

STÉPHANIE SAADÉ

Interdisciplinary artist with a penchant for raw materials, found and discarded objects and the exact reproduction of forms. In a shop tucked away in the suburbs of Beirut, which is full of chirping birds, she found her electrician, who can reconstruct any cable for her distilled replicas.

Why do you find yourself working in Beirut today as an artist?

It's both by choice and not by choice, because it's the place in which I was born and raised. But it's true that in the last few years I have been travelling a lot. I studied in Paris, and after that I went to China, then I was a resident in Maastricht, and so leaving and returning became part of my work. I think it's important for me to be in Beirut because there are a lot of materials here that I use in my work, which I can't find abroad, items arising especially from the chaos of the country's recent history. My work doesn't just depart from the material but the material plays a big role. So, for example when I decide to use 24 carat gold, it's usually for the properties of this material and it's not mixed with other elements. In short, I guess my first answer to your question is that I need to be here in order to make the work, and the second is I need to leave and come back often so that another kind of work can emerge.

What came to your mind when you found the discarded cables, before reproducing them in the series *Logic Remains*?

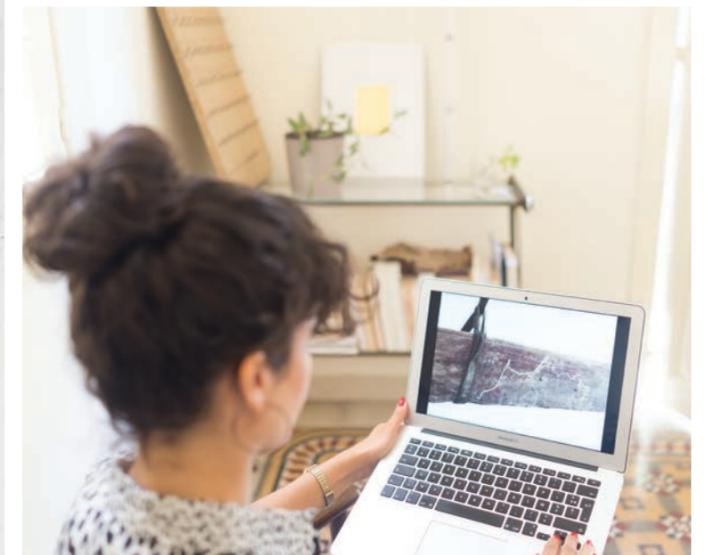
It was a kind of realisation, that moment when things appear to you, which passed by unnoticed though they are all around you. I often look at the ground when I'm walking – and these cables are everywhere in Beirut. When you find a fragment, the first thing you do is mentally try and reconstitute the full object. So I steal the object from its context, also because it doesn't really belong to anyone.

Are there other works that relate in this way to what you find in the spaces around you?

There is the *Re-enactments* series, based on objects that I come across by chance and which are layered and poetic. In this series I reproduce the object in question. The idea is not to document but to really go through the process of making it again. In this way, I can understand that logic which is different from mine. It could be the wonderfully minimalist



Opposite page: Stéphanie Saadé at her studio and detail of an apple gilded with 24-carat gold, from the *Golden Apple* pair. Photography by Isaac Sullivan
This page: Clockwise from top. *The Second Space*. 2017. Old wooden beam, three brass itineraries, belts, beam: 29 x 29 x 460 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Marfa' gallery; Stéphanie Saadé in her studio. Photography by Isaac Sullivan; *Graceful Degradation*. 2013. 40 x 270cm. Welded iron, stainless steel and brass. Image courtesy the artist and Grey Noise, Marfa', Akinci and Anne Barrault galleries



valet parking boards that hold keys or anything that's not art, or made by artists, but has a decorative purpose. The idea of the double is important in these re-enactments, where you have the original, which has little importance, is on the street somewhere and gradually disappears with time. The reproduction will outlast the original, since it has become art.

It's a commentary on the positioning of art object versus ordinary object.

One object is in one place

and the other is travelling to exhibitions, constantly at a different elastic distance from its original. So I'm interested in these pairs, which you don't see together.

You've somehow put them together.

Without either one replacing the other.

In the case of your use of gold, is it a replacement for something symbolic and intangible like a memory, an act of effacement?



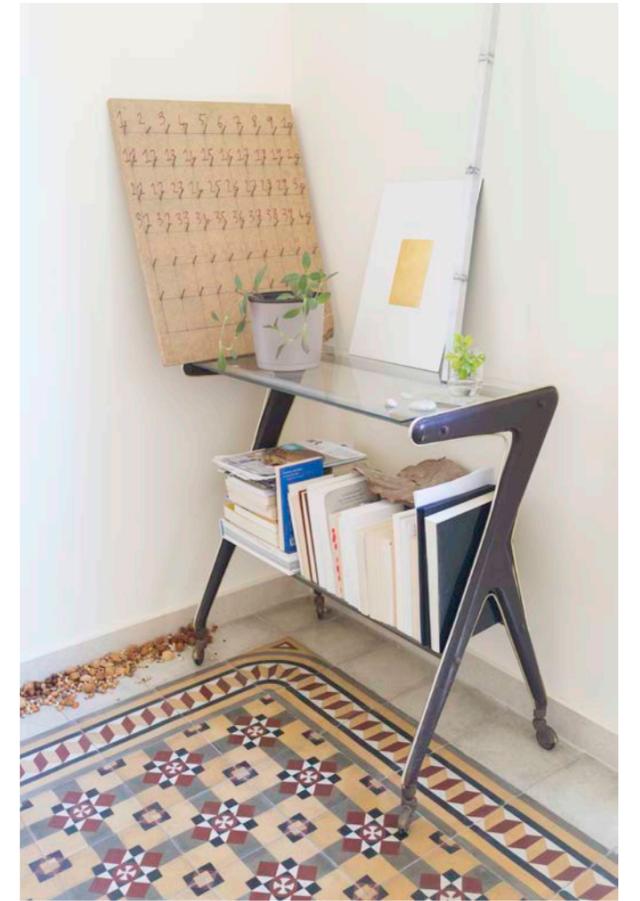
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Yes, *Golden Memories* is hiding a childhood image underneath the gold surface and you may recognise that it's the outline of a photo, because of the rounded corners – a vintage format that we don't use anymore. But though it's a very thin layer of gold, it's totally opaque and you cannot see anything behind it. Strangely, when people look at it in exhibitions, they do have the impression of seeing images – the shiny surface of the gold creates a kind of projection. It becomes a screen on which the viewers can project their own images or imagine what is underneath. Though I've lost and abstracted a photo, the form will last a long time due to the quality of the metal.

A running motif in your work is how you inscribe personal trajectories, such as in *A Map of Good Memories*, where you placed 20 good memories on a golden topography on the floor. But although you allowed that symbolic landscape to be altered by being stepped on, the brass lines for the trajectories in *The Second Space* was more inaccessible in a way. *The Second Space* was shown in Marfa' gallery and the beam

comes from my grandfather's old shop in downtown, which he lost during the war. My father had taken it and installed it in our house. I considered this beam to be a witness of Beirut somehow, of its downfall and its aftermath. But since it was also in our house since I was born, it was the witness of my whole childhood. I inserted brass lines to trace three trajectories corresponding to the routes I would take to school. Strongly anchored in my memory and my body, they take the form and thickness of the wood's veins. The idea of calling it *The Second Space* was the idea of not having the trajectories with any cartographic indications, but rather placing them in this second space which also allows the public to identify and to relate to them because they don't know where the lines are starting from or ending. It was very moving to bring this beam down, leaving a trace on the walls of the house, where it was stored for twenty years.

Which brings me to our last question, or fill-in-the-gap. To you, Beirut is...
It is one point on this whole map in which I'm weaving my work.



Stéphanie Saadé's studio and balcony. Photography by Isaac Sullivan



Above. Left: *A Map of Good Memories*. 2015. 300 cm. 24 carat gold on floor. Photography by Marco Pinarelli
Right: *Nostalgic Geography*. 2013. Printed map, mirror stainless steel track. 83 x 83 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Grey Noise, Marfa', Akinci and Anne Barrault galleries
Below right: Stéphanie Saadé in her living room. Photography by Isaac Sullivan

