



# Utopia by Design 500年后， 再思考乌托邦

首届伦敦设计双年展在伦敦市中心开展。超过30个国家和地区参加了这次国际展览，在萨默塞特宫(Somerset House)展出了他们的最新代表作品。此届双年展的主题为“设计乌托邦”(Utopia by Design)，其给自己的定位是一个为创意和学术而设的双年展。“Utopia”(乌托邦)这个词，来自希腊语的“ou”(没有)和“topos”(地方)，字面意思是“无处”(nowhere)。这个词的定义是“一个不存在的地方”。从延伸意义来看，“乌托邦”给人提供一个创造完美世界的机会。托马斯·莫尔爵士(Sir Thomas More)最先在他的《乌托邦》(Utopia)一书中用到了这个词，该书描绘了一个虚构社会的群居、宗教和政治习俗。这位英国思想家凭借想象构建了一个完美的社会体系，在一个小岛上，有54个按独特社会模式建立的城市。那里的人们生活都很幸福，不受任何金钱或私人财产需求的束缚。这本书出版于1516年，此届伦敦设计双年展的举办正是以它发行500年为纪念开始的。

采访、撰文—Maia Morgensztern 摄影—Ed Reeve(展馆现场)、Yaniv Kadosh(以色列作品Aidrop)、URBANUS都市实践(深圳展馆作品) 编辑—Haina Lv 翻译—Lynn Lee 设计—小黑

虽然“乌托邦”这个词是由托马斯·莫尔爵士创造的，但像柏拉图等希腊哲学家也会从城市的结构中，去探索一个理想社会的构成。还有一些人曾经尝试过建造不同的乌托邦城市，从18世纪法国建筑师Etienne-Louis Boullée的作品，到19世纪 Charles Fourier那些“共产村庄”式的建筑，以及20世纪 Le Corbusier的《Cité Radieuse》和 Mirra Alfassa的《Auroville》。包豪斯学院甚至以莫尔爵士的这本书名来命名他们的出版社，而现代派设计师则构思出了乌托邦将会如何变迁的社会蓝图，用图纸构建了所有的城市。这些空想家还开始寻找一个封闭的、自给自足的社会，希望能实现理想的生活。因为这些城市是一些与世隔绝的地方，它们也被当作像实验室一样的地方，来试验检测出最可能的解决方案。

“设计乌托邦”可以被理解成是：通过重新评估我们社会中真实存在的地方和我们对幸福的追求，试图想象出一个更好的世界。本届双年展就是通过建筑和设计去探索实现这些目标。在我们现在这个充满身份危机和全球政治局势动荡的时代，这样的任务本身似乎就有点理想化。一个设计双年展不是应该把焦点放在更实际的解决方案上，而不是企图用哲学问题来重塑整个社会吗？此次双年展的主管 Christopher Turner似乎也意识到了大家容易产生这样的疑问，他说：“我们并不是企图拯救世界的‘设计复仇者’，但我们的确认为，设计师有一种理想化的想象力，他们会提出问题，这也是找到解决方案的开始。”他还解释道，他希望抢救“乌托邦理想中的乐观主义精神”。对于设计师来说，关键在于强调更重要的问题，用托马斯·莫尔爵士书中的希望精神努力寻找解决方案。

公平地说，在萨默塞特宫已经可以看到一些切实的作品。Brodie Neill为澳大利亚设计的《Plastic Effects》就把焦点放在了日益恶化的海洋垃圾问题上，通过作品，他们研究了打捞海洋垃圾，将其再回收利用，制成实用物品的方法。以色

1. 双年展入口庭园由阿尔巴尼亚艺术家 Helidon Xhixha带来的呼应16世纪文艺复兴的放射状城市规划的金属椅子装置,传递“社交乌托邦”的理念  
2. URBANUS都市实践建筑事务所

带来的“深圳:新高度”(Shenzhen: New Peak)讲述了深圳在不到35年的时间里产生聚变后带来的问题,提出修建一座“DenCity”的乌托邦城寨  
3. 南非艺术家 Porky Herfer创作的

空间号召大家回归真我,关注传统手工艺,保持与自然与工艺的互动  
4. 土耳其著名的建筑事务所 autoban 从当地许愿树获得灵感创作的代表土耳其的“许愿机器”乌托邦城市装置

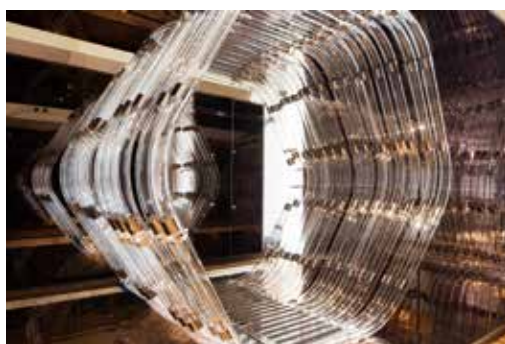
5. 以色列以一组互动装置讨论城市社会议题的设计解决方案  
6. 英国馆由 Edward Barber和 Jay Osgerby 带来的“Forecast”装置放在入口处的位置



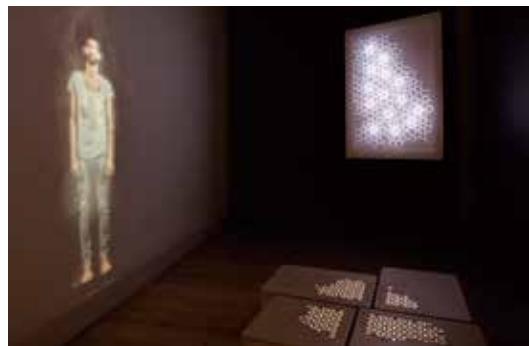
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列则关乎的是设计的积极影响力,他们的作品《Aidrop》是一个为灾区设计的急救分配系统,而“Louder”则是一套为丧失听力者设计的扬声器,可以与音乐声音振动同步。

一共有37个国家参加了此届双年展,分别得到了各自的大使馆、民众和私人机构的支持。希腊的作品《Utopian Landscape》利用大理石的迁移,用空间和时间作为介质,比喻着社会和文化模式的变迁。展示在中庭的“Forecast”是一个纪念雕塑,由Barber & Osgerby设计,它聚焦的是伦敦的航海历史,也表现出,乌托邦也是一种对旧式快乐世界的怀旧。它的旁边是阿尔巴尼亚的“Bliss”,这个作品是一套金属椅子,形状参考的是乌托邦式城市规划的原形。这些户外装置都从不同的角度探索和乌托邦有关的理念,也显示出,在展厅内部的展品也会丰富而多种多样。

和许多装置一样,在一楼展出的中国作品《深圳:新高度》(Shenzhen: New Peak),同样也受《乌托邦》书中的理想城市的影响,并往其中加入了实用的设计。在36年的时间里,广东省深圳市的人口从30万飙升到了1500万,住房建设等重大问题随之出现。URBANUS都市实践建筑事务所通过设计出能像小型城市那样自我维持运作的寨城Den City,来研究可以解决大城市人口迅速增长问题的方案。受到伊塔洛·卡尔维诺(Italo Calvino)的小说《看不见的城市》的灵感启发,他们设想大都市中有着独立的小岛,对一个深深扎根于共产主义社会理念的国家来说,是非常有意思的。通过使用大型模型和影片,这个作品同时也把焦点放在了科技与公共空间的整合上。

在一些令人印象深刻的装置中,法国的作品展示了一个记录在黎巴嫩的叙利亚难民的视频。通过《Le Bruit des Bonbons》(叙利亚震惊的眼)这个作品,人们马上联想到了自己最喜欢的糖果以及与之相关的记忆。在投影机旁边摆放着一个装满人形糖果的自动售货机,让参观者们忍不住都想掏出五英镑来买一袋糖。所有的糖果销售收入都将捐赠给一家慈善机构,用于帮助叙利亚家庭的安置问题。除了慈善之外,这个装置还探索了集体记忆的力量,也聚焦在人们个体身上——在新闻报道中,他们往往会被看作是无动于衷的大众。而在这里,像思乡这样的乌托邦式理念,则可成为打破障碍和隔阂的工具。

mischer' traxler工作室代表奥地利展出的作品《Level》则从更诗意和抽象的角度去表现这个世界的脆弱。在没有被任何事物碰触的时候,这个活动的雕塑品上那些LED灯都会亮起。而哪怕是最轻微的风吹草动——比如参观者路过时产生的小小气流,都会让这个作品的某些部分灯光变暗。在这里,只有稳固和静止才能实现“乌托邦”。在我们这个不断变动的世界里,如此不稳定的平衡,让人感觉如此可望而不可即。

有些国家,比如波兰,就把设计的主题放在了探索“反乌托邦”(Dystopia)之上。挪威甚至根本不用任何装置,只是摆出大型的纸板箱,装满了写着文字的画架。对于参观者来说,这种方式显得十分慵懒,尤其是以设计为主题的展览。

如果说,这些各种各样不同的装置让参观者们驻足流连,那么国家与国家之间的不同,却并非总是文化和科技导致的结果。首届伦敦设计双年展中,伦敦所有的大使馆和高级部门长官都受到了邀请。那些愿意参加的机构,则都被要求指定一个行政机构,来选择出一个设计团队,然后由这个团队来代表国家提交参展作品。作品必须在不到一年的时间内完成,有些国家,比如智利,还提供了超过30件作品给双年展举办方选择。大部分参展国家都是把设计任务交给了他们选择的设计师。各种纪念雕塑品、模型,或是简单的设计构思,它们竞相吸引着参观者的注意,最后再颁发大奖。对于首届双年展来说,最后的结果也很有意思,但这个选择的过程可能还会需要再完善——至少在接下来几年里统一标准化起来。

同时,今年的最杰出设计贡献奖颁给了黎巴嫩《Mezzing in Lebanon》。负责该设计作品的AKK建筑事务所的建筑设计师Annabel Karim Kassar创作了一个25米长的贝鲁特街道景观——包括有一家理发店、一家临时搭建的餐馆、一家水烟吧和一个迷你影院。在一个晴朗的下午,我在她的迷你贝鲁特作品旁边见到了Annabel,和她一起吃着沙拉三明治,谈起了她对“乌托邦”的理解。

**Christopher Turner 解解,他希望抢救“乌托邦理想中的乐观主义精神”,对于设计师来说,关键在于强调更重要的问题,用托马斯·莫尔爵士书中的希望精神努力寻找解决方案。**

1. 获得首届伦敦设计双年展“最杰出设计贡献奖”的黎巴嫩带来一个微型城市街道景观装置 2. 负责“Mezzing in Lebanon”的主建筑师 Annabel Karim Kassar 与我们分享了她对于“乌托邦”的理解

AKK



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## 对话首届伦敦设计双年展最杰出设计贡献奖 AKK 建筑事务所的 Annabel Karim Kassar

**MM: Annabel Karim Kassar, 首先祝贺你赢得了大奖, 你有何感想?**

AKK: 谢谢。我很激动, 而且老实说, 至今仍然觉得很意外。我没想过会得奖。因为首先要得奖非常难, 而且你永远也不知道自己为什么会得奖。我做的不过是尽自己的所能, 所以, 我很高兴评委们也喜欢我的作品。

**MM: 为什么会想到要设计《Mezzing in Lebanon》这个作品?**

AKK: 知道要代表黎巴嫩参加这次双年展, 对我来说很荣幸, 但肩负这个责任, 让我也觉得很有压力。我花了两个月时间寻找设计主题, 但什么也没找到。作为一名设计师, 我觉得很多人常常都会从过去寻找灵感, 去看看以前的“大师们”都做过什么作品。我不知道自己能做些什么, 然后就暂时放下了这个设计。而一旦放下, 我反而变得更放松了, 我开始思考, 我为什么会如此热爱我的国家——这里的街道、氛围、食物, 在这里什么都不用担心。这个想法立刻就变成了我的设计灵感, 把这里的人变换角色, 变成设计师, 把迷你的贝鲁特带到伦敦。《Mezzing in Lebanon》就是这样诞生的。

**MM: “Mezze”指的是中东的一系列小餐盘佳肴, 各种风味的菜肴混合在一起, 不需要按照什么特定的顺序食用。你是如何把这一理念与托马斯·莫尔书中描绘的乌托邦城市联系在一起的?**

AKK: 莫尔的著作中提到了一个大家可以和谐共处的世界。在我看来, 这说的并不是一个充满了科技和科学发现的未来, 而是一种让大家可以按照原有的生活方式共处下去的方式。我在黎巴嫩待了20多年, 这是一个小国家, 但也是一个生机勃勃、慷慨的国家。我觉得这里的人们已经形成了理想的社区, 而这正是我想要在伦敦展示出来的景象。

**MM: 黎巴嫩也是一个充满了紧张局势和政治纷乱的国家。“迷你贝鲁特”如何反映了现在的现实情况?或者说, 你的装置作品也融入了一种怀旧的思绪?换言之, 我们看到的是一个乌托邦式的城市, 还是一个已经存**

**在的现实城市的缩影?**

AKK: 确实发生了一些事, 让我经常担忧和怀疑我到底是不是真的生活在那里。但所展示的黎巴嫩仍然是有生气的。在新闻报道中, 这些可能被人们忽视了, 因为新闻想要展示的是其他一些东西, 但鲜活的黎巴嫩的确存在。它并不是一个遥远的记忆或梦想。

**MM: 在萨默塞特宫展出的很多作品都表现了莫尔对于理想城市的探寻, 但很少有作品尝试去制作出一个理想城市。作为一名建筑师, 你如何将自己的身份背景运用在这个作品的制作中?**

AKK: 嗯, 如果我不是建筑师, 我可能永远完成不了这件作品。我们一开始的概念、设计、绘图和模型, 就是从建筑师的视角入手。我们还需要申请各种各样的批准才能中途进行某些修改, 只有建筑师才知道该怎么做, 而且即使如此, 我们也还是要做很多让步。

**MM: 建筑结构往往用来区分各种不同的空间: 理发店、影院、小吃摊、床垫制造商、游戏厅等等。你是如何把一个建筑作品变成“现实的”贝鲁特的?**

AKK: 一旦决定了设计方向后, 我就邀请合作者一起参与制作。Rana Salam 负责海报平面设计, Georges Mohasseb 负责椅子, Mourad Mazouz 负责“Momo at the Souks”餐厅的食品, 而我的工作大部分是和本地的手工艺人一起合作, 确保作品能做得非常真实。

**MM: 你希望观众以何种方式与你的迷你贝鲁特互动?**

AKK: 首先有一点对我们来说很重要, 那就是如何重现贝鲁特这个城市的感觉, 同时也不要遮盖住伦敦的DNA。在凸显两个城市的特性时, 也展现出它们对对方的影响。除了建筑结构之外, 我们还想要加入一些情感元素, 所以我们会用分镜的形式来做, 就像拍电影那样, 以确保我们能做出对的感觉。把参观者和这个作品之间的互动方式也考虑进去, 这一点也很重要。在贝鲁特, 人们在公共场合的行为表现和私底下在自己家里的时候

不一样。这些街道有时候感觉就像秀台, 人们带着一种目的漫步在街头。他们在家的时候会放松得多。我希望能在这里表现这种感觉。如果你在这里停留的时间够长, 你会看到有人在我们的影院区小憩, 如果是在伦敦的公共场合, 他们绝对不会这么做!

**MM: 所以你认为, 建筑和设计可以改变人们的行为, 即使他们其实仍在自己的“家里”, 也能体验另一种文化?**

AKK: 没错! 建筑和设计可以传播文化。这就是我想要做的: 传递和分享一种生活方式。你可以通过建筑或组装的物件来实现这一目标。

**MM: 谈到这些物件, 你用过平价的椅子、大型的贝鲁特地图、回收沙发、咖啡桌、水晶吊灯甚至是卡车。其实它就像是露天市场。你是如何选择这些物件的? 如何决定该把它们放在装置的什么位置?**

AKK: 它们有些来自黎巴嫩的一个露天市场, 有些则是在这里制作完成的。卡车来自法国, 但卡车上面的笼子来自黎巴嫩。我们还有很多即兴创作, 到最后一刻都可能会进行修改。物品放在什么地方其实并不重要, 只要它们放在那里就好。它们传达着我们对一个“开放城市”的理念。

**MM: 贝鲁特室内装饰商 Henri Gohsn 制作的120道窗帘形成了一个渗透性的建筑立面, 它们似乎也包含着开放城市的理念, 你能解释一下它们对你而言意味着什么吗?**

AKK: 窗帘是这个装置中最重要的元素之一, 它们属于建筑立面的一部分, 同时也是非常个性化的物品, 模糊了室内和室外空间之间的界限, 也暗示着室内有着什么样的生活。这也是设计与人联系起来的另一种方式。

**MM: 这个设计作品最后会怎么处理?**

AKK: 我会很难放弃它, 可能会留下一些物件——或者说留下太多的物件! 我愿意这么想: 有一天我还会再做一个这样的作品, 再把黎巴嫩的文化带到其他的地方去。

MM= Maia Morgensztern

AKK= Annabel Karim Kassar



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The first Biennale dedicated to Design opened its doors in the heart of London earlier this month. Over 30 countries and territories joined the international competition by presenting newly commissioned works in Somerset House. Named 'Utopia by Design', this first iteration of the Biennale defined itself as place for both creativity and academic concerns.

*Utopia*, from the Greek *ou* 'not' and *topos* 'place' literally means 'nowhere'. It is by definition a place that does not exist. By extension, 'Utopia' offers an opportunity to create a perfect world. The term was first used by Thomas More in his book 'Utopia', which described the social, religious and political customs of a fictional society. The English philosopher imagined an ideal system for a man-made island composed of 54 cities built after a unique model. There, people focus on happiness, relieved of any need for money or private property. The book was published in 1516 and chosen as the starting point for the London Design Biennale to commemorate the 500 years of its publication.

While the term was coined by More, Greek philosophers like Plato were already looking at the structure of cities in search for an ideal society. There has also been a few attempts at building these utopian cities: from Etienne-Louis Boullée's projects in the 18th century to the phalanstery constructions of Charles Fourier in the 19th century, or Le Corbusier's 'Cité Radieuse' and Mirra Alfassa's Auroville in the 20th century. The Bauhaus School even named their publishing house after More's book, while Modernists came up with social blueprints of how the world would change, building entire cities from scratch. These visionaries also looked at a closed, self-contained society to try to reach an ideal life. And because these cities were literally and figuratively places isolated from the rest of the world, they could be used as laboratories to test the best possible solution.

'Utopia By Design' can then be translated as an attempt to imagine a better world by re-evaluating our physical place in society and our search for happiness, offering tools for communities to live together. The Biennale looks into achieving these goals through Architecture and Design. In our days of identity crisis and global political unrest, the mission itself can seem a bit utopian. Shouldn't a Design Biennale focus on tangible solutions rather than try to reshape entire societies with philosophical questions? Christopher Turner, the director of the Biennale, seemed aware of the potential pitfall: "We're not Design avengers trying to save the world" he told me, "But we do think that designers have a utopian imagination and ask questions that are half way to finding solutions." He further explained that he hoped to salvage "the spirit of optimism from the utopian ideal". The point is for designers to address bigger problems and work on solutions in the spirit of hope found in Thomas More's book. To be fair there are some tangible projects on view at Somerset House. Brodie Neill's 'Plastic Effects' for Australia looks into the ever-growing issue of plastic found in oceans, researching ways to harvest marine debris and recycle them into useful objects. Israel focuses on the positive impact of design, with 'Aid-Drop' a First-Aid distribution system for disaster areas, and 'Louder', a set of speakers for the deaf that synch vibrations with the music. In total 37 countries joined the Biennale, backed by their respective Embassies, public and private bodies. Visitors are greeted outside by Greece's 'Utopian Landscape', which uses the

migration of marble through space and time as a metaphor for the shifting of social and cultural patterns. 'Forecast', a monumental sculpture standing in the middle of the courtyard and designed by Barber & Osgerby, looks at the maritime past of the British capital - arguing that Utopia is also the Nostalgia for an old, happy world. Next to it Albania proposes 'Bliss', a set of metallic benches referencing the circular shape of the utopian city planning. These outdoor installations all look at the brief from a different perspective and announce the richness and variety of the projects installed inside the building.

Like many installations, China's 'Shenzhen: New Peak', located on the lower level of the building, is influenced by the ideal city found in More's book, with an added a practical approach. In less than 35 years, the city of Shenzhen in the Guangdong Province grew from 300 000 to 17 million people, creating major housing and organisational issues. For the Biennale, the architectural firm Urbanus researched ways of dealing with the rapidly growing population of the megalopolis by imagining self-sustained towers acting like mini-cities. The principle of independent islets inside the metropolis, inspired by Italo Calvino's 1972 novel 'Invisible City', is an interesting one for a country deeply rooted in a communist vision of society. Using oversized models and films, the project also focuses on the integration of technology and the development of public spaces rather than private ones.

Among other memorable installations, France interestingly addresses the proustian idea of nostalgia by displaying a video of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. In 'Le Bruit des Bonbons - The Astounding Eyes of Syria', people evoke their favorite candies and the memories attached to them. The projection is shown alongside a vending machine filled with sweets modelled after an assyrian idol, with visitors enticed to buy a bag for a fiver. All the proceeds are directly donated to a charity that helps displaced syrian families. Beyond philanthropy, the installation looks at the power of collective memory and focuses on individuals who are usually seen as part of an emotionless mass in the news. Here, Utopic notions like Nostalgia are used to break down barriers.

On a more poetic and conceptual level, mischer'traxler studio represents Austria with 'Level', a visually arresting mobile hinting at the fragility of the world. When untouched, the LEDs on the kinetic sculpture are homogeneously turned on. The slightest wind or draft - usually caused by visitors walking by- dims the lights of the unbalanced part of the structure. Here, Utopia can only be reached through stability and immobility. A precarious balance that can feel unattainable in our world of constant flux.

Some countries like Poland turned the theme on its head to explore the notion of Dystopia. Norway did not bother with any installation at all and propped large cardboards filled with text on easels. A rather lazy and dry way to engage with the viewer, especially when it comes to Design.

If the variety of installations keeps visitors on their toes, the disparity between countries is not always the result of a cultural approach as much as a technical one. For this first Design Biennale, all the Embassies and high commissioners in London were invited to participate. Those willing to join were asked to appoint an administrative body to choose a Design Team, which in turn worked on the submission to represent the country. The whole project had to be completed in less than a year, with some countries like Chile setting up competitions - they

offered over 30 projects for the Biennale to choose from- while others simply subcontracted the task to their chosen designers. Monumental sculptures, prototypes and simple ideas end up competing with one another for the viewer's attention, and ultimately, a Medal. The overall outcome is interesting for a first Biennale, but the selection process will probably need to be refined - or at least unified- in upcoming years.

In the meantime, this year's Medal for the most exceptional design contribution has been awarded to 'Mezzing in Lebanon'. Architect designer Annabel Karim Kassar, in charge of the project, created a 25 meters long Beirut streetscape -including a barber shop, a pop-up restaurant, a shisha bar and mini cinema- to celebrate the city. I met with Annabel on a sunny afternoon inside her mini Beirut to eat a falafel sandwich and discuss her vision of 'Utopia'.

Maïa Morgensztern: Annabel Karim Kassar, first of all congratulations on winning the Medal. How do you feel?

Annabel Karim Kassar: Thank you. I am very excited and still surprised, to be honest. I didn't apply to win. First of all because it is very hard and second of all, you never know why you win. What I did is give it my all so I am glad the judges liked it too.

MM: How did you come up with the idea for 'Mezzing in Lebanon'?

AKK: I got the brief to participate in the Biennale to represent Lebanon. It was an honour but also quite stressful to have this responsibility on my shoulders. I looked for an idea for over two months but could not think of anything. As a designer I felt people were often looking to the past, and what previous 'masters' had done. I did not see what I could bring to the table and ended up dropping the project. As soon as I did I became more relaxed, thinking about why I loved the country so much - the streets, the mood, the food- and not worrying about anything else. The idea suddenly came up to switch roles and use the people and makers as designers by bringing a mini Beirut to London. This is how 'Mezzing in Lebanon' was born.

MM: The term 'Mezze' refers to a selection of small plates found in the Middle East. Flavours are mixed and eaten in no particular order. How is this idea of a melting pot linked to your vision of the utopic city described by Thomas More?

AKK: More's book mentioned a world where everyone could live together in harmony. To me it did not refer to a future filled with technology and scientific discoveries, but to the way communities and people could live together with what they already have. I spent over two decades in Lebanon. It is a small country, lively, generous. People there form what I feel is an ideal community, which is what I wanted to show in London.

MM: Lebanon is also a country filled with tensions and political unrest. Do you think your 'little Beirut' reflects today's reality, or is your installation infused with nostalgia? In other words, are we seeing a utopic city or a raw extraction of an existing one?

AKK: Things do happen and I often worry whether I am physically there or not. But the Lebanon I am showing is also alive. It can be a bit ignored because the News want to show something else, but it does exist. It is not a distant memory or a dream.

MM: Many projects on view at Somerset House addressed More's search for an ideal city, but few attempted to make one. How did you use your background as an architect to build it?

AKK: Well, I could have never done this project if I had not been an architect. This is exactly how we looked at it from the start for the concept, design, blueprints and models. We also had to apply for various permits to erect the structure in the middle of a Listed building. Only an architect would know what to do, and even then, we had to make a lot of compromise.

MM: The architectural structure is used to determine the various spaces: the barber, the cinema, the falafel stand, the mattress maker, the game room. How did you turn a construction into a 'real' Beirut?

AKK: Once I nailed down the idea I invited collaborators to participate. Rana Salam did the graphic design of the poster, Georges Mohasseb took care of the chairs. Mourad Mazouz brought the food with a pop-up restaurant 'Momo at the Souks'. I mostly worked with local craftsmen to make sure it would be authentic.

MM: How do you expect the public to interact with you mini Beirut?

AKK: First of all it was important for us to re-create the feeling of Beirut without masking the DNA of London. The idea was to juxtapose the two cities, let them influence one another. Beyond the architectural structure we wanted to add an emotional aspect so we worked on a storyboard, as you would on a film, to make sure we get the right feel. It was also important to look at the way visitors could interact with the structure. In Beirut people do not behave the same in public as they do in the privacy of their home. The streets can sometimes feel like a catwalk, people promenade with a sense of purpose; they are much more relaxed at home. I wanted to reproduce this here. If you stay long enough you can see people taking naps in our lounge cinema, something they would never do on a public place in London!

MM: So you believe Architecture and Design can alter behaviours and enable people to experience another culture, even if they are technically still 'home'?

AKK: Absolutely! Architecture and Design can transport a culture. This is what I wanted to do: bring, and ultimately share, a way of life. You can achieve that with architecture and how you assemble objects.

MM: Speaking about these objects, you used cheap chairs, a gigantic map of Beirut on the floor, recycled sofas and coffee tables, chandeliers and even a truck. It is, in fact, like a souk. How did you choose these objects and their place in the installation?

AKK: Some of them came from a souk in Lebanon, while others were built here. The truck is from France but the cage on top of it is from Lebanon. We also improvised a lot and changed things around up to the last minute. It doesn't really matter where things are, as long as they are there. They communicate our idea of an 'open city'.

MM: The 120 curtains made by Beirut upholsterer Henri Gohsn create a permeable façade that also seem to encapsulate that notion of an open city. Can you explain what they mean to you?

AKK: Curtains are one of the most important elements of the installation. They belong to the façade and are also very personal objects, blurring the line between inside and outside spaces, hinting at life inside. This is another way for design to connect with people.

MM: What will happen to the structure?

AKK: It will be very hard to let go and will keep some objects - probably too many! I like to think that one day I will build another one like this, and bring a bit of Lebanese culture somewhere else.

- Maïa Morgensztern