



Abed Al Kadiri

The Story of the Rubber Tree

9 March – 4 June 2018

متحف
سراسق

 Sursock
Museum

With the support of: Mohamad Ali and Dina Zameli

The artist would like to thank Fatima El Hajj, Kevin Jones, Mariam Al Kadiri, Nada Shabout, and Dina Zameli.

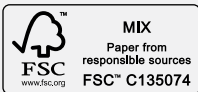
Preferred wine partner: Château Marsyas

Exhibition graphics: Mind the gap

Translation: Lina Mounzer

Booklet design: Mind the gap

Printing: Byblos Printing



Detail of

Abed Al Kadiri

The Blacksmith and the Rubber Tree, 2017-18

Pencil, charcoal, and oil on canvas, 2 × 3 m

With texts by Mariam Al Kadiri

The Story of the Rubber Tree is an ongoing project that examines the histories of Beirut's abandoned houses, frequently re-inhabited and invaded by rubber trees. Once planted to provide shade in urban gardens, rubber trees now grow wild in the absence of people to manage them, undermining the foundations of the houses they occupy. Abed Al Kadiri's new painting, sculpture, and video works trace the complex familial narratives and memories embedded in such spaces, taking the tree as witness to their histories.

Consciously unfolding as chapters in a narrative, Al Kadiri reflects on the social, economic, and physical transformations that Beirut has undergone in the last century, through the prism of a single family's home.

The Blacksmith and the Rubber Tree (2017-18) is a triptych of large-scale paintings that interweave moments of utopia, labor, and isolation. The structure of the storybook is the architecture for intermittent interaction between the blacksmith, his house, and the rubber tree in his garden. Though Al Kadiri works predominantly in painting, his use of pencil and graphite reflects the provisional nature of such stories, and the suspension of time.

The installation *In Dreams: Branch is the Brother* (2017-18) comprises of a sculpture cast in bronze directly from the fragments of five rubber trees gathered from five different houses across Beirut. The rubber chair is a replica of the original metal chair found in the blacksmith's house. The work reflects on the branch and the tree as symbols for the familial, connection, and the personal; their material mirrors the work of the blacksmith himself.

Al Kadiri's broader practice examines thematics of violence, cultural heritage, migration, and belonging. *The Story of the Rubber Tree* explores the changes wrought on Beirut's urban and personal fabrics, and the tree's ability to address intimate shared histories.

The Identity of the Un-exhibited

(Excerpt from a longer text)

Abido Basha

— For Dario

A small river or spring. The king's scepter has fallen to the ground. The house does not emerge from the house nor the spring. The house is the hat of the land. The house is the king the land, right on the river or spring. The roots of the house are wooden. The essence of those roots is the wood of trees. The trees are the litters of Beirut's houses. The rubber trees were either chosen by Beirut or chose Beirut themselves. They found, in its land, their seeds, and afterward it rose up the way mist rises from the river. The way trees rise up in children's stories. Trees that rub up against the air as they rise into the sky. Rise and tame the blinding face of the sky. The house in old Beirut is not a house without a tree. In front of every house, there is a garden. In front of every house, there is a tree. In the gardens, trees with eyes lit up like fireflies; people no longer see them these days, not after the collapse of the old empire that ran after the trees, until the trees vanished from the very memory of trees. The sails of the old houses were unfurled, moving down the river of time with their striped shadows and flags of hidden lightning. The page turned white. The houses did not turn into ash. They grew drowsy in the morning, and became the city's salt. Melted into the ground. They did not lament nor die, because they exist whenever the sun rises to bake the specters of the old houses, turning their absent blood into wine. Then, it discharged them, with brilliance, into a wondrous scene far from the demographic shifts. Sunset, not death. For houses have veins and black blood, the color of the gloves of the most beautiful women spending their nights on the bodies of beloved men. There

are no houses without neighborhoods awaiting their inhabitants. Neighborhoods are a blessing. Even in modern cities. A tree is a house's hill. An unbreakable past. Because blessings cannot be smashed and ruined.

Trees guard their houses with a mysterious incense glittering with truths. The smells of the trees are an incense that squeezes the heart by reflecting its beauty onto people. Jasmine trees, orange trees, pomegranate trees, carob trees, fig, rubber. In broad daylight, the rubber tree appears like an eloquence of speech. Its youth did not prevent it from appearing, with simplicity and clarity, to defend the persecuted houses. It does not shake the earth as it stands, because it cannot do harm, even to its enemies.

The rubber tree, not the idea of it. A man without a borrowed language. A dream suspended in space. Like a flag waving in the morning and resting in the evening. Because rubber is always on the ground, without waking and without sleeping. It turns on the wheel of the car. A rubber tree is unfortunate in our city. It has no refuge, because it has no religion, no sect, and no confession. It knows what others do not. A rubber tree is like the breeze, a prisoner of exodus and forgetfulness in an era that grinds down people, time, and trees. The path of the rubber tree is dark and the heart is awake. The trees are unfortunate in a city that is never silent and never speaks. Because he who is never silent is unable to speak. The tree is unfortunate in a new city that possesses what it does not know and does not know what it possesses. All trees are unfortunate in the city. Huge, gigantic. Courageous, unafraid, never desiring

to flee. But in the absence of the generous, forgiving sand, the trees left the delights of the ages behind, after it engraves the heart of the city with a secret song.

Rising out of short stories, the smaller they are, the more profound. The old houses fell, the trees fell victim to the supremacy of anger and the division of property. No air, and so no purity. No love. No seabirds, the birds snuffed out by their own tears as they circled against human speech. Against the human desire to shoot them down as they flew in God's skies. They became murdered birds, their bodies bloated with death. Humans torment the wealth of nature when they are too taken with matter. A wealth of beliefs, not of life. The lowest of the low.

Old houses exude love as they float on the covers of volumes made of firewood. Volumes whose stories do not put the children to sleep as they read them, children who do not cock their ears in astonishment at what they have heard. The sons will not inherit their fathers. The trees do not become gigantic, they do not grow ferocious as they root their heads into the layers of the sky. The houses do not speak of death so long as the trees continue to guard them from the winds of the generations. For houses, even if they are emptied of their inhabitants, do not die except by the death of trees. Because trees are the talismans of houses. And houses die with the death of trees. The new city is a graveyard. Resurrect old houses, the trees resurrect love in the huge clocks hidden in the hearts of those who have understood that innate expressions have, on their own, structured the relationship between places and people.

No one will wash up exhausted upon the shores of the city, to lean against a pillar on the seaside Corniche. Because Beirut, which lies flat upon the maps, is the summit of a boneless mountain. Beirut is the city of

history. Beirut is an unshaven head. With thick hair; her hair does not block anyone's way. Beirut is a boat for lovers. Sailing from one surface of water to another, but always on the same surface. Beirut is the friend of the friend, the enemy of the enemy. A jet plane that flies and does not fly. It is true that she has endured all divisions, all histories and all weapons, but all who tried to hold her died. She improves, not when her enemies are exhausted; she improves when her blue plains play on the dreams of prisoners, not soldiers. All who sought to hold her died, all but her own children. No one exists who does not have roots. The streets raged when the city was called to the frontlines. The beginning of a struggle. Pus, pain, and tumors. But everything the city faced did not terrify the leaves.

Beirut is the heart of God. The city attacked the fields of gravel with blows, she plowed the land, until the land began to seduce the land, until the land gave birth to the land. Beirut is the explosion of the calm tide upon the white sands, which guard equally the trees of life and the trees of death. A symbol. A symbol is not born twice. Comprehensive in both structure and meaning. No difference between form and image. The coordination, planning and detailing of the universe according to the standards of the new human consciousness. This is how the city exploded with construction. Monolithic blocks of buildings, stamped with the trademark of the new order. The buildings piled up in masses. Two-story buildings, three. The city no longer closed off to the spreading harvest, houses set apart, crowned with red roofs, surrounded by private gardens. One of the seasons of an explosive mood in the 1840s.

The bourgeoisie were not content with the public's zenith, they blended their voices with the paths others resisted. The people of Beirut are still fascinated by the captivating glimmer

outside the city. They locked the inner courtyard, they blocked the inner courtyard with a red-tiled roof above the inner courtyard. The *qamariyyahs* were replaced by windows. The columns and arches were raised. No one emboldened the link between the womb and the bonds of kinship. No father's keening and no child's keening and not a single abandoned daughter. The families readied their homes for families. They appointed rooms for their sons and daughters, like the trees, returning always to those rooms, without permission. The sons cannot flee any longer, they can only return to their family home. The benefits remained common against all the feelings ready to be extinguished, just as everything is extinguished when it stretches out. A house is a doctrine, not just a role. A house is a family's vigor. Solid and decisive. Except houses cannot survive when space devours space.

The bigger the city gets, the smaller the houses become. Their size diminishes. Unfamiliar houses. Houses devoured by the city. It transformed them into narrowed eyes in a flat face that contains all the landing fields. Pure stone in a single room, the family's fulcrum. The city's plump fingers tap on its houses. And so the roles were divided. The house was no longer a lifeline. It remained there, like the last native person standing. Inanimate objects return to their blindness. No secret ultimate purpose. No stated ultimate purpose. Silence closed in on the houses, until all their inhabitants fled.

House, a point. A point in a square. A square in a rectangle. The geometries no longer respond except to the conclusions between the houses and the city. With brush and pencil, alone in the night, waiting for morning. Alone in the day, waiting for night's formations, Abed Al Kadiri responds to the call of the identical axes in the lost houses. The inner rhythms are more eloquent than those which appear on the surface of the painting.

The rhythms do not lead either to the "kiosk" of the old house or to its threshold. Because the rhythm beats within the souls of painters.

Contemplation, nothing except the angles of cruelty where the wind blows. If the wind dies down, the angles of cruelty disappear. No one is able to believe that this could be the work of humans alone. This is the work of trees. Chinaberry trees and walnut trees and eucalyptus. There are more rubber trees. A mystic, mystical tree, responding to the call of the earth. Just as it responds to the call of the sky as it roots into the earth, then removes itself from its dwelling place on the cloudless outskirts of the sky. The tree's craving in the painting is a craving for the house. That is because the tree is the house's mistress, not its wife; its mistress until the end of time. He who is able can see it emerge from the earth, just as veins emerge in the hand.

Al Kadiri does not build the desired city on illusory shadows but on the origins of the house. The sources of the house. In a return to the dissipating signs, so they may flower anew upon the walls. As though they were calls to prayer, at dawn and dusk, engraved into the walls of the city, as though a Sunday hymn hanging on the sleeves of God, the one, the only. A tree rising on the wing of a thought, the thought of the first flower after the first flood. The Beirut house in the painting is Noah's Ark. Dream and reality intertwined. A house fashioned out of nature's body. There is no house today. A house we do not love and which does not remain as is. It loses weight every time it loses years. An unknown house, with unknown men, women and children. Yesterday's house is a radiant sign in an urn. Today's house is a true deception, no shadow and no smell. Only color. Color propped up on the walls and the doors and the windows, and if they should peel, then so be it. If a citizen should contemplate one of these new houses, he will be overcome with exhaustion.

Al Kadiri understands the lesson. He does not wish to uproot the house anew from the city's urbanism. He does not wish to leave it humiliated. The house, the mirror of the heart. A wanderer, risking to stand before a new cycle of construction. When the house provided a garden for its inhabitants. When the trees provided them with the generous familiarity of evening gatherings. The city stood before the moments of a cherished becoming. It deferred to the world when the world deferred to it. Afterward, it surrendered to the presence of the human demon. Millions of demons, with appearances that draw the angels into committing evil despite themselves. The deacons of death have arrived. They snatched away dreams. No stable resting place for them, since the stones of the buildings appeared black. No one traded buildings for buildings.

The old houses took on the shapes of old relationships. They melted the old trees. Transformed the trees into corpses. Rubber trees should not die in houses. They were not crushed by the power of a modernity endowed with death. They were not guarded. They remained like a wild bird that does not fly, that knew the dream of flight without going in search of it. The trees do not moan as they embrace the likely centers of Beirut's last houses, the city's hidden nymphs, despite their will, on the last traces of the past. Nothing but aged trees remained in the aged houses, behind the hidden objects, in a city whose inhabitants created their new houses using deceptive logic. Every house has objects behind it that no one will find. Houses straining to remain, after everyone has ceased looking for them. Each house is evidence of the many styles of architecture in the mill of past eras.

Abd Al Kadiri did not wish for the houses and trees to end up like crushed wheat. He created a symbiosis between houses and

trees in his paintings; he did not offer them up as examples of sin. As another example of mischievous knowledge. This is the work's finest engine, on a painting whereby each part calls for the next, with no cadences but for those of the sacred awakening to the other sketched works radiant in Beirut's memory. His arms push away the birth-pangs of death, the death of the house and that of the tree. A tree, not an artificial plant. A tree with arms that are not hollow like his. Arms, not amputated limbs, so they will not be replaced by metal sheets. In his painting, houses fatigued by their steadfastness. The radiance of the love that trees bear houses, with a strong heart, rigid, never diminishing.

In Abd Al Kadiri's painting, there is the family home. He doesn't wish for it to be consumed by the worms of disagreement between father and uncle. He wants them in the same place, weaving the threads of brotherhood. Bonds that cannot be untangled. In his paintings, flight turned on its head. A simple, circular movement, profound, pushing the houses far from the pits and chambers of death. It is inevitable that father and uncle will be reconciled. He does not want the houses to end up as piles of ash. He does not want the family photos to remain caught in the inevitable continuation. For the containers of memory to end as nothing more than bone. For the photos to burn, and lose their role in the arts of wielding force, on the doors of the globalized universe. No material but the graphite of the pencil, pencils do not drink nothingness. Wiping the colors from a painting, not wiping them on a painting.

Here is an artist who extinguishes the colors in his paintings, so that the colors are not placed in competition with the humidity of the foundations that are experts on old families. The painting is the bosom of the armed house. The painting is the bosom of the armed tree. After everyone failed to deter

misery from death and deter miserable death from the angels of old houses.

This is a comprehensive reconciliation project. Not a project that pits one material against the other. Al Kadiri, in that same place, is an airship, tired of traveling in the wind; the climate of ashes in his painting are ended in light. Graphite-like ashes, according to human and nonhuman measurements. His painting has worries; it is the wings on a fish; no faltering between two different areas. Beirut and the Bekaa. For this is what he is when questioned about his origins. He is never asked about the paintings; he is asked about identity. He doesn't wish for the bleeding to continue into these questions. No one city will be granted victory over the other. But Beirut is liberating, by virtue of its first purity. Beirut with its untouchable perspective. The Mediterranean city. The Silk Road. Beyond all the connotations of "road." Al Kadiri burned the colors down around the painting. There are no colors in the Quran. No colors in the Bible. Al Kadiri's paintings are gifts in honor of the house's resurrection, the hair of the city that was raised up on the debates between heaven and earth in a holy pursuit, not a trap.

Square geometric shapes organize society's various lives with all their human sadness and joy. For Al Kadiri, this is the most important thing. Interior courtyards open out onto space. Their inhabitants immediately closed them up. Fountains of water in the middle, surrounded by jasmine bushes, by basil and carnations, grape vines, lemon trees, banana, cactus fruit, mulberry and pomegranate trees. Bringing them out of the death that emerges from the shadow of darkness is a resurrection in the paintings. The painting's resurrection. The resurrection of his family as they greet one another and of every self-faithful to all that which stands against eternal stagnation. Because Beirut's

old houses aren't maquettes of accidental ideas, eternally stagnant. Because they know, better than anyone, that stagnation traps houses. A house is a king that cannot learn death, as he inhales the jam of leaves and the sugar of horses and the secret bread of trees. A house leading to the sea. A free body, with no photo permit. These houses suffer from the sudden rift that occurs between their lights and the darkness of the new houses, where the tropical rubber trees play their dominant roles in this capacity.

The tears of trees are botanical sap. Rubber trees cry like humans do, they do not read chemistry pamphlets with the aim of producing tears. The rubber trees recoup the houses of Beirut the city. Every embrace between a tree and a house is a downpour, evidence of the ancient signs of the universe. A devotion that does not die. Not the first time, nor the second. A redefinition of the painting. This is not simply an exhibition. This is a creation within an ocean. A creation from an ocean. The conditions of thinking about a contemporary work, as a creation to be shared with others, rather than something to be kept locked away in isolation.

Abido Basha is a Lebanese writer and theater-maker. He was born in Beirut and graduated from the Lebanese University's Institute of Fine Arts in 1982, before going on to pursue graduate studies in theater, acting and directing. Basha has published a number of critical and literary works, and he is one of the founders of the Lebanese Hakawati Group. He has put on a number of plays with some of the most prominent actors from Lebanon and the Arab world, and helped establish a new place for children's theater during the Lebanese civil war. In 1975, he cofounded the Sanabel troupe with Ghazi Mikdashi, Ahmad Qaabour and Hassan Daher. By reworking the dominant ideology, the troupe introduced innovative new teaching concepts that were a far cry from the old, dry teaching styles of the past. Abido Basha has written a number of children's songs and also co-wrote *Aghani al-Eid* (Eid songs). He has written two songs a year, including *Bayrut ya Bayrut ya qissa* (Beirut, oh Beirut, you story), *Madfa'a Ramadan* (Ramadan's cannon), *Badr al-Eid* (Eid full moon), and dozens of other songs with music composed by Ahmad Qaabour, Ghazi Mikdashi, Khaled al-Habr, and Marcel Khalife. Basha was one of the co-founders of the Sawt El Shaab radio station, and also hosted his own radio program on the channel. Entitled *Qazqouz al-bayruti*, the show broadly tackled issues of social and political conflict through the persona of a Beiruti hakawati, and did much to establish Basha's reputation. Basha worked at the Lebanese daily *Al-Safir* for 22 years – from 1979 until 2001 – as editor of the culture section. During that time, he also held the position of Secretary of Central Editing at the newspaper for six years. He taught the history of Arab theater at St. Joseph University and was also the director of the morning segment on T  l  -Liban for 14 years, from 2001-2015.



Courtesy of the artist

Seeking Roots: Abed Al Kadiri's *The Blacksmith and the Rubber Tree*

Rachel Dedman

Down Zaroub Ablā in Aicha Bakkar, Abed Al Kadiri finds the 80 year-old house his father grew up in. Sprawling through its garden is a huge tree. Not the fig or mulberry tree he heard about in stories told to him in childhood, but a rubber tree, vast and wide. Impervious to weather, its matte, flat leaves are waxen and sturdy, and cleaved in two, like palms held open, as though each made to hold a book.

For Al Kadiri, this house has lived as fiction: a once-utopic familial home now the half-abandoned source of a violent fraternal rift. Upon the death of his grandfather, who built the house, his father and uncle could not agree on who should own it, nor how to split and manage the assets its inheritance represented. They fell out irrevocably, and have not spoken since. The rift has colored decades of family history. On the day Al Kadiri stood in the garden, he understood the enormous rubber tree to be the only true witness to the house's history. In the same eerie way in which you learn a new word and start hearing it everywhere, overnight Al Kadiri began to see rubber trees across the city. Overspilling gardens, bursting through ceilings, overhanging the pavement: each signaled a Beirut house abandoned, and – behind the house – a family no longer living in it.

It is hard to know how rubber trees first came to Beirut. The Brazilian Emperor visited the Ottoman Lebanese territory in 1877, and migration to Brazil by Lebanese began in earnest afterwards. Rubber trees are native to South America; perhaps one was brought over as a gift to the local Ottoman governorate. They feature in a book about Egypt from the late nineteenth century, where they are known as a “tree of shade.” However

they arrived in Lebanon, by the 1930s and 1940s rubber trees were being planted for precisely that reason: quick-growing and wide, with dense foliage, they were excellent wind-breakers and sun-shades for those building houses along the capital's coast.

The first painting in Al Kadiri's series *The Blacksmith and the Rubber Tree* (2017-18) imagines a scenario just like this. The sun streams through a few clouds over the quiet sea, as a man plants a rubber tree sapling in the ground of his young garden. A simple wooden fence delineates the lawn from the world beyond, to which the man has his back. On the other side of the fence, another tree grows: skinny, dark, and leafless, its bare trunk a counterpart to the vivid solidity of the nascent rubber tree. Across the page – each painting operates as diptych – a slender house, freshly-plastered, takes up most of the image. Modest in scale, the house features details of late Ottoman architectural vernacular: arched doors with external shutters, a simple curlicued balustrade, and lattice-worked windows. Here the wooden fence runs along the front of the picture, separating the viewer from the house, concealing its entrance. Another stark, plain tree appears here, too, locked out of the gated plot, as though to emphasize the fresh fertility of the environment being built within.

An American encyclopedia published in 1846 credits the *caoutchouc*, or rubber tree, with an average growth of 25 feet in just four years, its trunk reaching four feet wide.¹ Yet those who originally planted the tree for shade had no idea the damage it could inflict

1. Robert Sears (ed.), *A New Pictorial Library*, 1846.

upon their homes. The faster and wider its branches grow above ground, the swifter its roots spread below it. Rubber trees ravage and infiltrate the foundations of houses, and undermine the structural integrity of buildings. For anyone who continues to keep rubber trees, therefore, maintaining and controlling their growth is imperative. The wild and unlimited presence of a rubber tree is today a sign of abandonment, a marker of absence, of no one around to keep it in check. Once rubber trees begin growing, it's hard to stop them. People speak of ripping up their floorboards to pour petrol on bare roots, of burning the trunk.

The second panel in Al Kadiri's series reveals the man who planted the tree to be a blacksmith, toiling over the anvil in his workshop. We've moved inside the house, and so has the tree. Decades have passed. Faint sketches of the house are still visible on the right, but they feel abstract and disconnected, barely perceptible behind the tree's bulk. The sapling is now large and heavy, with three arterial branches unfolding from the central trunk. Thick vines, like sheets of running water, fall from them; the tree's roots descend into dense smudges of ink. A couple of the outermost branches transgress the boundaries of their painted page, stretching into the space of the blacksmith. He remains oblivious to its presence, and works on.

Civil wars are particularly pernicious conflicts, because once they end, their participants have to live side-by-side with those previously designated the enemy. Civil war erodes trust between cousins, friends, and neighbors; it fractures the ability of a generation to be generous to one another. Without public "victory" to mark an ending, or the total withdrawal of an adversary other, civil war makes closure almost impossible. It also tends to have socioeconomic consequences, as destroyed land and abandoned housing

offer corporate real-estate developers the opportunity to rebuild at profit. Civil war in Lebanon changed the spatial, cartographic nature of the city, and also crucially altered the political structure through which Beirut was managed and developed.

The 1990s ushered in a new era of privatization of public space, and political corruption was mirrored in architectural ideology. Anything that existed before or during the war needed cleansing and renovation. The destruction of historic neighborhoods became part of a discourse of regeneration; its rhetoric masked the violence of the erasure of collective memory. Today, the government continues to use high taxation as an incentive for owners to destroy old buildings, sell the land, and facilitate the construction of elite real estate by developers. The law renders it no longer in an owner's interest to renovate or preserve an old building.

At the same time, inheritance laws mean families find themselves locked in complex battles over land. This predominantly affects brothers. Lebanese personal status legislation makes clear that sons and daughters should inherit property equally, and a Succession Law has existed since 1959. However, despite stipulating that gender and religious distinctions be no barrier to inheritance, the latter law only applies to non-Muslims. Muslims are governed by judiciary codes that are weighted in men's favor, and many women – particularly Palestinians, or those married to foreigners – are denied the right to inherit marital property or their equal share of it.² Though not uniquely an issue among men, the animosity that surrounds property inheritance has, judicially at least, a peculiarly fraternal quality.

2. See Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, "In search of equality: A survey of law and practice related to women's inheritance rights in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region," October 2006.

The third panel in Al Kadiri's series hints at this strife. The "page" has yellowed, wrinkled with the stippled fur that mottles old paper. We're in the postwar years; the blacksmith is dead. His studio now is empty of tools, it has become a cluttered storeroom for piles of cast-iron chairs, cold and forgotten. The rubber tree has grown unabated, expanded steadily to fill the frame of its image, and burst across the seams. A small porthole at the back of the workshop peeks on to the garden on the other side of the house. Rubber leaves are visible through it – the tree has the house surrounded.

Today, the rubber tree has emerged as a useful weapon in the quick sale of property; an instrument of violence. Its fast-spreading roots can undermine a building's foundations in just a few years, allowing owners to label an old property derelict, and pursue its sale. Planted originally for citizens seeking to put down roots, the tree ends up becoming a sign of their erosion, destroying the foundations of buildings and reflecting the fracture of families supposed to live within them. Al Kadiri's paintings chart the dissolution of a Lebanese dream, without becoming complicit in its fiction. The utopia of the 1940s, in which a blacksmith can afford to build a house and urban garden on the waterfront of Ain el-Mreisseh, is tempered by the image of the consistent manual labor that made it possible. In the final image the product of that work is all that's left: a tangled stack of chairs that no one sits on. The house is not occupied by those whose legacy it was intended to constitute; in fact, the man's family never appear at all.

Abed Al Kadiri's work uses the rubber tree as a vehicle for a deeply personal story. In seeking to understand the source of a feud between brothers, he returns to the house they were born in. The house forces him to reckon with its origins, the hopes it

represented, and the eventual dissolution of its optimism. Exploring these requires navigating realities of the war, of the city, and of the law. The rubber tree is more than a metaphor in this unfolding, but a literal marker of time's passing, a physical mirror to changing geopolitical dynamics. The work stems from the effects such changes have upon the individual, but the rubber tree remains invulnerable throughout, an ominous monument to kinship unraveled.

Al Kadiri's meticulous drawings mark a departure from his existing painting practice. His earlier work, freer in style, is equally invested in understanding contemporary political realities through the lens of historical references – the *Maqamat* of Al-Wasiti is the source of one of Al Kadiri's most powerful bodies of work. *The Blacksmith and the Rubber Tree* (2017-18) consciously references the engravings and watercolors that hang in Lebanese houses today: of perfect, historic Ottoman-style homes, of a "golden age" when Beirut was the Paris of the Middle East, and Lebanon its Switzerland. Al Kadiri's images recognize the blinkered perspective such nostalgia requires. The book is the framework for his narrative, but its form feels closer to the fairytale – visual, linear, poetic – than an authoritative historical text. Pencil and graphite, after all, are provisional mediums; they smudge and fade, intended as the foundation for a painting yet to come. The work dwells in the world of the sketch, the unfinished; as though aware that seeking roots involves making fiction.

Rachel Dedman (b.1989, London) is an independent curator and writer based in Beirut. Her practice navigates the art historical and the contemporary. Recent exhibitions include *Labour of Love*, Palestinian Museum (Ramallah, 2018); *Kindling*, Fotopub (Slovenia, 2017); *Midad: The Public and Intimate Lives of Arabic Calligraphy*, Dar el-Nimer (Beirut, 2017); *Unravelled*, Beirut Art Center (Beirut, 2016); *Halcyon*, Transart Triennial (Berlin, 2016); *At the Seams: A Political History of Palestinian Embroidery*, Palestinian Museum (Beirut, 2016); *Incidental/Peripheral*, MUU Galleria (Helsinki, 2015); and *Space Between Our Fingers*, Ashkal Alwan, Arab Image Foundation, Mansion, The Hangar, Dawawine (Beirut, 2015). She is the cofounder of collective Polycephaly, and a resident of Mansion, Beirut. Rachel has written for *Ibraaz*, *Reorient*, *Spike*, *Culture+Conflict*, and the Saradar Collection, among others. She studied History of Art at Oxford and Harvard Universities, and was a participant of Ashkal Alwan's Home Workspace Program, Beirut.

Abed Al Kadiri

b. 1984, Beirut, Lebanon

Lives and works in Beirut, Lebanon

Abed Al Kadiri double majored in Arabic Literature and Fine Arts at the Lebanese University. Solo exhibitions include *Abu Ghraib* (2006); *In the Corner* (2008); *Identity Turbulences* (2011); *Al Maqama 2014* (2015); *Ashes to the Sea* (2016); *Arcadia* (2016), and *Al Maqama Al Mosuliya* (2017). Al Kadiri has also participated in several group exhibitions regionally and internationally including Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Bahrain, Istanbul, Hungary, Paris, Cambridge, and Basel.

From 2006–2015, Al Kadiri held various positions apart from his painterly practice. He worked as an art critic beginning in 2006, before establishing the FA Gallery, Kuwait, in 2010. He was the director of Contemporary Art Platform (CAP) Kuwait in 2012, which has become one of the leading nonprofit arts institutions in the Middle East. There, he curated numerous exhibitions and developed an extensive education program. He also initiated art exchange programs, making way for collaborations with major art spaces in France, Spain, Hungary, the UK, South Korea, Lebanon, Egypt, and the Gulf. In 2015, Al Kadiri left his position at CAP, and has been living in Beirut working as a full-time artist since 2016. He is the cofounder of Dongola, a publishing house for limited edition books produced by artists. He was awarded the Surssock Museum Prize at the 32nd Salon d'Automne (2016).

Works on display:

Twin Gallery 1

The Blacksmith and the Rubber Tree, 2017-18

Pencil, charcoal, and oil on canvas, 2 × 3 m

With texts by Mariam Al Kadiri

Twin Gallery 2

In Dreams: Branch is the Brother, 2017-18

Installation: bronze and rubber sculptures

Where There is No One: A Tree, 2017-18

Video, 6'


Directed by: Abed Al Kadiri

Cinematography: Elias Daaboul

Sound design: Shadi Abi Chakra



Abed Al Kadiri
The Blacksmith and the Rubber Tree, 2017-18
Pencil, charcoal, and oil on canvas, 2 × 3 m
With texts by Mariam Al Kadiri

A detailed pencil drawing of a tree branch with leaves and a red vertical stripe. The drawing is executed in a fine, sketchy style, showing the intricate details of the bark and the delicate structure of the leaves. A prominent, solid red vertical stripe runs through the center of the composition, intersecting the branches. The background is a light, textured surface, possibly paper or canvas, with some faint yellowish spots.

Abed Al Kadiri: The Story of the Rubber Tree is part of an ongoing series of exhibitions in the Twin Galleries, showcasing recent work by early-career artists.

Sursock Museum
Greek Orthodox Archbishopric Street
Ashrafieh, Beirut, Lebanon
www.sursock.museum