

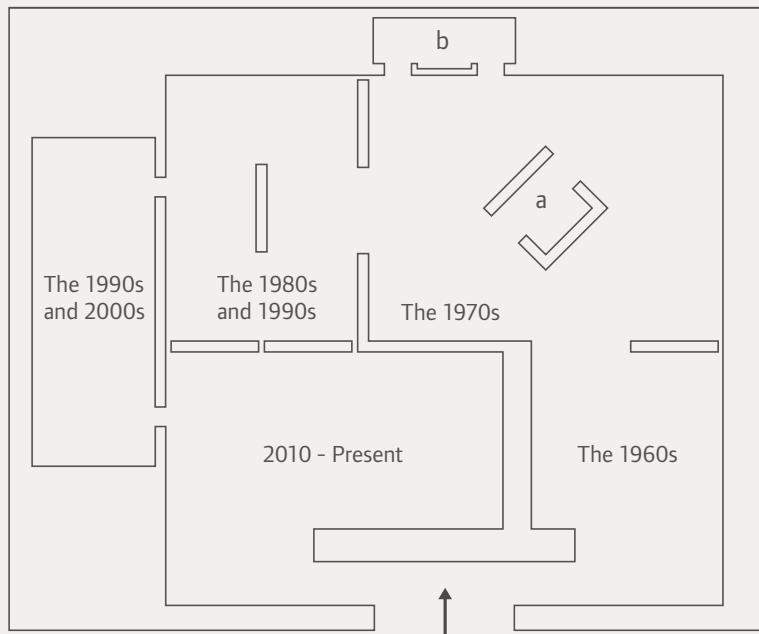
ASSADOUR

Landscape in Motion



18 March – 30 May 2016

Exhibition Map



a. Archive Room

b. Assadour in conversation with Joseph Tarrab

Guest curator: Joseph Tarrab

Co-curator: Nora Razian

Lenders of artworks: KA Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art, Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Karabajakian, Odile Mazloum, René and Nayla Moawad, Alain Tasso, Private collection (Beirut, Lebanon), and Private collection (Paris, France)

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Drawing on the Sursock Museum's collection of over one hundred works generously bequeathed by Pierre Cardahi in 1996, *Assadour: Landscape in Motion* traces the career of the artist Assadour, an important figure in the history of art in Lebanon. The exhibition features new paintings and etchings, as well as works on paper and artist books from the 1960s till today. It also dedicates a room to Assadour's personal archive, showcasing exhibition catalogues, publications, and original photographs.

Working across etching, painting, and drawing, Assadour explores themes of un-rootedness, alienation, and man-made destruction, questioning the role of fate and history in shaping our world.

The 1960s

Wanderings

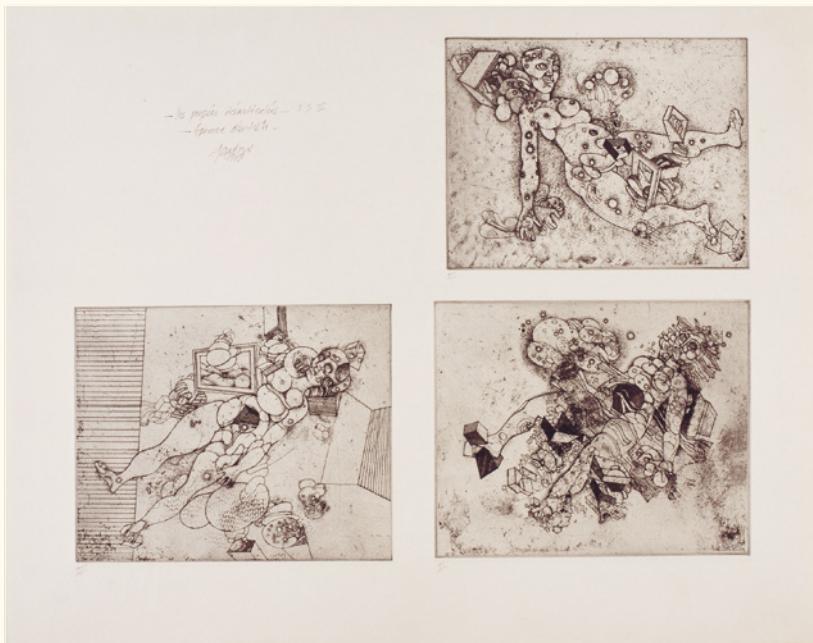
Born in Beirut in 1943, Assadour spent his formative years in Beirut, studying under Paul Guiragossian, as well as with the painter Guvder and with Jean Khalifé at the Italian Cultural Institute. In 1961, he received a scholarship from the Italian Embassy to study in Italy, taking courses in Perugia and Florence, where the Renaissance masters exerted a strong influence on him. Assadour later settled in Paris and attended the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, studying engraving under Lucien Coutaud.

This room includes some of Assadour's earlier works, in which we can begin to see the development of his characteristic detailed etching style. In many of these works, the human body is depicted in a grotesque fashion, sometimes tormented by alien objects. This fascination with the human figure is evident in the work *La Poupée Désarticulée I* [The Disjoined Doll I] (1969).

This ravaged figure appears again in etchings and paintings, a grotesque monstrous body, with oozing parts that sometimes fuse with mechanized objects.

Untitled, Undated
Oil on canvas, 65×54 cm
Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Karabakjian collection,
Beirut, Lebanon

Les poupées désarticulées I, II, III
[Disjoined dolls I, II, III], 1969
Etching on paper, 49.5×42.7 cm
Sursock Museum collection
Bequeathed by Pierre Cardahi, 1996



The 1970s

Objects and Debris

While not overtly addressing specific historical events, Assadour's work can be read through the lens of the 20th century's numerous atrocities. In many of his works, we find accumulated debris, deposited by violent waves of history that alter entire landscapes, changing reference points and geographical bearings. This fascination with time, landscape, and the body continues well into his career.

During the 1970s, Assadour began to establish himself as an artist in Paris and internationally, participating in many exhibitions and biennials dedicated to the art of etching. During this time, he earned numerous awards for his etchings, and was invited to sit on several committees, including those of the Salon de Mai de Paris (1974-1977), and La Jeune Gravure Contemporaine, Paris (1975-1979). It was also during the 1970s that he began exhibiting at Galerie du Dragon, situated near his studio in Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris. Galerie du Dragon was an important fixture on the international art scene in Paris, showcasing the works of artists who had emigrated to France, and who at the time had little access to spaces in which to show their work.

Le Cube [The Cube], 1975

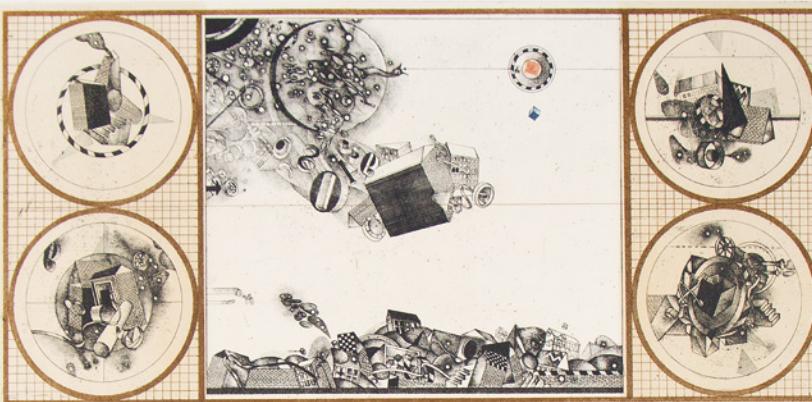
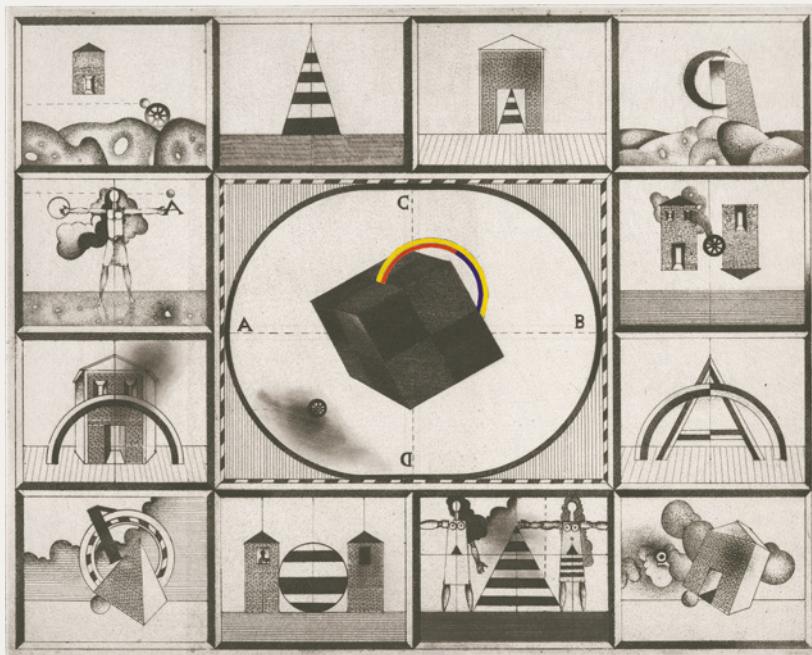
Etching and aquatint on paper, 38×57 cm

Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Karabakian collection,
Beirut, Lebanon

Polyptique [Polyptych], 1972

Etching and aquatint on paper, 50×65.5 cm

Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Karabakian collection,
Beirut, Lebanon



Archive Room

Featuring original photographs, exhibition catalogs, sketches, and artist books, the materials gathered in the Archive Room offer a glimpse into the working life of Assadour. An essay on Assadour by Pierre Cardahi entitled “L’envouteur” is also on view. Cardahi was a longtime friend of Assadour and an avid collector of his works, often visiting his studio in Paris to select them. Over his lifetime, he amassed over a hundred works by Assadour. Many of these works, including original copper plates, were generously bequeathed to the Museum in 1996, and are shown here together for the first time. Cardahi also bequeathed numerous oriental carpets, which are now held in the Museum’s collection.

Assadour collaborated with poets and writers, producing limited edition publications featuring original etchings. Assadour’s works are produced mostly using the aquatint technique, where marks are made on copper or zinc plates and where powdered rosin is used to create a tonal effect. Aquatint prints achieve a deep black and wash effect.



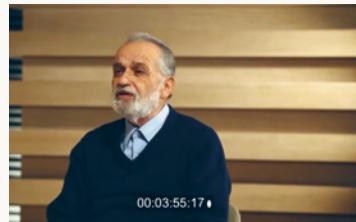
Krikor Beledian’s *Objets et Débris* (1978)

Assadour in conversation with Joseph Tarrab

Video, 47'

French with Arabic subtitles

Located near the Archive Room is a video of a conversation between art critic and guest curator Joseph Tarrab and Assadour on the influences on his work and his relationship to painting and color. The interview was filmed at the Sursock Museum in December 2015.



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The 1980s and 1990s

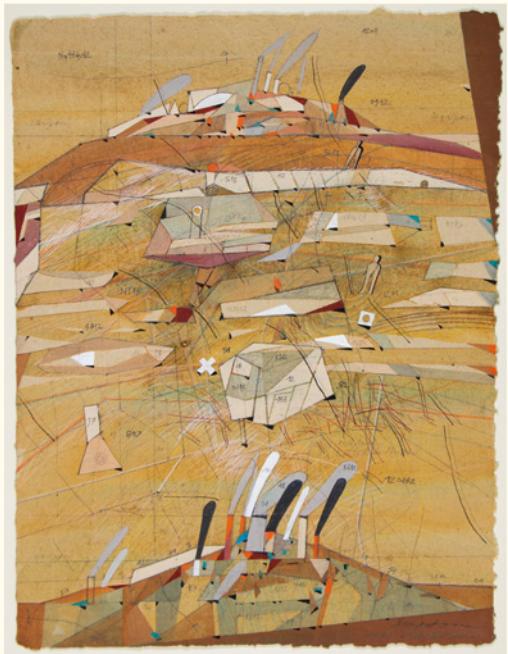
Color

At the end of the 1970s, Assadour moved from monochromatic etchings and aquatint into working with paint and color, using mostly watercolors. This move was spurred by his want to experiment with paint's technical possibilities and the challenges of working on a larger scale.

Assadour's work from the 1980s onwards focuses on the abstracted landscape, where geometric shapes and colors create visions of changing cities, seemingly torn apart and rearranged according to a master narrative. During this period, Assadour spent much time in Italy, especially in Matera, where he led workshops on engraving techniques. He was drawn to the landscape and architecture of this ancient town, known as "la Città Sotterranea" (the Subterranean City). Its significance for him is reflected in the many watercolor landscapes he produced during the early 1980s, featuring cupolas and other architectural elements common to this region of Italy. These landscapes herald a point of change in Assadour's career, where his focus shifts from the interior world to that of his surroundings.



Archéologie [Archeology], 1993 / 1994
Etching and aquatint on paper, 76×56 cm
Sursock Museum collection
Bequeathed by Pierre Cardahi, 1996



Personnage I [Figure 1], 1985
Tempera and watercolor on paper, 36×29 cm
Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Karabajakian collection,
Beirut, Lebanon

The 1990s and 2000s

The Trap

Assadour's work from the 1990s onwards returns to the study of the human figure in space, drawing on influences ranging from Japanese etchings, to Buddhist iconography and African tribal masks. In these works, the figure takes central stage. Mechanized figures create the tools of their own entrapment, pinned down by the rigid structures and systems they have built. We can read these works as a comment on contemporary life, where humans are only free within the narrow confines of their carefully constructed cages.

Spending many summers in Thailand, Korea, and Japan, Assadour was influenced by the aesthetics of monuments and artworks he encountered there. This is evident in the figures' poses and hand gestures which recall the Mudras, symbolic or ritual gestures used in Hinduism and Buddhism. In addition, the flattened perspective is reminiscent of Thai and Tibetan painting.

This room also includes a display of limited edition publications that feature original etchings by Assadour. These were often created in collaboration with poets.

Untitled, 2005

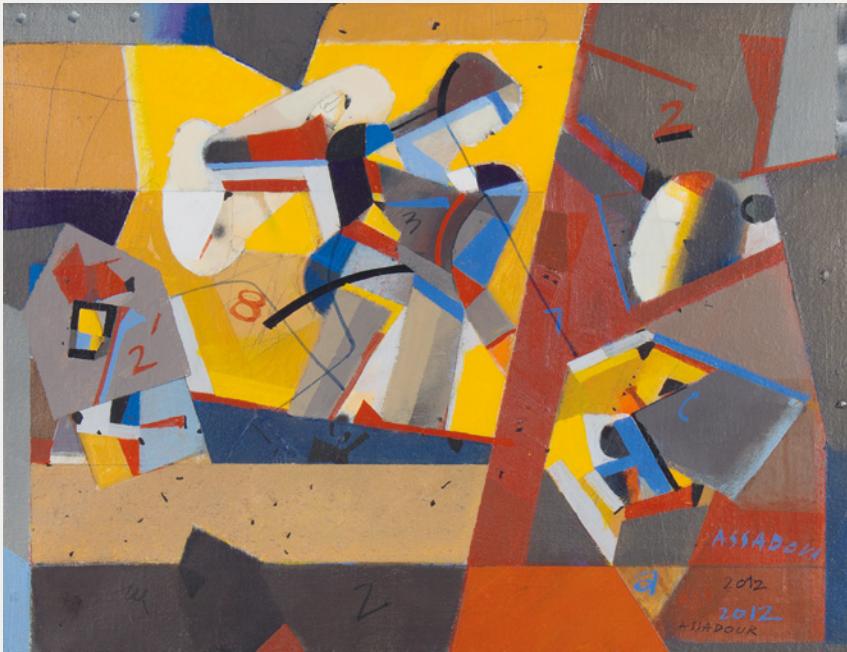
Watercolor and gouache on paper, 56×76 cm

Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Karabajakian collection, Beirut, Lebanon

Rouge, Noir et Or [Red, Black, and Gold], 2012

Acrylic on canvas, 27×35 cm

Odile Mazloum collection, Beirut, Lebanon



The 1990s and 2000s

Between Order and Chaos

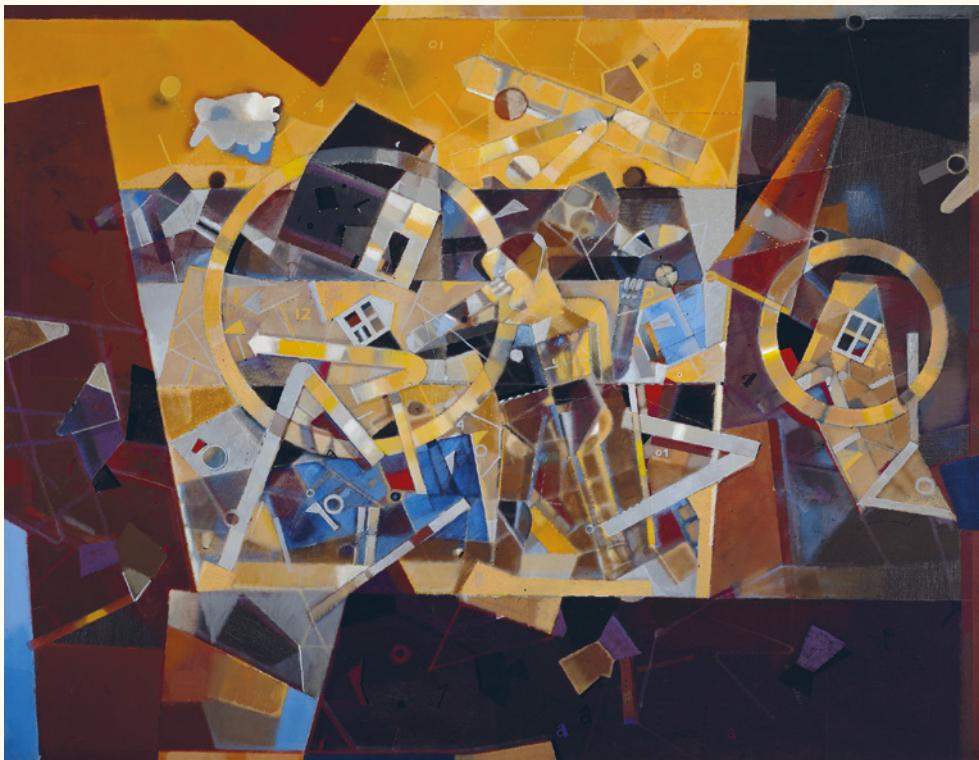
This room includes recent paintings in which the landscape and figure are once again brought into dialogue. In these large scale oil paintings, the force of a master narrative at work is once again present. Objects and figures within the frame are frozen in action, stopped in a split-second, as if poised to disintegrate.



Deux constructions inutiles dans un paysage
[Two Useless Constructions in a Landscape], 2015

Acrylic on canvas, 114×147 cm

Collection of the artist, Paris, France



Lettre à un architecte anonyme
[Letter to an Anonymous Architect], 2012
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 114×147 cm
Collection of the artist, Paris, France



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