

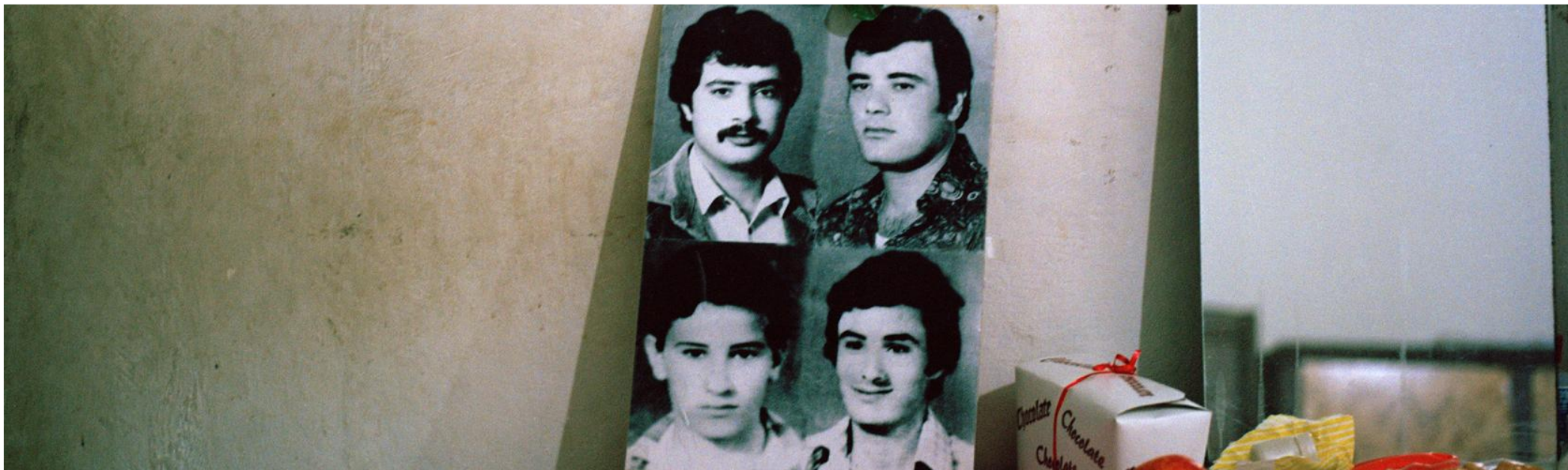
Featured in

Issue 215

Artists' Artists: Marwa Arsanios on Dalia Khamissy's Photographs of the Absent

Khamissy's works document unresolved personal histories

M BY MARWA ARSANIOS IN PROFILES | 14 DEC 20



'Marwa Arsanios on Dalia Khamissy's Photographs of the Absent' is part of a series of articles in which we asked nine artists to chose a colleague whose work has been on their mind.

Over the years, the Beirut-based photographer Dalia Khamissy has stored a vast number of images on the same 4TB hard drive. When I asked her recently about the website she plans to create with them, she told me: 'I have a problem going through and making a selection.' It's understandable: these pictures carry the weight of unresolved histories, bearing witness to layered conflicts played out across time. From the disappeared of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90) to those displaced more recently, these are documents of absence: a photograph of a photograph of a lost person, their clothes, their bed; a mother grieving her missing daughter. Khamissy's photographs do not attempt to fill that void, yet her images show that absence is never only absence: a new presence takes shape after a person – or their home or homeland – is gone.



Dalia Khamissy, Lebanese Zahra Abbas sits on her bed in her house in Tyre, south of Lebanon. Zahra was 25 years old when her husband Mohammad went missing in 1978 as he was on his way to Lebanon from Saudi Arabia after finishing his contract there, 2014. Courtesy: the artist

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Often set in the temporary dwellings of the displaced, Khamissy’s photographs expose what her country’s criminal ruling class covers over – wounds buried deep in the private spaces of domesticity – while continuing to do the things it does best: develop corrupt real-estate projects and clean up crime scenes. With a photographer’s love, Khamissy ceaselessly chases these moments and lives, running against time to bring them justice. What to do with all the photographs? Khamissy doesn’t want to see them again: she takes the pictures and leaves them on the hard drive; she will not go back and do the selection. ‘It is too heavy,’ she says. Khamissy’s work shows first and foremost how grounded we are in our own political defeats, but also that such triggers are often needed to spark the process of change.

This article first appeared in [frieze issue 215](#) with the headline ‘Artists’ Artists’.

Main Image: Dalia Khamissy, A photo of Palestinian Imm Aziz’s four sons on a table in the Palestinian refugee camp of Burj el-Barajneh in Beirut’s suburbs. On 17 September 1982, militants took away her four sons, Aziz, Ibrahim, Mansour and Ahmad, 2010. Courtesy: the artist

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MARWA ARSANIOS

Marwa Arsanios is an artist and researcher. Her work is included in the 11th Berlin Biennale, Germany, until 1 November. She lives in Berlin.

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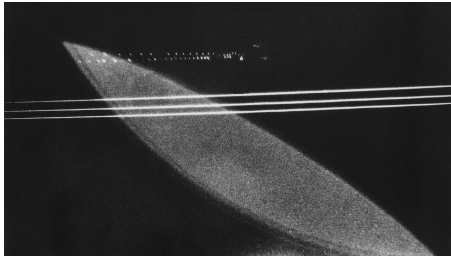
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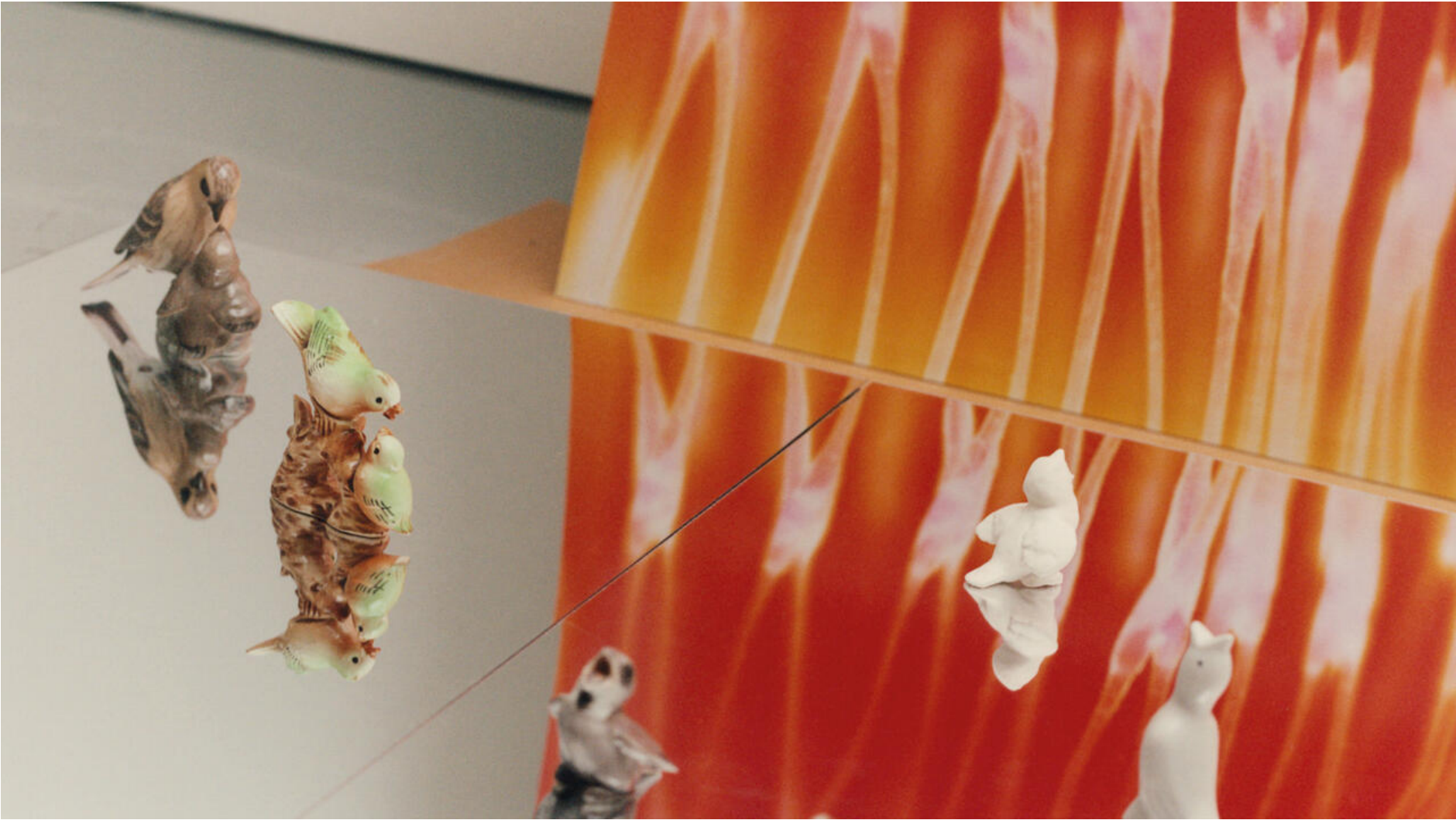
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