

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Lara Atallah 'If Walls Could Talk'

Location: Ayyam Gallery, Beirut

Opening: Tuesday, May 22, 2012

Dates: May 22 – June 20 2012



From May 22 until June 20, Ayyam Gallery Beirut will debut the series that won second place at the 2011 Shahbab Ayyam Photography Competition, 'If Walls Could Talk' by the exceptionally talented emerging Lebanese photographer, Lara Atallah.

Lara Atallah lends a voice to the current social problems and dissatisfactions encountered by the Lebanese in an urban environment through her photographic portrayal of various issues. Atallah states, "My aim is to tackle the issue, the photography is a means not an end." In this exhibition, 'If Walls Could Talk', Lara Atallah unveils two societal problems for consideration.

The first is gentrification; that silent pressure which quietly and powerfully alters a landscape and its social history, and forces families from their homes. When one thinks of gentrification, one wholly considers the ramifications of the people in the areas who are forced to evacuate. What is not readily considered is the loss of architectural heritage and more importantly, the loss of basic necessities for the area, such as a place for public education of the society's youth. These by-products of gentrification form the second societal problem for consideration in this exhibition.

'If Walls Could Talk' features twelve images taken within an abandoned public school on Bliss Street in Beirut. Beautifully capturing light and shade playfully dancing among the dust-covered tile-work and softly caressing the scrolling ironwork of the staircases, shadows are thrown, creating anamorphic forms to occupy the halls where young lives once took shape. Yet the abandoned silence is deafening and traces of these past lives are carelessly discarded within. While each image is aesthetically pleasing and poetically recounts the abandoned silence, it also harkens to a distant memory, a discarded story of youth that has been hiding in the cavities of one's mind and now flashes forth with brilliance when gazing upon these desolate scenes. It begs the question of memory of place. If the edifice is destroyed do the memories live on? Can walls that no longer stand tell the stories they have quietly witnessed?

Modernization brings a lack of authenticity, erasing the soul of a place. 'If Walls Could Talk' does not merely romanticize the disappearing architectural heritage of the city, it highlights the social and economical costs of the demolition. Lara Atallah observes gentrification transforming the demography of the Lebanese capital, causing the death of a heritage and the exodus of those who can no longer afford life in the city. Her first solo exhibition sheds light on the resulting, and often overlooked, neglect for the basic societal needs caused by

the destructive forces of gentrification.

Lara Atallah was born in Beirut in 1989 and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Design from the American University of Beirut. Since graduating, she has dedicated her work to address social issues, translating her sentiments across different medias, from podcasts to writings and photography. Atallah has since expanded her work with a new series documenting everything from street vendors to construction sites, with the aim to capture the complex layers of Beirut life. Placing second in the 2011 Shabab Ayyam Photography Competition in Dubai in 2011, her photographs have since been sold in the 12th and 13th editions of the Young Collectors Auction organized by Ayyam Auctions in Dubai. In 2012, Lara Atallah became the first recipient of the Khaled Ead Samawi Scholarship and will begin studies towards her MFA in Photography.

Since opening in 2006 Ayyam Gallery has become one of the most prominent galleries in the Middle East, with four exhibition spaces throughout the region, notably in Syria, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates. Ayyam Gallery proudly represents some of today's most recognized emerging and established Arab artists. For more information visit www.ayyamgallery.com

For interviews with the artist or any further details, please contact us at +961 1 374450 or email beirut@ayyamgallery.com