

Open Mic

A Conversation with Bernard Khoury

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FLORENCE PROGRAM

Made by students enrolled in the “Video,
Media, and Architecture” class taught
by professor Marco Brizzi at Kent State
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Biography

Bernard Khoury studied architecture at the Rhode Island school of Design (BFA 1990 / B.Arch 1991). He received a Master's Degree in Architectural Studies from Harvard University (M.Arch 1993). In 2001, he was awarded by the Municipality of Rome the honorable mention of the Borromini Prize given to architects under forty years of age. In 2004, he was awarded the Architecture+ Award. He is the co-founder of the Arab Center for Architecture. He was a visiting professor at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, L'École Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris and the American University of Beirut. He has lectured and exhibited his work in over 120 prestigious academic institutions in Europe and the US including a solo show of his work given by the International Forum for Contemporary Architecture at the Aedes gallery in Berlin (2003) and numerous group shows including YOUprison at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Turin (2008) and Spazio at the opening show of the MAXXI museum in Rome (2010). He was the co-curator and architect of the Kingdom of Bahrain's national pavilion at the Venice Biennale's 14th International Architecture Exhibition in 2014. His work has been extensively published by the professional press. Khoury started an independent practice in 1993. Over the past twenty years, his office has developed an international reputation and a significant diverse portfolio of projects both locally and in over fifteen countries abroad.

INTERVIEW WITH



BERNARD KHOURY

FLORENCE 2019

The contents of this interview focused initially on Bernard Khoury's current work and his personal experiences designing internationally. These are topics that relate very much to the student's semester abroad in Florence, therefore they formed the starting portion of the interview.

VMA / Growing up, your family built furniture. Did this push you into the world of architecture/design world?

Khoury | “It certainly did have an important influence. I grew up, many of my childhood years in walls that my dad built, I slept in beds that my dad designed, sat in chairs and studied at desks, and so on. I was basically surrounded by things that my father had built, so there is that, of course. There is a child who looks at his dad with some level of admiration, thinking that your dad is the strongest man in the world like every little kid does. So thinking whatever my dad built or did for us was something great and in fact, it was very pleasurable. So I grew up surrounded by that, and I think my father was from the generation that was very adventurous but also very optimistic and determined and very certain about what they were

doing. My dad was one of those and he remained like that until the very end. But as a child, I looked at the profession from, if anything, too much of a pretty picture - an idealistic picture of what architecture could be or should be. My father had a very strong personality, and I am the youngest of the family, and I don't think he was very interested in seeing any of us becoming architects. My older brother is a medical doctor, my second brother is an engineer who ended up in finance and my sister is a lawyer, and then there is me but I am a kid of the war and they were too busy worrying about other things so I basically ran away and took off and went pretty far from where my dad was, which was the only way to get my education otherwise I would've felt completely squashed.”

VMA / You studied at the Rhode Island School for Design, and at Harvard GSD. Was there something that you learned or observed, as somebody who came into the United States to study architecture, that you think others that would have studied their whole lives in the United States not have noticed?



Bernard Khoury. [Left]
Michael Randza. Justin Meikle. Reis Petrovich. [Left-Right]
Not Pictured | Abdullah Samarin. Trisha Kreydt. Caitlyn Wolford. Keyarash Montazeri. Pat Hickey.
Jonathan Bonezzi. Tim Jockers. Marco Brizzi.

Khoury | “First of all, I was on probation twice when I was at university. The third time I was kicked out. I was not the exemplary student in the first couple of years, I would say. I had a couple of advisors at the freshman level that were great, but they were not architects. But when I moved into the architecture department, I was not very happy at the beginning, which held up until about halfway through my studies. Halfway through Junior year, even, I was a very mediocre student. Then something clicked; I started making things, and I was very much a manual person. I went through five years of architecture school, and two years of grad school without a parallel ruler and without a computer, but I draw. I did not construct my projects with a very conventional means and in a linear way as our critics would’ve liked to see, but at some point I was convinced I should focus first on the narrative of a project and constructing a situation inventing my own history (not story, but history) that I feel should be relevant to a situation. That took a lot of time, and in the early stages it was a lot of talk and the teachers didn’t like that. Then at the end, I would work - I would work my ass off to do things and build things, and toward the end, my critics

at school knew I was very determined and I knew what I was doing. I applied to Harvard without sending any GRE scores, without going to any interviews. I am probably the student with the lowest GPA whoever made it to Harvard, without ever seeing anyone. I was just presenting three projects, but they showed a lot of determination. I was very surprised to be accepted to all of the schools I had applied to, and it wasn’t until ten years later that I met with Machado Silvetti, who was in charge of admissions ten years before, and I asked the question. It was very interesting - they remembered my portfolio ten years later, so I respect them because they were very serious about their selection process. I remember one of them telling me, ‘It is not because you were better than others. Certainly not, there were people much better than you in terms of being good or bad, but we’re interested in people who are very determined and who have serious interrogations, and these interrogations were very clear.’”

"...I would like to portray myself as someone who is very much grounded in the territory in which they operate, and I like to think of my work as obsessively circumstantial..."

VMA / Fast forwarding a little to your current work, a lot of it seems so imaginative or other-wordly. Do you have any inspiration, because it almost feels like science fiction, so I was wondering if you feel the urge to bring inspiration from science fiction movies or writings or anything outside of the architectural world that creates a vivid world that hasn't been built but has been conceived and thought?

Khoury | "Well, it's interesting you say that I would like to portray myself as someone who is very much grounded in the territory in which they operate, and I like to think of my work as obsessively circumstantial and specific. However, yes, there were influences from Lebbeus Woods that I took studio with in grad school. Two, I remember very well walking out of the Terry Gilliam's movie Brazil, and I was a sophomore student, knowing that was an experience that had changed my life, and I also watched it 20 times after that. Besides that, I think pretty early in my school years, I was deceived by the tools that

architects practice with, in the sense I was very worried in my early 20's about being stuck in the Stone Age. I thought that we manipulate stone and steel and glass and concrete and things that are very "in-malleable," but by the mid-'80s we were taking a turn and our culture was moving more and more towards producing meaning through more spontaneous, more instantaneous forms of production. I was very worried that architecture would keep me away from that, so pretty early I started looking at other ways and other means of not making things in such an orthodox way, and many of my critics at school dismissed me as being a gadgiteer, a machinist. Later, as I had already started building, my good friend Woody Richard, the French architect, called me the "Electrician of Pleasure", the "Aeronautic Engineer", the "Electrician of Pleasure", because he thought that whatever I was fabricating was not architecture in its conventional tools, but it was desperately trying to connect with other trades and other ways of doing things. I produced (particularly in the smaller buildings where we could experiment) more with the artisan side of building than the conventional building industry. So, we were able to build things that didn't really look

like buildings because they were not built the conventional way. They were built with metal workers, they were built with carpenters, they were built with people that weren't necessarily from the coachbuilders and stuff like that, they were not from the construction industry. I describe some of my work as instruments - they are the products of a narrative, and not necessarily as architecture for the sake of architecture, or architecture in response to the history of architecture. I am not very good friends with the theory of architecture, I think it produces bullshit these days."

VMA / What is your favourite museum you have visited and what makes it your favourite?

Khouri | "Well I'm not much of a museum person, I've called them many, many times 'the cemeteries of culture.' But, one museum that I have not visited, but I have visited through the web and publications is the Abu Dhabi Museum which seems to be a fantastic place. Now, the Louvre, whether the museum is legitimate, it could have been on the moon or anywhere else to me, the building is so fantastic that it goes beyond its function and relevance as a program.

But it is a magical place and still surprises us every now and again with absolutely magical works. The Centre Pompidou in Paris is another building that has left a great mark on me. I'll tell you an anecdote: I lived in Paris when it opened in '76 or '77, and a few years back I had met Richard Rogers, who was a very sweet man. We were having a drink, and I told him how my mom, who was also an architect, took me when I was maybe 8 or 9 years old at the time. She takes me by the hand to visit Pompidou, which had opened a week earlier, to the Esplanade. I looked at this thing as a little kid, and I asked her "Mom, what is this?" What is my mother to tell a little boy who is 8 or 9 years old? It's too complicated. So she tells me it's the building of the year 2000, and immediately I started jumping and saying "I can't wait until it's the year 2000!" But the year 2000 never came in that way.

So I tell that story to Richard Rogers, and he tells me 'that's unbelievable,' because literally about a week after it opened he took his son who was the same age. When they arrived in front of the Esplanade, his son asks the same question: "what is this?" And Richard tells his son, "it's a slide." So, the son started running and makes his way through the people and up the

escalator and gets upstairs, the father is running after him, and when they get upstairs the kid asks 'where's the slide?' There was no slide, so those are the disillusionments of little kids looking at magnificent architecture."

VMA / Your blunt and not give a damn attitude is very refreshing, we live in such a politically correct world and people are sort of afraid to speak the truth even when you have to speak the truth sometimes. On a larger scale, do you think that if you would have been more politically correct, or less brute in your career, that it would have affected you negatively or positively?

Khoury | "I do give a damn, I am a very serious man. Well, I know that I seriously questioned making the jump back to Beirut upon completing my graduate studies, as I thought there were a lot of opportunities for me in the U.S, having graduated from a respectable school and the U.S. obviously gives you access to scale and a certain level of stability that my part of the world would not offer me and I knew that but I still made the jump to Beirut and that has had a very important influence on me...I know

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Bernard Khoury [pictured]
[left] CENTRALE Beirut, Lebanon | Entertainment Built 2001

that if I had stayed in the US I would have had a bigger practice, I might have been more respected by my peers, in the sense that I would have produced more correct work, more green work, more awards...but who gives a fuck? Seriously?

VMA / You work with a decently sized team and you work in a large open studio right in Beirut, what do you think the advantages and disadvantages of that studio space are?

Khoury | “It is not the space, as much as I’ve tried, since I moved into that space in 2004, and this is when we were moving up in scale. I was moving from small scale projects, and I had a much smaller team when I moved into that space. It was quite a while ago - it was in 2004, so, 15 years ago. We were moving up in scale. I was going from small scale projects, and I had a much smaller team, and it was great. I had great early years. I was going from one project finish to another project finish. I like to make these stupid metaphors, but if

you're in bed with one person, you're done - stories over. You go and fall in love with someone else, another project. When you get to a bigger scale, there's something very critical because you have to start managing your time, your emotions, your intellectual effort, and your emotional effort, and you have to disperse it. As much as you want to think that you can be a superhero and you can be in bed with 20 women, you're not going to be good. It's the same with architecture and our profession. So, when we moved up in scale, I had to really start thinking very seriously about how it was going to work. You move up in scale and you get a bigger team, you have a bigger space, and with that comes more expenses. And it's very important you think about that if you ever think of having your own practice at some point. It's funny because all the architects who start their practice want to go bigger and bigger, and get more and more projects, and a bigger office, and then they have 100 people and then 200 and then 3, 4 and 500 people, and the bigger the office is, the more powerful they think they are. But I think that's absolutely wrong, and that's a very wrong way at looking at our profession. Scale has got nothing to do with it. Scale is actually a problem.

The bigger you are (in terms of the scale of an office), the more difficult it will be when it comes to producing interesting works because you have to satisfy 20 women in bed, and that's very difficult. So I took that space thinking that I would build a structure that I would share with others: share the administration, share the space itself, share the cost running that space, and share those who produce the work, like the juniors or the interns or whatever. And it did work to a certain extent, but I never got architects who came in really as my equal in that space. Maybe because I was too loud and too present in it. But on the other hand, some of that formula remained working to this day, in the sense that I don't have employees. All the architects that work in that space are independent architects. And it is absolutely legal in Lebanon - you can be registered at the order of engineers and architects, and you can be as an independent who is acting in someone else's space without being an employee. So these people, they basically bill me or bill the company their services. If they do a lot of work they will bill accordingly, if they don't do a lot of work, they will bill accordingly also. That, to a certain degree, has made the weight of carrying that structure a



PLOT # 4328
Kferrdebian, Lebanon
Residential
Built 2010





PLOT # 1282
Beirut, Lebanon
Residential
Built 2017



bit more bearable than if I had to have employees in a more kind of stable and continuous manner. I also had subcontractors at some point who literally paid for the timesheets of all the architects, and basically took a share of what this office was billing it. Today there is a graphic design practice that is not me, but shares that space and shares the administration and so on. We're looking now at a potential partnership with someone who is in project management and will be acting on his own and will be using the space and its resources. That's the idea - it's like sharing a hospital with a certain number of

CENTRALE Beirut, Lebanon
Entertainment *Built 2001*

medical doctors. That's the idea behind that space. And that space is located in an industrial zone, where rent is relatively still cheap. And it's an open space where I don't have a dedicated office but I just move around on my chair from one station to another. So it's really engineered carefully around the way I wanted it to work."

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wrong...”***



**PLOT # 4371 Beirut, Lebanon
Residential Built 2015**

***VMA / The drive-by shooting
films that you create to show
the relationships between the
building and its contexts are not
something you normally see.
How did you come up with this
method of documenting your
projects?***

Khoury | “Are they still online? Cause they are very old, they are hidden at the bottom of the website if you don’t look for them you won’t find them. What was your question? There was a point where I was desperately trying to... We were building a website, and I have a problem of representing my

buildings only through drawings and conventional videos. I’m not saying these are the way or a great way, but we were just playing around. Since we had frequent site visits and Beirut is not a very big city and I traveled by bike, going very fast from one point to the other, without suffering from traffic, we had this idea of putting the camera on my helmet and taking off once a week from the same point in the office as I ride my bikes. We have a freight elevator, and the office is in a very dirty part of the city, so I

can't keep them downstairs, so I ride upstairs. I take off, and we don't edit these films because they're 10-15 minutes, and that's all it takes me to go to the site, and walk through the site. They are very much calculated because there are things I want to see and a path I want to take, so I very much control your experience of the construction suite. So, we put these online and we made about 10 videos. It's not that I got tired. I was looking at this film and I wanted them to look great, so I rode very fast, very madly in a semi-suicidal way. I thought, 'if I keep doing this, I'm going to die.' In one video I'm going against traffic at 120 kph in the middle of the day zipping between cars. I wanted to feel this very carnal relationship between me the building and the city. I think riding in the city on a motorcycle is a very different experience. In the car, it's like sex with a condom, but on the bike, it's a very natural and very unprotected way - a very different way."

VMA / In regards to your materiality and your aesthetics on each project, a lot of cold and black materials are used. In our schooling, they often tell us to stay away from these types of materials saying that

they are not good choices. Do you believe that there is a small margin that using these design choices are acceptable, or do you believe that they could be more widely used if they are used correctly?

Khoury | "I'm sometimes amused and sometimes very annoyed by what I call 'the Dictatorship of Anglo-Saxon' - politically correct and good behavior in architecture that is imposed on us through the hegemony of the construction industry and all its tools, like LEED. It's a bunch of bullshit. I'm very amused in like Saudi Arabia, or Beirut, or Qatar, where everybody wants to get the LEED certificate. So, they start putting bicycle racks and use glass imported from China, and they make their buildings white, and they try to make it look Arabic. That's bullshit. That's complete bullshit. Lebanese architecture is not triple-arched buildings clad in stone, with red little pointy hats. That's complete bullshit. That's a falsification of history. Arabic architecture is not all that crap. We don't need the Anglo-Saxon world, and the Western world to tell us what our architecture is about. When I use steel, if you're referring to the use of steel in the buildings, that's



**B018 Beirut, Lebanon
Entertainment Built 1998**

very interesting because, all the black steel you're referring to, is steel that is manufactured, literally cut, welded on site by local workers. So it's basically taken at its rawest state, cut welded on site. It doesn't come from China or anywhere else. It won't qualify as being "LEED" or whatever, but it is as local as can be. In that way, I don't have any lessons to get from the construction industry, which is corrupt to the bone. I don't have any lessons to get from architectural critics who don't know shit because they have no experience on the battlefield. They don't know what they're talking about. My buildings

are local. My buildings are extremely well ventilated. You use less air conditioning in my buildings because they are extremely well ventilated. They're well shaded. They're extremely well lit. You get out of the elevator at noon on the fifteenth of August, you don't turn on the light to put your key in the door because the circulation is outside. We're the last building to turn the lights on because it's naturally lit, and so on and so forth. But I don't go and brag about these things, as I think that

this is absolutely natural. Just like you know I don't go and pee here [gestures to the floor] because it's natural. If you're clean, you are clean. Don't go and brag about it. All these people who talk, and talk, and talk about this - they only talk about this because they have nothing else to talk about. I am extremely comfortable with the materials I use, absolutely no regret or remorse whatsoever. I am as local as can be. And I am, in fact, very much a proponent of, and a great defender of local artisans and local architects because I think they know their territory. The proof is looking at our territory, the Arab world, the city of Beirut in particular, but I think it applies to all the Gulf region. It's very sad. It's pretty bad to see what the imports have done. What those great architects have done. You look at what foreign architects, mega stars have produced in our region. It is bullshit. It is crap. It is really bad. Even those who are still doing great work where they come from, when they come to our part of the world, they do crap. They try to do local stuff. They try to make buildings that look local. They try to make buildings that look like they come out of the ground. But they are so obsessed about that, they walk on the tip of their toes and they end up formulating things that

look extremely superficial. And you know if we were to fight in my streets, I would cut their throats in a New York second. I know the little ins and outs of my streets, they don't. So, I use black metal, and I have no regrets whatsoever. And do that if you feel that any material brings you or leads you to what you think is a good cause and is relevant. Use it. And forget about LEED and all those crappy systems."

VMA / So to kind of switch gears and talk about education for a second, Education and architecture today is becoming more cross disciplinary, were finding ourselves growing and learning through different media. What advice do you have for students who might be considering using an architecture degree for a different field of design?

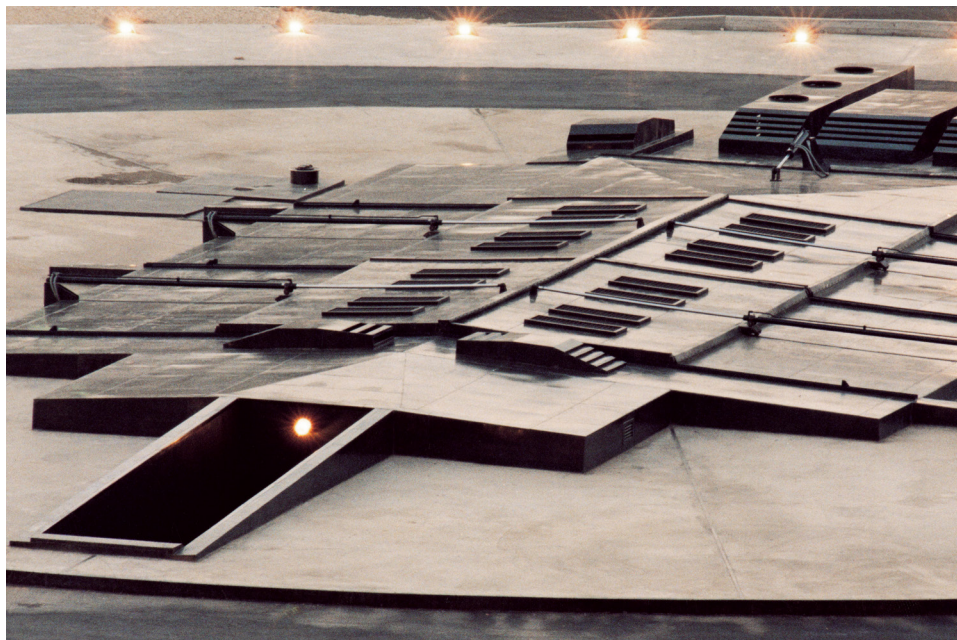
Khoury | "That's a very interesting question and I'm going through that indirectly right now. My son is 19 and he started studying political science at the American University of Beirut because that's what he was interested in. But then he felt like leaving Beirut, so he took off a few months ago and transferred in the middle of the year

and went into architecture in the US at UM. (JJ awes) So that's his choice, I think architecture is a very difficult profession and can sometimes be very frustrating I wouldn't push my son to that path unless he really wants to do it. It's his problem. But to make a long story short, my son was only 19 and he tells me "I want to get an architecture degree but I don't know if I will stay in the profession" I just think it's an interesting profession, it helps you think in an interesting way. I think all architects should have the right to reconsider the profession and attempt a singular path. Because the profession as it is when you get out of school is not very tempting. I would encourage all of you to really really think of how you are going to use your school experience in an inventive way, you could end up being a carpenter or a chef.

VMA / To interject here for a second, what are your thoughts on the state of architectural education?

Khoury | "I'm not very interested in the academic circles these days, particularly in the western and Anglo-Saxon world. I still give a certain number of lectures each year and do a studio when I have time for

that but out of pure curiosity, to see what is triggering curiosity in the younger ones and also see to what extent I can still interact with the younger generation. And I find more awareness in zones like in India, not the quality of work but awareness kids have, political awareness for fundamental questions that I think the more comfortable and stable areas have lost. I don't see anything interesting coming out of Harvard, MIT, Columbia, you name it, these big schools, I think it's pretty bad. I had the chance to do something at the Biennale a few years back that was done by Koolhaas and that was an incredible blow... to see what extent the architecture community has become immune to politics, I mean completely immune. And I think Koolhaas is a good example, this guy is a catastrophe, he should be eliminated. You guys should go cut his throat literally because I don't know if you remember the 2014 Venice Biennale. It was 100 years of modernity, 1914-2014 and when the giant, Koolhaas, asked all the national pavilions to commit to the same question which is 'modernism on your territory' you would think this is the end of modernism, this is quite a big ceremony. It is quite pretentious from Rem Koolhaas to do that, but it



**B018 Beirut, Lebanon
Entertainment Built 1998**

could really be an ambitious question, and you really are ready to see how different territories are going to respond to that question. And what we ended up with was a parade of archives. And that was it, a parade of archives. To me, it was a very sinister and very cynical biopsy of a dead cadaver. It was Rem Koolhaas. As a sinister cynical human being. And if you see what he had produced, I would encourage you to see what he had produced. Elements was his intervention which was a very big intervention in the Biennale; it was a catalog. To make the long story short, it was a catalog of what modernism

has produced, I would say mainly on the mechanical front through the machine age, through modern time, but literally a catalog from escalators to toilets, air conditioner system, elevator and so on. Literally, a catalog and that was the end of it. And to me, that was an extremely sad moment to see someone so influential who is going to be followed and revered and taken seriously by young students who still have a certain level of naivete. To come and say modernism is just that because frankly in the

mechanical level we failed, we didn't do anything wherever we were in 1914 where are we in 2014; the progress is not really worth talking about. If a span was 10 meters and it's 30 meters today what are we talking about? Really? Example, I remember in 1994 my cousin showing up in Beirut with something like a fridge and it had 1G of memory and we were like Wow 1G of memory; that was 1994. So we look at other fields medical field, all the scientific fields, music, etc... The progress that was made through modernity was scary but amazing, fabulous or catastrophic, etc... there were a lot of things to talk about. In architecture to reduce everything we have done to the mechanical performance of the field of architecture and make a complete abstraction of the political agenda of the modern heroes. This guy should be hung by the balls, it is an insult to our father and grandfathers. He should be alienated. He should end up in the garbage of history. So this is what is happening in the academic world. Stay away.

VMA / Is there anything you would like to achieve that you have not already achieved?

Khoury | “Of Course [hang Rem Koolhaas], I had a really stupid answer to that question once that was quoted and put in a magazine and it just stuck on me for a long time which was what would be your favorite project, and I said: [i'm in Italy and I should not say this] but to convert the Vatican into a big mall... I think sometimes designing the barbershop on the street corner of some beat-up neighborhood could be so much more relevant than designing a museum in Manhattan. It is far more important of a political act because these big institutional projects again it will precede the architectural act. These big architecture projects come with an agenda which is already predetermined and it comes with such a load of moral that at the end of the day there is no space for any sort of radicality so, a monument is a monument. The good and the bad is already clearly defined and there are questions you simply don't ask because of the morality of the program and whomever behind the program and the institution that is behind it. On the other hand, when you build a nightclub in a beat-up neighborhood or a barbershop or a gas station you not being accountable for the political meaning of your act and this is when it can become very



**SS / DW Beirut, Lebanon
Installation 2006**

interesting because there is a space for radicality there. if you find the right ally it is really in the mud when you can produce an interesting meaning and interesting questions.”

VMA/ How has the positive and negative changes in society (specifically Lebanon, but applied to anywhere) affected your approach to architecture and design?

Khoury | “I think that is a good question. I was very hesitant upon finishing my graduate studies and coming back to Beirut because I

knew it was going to take me to other territories and other questions that were not necessarily the more universal issues that our schools are training us to tackle. But Beirut was very tempting at the time because we thought that there was a big reconstruction project that was gonna happen. It never really happened. But in the beginning, it was very tough on me as the big reconstruction projects were not there. But Beirut really helped me. It pushed me and forced me to elaborate and develop very

"When you assess the role of the architect today in his large scale projects, you see it is no longer what it was way back."

specific strategies that I think I would not have developed somewhere else. They were very specific to the territory. They were very political in many ways. I learned to enjoy the sourness and the bitterness of the territory. Not in such a masochistic way, but I thought that in those territories you have things to do and you have causes and you have battles to wage that are sometimes very existential. And the more I worked in the mud, literally in the mud, the more I looked at my colleagues abroad - I thought that I envied them in many ways because I thought that I was never going to build museums,

I was never going to build public buildings, I was never going to build Nobel programs, and so on and so forth. But I also thought that what they were interested in seemed absolutely futile to me because I had survival questions hitting me left and right every single day. And I thought that it was for a good cause. So I don't think that's negative. I don't think there's anything negative or positive. And some people and critics will say that I am a bad architect because I build for the private sector because I build clubs and restaurants, and I build banks and I build for the rich - and that's not good. I don't talk about

green and such sugar-coated issues that fill the colorful and shiny pages of your architecture magazines and architecture social media, which to me is total bullshit and is absolutely sterile and absolutely uninteresting. So my buildings are black and they pollute, but I can afford to pollute because I build out of toxic territories, and I do whatever I can, the best I can. But I wage battles on very difficult territories, and not in the secure territories that some of our glorified colleagues operate from.”

Was it difficult going through school, especially at Harvard, being so unique and having such unique ideas? Did you ever feel discouraged, and how did you overcome that?

Khoury | “The discouragement didn’t necessarily come specifically from the school or from specific critics. I mean, you will cross some great critics in your academic path, that are great people dedicated to teaching. And there are also complete morons dedicated to teaching. There’s good and bad everywhere. But I wouldn’t hold those responsible. I think the questions and the discouragements came, as I was saying earlier, from what I thought could be the limit of

our practice and our profession. And I must say, I was pretty aware of that at a relatively early stage - as I was still an undergrad student. Those were the things I was worried about, and these anxieties still hit me today. To give you an example, I can’t build a hotel that has more than 30 or 40 keys without a hotel consultant; I can’t build an airport without an airport consultant; I can’t build a jail without a jail consultant; I can’t build a... you name it. Any building beyond a certain scale or certain importance requires a consultant who’s not an architect. And that consultant and the agenda he comes with is, in fact, the DNA of the project. You look at what precedes the architecture, in fact, is extremely important. When you assess the role of the architect today in his large scale projects, you see that it is no longer what it was way back. And the more we move forward in time, the less architects really have a lot of power over the project in general. And that’s anxiety I think every architect should have: to have to rebuild the relevance of the profession, not as much for prestige as much for the push of the profession should bring meaning to projects beyond just being the last layer that applies. So, I think we should fight for that and understand that architecture

is not an autonomous discipline; that we should really interact with whatever is around us, but you should also try to invent through our profession. That is becoming harder and harder.”

VMA / At this point in your career, do you feel that your message, obviously you feel very strongly about it and incredibly passionate about it, do you believe that you have it so secure in your own mind set that when you approach these projects and you want to tell a story that the story almost tells itself naturally, like subconsciously once you start to work or is it something that you premeditated in advance and take a lot of precedent before hand to approach and tell the story?

Khoury | “I think, in looking back, I must have over 300 projects in our archives that went pretty far into development. I think the most interesting projects are those that were toughest to start or where I really didn’t know what I was going to do when I started. I think we’re living in times where we’re not in certainties anymore. Those times

are over, and they have been over for half a century. I think if we’re going to bring anything to the table in our practice, in our discipline, it will come out of extremely specific situations for which there was no answer when the question was raised. So I don’t have a message, not one whatsoever. I keep saying that I can contradict myself on one street corner to another simultaneously without an ounce of cynicism simply because one specific situation led me to take a certain position that is completely different from the one I’m taking across the street. Because a very specific situation and condition on that other site led me somewhere else. So, I don’t have a message. I would like to stay that way, and one day if it is no longer the case, I will be an old schmuck and I should give it up. I am not Zaha Hadid, with all respect, or Frank Gehry. Do you have a piece of paper? [Crumbles and throws tissue.] I don’t do this and throw it on site, model it now in Rhino, and make a building. It’s not the way I work. And these people create forms and shapes, but I think they are in the Stone Age. I am no longer interested in producing recognizable shapes and forms at all. Architecture is no longer about that; we do produce shapes and forms at the end of the

day, but that's not what I'm interested in. There is something that proceeds that that is far more important. We start our projects with words, where no pens or papers are allowed. Words liberate you, whereas form crystalizes and it can be extremely stiff. No matter how complex it is, it looks absolutely pathetic. They make these things that twist and go up in the air, and you see how painful the steel is, and it's acting structurally and all that for what? To produce a very superficial representation of the cultural phenomenon. Let's move on to something else, and let's produce meaning. Architecture should produce meaning it should not represent, but it should produce."

VMA / In finishing up, we have just one more question for you. Where do you see the field of architecture heading and how do you think you can contribute to its progression?

Khoury | "I have no idea where it's heading. The future will take care of itself. I am very much grounded in the present and if I can act in the present that is already great. I don't think I have the luxury of predicting the future; us architects we are very much tied to the orders we receive,



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we are at the bottom of the ladder. You have to understand this, and only by understanding this can we move forward. How can I contribute? I don't know. I have used a lot of unorthodox ways to communicate, we talked about communication earlier, I think communicating is extremely important. Communicating is architecture and architecture is communicating. Communicating doesn't come after you build, we are no longer there, today we are in a world where you have to understand where your strategy is going to have to take this into account, taking some extremely tough issues into consideration that we live in a very instantaneous culture. Our

relationship with temporality is still grounded in the stone age. In a period where things come and go and vanish in no time. You have to understand this and I think I was very aware of that relatively early. I have used very unorthodox means of communicating. I went as far as being the mascot of Johnny Walker whiskey. To try to exist because I thought that our conventional ways of communicating were not enough so my intellectual friends thought that I was being a whore or I was not being very smart but you do what you can with the means you were given. If it's for the right cause you can partner up with the devil, that's okay."

This interview with Bernard Khoury was focused upon his Lebanese heritage, and its influences on his designs today. It was a collaborative effort among students of the Video, Media, and Architecture course at Kent State University Florence. Guest lecturers were brought in from all over Europe for a Spring lecture series and students were tasked to create an interview before each of these lectures. After analyzing numerous interviews with other architects, students researched and explored the work of the visiting lecturers. Questions were then devised by each student, and these questions were analyzed based upon their thematic similarity and their relevance to the work of each lecturer. The most appropriate questions were chosen for each interview, and the specific students who created these questions then were charged with interviewing our guests, using the chosen questions as a base and posing any other questions that flowed with the interview.