

Stéphane Lagoutte

Lebanon, Stratigraphy

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Oct. 14th 2023...

Jan. 14th 2024

Opening

Friday

Oct. 13 oct.

6.00 pm



*musée
Nicéphore
Niépce*

Curated by:
Céline Duval,
Stimultania
Emmanuelle Vieillard,
musée Nicéphore Niépce
Scenography, installation:
musée Nicéphore Niépce

Exhibition
produced in tandem
with Stimultania,
the Strasbourg-based
photography centre
and the CRI des Lumières
in Lunéville

With support from Canson

Stéphane Lagoutte is a photographer. He has been a member of the MYOP Agency since 2009 and its Director since 2016. In addition to his work as a news photographer, he has also produced an extensive body of documentary work that questions the very nature of photography itself.

The museum presents a body of work produced by the photographer over a ten-year period in Beirut. It is made up of five series, “Beirut 75-15”, “Observation”, “Revolts”, “Seeing”, and “Legacy”, that span a non-linear timeframe. His work studies the succession of strata that make up modern Lebanese history from 1975 onwards, not unlike a geologist.

The layers follow on from one another, spread, and seem to form a cycle that prevents any kind of transition, but the facts never repeat themselves identically. Between memory and current affairs, Lagoutte takes us down new paths.

“From a formal point of view, the many years I spent travelling allowed me to rethink my work as a photographer and gave me time to imagine other forms. The idea was always to document, but whether it was dealing with direct events or profound repercussions – in the form of traces – the topics required different emotional approaches that overlapped and completed one another.”

Using various photographic forms such as juxtapositions, enlargements, projections and close-ups, the photographer uncovers signs and truly bears witness to the complexity of the situation in Lebanon.

Beyrouth 75-15
2015

Stéphane Lagoutte fell in love with a woman and she brought him to Beirut. He was blown away by a city at the crossroads of the present, the past, the historic, the archaic. Naturally, he took out his camera and got to work, delving deep, sneaking into crannies, sliding into the in-between.

The photographer was lovestruck and lost his way in winding streets, faces at windows, buildings shot through with painful memories. He came across abandoned luxury hotels, uncertain staircases, and below, in the hidden depths of the city, a discotheque dozing under a layer of dust. There, beside the indescribable concretions, he stumbled on the negatives of another photographer, perhaps a dead one, pictures taken by a ghost. Over the space of three years, Lagoutte went back again and again, walking the streets of Beirut. The pictures piled up, but were never enough. His camera remained sterile, nothing worked. On his return to Paris, he carefully exhumed the old, forgotten negatives. Another life jumped out at him. Men and women dancing, drinking alcohol, chatting, laughing, loving. They had not yet learned to be afraid. Here was life in Beirut before 1975. Before the civil war that was to leave no one unscathed.

Consequently, not unlike a couple that gets back together after years apart, the images of today lie on top of those of yesteryear. Beirut 1975-2015. Two lonely figures meet and embrace in this temporal juxtaposition, allowing the photographer, Stéphane Lagoutte, to weave an augmented, moving present.

His pictures do not just bear witness, they act. They do not stop time, they open it out.

Samuel Doux

Observation
2011-2014

A photographer in the streets of Beirut awakens suspicion, distrust. Even in the streets where nothing has happened, with no history, the photographer can feel eyes on him. He can feel he is being watched, considered as a potential threat, an individual whose intentions are not at all clear. As he is being observed by strangers from their windows and balconies, he shifts his own gaze and looks at them in turn. He takes photos all the same, recording instants in a suspended city. Back in his own studio, Stéphane Lagoutte decided to give these people back their sense of place. By drawing them, in Indian ink, one by one, he made them part of history in a way that was both poetic and political. Each character took on another dimension, their monumental size reminiscent of historical paintings. These anonymous figures became the harbingers of the tragic acts that spread so relentlessly throughout the history of Lebanon.

Revolts**Photographs:****Stéphane Lagoutte, 2019-2020****Editor: Oan Kim, 2023****Sound: Lebanon during
the demonstrations of 2019-2020
4 minutes**

The demonstrations kicked off on the evening of October 17th. A “WhatsApp” tax sparked a protest movement among the people who demanded political and structural change. Stéphane Lagoutte was there and followed events up until the government resigned. The photographs of the early weeks of the demonstrations project a strong feeling of unity against the ruling class through peaceful protest. Lagoutte returned in February 2020. The banks had started to prevent customers from accessing their accounts, unemployment and poverty levels were rising, Lebanon was heading into a very troubled period. The occupied streets and squares no longer buzzed with the same fervour but people were still committed to the struggle.

Stéphane Lagoutte attempted to represent the struggle in pictures. “It was 8 a.m. and the demonstrators were trying to block access to the parliament building, despite the water cannons and teargas. I had the strange impression that the Lebanese people were already at work. As if this was a duty, the duty to resist, express anger, refuse to budge. This was before the pandemic struck, before the port explosion that confirmed they were right all along. Their struggle was that of a people who could no longer afford to resign themselves to the inevitable, in violent opposition to the ruling classes.”

Seeing**2020**

On August 4th 2020, the city of Beirut was hit by a double explosion at the port, that did untold damage to their hopes for the future. In the days that followed, the continuous flow of cars on the motorway across from the explosion site was never ending. The city’s inhabitants wanted to see for themselves. They had to see in order to believe, to witness the unthinkable and make it real.

Stéphane Lagoutte, like so many other press photographers, was there. He turned his lens away from the main event, turning his back on the port to capture the faces of the onlookers. He recorded their first look, the one that revealed the extent of the catastrophe and its impact on the living.

Legacy**2020**

Ten days after the explosion, Stéphane Lagoutte talked to the locals, collecting accounts, recording scars, plumbing souls. “The inhabitants of the destroyed neighbourhoods talked to me non-stop and I photographed their movements, their shock [...] The facades of the houses were gone, the buildings deserted. No demonstrations today. They are much too busy.”

1.
Stéphane Lagoutte
Beyrouth 75-15
2015
© Stéphane Lagoutte / MYOP



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2.
Stéphane Lagoutte
Observation
2012-2016
© Stéphane Lagoutte / MYOP



3.
Stéphane Lagoutte
Revolts
2019
© Stéphane Lagoutte / MYOP

4.
Stéphane Lagoutte
Legacy
2020
© Stéphane Lagoutte / MYOP



3



4

5.
Stéphane Lagoutte
Seeing
2020
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every day
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and 2.00 ... 5.45 pm

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