

# BURJ EL HAWA

**Jad El Khoury, Beirut**

Growing up in Beirut, like most others of my generation, I regularly encountered the remains of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). Bullet traces, abandoned buildings, a city that never fully recovered from the war – a painful decade and a half undocumented in history books. No one wanted to answer any questions; no one wanted to talk about the war. Faced with silence and reticence, I came to the conclusion that Beirut is in denial of its painful past – the healing process of the city is on hold, and we currently live in a new form of civil war.

I see my urban interventions as a way to make a change. In 2018, I decided to transform Burj El Murr (El Murr Tower), one of Beirut's abandoned contemporary heritage buildings located in the city centre. The tower was once considered an architectural icon of innovation, but it became a snipers' tower during the civil war between East Beirut (the Christian cluster) and West Beirut (the Muslim cluster). As a result of the war, the tower was never completed, and with no plans for renovations due to the urban strategies controlled by political powers, it was doomed to remain a constant reminder of the bitter history of Beirut. Currently, the first four floors serve as an army base while the other 36 floors are empty.

To transform the tower, an installation was made from 400 colourful window curtains installed on both the eastern and western façades. The curtains were made of the same fabric and colours as those seen in the crowded streets of Beirut where locals actually live, in contrast to the coldness of the upscale glass towers in the city centre, which has become a ghost town due to its privatisation after the war.

Since permission from Solidere (the owners of the building and most of the city centre) was not sought, the challenge was to complete the installation quickly and discreetly. For this reason, during the six days of work on site, the curtains were rolled inwards to avoid being seen from the street. On the final day, all of the curtains were opened together and the blowing wind started moving them – giving the tower a breath of life. The 'tower of bitterness', once a separator standing at the demarcation line, was transformed into the 'tower of wind' (Burj El Hawa). A dancing tower in the Beirut skyline calling out for the city to start its long-awaited healing process.

Solidere ordered the immediate dismantling of the installation. Nonetheless, it survived for two weeks and became a locus for urban activism – acting as a wake-up call for people to reclaim the Beirut city centre and to participate in building a vision of their own future city.

The 'Burj El Hawa' installation has since been internationally acclaimed. It won the 2019 Arte Laguna Prize in Venice and I have been asked to make similar installations on the National Museum of Beirut (on April 13, 2019, the memorial date that marks the beginning of the Lebanese civil war), the Beirut Pavilion at The Countless Cities Biennale in Favara, Sicily, as well as in other cities.

# TOWER OF WIND



Burj El Murr (El Murr Tower). Beirut, Lebanon, 2018. Photograph ©Jad El Khoury.



Burj El Hawa (Tower of Wind). Jad El Khoury, Beirut, Lebanon, 2018.  
Photograph ©Jad El Khoury.

Jad El Khoury is an artist living and working in Beirut, Lebanon. He graduated from the Lebanese University with a degree in interior architecture. His work is characterised by mural drawings and public art installations that tackle social and political issues. His projects include the 'War Peace' illustrations (2015–2017) that highlight the bullet and missile traces on buildings in Beirut and which feature funny characters that deliver joy instead of bad memories. A more recent project is the 'Burj El Hawa' installation (Winner of Arte Laguna Prize 2019), which resurrected an abandoned building by equipping it with colourful curtains that are typically found in the street of the Lebanese capital. El Khoury has participated in exhibitions in cities including Beirut, Jeddah, Kuwait, Venice, and Amsterdam and his work has been featured in international media including BBC, Al Jazeera, *National Post Canada*, *La Repubblica*, and *Designboom*. This year, he collaborated with SWATCH for its 2019 spring-summer collection and recently he completed the Beirut Pavilion at The Countless Cities Biennale in Favara, Sicily (2019).





Process Photographs ©Jad El Khoury.





