



Left: Fawzia (with Her Mother's Pink Scarf), Bhamdoun, Lebanon, 2022

Below: Demi, (Broken Glass—One Year After the Beirut Port Explosions), Brummana, Lebanon, 2021

Bottom: Mirna, Rayak Train Station, Rayak, Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, 2024

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Shaped by War

These beautiful portraits of young women living in Lebanon reflect on a country that has been formed by upheaval

Published to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the Lebanese Civil War, Rania Matar's *Where Do I Go?* is designed to highlight the creativity, resilience and dignity of its subjects. The title comes from some graffiti the photographer encountered on a wall, and is a thread which binds all of the work together.

Beginning when Matar returned to Beirut after the 2020 Port explosion, the project saw her work closely with women across the country.

Matar herself left Lebanon aged just 20, and recognised her own experience in many of her subjects who face a difficult decision about whether to stay in the country or leave.

The photographer works closely with the subjects, who each select the locations and decide how active they want to be in the frame – do they want to climb trees or rocks, do they want to enter abandoned buildings, or step into water. The aim is to give this women agency over both the setting of the shot and their representation within it.

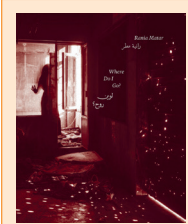
The locations themselves include coastlines, mountains, urban districts

and border zones. They go across the Mediterranean, and take in Beirut's eclectic architecture. Whether in a remote landscape or a famous neighbourhood, Matar works with the backdrop to produce her beautiful work.

Always, there are reminders of the country's difficult past. Whether that be bullet-scarred interiors, grand abandoned mansions, shuttered theatres or even just ordinary streets which demonstrate the echoes of conflict. Above all however, we're reminded just how beautiful the place is, and how magnificent it can be for a backdrop for a portrait sitter.

An interesting essay is also included by the curator Elliot Josephine Leila Reichert, who has put together an accompanying show for the book, currently taking place in the USA. In this Reichert surmises that while few artworks about Lebanon managed to escape its sad history, Matar's photographs look to the present in a hopeful and sustainable way.

A beautiful and moving project that is well worth your time. **Amy Davies**



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