

A P E A L



Within the framework of "A Museum in the Making", **The Association for the Promotion and Exhibition of the Arts in Lebanon (APEAL)** with the contribution of **Temporary Art Platform (T.A.P)**, has commissioned twelve Lebanese contemporary artists to intervene in four daily newspapers: *Al Akhbar*, *Assafir*, *L'Orient Le Jour* and *The Daily Star*.
curator: Amanda Abi Khalil

IN TODAY'S PAPER

Haig Aivazian intervenes with drawings and texts taking as starting point a construction site on hold since 2004, at a stone's throw from the Daily Star's Headquarters in Al Markazia. The selection is a part of *Ivy Usurps the Place of Laurels*, a series exploring historical motifs and motives, to investigate archeology and architecture as powerful tools that shape ideology, and that have constructed visions of the world from the very first formulations of our global imaginary. The works mainly focus on displacements of earth, that occur in three kinds of constructions sites: sports stadia, luxury apartment buildings, and museums.

Haig Aivazian is an artist based in Beirut.

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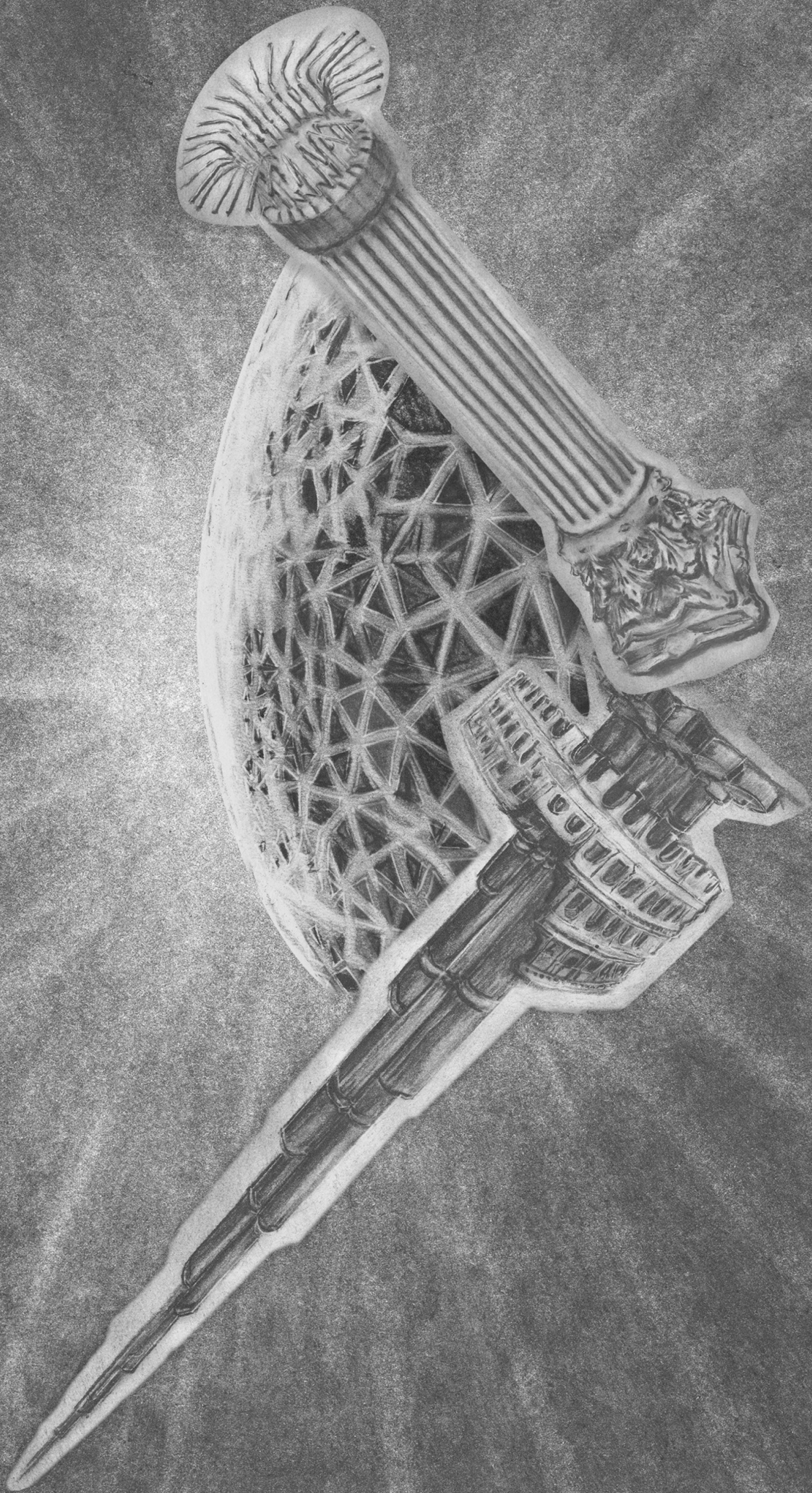
**WORKS
ON PAPER**

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Ivy Usurps the Place of Laurels, 2016
Digital collage of charcoal drawings of Colisco,
Rome; Buri Khalifa, Dubai; dome of the Louvre,
Abu Dhabi; base of a Roman column, Beirut;
concrete foundations of Guggenheim, Abu Dhabi.



Rome is Not in Rome

HAIG AIVAZIAN

Maybe architecture itself has become information. Information not as text in a book or text in code on a digital device, but information in activity: invisible, but pervasive activity that controls how objects will be organized and circulated in the world.

Keller Easterling

1- A Stone's Throw Away

At The Daily Star newspaper offices in the Markazia building in downtown Beirut, a stubborn odor seeps in from the outside, no matter how tightly the sliding aluminum windows are sealed. The Markazia is a stone's throw from the iconic Riad El Solh square, which is adjacent to The Landmark Beirut -- a development meant to house luxury hotels, high-end furnished apartments and haute couture retail outlets. The project has been on hold since 2004, due to considerable archeological findings on the plot.

These sorts of findings are unsurprising, given the fact that underneath the asphalt of much of Beirut's Commercial District, there lie layers of archeological remnants from the various civilizations that comprise the city's deep history. Fragments of ancient architectural elements and foundational footprints have been unearthed since the end of Lebanon's civil wars in 1990, and remain on view in various plots in the city centre, surrounded by luxury developments.

In the summer of 2015, Beirut was covered in heaps of accumulated garbage, festering under a particularly hot summer's sun. Angry inhabitants periodically set the trash on fire, sending billowing black smoke into the sky. Due to its proximity to the parliament building, Riad El Solh square had in recent months become the meeting point for large anti-government and anti-corruption protests triggered by the government's inability to provide citizens with even the simplest of services, such as trash collection. It is that summer that slogans were spray painted and drawn onto the hoarding of The Landmark, likening government ministers to human garbage.

Sifting through garbage is an important part of how archeologists learn about ancient peoples' living habits. And no doubt the many found, and many more lost, archeological artifacts have something to do with the persistent odor that Daily Star employees have been complaining about. The statue of Riad El Solh can see over the hoarding and is witness to the apparitions and dis-appearitions of earth and shadow, artifacts and civilizations.

2- Restoration

It would seem that regardless of how dire the economic or political situation, construction booms in Lebanon. From large retail areas to luxury developments and private mu-seums, it is difficult to find a correlation between hardship and economic downturn on the one hand and the sheer density of construction cranes on the other. Given how frustratingly difficult it can be to accomplish even the most minute administrative errand in Beirut, one can only imagine what a tangled mess of red tape matters of land, construction and ownership must be -- a fact that surely resonates through much of the so-called MENASA region, from Alexandria to Marrakech.

It took Bruno Frisoni, head designer at Roger Vivier -- the Parisian maison credited with inventing the stiletto heel -- quite some time to navigate the tricky terrain of Moroccan bureaucracy to acquire the permits needed to own and restore a home in Tangiers in 2013. Then came the part that was closer to Frisoni's heart: decoration. For the flooring he would choose various kinds of marble, matching them with traditional

zellige tiles. For decisions relating to color schemes for fabrics, leather, furniture and the such, Frisoni would summon Matisse's paintings of views of Tangiers, as well as the aquarelles of seminal French Romantic painter Eugene Delacroix, made during his travels to the country in the early-mid nineteenth century.

The 2013 'Art Bonus' law has led to a boom in private money coming to the rescue of the ancient ruins that pepper Rome. Footing the city's historical maintenance bill are the likes of Fendi and Bulgari, though Saudi royalty has also chipped in on some of the cost. Ten years prior, Roger Vivier had merged with Italian luxury retail mega group Tod's, which for its part, is benefitting from philanthropic tax breaks by taking on the controversial 30 million dollar endeavor of restoring the city's most recognizable land-mark: The Coliseum.

3- Twenty Arms and Forty-Eight Hours

Upon landing in Morocco in 1832, "among the strangest people", Eugene Delacroix was seized with great restlessness. Having crossed the Mediterranean by tagging along with a diplomatic mission from France, it was as if the painter were seeing mirages refracted in front of his eyes from a time and place, long and far away. "Rome is no longer in Rome," he would relay. "It is right here at my doorstep."

Fearing the disappearance of these visions of men and women clad in white garb, as if teleported "from the time of Homer", Delacroix would record his sightings like one awakes from slumber, rushing to transcribe his dreams before they dissipate into the start of the day. "Imagine my friend," he would write to Jean Baptiste Pierret -- an em-ployee of the Interior Ministry in Paris and long-time friend and correspondent, "what it is like to see lying in the sun, strolling in the streets, mending old shoes; consular figures, Catos, Brutus's... I would need twenty arms and forty-eight hours in a day to be able to give an idea of all this." But with his existing two arms, and in addition to his prolific letter writing, Delacroix would frantically fill his drawing books with notes in pencil and ink. More than anything else, the books were filled with watery aquarelles, often only partially colored in, with unpainted areas simply assigned names of colors to be filled in at some later stage.

The notes were impressions, names of places, figures, descriptions and so on: an eth-nographic exercise... Though from the start of his trip, the painter would express serious reservations about the scientific value of his notebooks -- especially once deracinated out of the maelstrom of colors refracted from landscapes, zellige tiles, djellabas, architectural façades and interiors -- and brought back to grey, dreary and spleen-filled Paris. Most crucially, the books were in fact an exercise in understanding the deflections of the sun, how they affected images and how inseparable those images were from color. Reflecting on what paint should strive to do, he would write: "...there are neither light or dark shades. There is a colored mass for each object, variously reflected on either side." These realizations will later be developed into theories on light and the division of colors in painting -- the very theories that Paul Signac will channel as the founding principles of Impressionism in his book D'Eugene Delacroix au néo-Impressionisme (1911).

4- Mirages I

Today, the Aswan Dam enables the irrigation of large swathes of the Nile delta, but at the time of Napoleon French troops, in their thick, itchy woolen frocks, crossed nothing but scorching desert in their advance toward Cairo. While the troops literally died of thirst, mercilessly taunted by the desert's refractions of large bodies of water in the sandy distance, mathematician Gaspard Monge was fascinated by the mirages, and became the first to produce an optical analysis of the apparitions.

In 1798, the year Delacroix was born, Napoleon Bonaparte's Egyptian Expedition de-parted to the shores of the "city built by Alexander the Great". The goals of the expedition were manifold. Though, on a military level, the mission was riddled with spectacular and costly defeats for the French, the trip would produce one of the great advances of the Enlightenment. The French fleet included savants from a wide array of disciplines who would constitute The Institute of Egypt. The findings of this group -- its obsessive documentation of Egypt's ancient ruins, flora and fauna, and the contemporary state of its inhabitants, crafts and architecture -- would be compiled into the epic Description of Egypt.

Many of the intricate drawings which took up 11 of the 20 volumes of Description of Egypt, were drawn by debonair artist Vivant Denon, who became fascinated by the an-cient ruins of Egypt and was known to draw with incredible speed, often on horseback. Legend had it, that his passion, thirst and fascination for ruins, enabled him to draw while bullets whistled by his head and in otherwise horrid conditions.

It was this lead flying past Denon that Nicolas Conté -- member of the Institute who had lost his eye experimenting on his invention of the hot air balloon -- would use to create the lead pencil, after the French artists had exhausted their drawing supplies in their euphoric reproductions of the discoveries around them. In fact sanguine, the color most commonly associated with the Conté crayons, became the overwhelming tool of choice for neoclassical artists drawing from Greek and Roman Antiquity.

Bonaparte would appoint Denon to the position of Director of the Musée du Louvre shortly after the end of the Egyptian Expedition, and many of the artifacts that Denon often personally looted would end up in the museum's collection. Indeed Denon was not always satisfied with simply recreating artifacts on paper, capturing sacred objects, animal spirits, deities, and secret languages past. After all, drawing did seem uncannily close to the seizure inherent to looting: a resonance not lost on the British troops who sought to get their hands on the entirety of the Institute's knowledge production, in re-turn for granting the French safe passage. They would eventually settle for the Rosetta Stone, which resides within The British Museum to this day, letting the French hold onto their papers.

5- Mirages II

By the time Denon was at the head of the museum, Hubert Robert was just a few years away from death. He had designed the changes to the Louvre's Grande Galerie and illustrated its projected use -- just two years prior to Denon's Egyptian adventures -- in an iconic painting that was a veritable demonstration of the ideological ramifications of one point perspective. The painting was of the long hall of the museum vanishing into the distance, with the linear history of western painting on its walls, culminating with the French School. While Robert's illustrious career included a substantial stint as keeper of the Louvre, it began with his fascination with Roman ruins, which he painted relentlessly during and well beyond his eleven-year stay in Italy. His fascination with the passage of time was such that it was as if he saw ruins everywhere. In a twin painting, he imagined the gallery he was helping refurbish both as the apogee of Western civilization, and as a decayed ruin with grass growing on its rocks and peasants using its artworks for firewood.

6- Mirages III

Perhaps the most important change that Hubert Robert proposed to the interior of the Louvre was the skylight that goes along the length of the space, providing natural light-ing to the galleries to this day. Two centuries later, when president François Mitterrand sought to rejuvenate his country's cultural institutions, it was the first time that a foreign architect would be invited to tamper with the Louvre. I.M. Pei proposed the

now-iconic skylight above the museum's main courtyard, the Cour Napoleon. The new entrance to the museum took the shape of a steel and glass pyramidal structure which maintained the proportions of the Great Pyramid of Giza. It was as if, in exchange for acquiring this new pyramid, there was no longer need for the French to hold onto the second obelisk, which twinned the gifted one on Place de la Concorde, but remained at the entrance of the Ancient temple in Luxor. It would be symbolically returned to Egypt by Mitterrand in the nineties. More than half of the surviving obelisks of Ancient Egypt however, remain scattered around the world, with most of them in Rome.

In 2007, the Louvre Museum once again called on the services of an architect for an expansion project, and though the firm they chose to call upon was that of Frenchman Jean Nouvel, this time it was the museum itself that was no longer on French soil. Alongside other global institutions such as the Guggenheim, New York University and a British Museum affiliate, the Louvre was to open up shop in the Cultural District of Saadiyat Island. The same year marked the biggest upgrade by the United Arab Emirates' air defense capabilities, with among others, the acquisition of thirty Mirage 2000 fighter jets from French armament giant Dassault, in addition to the modernizing of its existing fleet of over thirty jets of the same make.

The dome of The Louvre Abu Dhabi, a flattened orb partially hovering over sea water, is said to have been inspired by traditional Islamic architectural elements such as mosques, madrasas and mausoleums. Its intricately perforated surface allows rays of sun to create what Nouvel refers to as a "Rain of Light" effect -- reminiscent of the late-ice-work of the traditional mahogany mashrabiya window screens, which so intrigued Napoleon's men upon entering Cairo.

7- Mirages IV

Jean Nouvel often works with highly precise prototypes to better approximate his draw-ings into experience, but he is clear about the fact that some aspects of the design can only really be seen and decided during construction. The dome-like canopy of the mu-seum in Abu Dhabi is comprised of ten layers, each with an intricate pattern of holes: it is likely that even the most technologically advanced renderings could not have predicted the exact effects of the light traveling through these openings.

Nouvel had come up with a similarly perforated design in 2004, for a project called The Landmark in Beirut's Downtown Commercial District. It is rumored that, here again, the French architect was inspired by local motifs for his design, which -- with its many ir-regular cavities -- looks like the bullet-riddled structures that had mined the area during the Lebanese Civil Wars: a projected ruin à la Hubert Robert. Since the unearthing of Roman-era archeological findings, construction of The Landmark was suspended, shortly after breaking ground. The found objects were removed from sight, displaced like many of the discovered ruins in the area, not least of which is the Roman hippodrome, long sought by archeologists.

The hoarding which still encircles the plot contains drawings of landmark pieces of ar-chitecture from around the globe. Below the angry slogans likening politicians to human garbage, the buildings are rendered in one continuous white line linking the geographically distant icons. By walking around the circumference of the development, one can travel from the Lebanese capital to the Statue of Liberty, to the Eiffel Tower, to the Burj Khalifa, to the Coliseo, thus circling the earth's circumference in a matter of minutes.

The objects and architectural fragments found during the construction of The Landmark Beirut and other sites in downtown, have already been encrypted into this periph-eric highway of global cities: a continuous line where objects, buildings and bodies circulate, albeit at varying speeds. Through this hoarding the artifacts can make their way to the brand new

museum in Abu Dhabi, where some of Denon's looted goods -- some-times literally dynamited off of the walls of sacred temples in Egypt -- would already be waiting, having employed similar routes to arrive there.

Many of Delacroix's notebooks from Morocco, now in the Louvre collection, were exhibited at another Nouvel building: the Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA) in Paris in 1994. Though Nouvel again found inspiration for his façade in the mashrabiya, he introduced photographic mechanics to determine the relationship of the apertures in the building to sunlight. Other areas of the structure contain allusions to Ancient Egypt. Delacroix's colors so strongly affected by the Moroccan sun have become like the mirages that taunted Napoleon's men: watery shapes refracted from the Louvre in Paris, channeled through the shutters of the IMA's façade, to be projected upside down through the latticed roof of the Louvre in Abu Dhabi.

In the world delineated on The Landmark hoarding, the colors of which have been faded by exposure to the Mediterranean sun, the lost hippodrome engulfed by the earth in a Beirut development, pops-up in Rome to meet the Coliseo through the scaffolding which imprisons it. The Coliseo watches over the construction of Zaha Hadid's Al-Warkah Stadium in Doha. A construction worker who fails to abide by the midday break rule on a hot summer day in Doha, results in a worker suffering sunstroke in Abu Dhabi.

8- A World of Worlds

A copy of the first edition of the Description of Egypt is located in the library of Alexan-dria, and has been digitized for online consultation. Bibliotheca Alexandrina director Ismail Serageldin expresses hope that the library -- whose building is covered by the alphabets of the world -- might be a "worthy successor" to its ancient counterpart, as well as an active embodiment of the city's rich 2300 year history.

In 245 BC, less than a century after Alexander the Great founded the city, Eratosthenes was appointed Head of the Great Library of Alexandria. Credited to have invented the field of geography as we know it today, Eratosthenes described and mapped the entire earth -- dividing it into climate zones, structuring the surface of the globe into a grid, and using parallels and meridians to network its surface.

While reading in the library, Eratosthenes had come across an account claiming that on the day of the summer solstice in Syene -- known today as Aswan -- the sun was reflected perfectly and in its entirety, deep in the earth at the bottom of a well, without so much as casting a single shadow on the walls of the structure. Eratosthenes was intrigued by this peculiar play of the sun in Syene -- all the more so given that, on the same day and at the same hour, pillars cast a significant shadow in Alexandria. This disparity confirmed to him that the position and angle of the respective cities in relation to the direction of the rays of the sun were not the same, and that the earth was there-fore surely curved. Eratosthenes became convinced that he could determine the circumference of this curved globe by measuring the angle of the shadows cast in Alexandria, and their distance to the sun trapped in the well of Syene.

The measurement commonly in use at the time was the stadion, a unit based on the standard length of sports stadiums. Five-thousand stadia separated Eratosthenes' pil-lar from the well of Syene, and the librarian's calculations established the circumference of the earth at 250,000 stadia. The sun was reflected perfectly at the bottom of the cylindrical well of Syene, engulfed by the earth. There was not a shadow to be seen on the Tropic of Cancer. One had to walk five thousand stadium lengths to the North to find them, cast long from structures protruding to the skies.

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