

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TRAUMA STIMULATED ART, OR THE EMBODIMENT OF AFFECT IN LEBANON: AN ALLEGORY

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The process of doing art in Lebanon is closely linked to politics; it has its root in the traumatic Lebanese civil war that took place from 1975 to 1990. The heightened political environment in Beirut influences affective circulations and expressions within communities, and as Kaelen Wilson-Goldie notes, the divisions in the political landscape often generate divisions in the art scene.¹ In other words, for the Lebanese people, affect is inherently political. It is also economic, as politically biased funding fuels the fires of this politicized affect, revealing certain values and prejudices. Since trauma in Lebanon is most manifestly a result of war, death looms ever-present and is often a major focus of art practice. Artists face an ethical problem since they might be seen to exploit people's misery in mining this political and traumatic history for their art productions. The risk here is that death becomes the point to which all the aesthetic discourses lead: dying for country, for the cause, for religion, for politics, for ideology, and so on. This is evident in a number of artworks, as well as in observable behavioral ideology, and in various social, individual, or national conflicts. Traumatic and violent death becomes a justified aspect of life. This has led some artists to refuse the political and nationalistic glorification of death and to promote life instead. In this way, Lebanese artists attempt to use art to overcome trauma and to affirm life in the face of traumatic affect.

¹ Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "An art scene divided," *The National*, 2008, www.thenational.ae (no longer available online) (accessed July 2, 2008).

