**Press release – February 2017**

The Sursock Museum is pleased to announce its upcoming exhibitions *Maha Maamoun: The Law of Existence* and *Visit Beirut! Postcards and Travel Guides from The Fouad Debbas Collection*.

Both exhibitions will open on **Thursday 23 February 2017 from 18:00 to 21:00.**

They will be on view until 12 June 2017.

**Maha Maamoun**

**The Law of Existence**

Opening Thursday 23 February 2017 from 18:00 to 21:00

On view until 5 June 2017

Twin Galleries, GF

Drawing references from literature, cinema and vernacular imagery, Maha Maamoun’s films and photographs are an investigation into the circulation, consumption, and function of images. *The Law of Existence,* Maamoun’s first solo show in Lebanon, brings together works dealing with the many faces and forms of state power in contemporary Egypt, from its manifestation in the intimate lives of citizens to power solidified in the edifices of government headquarters. The works exhibited here were produced within the last six years, during a time of great change and upheaval in Egypt. At the heart of these works is a reflection on human nature in times of uncertainty.

Shot between Cairo and different locations in India, the film *Dear Animal* weaves together a short story by writer Haytham El-Wardany – titled “Lord of the Order of Existence” – about a drug dealer who turns into a strange animal, and a selection of letters written by Azza Shaaban, a director-producer involved with the Egyptian revolution and now living in India, from where she sends notes about her travels and healing process after the revolution. At once occupying disparate temporal and spatial registers, *Dear Animal* is a meditation on our relationship to power, violence, and the unfamiliar.

Compiled from mobile phone footage posted on YouTube, *Night Visitor: The Night of Counting the Years* documents the break-in by protesters at the State Security buildings in Cairo and Damanhur in 2011 after the first wave of the Egyptian revolution. Shaky cameras and pixelated images take us through the dark interiors of these previously impenetrable structures, from secret prisons up to the lavish offices of government officials, hung with gilded portraits and connected through direct phone access to the president. The work’s title references the 1969 film *The Night of Counting the Years* (*Al-Mummia*) by Shadi Abdel Salam.

Two videos, gleaned from YouTube, act as a footnote to *Dear Animal*, speaking to animal/human relationships through the case of a lion shot by police during a drug raid.

To mark the opening of *The Law of Existence*, Maha Maamoun will be in conversation with the Sursock Museum's Head of Programs and Exhibitions Nora Razian on **Thursday 23 February from 19:00 to 20:00.**

**About the artist**

Maha Maamoun (b. 1972, Oakland, CA, USA) lives and works in Cairo, Egypt. Her work is generally interested in examining the form, function, and currency of common cultural, visual, and literary images as an entry point to investigating the cultural fabric that we weave and are weaved into. She also works collaboratively on independent publishing and curatorial projects. She co-founded the independent publishing platform called Kayfa-ta in 2013. She is also a founding board member of the Contemporary Image Collective (CIC), an independent non-profit space for art and culture founded in Cairo in 2004.

Recent exhibitions include *The Time is Out of Joint,* Sharjah Art Foundation*,* 2016; *Century of Centuries,* SALT, 2015; *Like Milking a Stone*,Rosa Santos Gallery, 2015; *The Night of Counting the Years*, Fridricianum, 2014; *Here and Elsewhere*, New Museum, 2014; and *Ten Thousand Wiles and a Hundred Thousand Tricks*, Meeting Points 7, 2014.

**Visit Beirut!**

**Postcards and Travel Guides from The Fouad Debbas Collection**

Opening Thursday 23 February 2017 from 18:00 to 21:00

On view until 12 June 2017

The Fouad Debbas Collection Gallery, Level 1

As early as 1865, seven passenger lines began to regularly service Beirut. The modest lodgings hitherto available to travelers, the *locandas*, were to evolve.

In just a few years, hotels proliferated, along with travel agencies set up on the quays.

Hôtel Gassman, Victoria, Royal, Beyrouth Palace, Métropole, Hôtel Bassoul d’Orient, Saint-Georges, Palm Beach… Travel writing from the 1850s and guidebooks published by the likes of Joanne, Baedecker, Cook, and Bleu, helped to boost the profile of Beirut’s hotel establishments, and make the city a sought-after destination, and no longer the mere stopover it had long been.

Through postcards, guides, and other publications from The Fouad Debbas Collection (available for consultation at the Sursock Museum library), picture yourself as a tourist in early 20th century Beirut, and begin by choosing your hotel!

**About The Fouad Debbas Collection**

The Fouad Debbas Collection is a photographic collection comprising over 30,000 images from the Middle East – namely Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Turkey – from 1830 till the 1960s. It was built over the course of two decades by Fouad César Debbas (1930-2001), who was an ardent believer in the importance of collecting and preserving images as a means of safeguarding cultural heritage.

Housed in the Sursock Museum, the Collection consists of photographs, postcards, and stereoscopic views, in addition to loose albumen prints, etchings, and books, all of which relate to the region. The collection, Orientalist in character and replete with commercial clichés, forms an important part of the Sursock Museum’s collection, highlighting photography’s key role in the development of modern art in Lebanon.

**About the Sursock Museum**

The Sursock Museum is a modern and contemporary art museum in the center of Beirut first opened in 1961, with a mission to collect, preserve, and exhibit local and international art.

Through our collection, archives, exhibitions, and public programs, we aim to produce knowledge on art practices in the region and explore work that reflects on our contemporary moment. Our goal is to support local art production, to provide a platform for encounter and experimentation with art and ideas, and to inform and challenge different audiences in new and unexpected ways.

**Opening hours**

Open daily from 10:00 to 18:00
Late opening on Thursdays from 12:00 to 21:00
Closed on Tuesdays

Admission to the Sursock Museum is free of charge.

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