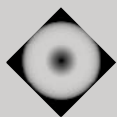


لغة

*In the blink of an eye*



MAY

in the  
blink of  
an eye



لغة

*A series of commissions  
on billboards in Beirut*

OCTOBER

2024

*A series of commissions on billboards in Beirut*

# infiltrate — permeate occupy

*"People expect the billboard to be a site for advertising products, lifestyles, or services. But if an artist infiltrates the banal billboard format with another kind of communication - the «wrong» message appearing in a familiar context - then a glitch in the viewer's assumptions might make them see this communication differently. This is how billboard art can cut through much of the white noise of our day."*

- Laura Steward Heon, *Billboard: art on the road*

Beirut is a visually polluted city: over-saturated with media advertisements, on highways and street corners, meant to disturb a passerby's horizon, from long distances as they're driving, on both sides of a highway, on both sides of a billboard sign, to invasive street corners, as they walk around the busy city walkways. Every major intersection, building façade, electric pole, and telephone booth, has turned into a space for anyone to infiltrate, permeate, and occupy: homemade advertisements for small business and shops glued up on white A4s to glossy blown-up advertisements trying to sell you the products and lifestyles - a commentary on the context and various overlapping crises: luxury travel, second passports, hair transplants, and the year's hottest car. The media signscape has also been co-opted by the cultural scene in Beirut: graffiti, murals, collages, and event posters that have accumulated over the years.

The era of billboard advertisement has also brought with it urban changes: the metal structures that support the images are brought up as easily as the images that they carry. Overnight, new architectural monsters disrupt the urban landscape, ushering a generation of violent images to make their way, in their repetitive encounters with their audience. The strategy is interesting to observe; with targeted advertising placing advertisements in specific locations to better address a certain demographic. As a medium and a structure, the billboard is ripe for intervention: a porous medium between image and audience, allowing a constant conversation between the two.

The billboard is inherently pliable, open to be manipulated and used. Blank enough to chameleonize; they are spaces of spectatorship and viewership, unmediated, each one informed by the landscape that surrounds it, in a continuous loop of feeding an audience an image all the while being fed by the gaze of those who view it.

We've become used to the advertising image, so much so that we are numb to what appears overnight. Over time, our continuous exposure to the advertisement reinforces the brand message, and the image is absorbed into our subconscious in the hopes of disrupting our purchasing patterns.

At the beginning of the crisis in 2019, the sudden denudement of the billboard from its image - and thus its sudden reappearance of it as a structure - served as a stark symbol of the failure of the advertisement image in the face of decay. There was nothing to consume, nothing to sell, nothing to feed into the visual spew of everyday life. The sudden halt of advertisement images felt like a guilt-ridden move; an indicator of a failure, of the loss of desire, a direct correlation between an economic downfall and the billboard stripped of its image - a phenomenon beautifully portrayed in Randa Mirza's three channel video installation *#crisisbillboards* (2021).

What kind of image holds up in the face of failure?

During the uprising in 2019, the billboards also became a space for public outcry, providing structural support for impromptu interventions, questioning the role of the public and private sectors in the face of the crisis - much like other public structures in the city (the Egg, the statue in Martyr's square, and major city roundabouts).

In the past couple of years, we've seen the demise of the image, iconography and representation in full juxtaposition to a failing political state. In January 2024, TAP reached out to ten visual artists to create context-responsive, socially-engaged works that occupy the space of the billboard - conceptually reflecting and subverting the commentary on the failure of its classic image: the advertisement.

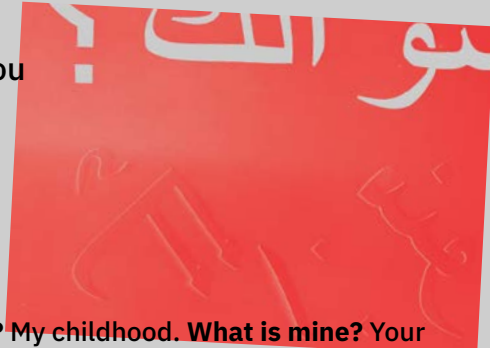
The billboard format requires the contemporary artist to address a wide general audience and engage unsuspecting passersby with great visual clarity. The use of billboards and the subversion of the media signscape by contemporary artists is inscribed in a rich political and social history. Dating back to the 1980s with the advent of the billboard advertisement, artists like Jenny Holzer, the Guerrilla Girls, John Fekner, Félix González-Torres and Tania Bruguera began using the larger-than-life format to subvert the consumerist-driven agenda, by infiltrating the public spaces, permeating the billboard medium, and occupying the billboard structure.

TAP finds in commissioning public artworks a unique opportunity to grant contemporary artists a space to expand their field of practice outside of their studios and white-cube spaces. There have been instances when artworks have been displayed in a public setting, however, we are more interested in asking artists to think more critically about what it means to practice art in public: with and around the audience for whom the work has been created, and to allow the work to be molded and mediated by the experiences of the audience.

In 2021, in the context of Art, Ecology and the Commons, TAP invited multidisciplinary artist Nasri Sayegh to intervene on a billboard on the edge of the Beirut RiverLESS forest. In *Paysages exquis*, he blurs as much as outlines the frontier between the highway and sylvestrian landscape. We then invited Omar Fakhoury and Christian Zahr to intervene on the same billboard; they flipped it and turned it into a terrace, a platform that was open to the public to use as a stage. In 2023, in the framework of the public art exhibition On rooftops and under the ground, we commissioned Lara Tabet to intervene on a billboard close to Ain El Mraisseh, where she speculates on releasing the strain of Human Neuropeptide Y bacterium into the Beirut water system.

Today, we have invited Annabel Daou, Basile Ghosn, Dalia Baassiri, Dia Mrad, Mahmoud El Safadi, Nathalie Harb, Randa Mirza, Renoz, Tamara Kalo, and Yasmina Hilal, whose works will pop up across different billboards in Beirut over the summer. The artworks will be up for two weeks, living amongst other advertisement images, infiltrating the urban landscape of Beirut, completely permeable to the experience of the city and its inhabitants. We will be announcing the date and location of each intervention on our Instagram page (@temporaryartplatform). You might also encounter them as you walk or drive by the streets of Beirut. Hopefully, they will alter your day if they are on your route. In our conversations with the artists over the course of three months, we touched on aspects of immediacy, vulnerability, the use of language, borders and demarcations, the relationship to the city, the world of advertisement, notions of scale and intimacy, urban landscape and threatened ecologies. Each work is imbued with political and social undertones, and each work is meant to be encountered: a subtle infiltration of the public spaces we inhabit, a permeation of the billboard medium as we've come to know it, and an occupation of an urban structure.

Annabel Daou  
انا بيل ضو



**What is yours? My childhood. What is mine? Your presence. What is yours? My mistakes. What is mine? Your courage. What is yours? My past. What is mine? Your past. What is yours? My heartache. What is mine? Your voice. What is yours? My pain. What is mine? Your struggle. What is yours? My name. What is mine? Your name. What is yours? Time. What is mine? Time. What is yours? My doll. What is mine? Your life. What is yours? The joy of being on a mountain. What is mine? Everything I have to give. What is yours? My self. What is mine? Your self. What is yours? Almost nothing. What is mine? Your question.**

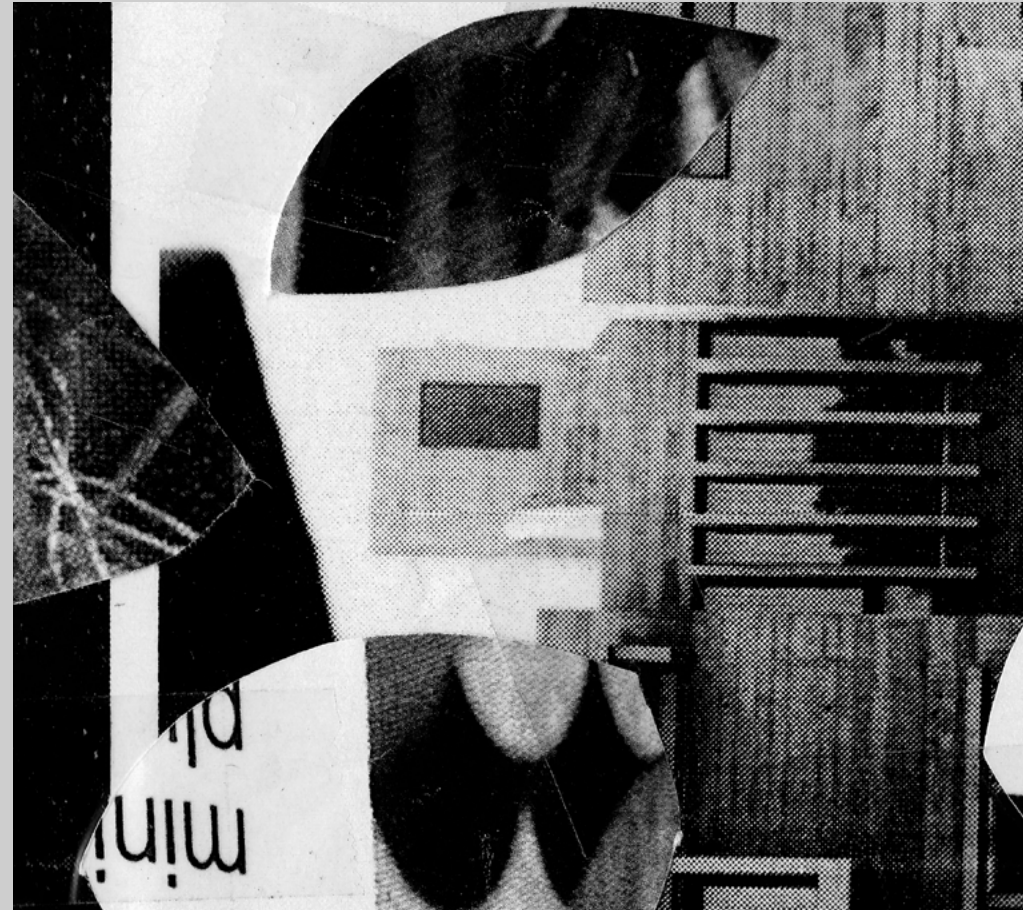
The process of determining what belongs to oneself often engages one in questions of what belongs to others. This work asks viewers to reflect on notions of difference, of separation, of the demarcation lines between personal, collective, and exclusionary forms of belonging and possession. It simultaneously invokes the shattering of meaning as words slip out of our reach or dissipate as they are spoken. Who is being asked and who is asking?

*Annabel Daou's work takes form in paper-based constructions, sound, performance and video. Daou suspends, carves out or records the language of daily life: from the ordinary or mundane to the intimately personal and urgently political.*

Basile Ghosn  
بسيل غصن

An abstract swap, a long distance call.

*Using anonymous archival images, Basile Ghosn recreates urban landscapes and architectures through drawing, the use of scotch tape, plexiglass, photocopying and printmaking techniques. The manipulation of anachronistic elements serves in his works a Lo-Fi re-reading of architecture.*







## Dalia Baassiri داليا بعاصيري

I bathe a small olive tree with native handcrafted soap, a perpetuation of my practice of documenting ritualistic acts of cleansing as testaments of care. Much like the gentle cleansing of a departed one before being laid to rest, I pay homage to the tens of thousands of olive trees that have been an intentional target in an ongoing war.

*Dalia Baassiri's interdisciplinary work stems from the parameters of the home. Finding refuge in the world of the domestic, from dust particles and houseplants, to reading glasses, and sink drains, she draws inspiration from her time spent in refuge indoors.*

## Dia Mrad ضيا مراد

Acts No. 92/160 ,92/159

The debate surrounding Lebanon's «old rent» laws reflects divergent perspectives between tenants and landlords, entrenched within legislative frameworks such as Rent Acts No. 92/159 and 92/160 enacted in 1992. These laws established rent control for pre1992-properties, maintaining rates below market values due to socioeconomic instability. Proposed amendments aim to rectify these disparities by updating rental rates while safeguarding long-term tenants. Against the backdrop of the current economic crisis and significant devaluation of the Lebanese lira akin to conditions in 1992, these discussions carry heightened significance.

The legislation is presently under parliamentary review, awaiting further study.  
The time to act is now.

*Dia Mrad investigates urban materiality and symbolism and captures urban landscapes embodying human experience. His work reflects interactions with the physical environment and inviting contemplation of connections formed between people and material.*





## Nathalie Harb

### نتلي حرب

Beirut's signscape is wildly populated by projections into a safer future, a rhetoric centered around private ownership, overseas investment, catastrophe insurance and the commodification of nationality. With these billboards we're reminded of a past that's projected onto a shinier future. We understand rest, sleep, and pleasure to be acts of resistance through which we can uncover schizophrenic narratives. Disrupting the advertising sequence is aimed at halting the aggressive noise for a short while, to rest in rebellion, to rest elsewhere away from the speculative future drawn on and for us.

*Nathalie Harb engages with the complex interplay between public and personal space, exploring themes of shelter, care, and conflict. Her practice draws on collaborations between diverse practitioners to create projects spanning urban interventions, theater, and exhibitions that question the notion of home by proposing an alternative use of our habitat.*



## Mahmoud El Safadi

### محمود الصفدي

A body as a landscape, a horizon cuts across skin, a line keeps memory to measure time: a horizon to gaze across, a mark to surpass, a border to transgress. The night is quiet; can we stay or escape? If we touch, would we understand each other? Were you waving or drowning? Have we tried all that we could?

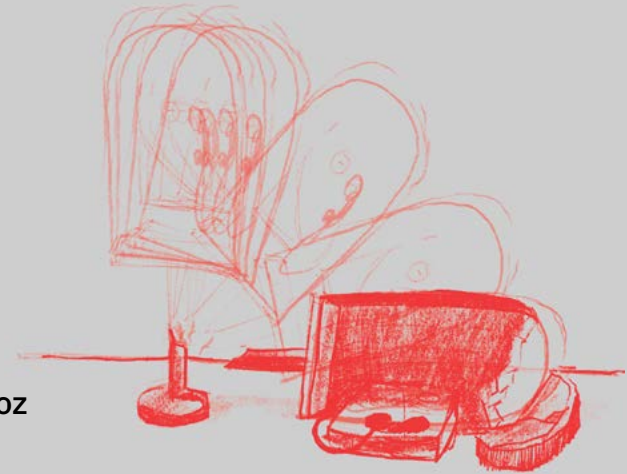
*Mahmoud El Safadi's work is informed by his personal experience of migration and displacement to explore the complex realities of globalization and the contemporary world's shifting and often polarized nature. He uses the mediums of video, photography, sculpture, and installation to question the complex relationships between nature and culture, material and lived heritage, and challenging conventional notions of what is "natural" and what is "artificial".*

## Randa Mirza

رندا ميرزا

Keep your mental balance when confronted with a foe,  
If you are poised and tranquil when all around is strife,  
Be assured that you have mastered the most vital thing  
in life

*Randa Mirza manipulates and constructs images to reveal the discourses inherent in all depiction, on the tenuous border between fiction and reality. She seeks to review normalized, gendered and orientalist illustrations by bringing into light the hidden symbolic, social and political paradigms.*



## Renož

رينوز

As I gaze upon the city's urban landscape, I am met with numerous monuments, structures, and objects. Often, these remnants are the residue of development projects that faltered and, neglected, become fixtures of the streets, gradually melding into the urban scenery while losing their original functionality. These objects evolve into modern ruins.

*Renož explores urban structures that have emerged in the city after the civil war and their impacts on the lived environment. His interest in broad thematics such as corruption, water scarcity, and inflation influence his work as he integrates found recurring elements (devalued currency, water trucks, road signs, telephone booths) into his studio practice.*



## Tamara Kalo تمارا كالو

This project aims to conjure an ancestral futurity in the present. As Lebanon undergoes perpetual crises, it leaves one's life within it fixated on quotidian struggles, unable to imagine a brighter tomorrow, and occasionally escaping in the nostalgia of its recent romanticized past. Working with a seven-thousand-year-old olive tree, the work muses on the notion of deep time within the framework of this living tree, imagining the deep past as well as the deep future.

The work also uses the site of the billboard to consume light during its exhibition - just as a tree photosynthesizes - rather than promote consumption. The exposure to sunlight in the present alchemizes the ancestral tree's leaves to postulate a renewed future.

*Tamara Kalo incorporates light- and time-based media to investigate narratives that shape home, displacement and collective memory and to represent the fragility of what lies between a moment in time and place and its memory.*



## Yasmina Hilal ياسمينا هلال

Through the manipulation of a singular image, a collage of an embellished hand of a mannequin speaks to the literal and figurative lengths women go to in order to reach the aesthetic standard of beauty perpetuated by media advertisements. A peculiarly attractive paste-up so odd, it becomes difficult to define.

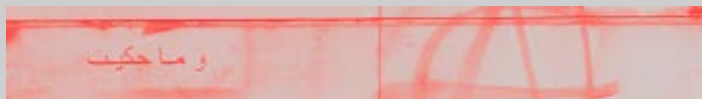
*Through experimentation with negatives and alternative photographic techniques, Yasmina Hilal creates her signature collages. Innumerable in their forms, her works are a combination of the odd and mesmerizing, of movement and stillness.*



# visual noise

- IONA STEWART

If walls could speak - a poster, a billboard, a scribble of graffiti - a cacophony of voices. Beirut is visually noisy. After reading Iraqi artist Rafa Nasiri's memoirs of Beirut and reflecting on the questions his work raised, I began to rethink my 2021 visits and conversations in Martyr's Square and the semiotics of these voices.



*"and I didn't speak"*

## Can the noise be heard?

*The pollution-greied walls of blown-out buildings around Martyr's Square are littered with A4 posters, free-written graffiti, and satirical murals. 'To where?' scribbled in permanent marker. Or, 'you monkeys, return to your cage' in a clean stencil, alongside an image of a politician. A mural-sized graffiti of a frowning pig with an upturned crown hanging over its head - a speech bubble declares 'stuff the crown up your ass'. The foreground plays host to naked wires, exposed ceilings and smashed glass that extend into the street.*

Jaworski and Thurlow describe semiotic landscapes as public areas that contain intentional visible inscriptions with the intention of meaning-making (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010). Covered in words and images—state or corporation-sanctioned and not—Martyr's Square semiotically delivered a site of competing affective regimes. In a disturbingly empty public space, the billboards, graffiti, signs, street art, and dilapidated buildings both call out for attention and seep into the din and commotion of the city's spatial narration.

*Towering above the walls, billboards advertise golden visas and Greek property, rechargeable battery-powered appliances, bitcoin alternatives to national currency and detergent for cold water. In an empty parking lot lies a billboard picturing the martyrs of August 4, on the other side, an ad for a luxury watch.*

## How can we understand the noise?

In linguistics, metapragmatics is a term describing how we discuss the appropriate use of language in context. For instance, if your colleague suggested to you that you shouldn't bring up your salary at the work party. If we apply this logic of metapragmatics to affect and other bodily and emotive ways of meaning-making, affective metapragmatics could be thought of as communication about the appropriate ways to feel, to experience things in one's body and communicate in a wider relational and embodied sense. Through affective metapragmatics, both billboards and street art contextualise and frame how people ought to feel and respond in their bodies, in the context of Lebanon's current crises.

## Can you hear the noise?

*Construction barriers obscuring ruins from view are lined with white posters depicting contorted faces, scrunched eyes, and a wide-open mouth in a constant, silent scream. "Ighdhab," (get angry) is scrawled in big red lettering on the first poster. They read "I can't live here," "I wake up screaming still," "where will I go?". The posters are torn and partly covered with recent graffiti and election posters.*

*My friend said they depict well what it feels like to fall apart inside, the silent scream of a panic attack. She asked me if I knew that feeling, that makes the hairs on your head stand, "can you feel it even though you can't hear it?... that's what it's like in this country", she said, "people can see our pain, but they don't listen".*

Her affective bodily response is both pre-linguistic and pre-emotional. The layers of messages add onto this affect. The red splattered paint amplifies the layered messages scrawled, as if they scream over each other at the viewer. They free the viewer to respond likewise to the situation. These metapragmatic values are sites of social contestation, challenging the kind of 'resilience' that moves on. The messages tell the viewer, "feel this".

*"but they don't listen"*

*Round the other side of the square stands the Le Grays hotel covered in a Lebanese flag and grey canvas reading "STANDING STRONG! TOGETHER WE SHALL RISE ONCE AGAIN. SEE YOU SOON, LE GRAY" and a mural of two doves in front of big red letters reading "HOPE".*

*"but they don't listen"*

## Can you feel anything over all the noise?

There appear to be two types of messages: one of hope, togetherness and a future by sanctioned entities displayed on billboards, shops, and hotels. Unsanctioned street arts tell a different story, they talk of cynicism, despair, anger, blame and rage. Both say, “feel this”.

*One series of billboards caught my eye. Against a red background, billboards stating “LOVE IS THE ANSWER,” “HOPE IS EVERYTHING,” both written in white, and one similar in blue lettering “PATIENCE PREVAILS.”*

This visual noise denotes a physical and emotional event. Although they don't explicitly express political aims, they are denotative of the kinaesthetic and paralinguistic bodily experiences... emotions, fear, panic etc (Guddemi 68 :2020). As Povenelli reminds us, “space and time are not built up only from socially mediated semiosis; they are built into subjects”, they are both spoken and corporeal (Povinelli :2001 402). Street art as urban narrations or texts are initiated into subjective experience through bodies - the trauma and corporeal sensations they feel “bearing the history of their physical associations” (Povinelli 402 :2001). The anxiety, the hair standing, the panic attacks, the anger, the tension are all felt in the body. These experiences are affectively reflexive in the sense that they contribute to framing an ongoing affective relationship to space, to events, to a public.

## CAN YOU HEAR OVER ALL THE NOISE?

The materiality of this street art, the repetitions, the peeling, weathering, writing over, vandalism, the physical blight on the facades all contextualise their messages, as does their location - in a square that's always been at the heart of revolutions, and overlooking the port which still bears the physical marks of its destruction. In a dialogic sense, counterpublics are built on top of counterpublics as text and images are covered over, ripped off, written on top of or supplemented. It is important to note the performance of the public address. The very action and materiality is a metapragmatic statement. For instance, a stay-painted message on a wall alerts the viewer that this is subversive, while a billboard message has been sanctioned by someone. This public address is also affective. The viewers' dispositions are given significance and validity by recognising that the street art is addressed to them. The street art addresses the chronotopic displacement of the city and is framed by the recent events: uprising, explosion, collapse, the space of the city effected by it, as well as the ongoing crisis. Ironically, the billboards – buy a passport, buy citizenship through investment abroad, buy solar panels because you have' no electricity – recognize these same events and issues by providing “solutions.”

## Where does your voice matter in this city?

Iraqi graphic artist Rafa Nasiri (2013-1940) would visit Beirut often in the 70s and 80s. In his memoirs he ponders the futility of human markings and the traces we leave in this city. Known as a sufic and calligraphic printmaker, he would photograph the city's graffiti and street posters, becoming captivated by how unintended marks such as cracked walls, rust, corroded, spontaneous writings and graffiti or cracks in alleyways - though partial and marginal - are evidence of human traces and voices. These scratchings for Nasiri were both entirely futile and forgotten and simultaneously at the heart of our spiritual impact on the earth.

Three years ago, street art felt like a situated practice of meaning-making. In hindsight, perhaps more white noise textures Beirut – scratchings on the walls, here one day, and gone the next. In 2021, when I struck up conversations with passersby in Martyrs' Square, one woman who worked in the area told me she never noticed the street art. It was just background noise.

*A couple passed by, the wife, smartly dressed in knee-high boots and a black turtleneck replied with impatience, “what, these scratchings? These aren't even graffiti, it's just people ruining this space. I have not time for this stuff...”*

*“It's not about bringing back any feelings, we never forget, my body feels it every day. Kel hada 3am bi3abbir 3an halo”*



*“and I didn't speak”*

Most of the time we're just getting by in the concurrent and compounded crisis. I can barely hear over the noise of my own head.

Several times a day it will happen that, all of a sudden, I can concentrate a bit better. My heart rate slows, my body relaxes; there's a strange lull as if the city has let a breath out. It took me a year and a half to be conscious of these perforations to the visual and sonic noise of the city. Every day, a few times a day, our neighbourhood gets an hour or two of electricity from the state. Generators suddenly splutter and halt their incessant whirl. There's a collective intermission to the thundering noise and we can hear and encounter ourselves, and each other, and our neighbourhood, just a little bit better.



Photos taken by Walid Sadek circa 1992.



Photos taken by Walid Sadek circa 1992.



TAP is a nonprofit organization committed to making another world possible, by affecting social change through contemporary art.

Founded in a region of unrelenting volatility and absent cultural policies, TAP curates the conditions for communities, private bodies and governmental institutions to recognize that contemporary artists can be allies in driving enduring social change amidst precarious contexts.

In the process, TAP creates accessible tools and production opportunities for contemporary artists, whilst rendering their practice porous and participatory, within and beyond the field of art.

TAP was founded by curator Amanda Abi Khalil and registered as a nonprofit organization in Lebanon in 2014 and France in 2020. It is based in Beirut and Paris, and its interventions take place internationally.

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**Sandra Dagher**, *cultural practitioner*

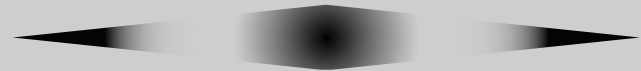
**Omar Fakhoury**, *artist*

**Maira Marques**, *curator*

**Walid Sadek**, *artist and writer*

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