouraytem, was one of the earliest people who lived in the neighbourhood. He is the one who built the mosque and he was a big merchant in the Bazarkan market¹ inside the city walls. My grandfather was one of the founders of the chamber of Commerce in Lebanon. That is why they changed the name from Jibb Al-Nakhel into Kouraytem, and this is actually the case for two-thirds of Beirut's neighbourhoods. They had different names which changed depending on the families who lived there. Same thing in Hamra [one of the main streets in Beirut]; Jorn El-Dibb, or something like that, later became Hamra.

After a family name?

The Hamra family name, yes.

I want to take you back to the photograph that was taken by...?

His name was Ghazy Toghlob

Yes. You briefly mentioned that you used to play and that you remember the hideouts in the house. You said that it was gone and now a building stands in its place. Do you remember which year the house was demolished? How old were you then?

¹ Bazarkan was a major souk in Beirut where residents and others met to buy their necessities especially fabric and sewing tools.

They started demolishing the house in 1981; you can see them removing the rooftops in the photograph. I was born in 1976, so I was five or six years old when the house was demolished and...

And why did they demolish it?

They demolished it because there were too many heirs to be able to divide the inheritance after my grandfather passed away. And they built a huge ugly building with thirty-two apartments.

During that period, as a kid, how do you remember the move from such a huge house into an apartment?

Yes sure, it was very different. First of all, it was a big house with character. It had an area where I could play on the roof, in the attic. There were gardens around the house, cacti and pomegranates. We used to play in the sand, and we had turtles and dogs. Suddenly [we moved] into an apartment that was shut tight. And on top of all this, there was the civil war. I mean in 1982 there was the Israeli invasion, in 1983 and 1984 clashes broke between Lebanese militias then we had the Lebanese army invasion. Later in 1984, there were executions of many people including my family members. The apartment we moved into didn't mean much to me. The only thing is that, because it was much smaller compared to the house, we used to hide between... we used to count the [apartment] walls to hide between...

Between the rooms.

Between the rooms; which is the safest place from the bombings. This is probably why I have nostalgia for the childhood home, because the situation changed drastically [afterwards].

[20:32]

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the house?

I remember, since it appears in the photograph, the French radio resembling a lighthouse. Most people say it's the French lighthouse, but it was a radio station that looks like a lighthouse.

Yes, it looks like a lighthouse.

I used to sneak inside as a kid. There was an archive for the Lebanese army. I used to take [things] from the archive and read them.

Were you allowed to go inside?

No, it was forbidden, I used to sneak inside. I mean I even went up without... because there were no security guards for a while in the eighties, and I was a kid.

So, it was abandoned?

Yes, it was abandoned and since I was a kid, I could sneak inside. I could wander and play inside. I used to climb up, up. Other than that, it was bombed by the Lebanese Army in 1988. There was a war where the Lebanese army was bombing Ras Beirut [in west Beirut] and the Syrian army was bombing east Beirut. Back then, the army's commander-in-chief was Michele Aoun who is the [Lebanese] president nowadays. The night the [radio station] got hit in in 1988, I was injured and admitted to emergency.

At the time you [were living] in the building?

Yes, the building was there, the house didn't exist at the time. The radio—lighthouse—reminded me of that incident. Here [in the photograph] it was still intact. It wasn't hit yet, but later it was hit by a 155 or 240 [calibre] rocket. This was when I was injured by three or four bomb splinters and broken glass. And at the time, I always... this... I don't know if I should tell this joke about the... every day the newspapers would mention the numbers and names of the dead and injured.

[23:06]

This was during the civil war?²

Yes, during the civil war. The *AUH* [American University of Beirut] made an error and put my name among the dead instead of the injured. The following day I was answering the [home] phone. People called offering their condolences and I was the one telling them, "This is Maher, I am still alive." So yeah, I find it funny! They would call to offer their sympathies that I passed away and I am the one answering the phone saying that I am still alive. Besides, [the radio] was also bombed in 2006, during the war with Israel. There was an antenna for the Lebanese army. A drone armed with a missile penetrated into the same pole—lighthouse— French radio. It was targeting the broadcast antenna of the Lebanese army. [Sigh] And this is it, I imagine. I mean what I can remember about all these... Plus the key meant the most because it is the only thing, the only tangible *object* which we used to open the door of the house in the photograph.

Is there anything else you would like to share about the photograph?

No, no.

² The Lebanese civil war was a multifaceted civil war lasting from 1975 to 1990 and resulting in an estimated 120,000 fatalities.

[25:00]

From these, what do you want to talk about?

The second object is a *carnet d'absences* which has written inside: "*College Protestant Français, Carnet d'absences, Nom de l'élève : Maher Kouraytem, Salle de : 6ème B*". Then when you open the *carnet d'absences*, yes, ok! You have the *règlements*, etc. Then you have [pages] where [the absences are] supposed to be marked monthly; you have from *octobre*, the beginning of the school year till *juin*, the end of the school year. The *carnet d'absences* was... whole months, I mean more than six months, eight months of the school year are almost all empty. And the reason was because we didn't go to school to begin with because of war. 1988 was the Aoun war and since we couldn't attend school, this *carnet d'absences* was useless. It was still blank, brand-new with the exception of one page, which is rare.

Ok... and where was the *College Protestant Français* school?

[I could walk to] the *College Protestant Français* from the old house. Likewise, when the building was built there, I used to cross the street. It used to exactly face the house. I only had to cross the street and I'd arrive at school. I still remember the school janitor and guard; he used to help me cross the street. My family were friends with him and he lived in the school.

I'm looking at the *postcard*: I can see the house and there is a huge grove facing it. Is the school [located] above the orchard or...?

No. The school is located on the site of the French camp here [points to his hand].

On the left?

Facing [the house], here.

So, the French camp is destroyed, or...?

The camp doesn't exist anymore. Only a few traces remain. What is left of the camp, for example, there is a *basket*[ball] playground. They made other playgrounds, but there is one in particular [now in the school] that lasted from the camp. They also found Roman and Greek ruins in the ground.

In the camp?

Where the camp used to exist. [The ruins] were around when the land was bought, was taken. The garden contains Roman and Greek ruins, they were scattered in the garden.

Ok. So now at school there is a *basket* playground and the ruins?

Surely, they still exist.

So, the school is where they were...

Yes. But it's also because many empires passed through the region so anywhere you excavate, you'll find ruins from certain eras. And during the [civil] war, the school was hit around nine times.

[29:18]

And why did you decide to carry the *carnet d'absence*?

The *carnet d'absence*, because it is related to childhood. Because I like the school phase, the *College Protestant*, I like ... I also chose this year in particular, 1988 because the *carnet* is blank. It has nothing. We didn't have absence[s] because we didn't attend school in the first place. So, it is also a reminder of the situation we endured. I mean, we filled the name and which class we're in, but we rarely attended school.

What else do you remember from your school days?

What else can I remember from school days? It's the school, the childhood memories—these were certainly nice. We used to take *solfege* and chant classes. Madame Gelalian used to teach us solfege. Madame Gelalian taught Ziad Rahbani³ solfege and her husband taught him piano. There was also Greta Naufal, the art teacher. She was half Lebanese, half German. She was also... her class was my favorite, I used to enjoy her class a lot. I feel that I benefited the most from Greta's class, the creativity; it was the only class I enjoy. I mean as painting and...

Painting?

Yes, painting.

Where do you put the notebook? Where do you keep it?

There is a small box where I keep the things which I brought with me, things I'd never give up. Inside this notebook *d'absence*, there is also a paper handed to me by the *Collège Protestant* administration.

This yellow paper?

³ Ziad Rahbani is a famous Lebanese composer, pianist, and playwright.

Yes. Yellowish, because of the [passage of] time. [Reads from the paper]

« *Beyrouth, le 9 Novembre 1989. En raison de la disparition tragique de notre élève Lara MATAR et afin de pouvoir s'associer par la pensée avec sa famille et tous ceux qui l'ont connue, l'établissement sera fermé ce vendredi 10 Novembre. La Direction.* »

[32:54]

Who is Lara?

Lara Matar attended school with me; she was in the next classroom over. A [car] bomb detonated in Sadat [area in Beirut] not far away from the *College*. Many people were killed in the bomb, including the car carrying Lara Matar. Many people were gravely injured, and Lara Matar was killed. I remember that her classmates distributed a [paper] in her handwriting for all the students. I kept it somewhere, written in her handwriting. And yeah, I remember at the time I was emotional: it touched me and I kept it for a while—“*I will survive*” lyrics written in her handwriting.

So, you keep the paper in the *carnet*?

In the *carnet d'absences*. The reason is also a reminder of the tragic event and the war memories and school memories, and the people who were with us at school and are no longer there. I mean, she died because of a bomb. They were going to play tennis or something, but they got blown-up instead. A whole building, half of the building, collapsed because of this bomb and many people died.

How old were you back then in 1989?

In 1989, I was 13 or 14 years old.

So, you put the note about Lara in the *carnet* and you keep both of them in a box containing all the objects you brought from Lebanon...

The two of them remind me of where I come from and also why I moved here. You asked me earlier “Why did you come?” We grew up like this, a blank *carnet d'absences* because we didn't attend school in the first place. Inside there is a note about a schoolmate who died in a car bomb. And she isn't the only one, other schoolmates died in such events or by random bullets. So, this is an additional reason why a person might consider... why he would leave his country where he lived his whole life, and where he loves, and where he swims, where he sunbathes...

[37:04]

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the *carnet d'absences* and the *note*?

No. And, and with them... wrapped with them is this *sac* where I used to put the... a blue *sac*. We all had one of these. It resembles the *tablier* we used to wear to keep our clothes clean.

School?

For school as well. And it also has my name embroidered on it. This is where I used to keep the food I'd take with me. Labne sandwich, cheese sandwich.

To school?

To school. And I have a photograph of me holding it [school bag] back when I was three or year years old. The photograph dates back to 1979 or 1980 and I was holding, this exact bag. This also reminds me of...

School days?

School days and lost childhood.

[laughter]

And what did you use to put inside? Do you remember what kind of sandwiches you used to take?

Labne and cucumber, cheese, Karishe... What do I know?! I mean, basically! What could it be? A Labne sandwich.

Was the [bag] provided by the school or parents?

We bought it from school, same thing for the *tablier*.

But the [embroidered] name... the school?

No, we used to sew it. My mom probably stitched it. [The bag] is light blue and the embroidery is dark blue.

How do you feel when you look at it...? I don't know, is it happy memories or war memories?

Entwined. This [bag]... because I was younger... When we got older, we stopped carrying the bag. Maybe this [bag evokes] happy [memories] because I wasn't very

aware, I was three or four years old. I don't know, but they are conflicted. I keep all three together. [I have] conflicted memories between happy memories—like everything in life—they have happy memories and they also remind [me] of not so happy memories. I mean...

So, if you're telling me that this bag was [yours] till the age of four or five, does this mean that the old house still existed at that time?

The old house was still there.

Because you mentioned that it was destroyed when you were around five or six-year-old. So, this was during the same period...

Yes, it was still the time... we were still in the beautiful old house...

And you keep the bag along with the school effects. Do you keep other objects from Lebanon in this box?

Yes, there is my identity [card] but likewise I didn't use it. It was the last year they made such an identity [card].

Lebanese [ID card]?

Lebanese, old. This, few people have it... I believe that people born after 1976 don't own the same identity card.

Ok.

It has a picture of me as a child as well, plus it is vintage, and I like vintage stuff. It has my old photograph...

[41:25]

[doorbell rings]

Ok. Let's pause.

[continue interview]

We were talking about the Lebanese ID before the doorbell rang... You were telling me how you didn't use it and that it is vintage and that they don't make the same kind of identity cards anymore...

Yes. I didn't use it and they stopped making this kind of identity card after 1976. After the war, they started making a new magnetic *ID card*.

Ok.

This is valuable to me because it is *vintage*, and I like *vintage* stuff.

Yes.

It's also an object similar to... it bears resemblance to the *carnet d'absence* in that I didn't use it because it was useless during the civil war, the identity card [I mean].

[42:37]

Yet, the *carnet d'absence* is not *vintage*?

No, not *vintage*. It's more *sentimental*.

Ok.

Since it reminds [me] of childhood and of a year where we missed school because of war. Same thing with the note about Lara's death and with the school bag we used to carry food.

It [school bag] has ink stains.

Yes, from school. It is even dirty in some places, but I left it as is.

Where did you keep them in Lebanon?

I kept them in a drawer all together. All *sentimental* things.

Did you hesitate when you decided to bring them?

These I didn't hesitate. I knew I wouldn't come here without them. They mean a lot to me. And the things I brought meant even more when I was about to leave the country. Before, I never thought about what I should do with them, I kept them as objects, *sentimental objects*, but I didn't think much about them. I started thinking more about them when the decision was made that this is it! We have to pack our stuff and immigrate. I mean they became more meaningful...

Is there anything else you'd like to share about them?

The identity, the Lebanese identity [card]. First, in addition to being vintage, it was useless. [It also indicates] how a person's identity is not static, it is flowing. Since the region was once part of the Ottoman Empire, my grandfather's identity [card] was written in Turkish and was [issued] by the Ottoman Empire; it had "Beirut/Syria" written on it. By my father's time, Greater Lebanon had been established so he had a different identity [card] and I have a different one too. So, in addition to being *unique*, *vintage*, the three *generations* didn't have similar identities. So, this is also an indication of something... I mean, I don't know... I wanted to bring my father and grandfather's identity cards, but I couldn't find them.

You looked for them?

Yes, I didn't find them. My grandfather's identity [card] was written in Turkish. Likewise, it had "Beirut/Syria" written on it and that he was exempt from military service, or something along these lines, and that he was a merchant.

[46:18]

***Interesting.* Because both pictures of the house, the one in the eighties and the black and white *postcard* also have Beirut/Syria written on them.**

Yes.

[You know] Similar to what you were saying about identities, likewise the region's name changed...

Yes, the region changed. The place... the place's name changed. Beirut remained, but in one place it is Beirut/Lebanon and in the *postcard* it is Beirut/Syria.

And the *camp Militaire* became a school...

And the *Camp Militaire Français* became *College Protestant Français*. And we moved to a French province, maybe it's not a coincidence after all.

Yes, sure because you told me that one of the reasons...

One of the reasons I chose Montreal was that I spoke French. And earlier, Beirut wasn't called Beirut, it was *Beyrit* during the Canaanites and subsequently it was renamed to *Berytos* when the Greek were here. [It is] a bit similar to here. I mean, Montreal is a relatively recent name, not so long ago it was named *Tiohtiá:ke*. It had different populations.

Yes.

And this is it I mean. The connection is once again the French presence here and in Beirut.

And speaking of identities, in few years you might have a different identity...

After some time, even in a year maybe, I might acquire... I've had my permanent resident [card] since we arrived, but when I take the *citoyenneté*, I'll have a Canadian identity.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

I can speak about other *objects* if you like.

[48:54]

Which object do you want to talk about?

There is still this object which I couldn't... an object... I couldn't leave unless I could bring it with me. I bought a silkscreen of the Lebanese artist Greta Naufal Khoury, an *epreuve d'artiste* about Billie Holiday... I also keep it in the living room; I see it every day. It reminds me of the years when Greta taught me, and the huge impact she had on me because I became a painter later.

At the *College Protestant*?

She used to teach me at the *College Protestant*... It was the only class I believed was beneficial or I personally liked. I felt that it was really helpful in rest of my life and gave me self-esteem. She pushed me to stay *créatif* in life. Plus, she was also my art teacher from the time I was five or six years old. We didn't only paint/draw, we sculpted, and she introduced us to art history and color mixing. She gave us the freedom to do many *creative* things and because of her I became addict[ed to art], I couldn't stop this thing... I felt it was a very *positive* thing in my life. So, this artwork reminds me of Greta and the class I took with her for many years.

You told me that you bought it?

I decided to buy it around maybe one month before we decided to immigrate...

Ok, not before...

No. Previously, I didn't have an artwork by Greta. I decided to buy one before we moved. I made an appointment and went and met her. I wanted to take it with me; I wanted something from Greta to keep at home with me.

So, when you look at it, it reminds you of Greta?

I remember Greta and the classes we took at *College Protestant Français* and childhood and *adolescence*. Even after I left the *College*, I would meet her from time to time and attend her exhibitions. So it was also one of the things I felt I couldn't not have with me when I left the country.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

[No answer. Silence]

You told me that Greta had an impact on what you decided to do with your life?

Before I became an artist, I studied accounting and whenever I'd meet Greta, she'd say, "Why do you bother with accounting?! You have a talent, stay in the arts. You shouldn't stop painting, shouldn't stop *creativity*." So, she always pushed me even after I left the *College*. It [the art class] was nearly the only class where I had really high grades. Eighteen of twenty, twenty of twenty, all the rest below average. So, this also... it is... because I was focused on this...

Course...

Course. And she always gave me praise for doing well...

[53:40]

There is a question I always pose about whether there is a relation between the objects. However, it is clear that your objects are very connected to each other, the school, childhood house and childhood in general. Even this...

Greta even taught me in the *College* facing the house.

How do you feel the objects converse with each other?

I feel strongly that it may be nostalgia for childhood... an attempt to preserve the happy and ugly memories I lived in Ras Beirut, in *College Protestant*. Also, a comment about Greta: she did more than was required of her; she'd take us to art exhibitions. In the eighties, I attended one of her exhibitions at the Carleton, *Carleton Hotel*—it doesn't exist anymore. For example, ever since then I started being interested in attending art exhibitions. And this is the connection between them: childhood memories, the school and the old house... things that all no longer exist and that I wanted to bring here to stay, in exile, I mean.

[56:00]

Is there anything else you'd like to say, something that you haven't said about the objects or...?

[head nod, no] I believe this is what... no doubt that... just one last word, there is no doubt that every time I look at them or remember them, they stir my feelings—some are good and some bad. Even if there are good or bad things, it is important to keep these memories and sentiments and to know one's *background* and where one comes from, what one endured in one's life—things that aren't good, and at the same time to keep the good memories from all the places where one has lived... places that no longer exist.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

If you want to choose, if you have to choose one thing from the objects you showed me to bring with you, what would it be?

It is difficult to choose between these objects, but maybe... maybe the framed photograph because it carries... maybe the photograph has many... Since the photograph depicts where I lived, my childhood along with the key I used to hold to open the door... maybe this is the... if I have to, if I have to [choose] only one ... only this.

Was there anything that you wanted to bring and couldn't? You told me you were thinking to bring your father and grandfather's identity [cards] but couldn't find them. Were there other things?

Wanted to bring and didn't...? Yes, I couldn't bring the sun of Ras Beirut; I couldn't bring the sea of Ras Beirut.

If later you decide to move from Montreal, is there anything you got here and might take with you if you move and live in a different country or different city?

From Montreal?... I believe I need to live here longer to be able find something... but currently I don't think there is anything I might have regrets about if I discard it when I leave Montreal.

Last question, did you consult with anyone when you chose the objects for the interview?

I decided on the objects.

I finished my questions, if there is anything you'd like to add?

I don't think there anything I didn't mention. I spoke about everything.

Thank you.

[1:00:31]

Translation to English: Emma Haraké

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