

ARIANE SEVERIN is a German-born London-based photographer and artist. Projects focus on notions of travel, psycho-geography and the city with an emphasis on the Middle East. Her work has been exhibited and published in the UK and abroad. Recently her work has moved its emphasis to the medium of collage.

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Visual Art

Artist's Statement: 'Ripped'

Ariane Severin



IN 2003, I FELL IN LOVE WITH BEIRUT and moved there three years later. The city was very different from my preconceived ideas of how it would be, but I felt strangely at home. Only recently have I come to realise that it was memories of my childhood hometown, Frankfurt, which made me feel so at home: another city where many still war-ravished buildings become the stuff of youthful fantasies. Beirut subconsciously reawakened that 'ruin romanticism' in me.

As a photographer and artist I wanted to document the city, and I became intrigued by what appeared to be torn electoral posters. They not only attracted me visually – reminding me of 'décollage' works by artists like Mimmo Rotella or Wolf Vostell – but also because the violence with which the faces of the politicians were 'ripped apart' seemed to me to reveal different layers of the country's complex political situation. They sat well on the bullet-shattered walls of the city. It became apparent that these torn posters were not exclusive to the Lebanon; I found more of them on my travels to other Middle Eastern countries.

For me, these ragged fragments of political figure-heads have become symbolic of the search for a new identity in the momentum of the Arab spring, its aftermath of crushed hopes, and the collapse of faith in leaders and electoral systems. As well as, unfortunately, the violence that is so often connected to these continuing events.

I had to leave Beirut after three months, being caught up in the 2006 war. I have not returned. It was a traumatic and violent event in my life, and these posters take me back to that time which is filled with heartbreak and personal, political and historical sadness. Collage and décollage has now become the main focus of my creative work, so perhaps a seed was planted in me there on the walls of Beirut.



Ariane Severin, 'Untitled', Beirut, 2006.



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