

Pierre Sadek

Picturing History

8 February – 30 April 2018



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PIERRE SADEK
FOUNDATION

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In partnership with: Pierre Sadek Foundation

With the support of: touch

Media partner: LBCI

Exhibition design: Karim Bekdache Studio

Lighting: Joe Nacouzi

Exhibition graphics: Mind the gap

Translation: Lina Mounzer

Booklet design: Mind the gap

Printing: Byblos Printing

Preferred wine partner: Château Marsyas

Cover

Pierre Sadek in his office in *Al-'Amal* newspaper, late 1970s

Though rooted in a very specific world-historical era, Pierre Sadek's work is timeless. It constitutes a meticulous record of the history of a region in political, existential, and violent turmoil, documenting the names, faces, and events that captured the world's attention during a time of tumult. Sadek was a man of such few words he teetered on the abyss of silence; over the course of five decades, he devised a shorthand language which spoke directly to the conscience and unsettled the course of nations. His drawings illuminate events with flashes of brilliance, his sensitivity to people's pain never dulling the sharpness of his outrage.

The Sursock Museum and the Pierre Sadek Foundation are proud to present the first exhibition of Pierre Sadek's work since his passing, collecting together some of the various subjects and themes he worked on over the course of a long career in both print and broadcast journalism, which spanned a period of time from the end of the 1950s until his death in 2013.

The exhibition is intended as an exploratory journey into the work of an artist who created images that at times served to record history and sometimes helped make it. He was witness to an era rife with world-changing events in the history of both Lebanon and the region, and his work not only transformed caricature into a school of art, but in fact spawned an entire category of work that can be classified as "Sadek caricature."

Eras, events, wars, and occupations: Pierre Sadek drew all of these together into the art of caricature.

Pierre Sadek: Picturing History

Rajeh El Khoury

Over the course of half a century and more, Pierre Sadek sat down daily, navigating stories of daily suffering and daily oppression and out of them creating a rich, singular, rare, and resounding testimony of the times. He came to document an entire era, a difficult and tumultuous period in the history of Lebanon and the entire Arab region, making a record of those Arab policies that intersected through the country, bisecting it into factions, and sometimes cutting it off from the world entirely.

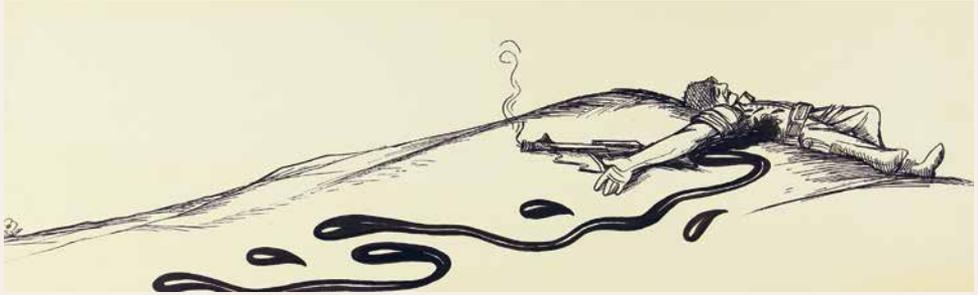
And for over half a century, Sadek's India ink flowed from his powerful brush, just as the blood flowed through his impassioned heart, and his extraordinary talent flowed into drawings that Lebanese and Arabs alike came to anticipate daily, looking for them in the local magazines and newspapers that published his work, work he undertook for the sake of Lebanon, a country whose fate moved his mind and captured his consciousness from the very beginning.

And for over half a century, Pierre Sadek shook both our hearts and our minds, using two complementary symbols to create a completion of meaning and intent so that they could together remind the Lebanese – and sometimes all the Arabs – that authenticity is the cornerstone of progress, that honesty is the highest emblem of humanity, and that authenticity is in fact built on honesty, that it is the basic and necessary prerequisite for progress. Pierre Sadek spoke to his readers gesturing with two hands at once, with one hand being the artist, Sadek, and the other his alter-ego, Touma.

Sadek spoke through Touma, who was a clear embodiment of an everyman Lebanese citizen: honest, decent, simple, wholesome, and humble, a respectable working-class person. When Pierre hid behind the persona of Touma, he could laugh, be sarcastic, angry, vengeful, ruthless, and mercilessly critical, poking at wounds without making them bleed anew.

Sadek the artist went beyond the limits of kin and family, his every offering an exercise in saying what needed to be said, an affirmation of faith in both life and work. His commitment in turn served to imbue his masterful caricatures with a vital soul, with vibrant life, with eye-opening meaning. He turned it into the fourth authoritative voice of the press, the call of the rooster that heralds the breaking of a new dawn, of fresh light, until his drawings and commentary came to be considered a unique, rare, and enduring school of art all on their own.

The drawings selected for this exhibition present the themes of Sadek's work in a consistent, sequential, diverse, and comprehensive format; together they relay fifty years of Lebanese history, telling the story of various eras and policies, through all the different presidents and prime ministers of the republic, the country's parliamentary representatives, party leaders, and religious and secular leaders. Together they are also a testament to Pierre Sadek's unrelenting focus on the question of freedom in Lebanon and the region, and on the various freedoms that Sadek always believed to be the spirit of democracy, the prerequisite for social



The Army repels a massive Israeli invasion and sustains a loss of 61 soldiers between the dead, wounded, and missing
An-Nahar newspaper, September 17, 1982

progress, the basis for reform, and the theater of creative interaction between different ideas.

Pierre Sadek conjured up all these different eras with his ink, and all the different leaders and politicians found their way into the workshop of the brilliant artist, who was always firmly anchored in his unique and impressive principles. Sadek is not an artist who merely represents faces and shapes; he is rather a commentator, writer, critic, teacher, and political and social analyst with his own signature style and singular language: an intelligent, sophisticated, and nuanced form of caricature, which doesn't rely on an exaggerated focus on details, a distortion of the features or overstated flatness to inspire admiration.

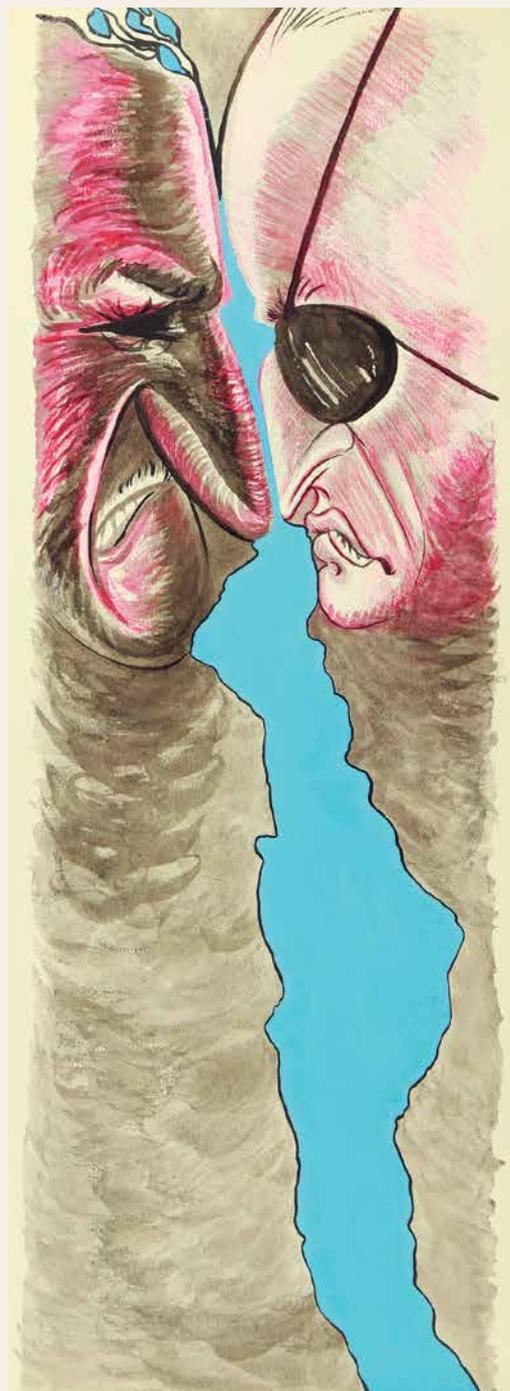
His caricature is a form of commentary that arises from intent, a profound expression of what a healthy society might look like, of the interiority of citizens – their goals, hopes, and aspirations. They are portraits of what an entire society aspires toward, of what might serve the nation, grant victory to the cause, support freedom, guarantee sovereignty, bolster independence, resonate with what is right, maintain justice, and form the essence of the law.

He communicates all of this through his own special language. He does not rely on an alphabet that requires reading proficiency for its meaning and intent to be understood,

nor does he provide overt explanations of the purpose and aim of most of his work. His work is rather only read through perfectly-placed lines and through a unique and purposeful composition that exactly expresses the feelings of a society and the positions of its citizens. It taps into the current of public opinion, of aspirations and desires, and provides insight into the dialectical and interactive relationship – both positive and negative – between the authorities and the individual, between the regime and the group, and between the individual, the collective, and the authorities in power.

Sometimes it was indeed bigger and more expansive than that, because the pivotal news and central events that drew people's attention were often embodied by the interactive relationship between different nations on the one hand and international groups and organizations on the other. Therefore, Sadek devoted a lot of ink to purposefully outlining the various relationships between Lebanon and other countries, both those countries meddling in Lebanese affairs and those which supported Lebanon and respected its sovereignty.

And so Pierre Sadek was not just a caricaturist who produced daily drawings that appeared in print journalism and on television, but an independent press all his own operating



within the realm the larger press, an independently-produced program that appeared on the airwaves. His work addressed the present moment, providing both a summation and conclusion with regards to the event, offering up equal measures of criticism and guidance. He did all this in the language of caricature, using neither alphabet nor words – exactly how music is an international language understood by both the educated and the illiterate – a language able to entertain both the mute and deaf, and which requires nothing but two eyes and an open mind.

Over half a century of creative puns, sly remarks and comments from Touma, who was conjured up by Pierre Sadek as an alternative persona through which to speak, or, more accurately, through which he could channel the nation's voice, the voice of the people, the truth of their aspirations and ambitions. He spoke out for freedom, against any form of restriction on that freedom, restrictions he knew all too well, as he would, over the course of his career experience threats, warnings, and silencing. But his courage would always win out, whether over attempts to bribe him into silence, or intimidation tactics to stop him from voicing his honorable and principled criticisms of the blunders of the powers in charge, or of the faults of the politicians and their misguided policies.

In the spirit of Pierre Sadek's commitment to documenting daily events and developments, this singular exhibition aims to provide a complete and vibrant history of those same events and developments, of all their different, successive phases that together give us a picture of those days of rage, pain,

Egyptian-Israeli conflict over the Suez Canal:
Israel considers it the country's natural border so long as the Arabs refuse to make peace
Featured in the drawing: Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan and President Gamal Abdel Nasser
An-Nahar newspaper, September 7, 1967



The biggest monetary crisis since the student rebellion in May: France loses one billion francs in the span of a week, which threatens to devalue the currency
Featured in the drawing: French President Charles de Gaulle
An-Nahar newspaper, November 24, 1968

and suffering, as well as the times of stability, calm, and comfort that the country experienced. Pierre treated all of these with equal aptitude, feeling, and perceptiveness, using his brush to draw them out into lines, colors, and harmonious, artful composition. His ink often flowed into an affecting picture speaking loud truth to grievous wrongs, images built on righteousness, honesty, and integrity, his haughty sarcasm couched in a perfect politeness ranged against the forces of wrong, sabotage, and harm.

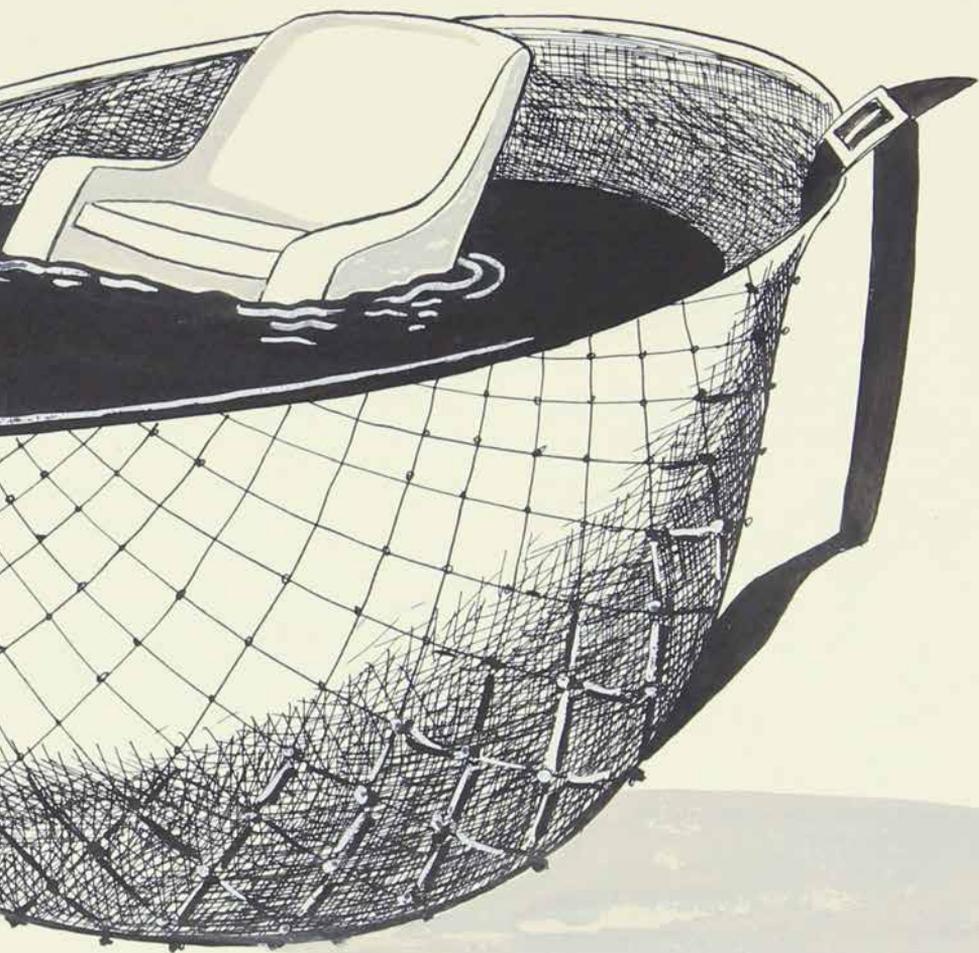
Over half a century of the history of Lebanese politics, its main players and events, its painful and hopeful developments, its happy times and sad times, its successive and interrelated crises. Pierre's drawings capture a Lebanon before Chehab's tenure and afterward; they depict life during the time of what was called "the Second Bureau" (the army intelligence), the different terms of rule, different governments, the various political parties and the causes of freedom, and the repression of

dissent. They remind us of pivotal events and personalities, all with their distinctive traits: the Tripartite Alliance, Suleiman Franjeh and his ever-present cigarette, his memorable declaration that "my nation is always right;" Saeb Salam with his carnation boutonniere and cigar; the quick-temperedness of "democracy's general," Raymond Eddé; the elegance and decisiveness of Camille Chamoun; the idealism of Pierre Gemayel; the mysticism of Kamal Jumblatt; and the strong determination of the late President Bashir Gemayel, affectionately and respectfully known as the *bash*. On the day of Gemayel's assassination, Pierre Sadek drew a dove of peace falling from the sky, its wings wide open, carrying a note that read: "You are hereby welcome to carry the cause onward... Bashir." His historical record continues all the way up to the time of the late Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, who I recall once told Pierre, while all three of us were in his office in Koreitem the night of the 2000 elections: "You, Pierre, bear witness to the cause of Lebanon's freedom."

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The bloody events of the Lebanese war that took place over the course of 1978 completely inundated the government
The censors banned this caricature from being published
Al-Amal newspaper, 1978





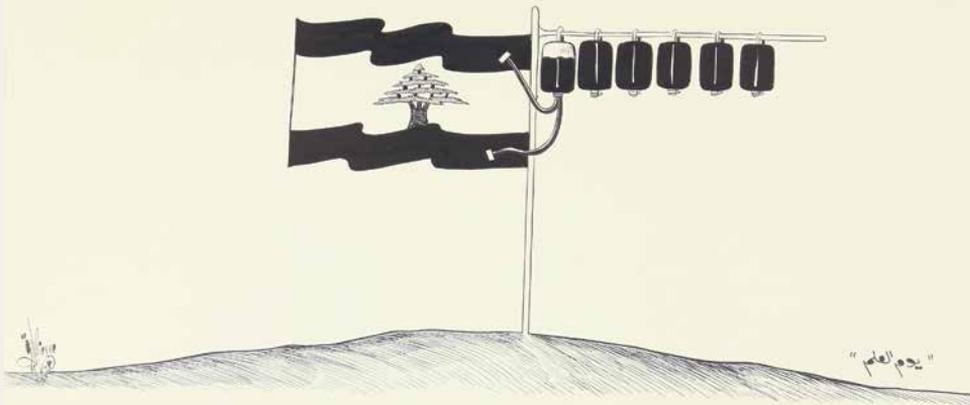
Pierre spent over half a century documenting the crises and causes of the region, the sufferings of the Palestinians in their stolen country, the viciousness of the Israeli enemy and their oppressive occupation of the Palestinian people. He bore witness to the Palestinian presence in Lebanon, especially after the Palestinian leadership lost its way so much so that Abu Iyad (Yasser Arafat) was moved to proclaim that the road to Palestine runs through Jounieh. We heard neither clarification, correction or denial about this remark from Yasser Arafat, who instead took pride in the fact that he ruled all of Lebanon from his position in Sabra, and thus also took up a lot of Pierre's ink in rebuke and criticism.

Pierre's agony was never given even a day's respite; he worked sometimes through tears, shed over having to witness the pain of the wars of others fought on Lebanese soil, the period of Syrian guardianship over Lebanon, which would come to weigh heavily on Lebanon and slowly choke away its freedoms, locking the country up into "a giant prison," as the late leader Kamal Jumblatt called it. As nationalist leaders and journalists were killed, falling victim to subsequent violent murders, through the Cedar revolution and the

historical resistance of the Lebanese people – a victory subsequently confiscated from them – through all of these heated events with all their many difficulties and small joys, Pierre Sadek and his mouthpiece Touma had something to say to the Lebanese people daily, as reliable as the sun rising every morning.

In a Lebanon perpetually pursued by pain, Pierre Sadek perpetually pursued the story of Lebanon, pained at its pain, angered at its anger, vengeful at its vengefulness, bleeding from its wounds, shouting its cries, hoarse with crying out at its silence. For nations are never silent, sovereignty is never quiet, freedom is never mute, but Lebanon, which balanced precariously on the edge of a precipice, dug far and deep into the consciousness of this sensitive artist and citizen who loudly proclaimed the dignity of the country, of identity and belonging.

Sadek's drawings were tasked first and foremost with satisfying the hungers of his own creative mind and upholding his principled stances, praising rights and criticizing wrongs from his platform, both in the pages of the newspapers (*An-Nahar*, *As-Sayyad*, *Al-'Amal*, *Al-Masira*, *Ad-Diyar*, and *Al-Jumhuriyyah*),



The Lebanese flag receives blood donations
Al-'Amal newspaper, November 18, 1982

and in the live drawings and animations that appeared on our screens, first on the LBC channel, then on Future TV.

Pierre and his ink counterpart Touma were tasked with suffering through the wars of others on Lebanese soil, the so-called civil war, and suffering through the policies and under the politicians who contracted these wars, who led the wartime charge by delegating violence and profiting from it, fulfilling the directives of outside powers, buying and selling their own country, partly out of greed for money and partly out of cynical ignorance. And it was always up to Pierre and Touma to take a stand, to say no, to condemn and respond in the voice of the Lebanese people, to give voice to their distress and frustrations about what was happening to them and their country.

Pierre Sadek and Touma spoke out on behalf of the Lebanese people without words, unearthed their buried pain with bitter irony, expressed their rage with laughter and their aspirations with vaunted ideas. And yet Lebanon's most noteworthy and eminent personalities were also given rightful place in Pierre's drawings.

Pierre Sadek was himself one of Lebanon's greats, one of those who both made history and illuminated it. His drawings were a soaring creative achievement in the history of art, of journalism, of patriotism, and a refined sort of caricature, a considered language of foresight, brilliance, and intelligence.

Pierre's talents made themselves known early on in his life, as soon as he began his studies. He went on to pursue higher education at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA)), though his parents didn't really approve of his career path as an artist, as he stated in an interview with *Mulhaq An-Nahar* (the cultural supplement of the *An-Nahar* newspaper) on July 16, 1994. He would hide beneath the bed and create drawings of politicians, using their photographs as models of their likeness.

He began working at the *Al-Sahafa* newspaper in 1956, which at the time was being run by François Akl, and then moved on to working at a magazine called *TV*, published by the legendary newspaperman Ghassan Tuani and run by Akl as well. He then moved on to work at *As-Sayyad* magazine, which was a pioneering publication in terms of its



The Second Bureau interferes in the Lebanese elections. Worth noting that Sin el-Fil (in Arabic, lit: “the Elephant’s tusk”) was the headquarters of President Charles Helou at the time. The drawing was banned from publication and Pierre Sadek was called in for questioning before the military tribunal, which gave him a two-month suspended sentence; President Charles Helou later issued a pardon. *An-Nahar* newspaper, March 2, 1968

dissemination of caricatures, but soon found himself caught up in an amusing debate with the head of the publishing house, Saïd Freiha, who objected to Pierre's drawings of Gamal Abdel Nasser, rendered in a caricaturish style that made Nasser appear ugly. Freiha asked that Sadek modify his depiction of Nasser, and Sadek retorted with: "My dear Saïd, I'm a caricaturist, not a portrait photographer." Soon after that, in 1958, Pierre moved on to *An-Nahar*, where his drawings were given two columns of space on the front page of the paper.

It was not long before the allotted two columns on the front page turned into eight on the back page. Bookshops and newsstands selling the newspaper sometimes took to displaying its back page rather than its first as the caricatures proved so popular. Every time I saw this, it personally gave me great joy, particularly because my own column, "By the Light of Day," occupied two columns of space directly beneath Pierre's caricature.

Pierre was as much a journalist as he was an artist, always carefully following the news around the clock. He was one of the first people to receive dispatches from the wire services when they were transmitted to the office, and he would pore over them, searching for the idea that would take shape in that day's drawing. "It's easy to find an idea in a country as chock-full of political developments as Lebanon," he once declared in an interview. "Sometimes I take several ideas and merge them together, finding connections between different events, and suddenly one perfect image will come to me that encapsulates everything."

Pierre Sadek was a pioneer of live animation drawings, the first caricature artist in the region and in fact the whole world to create live animated caricatures, which first began appearing on the LBC channel and then later on Future TV.

He was an artist, a poet, a politician, and a critic, as well as a joy to all his friends and acquaintances. Above all, however, he was brave. He left a golden testament behind for all journalists when he declared in the aforementioned interview with *Mulhaq An-Nahar*: "In my capacity as an independent artist, I have to be brave. When I'm working, I never think about what might be the ultimate outcome, and so sometimes my wife and children are afraid of what might come of my drawings. But when I'm drawing, I think of nothing but the subject I'm working on, and I fear no threats, though they are many. I am simply in the moment, fully present with my drawings and characters."

There are a number of collected works of Pierre Sadek's drawings: *Caricature Sadek* (a play on his last name, which means "honest") (1964), *Laugh at Politicians with Pierre Sadek* (1972), *All on the Nation* (a play on the lyrics of the national anthem, which begins, "All for the nation") (1977), and *Bashir* (1983). There were also a number of exhibitions of his work, both in Lebanon and abroad, including one held at the Galley Damo in 1980. I wrote an introduction to the exhibition at the time, from which two lines were cut: "Pierre Sadek, who loudly and staunchly challenges the status quo, emerges from this exhibition of suffering the way Omar Khayyam did in his Rubaiyat; he emerges in a state of faith, for he ends it on the Mount of Olives and at the limits of the divine presence he is reassured."

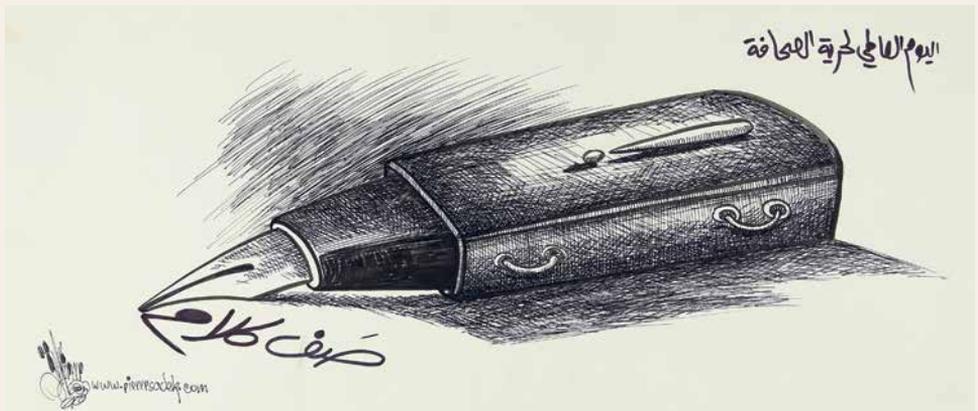
Pierre was swept up in the tides of worry, pain, and work in his life by the sea. He was my lifelong companion, and we stood shoulder to shoulder on the back page of *An-Nahar*, within the pages of the *Al-Amal* newspaper and in our creative pursuits, and yet I was unable to articulate what his wife Hanan did when she wrote:

“Among a thousand honorable men he was the most honorable; among a thousand honest men the most honest.”

He left us too soon, like a sail disappearing over the horizon still billowing with creative force, his voice still loudly singing out the words to the song by Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers, “They say my country is small...,” words he repeated over the course of his entire life, singing them to us when drunk on words, perhaps because they encapsulated the urgent task he had dedicated his life and

art to fulfilling, a smoldering expression of his objections to the torments suffered by his country, a country which ought to be fenced in by rage: “For dignity is a form of rage, love is rage, and rage the best of my country.”

Between 1308 and 1321, Dante Alighieri composed his singular epic for the ages, *The Divine Comedy*. And I say that Pierre Sadek, over the course of half a century, drew up his own epic for the ages, that of the Lebanese Tragi-Comedy.



May 6: World Press Freedom Day
An-Nahar newspaper, May 4, 2006

Pierre Sadek

b. 1938, Zahlé, Lebanon – d. 2013, Beirut, Lebanon

Pierre Sadek studied Fine Arts at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA). He contributed to several Lebanese and Arabic dailies such as *An-Nahar*, *Al-Anwar*, *Al-ʿAmal*, *Al-Jumhuriyyah*, *Ad-Diyar*, *An-Nahar al Arabi wal Duwali*, and *As-Siyasa*. His work was published internationally in various magazines, newspapers, and news agencies such as Associated Press; United Press International, *Time Magazine*, *Le Matin*, *France Soir*, *Washington Post*, *Atlas Magazine*, *Jeune Afrique*, and *Suddeutsche Zeitung*. He is credited for pioneering televised animated caricatures following nightly newscasts on the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation – LBC (1986-2002) and Future Television – FTV (2002-2013). His caricatures, drawings, and paintings were exhibited locally and internationally, including at the Saint Georges Hotel, Lebanon (1969), *War and Peace*, Kuwait (1972), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (1977), *Pierre Sadek 80*, Damo Gallery, Lebanon (1980), and *This is My Lebanon*, Washington D.C (1984).

Publications include *Caricature Sadek* (1964), *ldhak Ma' Pierre Sadek 'Ala el Syassiyeen* (1972), *Kuluna 'al Watan* (1977), and *Bashir* (1983).

He was the recipient of several awards, including the Said Akl Award (1965, 2003), the Kamal El Murr Award (1988), The Shield of the National Library, Baakleen (2000), The Dubai Press Club Award (2000), the Lions Award (2000), the Liberty Lions Award (2000), and a Recognition Award from the Tunis Festival of Art (2013).

He was decorated with the National Order of the Cedar: grade of Knight by President Suleiman Frangieh in 1972, grade of Officer by President Elias Hrawi in 1997, and grade of Commander by President Michel Suleiman in 2012.

Rajeh El Khoury

b. 1944, Kfeir al-Zayt, Lebanon
Lives and works in Adonis, Lebanon

Rajeh El Khoury began his career as a journalist in 1960, working as a translator at the *As-Sayyad* press and a journalist covering social affairs. He wrote political commentary for *An-Nahar* beginning 1963, and for *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* in 1994. Former professor at the Faculty of Information at the Lebanese University beginning 1975. Served as a member of the UNESCO National Committee beginning in 2005; was Lebanon's media representative at the annual UNESCO General Conference twice. Founding member of the Media Administrative Board/Committee for the annual Environment and Sustainable Development Award awarded by the United Nations. Served as a member of the jury for Arab Journalism and Media Awards in Dubai and Sharjah for ten years. Chairman of the Coordination Committee for the Media Creativity award from the Arab Thought Foundation. Member of the Board of Directors of the Sharjah Government Communication Awards until 2015.

Publications include: *Conclusions and Lessons: 15 Years of Research on Zionist Propaganda* (1980), *Adventures in Rescue – politics* (1984), *The Lebanese Crossing Between Two Civilizations* (1967), *The Sands of the Body-Vessel – poetry* (2006), *Jellyfish in the Sea of Sadness – poetry* (2007), *The Gates of Water – poetry* (2008), *Terrorism Against Terrorism – politics* (2009), *The Branches of the Weepers – poetry* (2016).



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