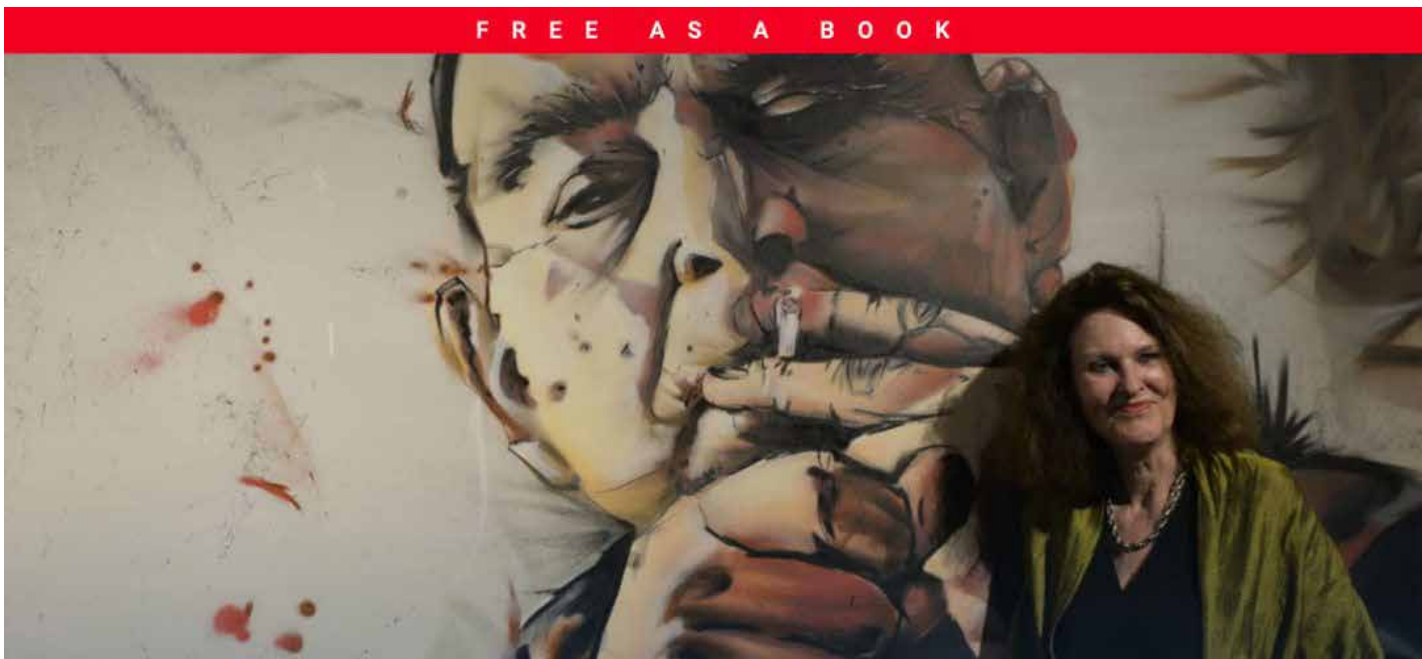


Umam's Exhibition on the Treasures of Studio Baalbeck

Carol Ziadé Ajami



In the presence of the German ambassador and on the occasion of International Archives Day on June 9, Umam Documentation and Research relaunched its online archive catalog, Umam Biblio, accompanied by an exhibition on the visual material of the Baalbeck studios. It will take place in the exhibition and roundtable space of the Slim residence, named the Hangar. This new edition is dedicated to Lokman Slim, who was assassinated in southern Lebanon on February 3, 2021. This is Beirut met with Monika Borgmann, the co-founder of Umam, Rasha el Ameer, the author and publisher, as well as archivists working within Umam. The exhibition is open to the public for free every day from 11 AM to 5 PM, until June 30.

Since its creation in 2005, Umam Documentation and Research has taken on the challenge of making its documentary and archival heritage available to citizens, which includes newspapers, publications, written documents, audiovisual material and photos, mainly about Lebanon and its recent history. For Umam, these treasures have an informative and structural function in public debates. Thus, the creation of this platform allows direct access to catalogs and some digitized documents, which are essential to the collective memory of a people.

Umam Biblio exists in two versions: in Arabic with Arabic content, and in English with English content. Umam's archives are constantly expanding, both in their physical and digital collections, hence the continuous evolution of the platform. This recent edition is supported by the German Federal Foreign Office. Previously, a first edition was launched with the support of the Swiss Embassy in Beirut. The exhibition is supported by the French program "Protection of Lebanese Intangible Heritage in Peril," thanks to the French Institute of Beirut.



Monika Borgmann

The co-founder of Umam shared her joy with This is Beirut in relaunching the website (www.umambiblio.org), an online catalog of the archives Umam possesses, in its new version, dedicated to her murdered husband. “For the inauguration, we are screening scenes extracted from three films as they were retrieved before the final work was edited, which we do not possess. The first represents Lebanon seen from the sky; the second reveals the cultural, sports and social life of Beirut in the 60s and 70s; and the third is a film by Georges Chamchoum entitled, *Le salut après la mort*. It was our common dream, Lokman and I, to build and preserve archives accessible to everyone. For us, it would be difficult to mourn the war and move to the stage of reconciliation without knowing the past, to understand the present and imagine the future. Similarly, talking about the golden age of Beirut without the documents and remnants of the city’s emblematic places is a challenge.”

Rasha al Ameer

Although busy with visitors, the founder of Dar-Al-Jadid answered our questions. “It is a very long-term work that began during Lokman’s lifetime. Supported by the French, my brother and Monica spent years restoring an entire film, one of Studio Baalbeck’s first films, later screened at the Montaigne hall. Moreover, imagine that one of the biggest box office hits in the history of Egyptian cinema, the thriller starring the star Souad Hosni, *Khalli balak men Zouzou* (Watch Out for Zouzou), and the entire film editing were done in the premises of Studio Baalbeck!” Then, in a sad tone, she said, “The archives of Lebanon have been sold to the Emirates. It is terrible to sell the cultural and artistic heritage of an entire people. It is shameful and unacceptable to let other peoples preserve the collective memory of the Lebanese! No one feels involved! Fortunately, there was Lokman, and there is today Monika Borgmann, his wife. And we wonder why our heritage is in museums in Germany and the USA?”



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Ghalia Daher and Ayman Nahlé From the Umam Team

Ghalia Daher, a documentarian, specifies that Umam possesses several important collections, saved from destruction and oblivion. Starting with the archives of the Carlton, which hosted tourists and artists

from around the world, and where major political decisions were also made. “The story begins when, on his way, Lokman Slim encountered trucks supposed to take these archives to the dump. He bought them and saved three hundred thousand documents belonging to the Carlton in Umam’s archives. In 2011, Umam learned that the treasures and remnants of Studio Baalbeck were being liquidated, even thrown away with the trash. Lokman rushed and saved thousands of documents, meticulously arranged, dating from 1962. The film reels recovered were digitized thanks to the work of Arsenal (Institute for Film and Video Art in Berlin).”

Ayman Nahlé, an audiovisual archivist and filmmaker, recounts to *This is Beirut* the success of Studio Baalbeck, “There was a very skilled financial director within the pioneering Lebanese film production company, Sami Habibi. He sent an invitation to all filmmakers from Europe and the USA to come and film in Lebanon. The magic formula was: ‘Come produce in Lebanon, the country that has everything, including the sun.’ Producers came from all over the world, from Europe, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and filmmakers were delighted to have at their disposal the sophisticated film equipment of Studio Baalbeck. The co-founder of Studio Baalbeck, Badih Boulos, was also very shrewd, as he made it a large industrial company, sparing no expense. Supported by the banker Youssef Baidas, the other co-founder, he equipped Studio Baalbeck with the most revolutionary equipment, non-existent at the time, in the entire Middle East. On another level, we find in the saved archives a collection on the holy city, Mecca, as it was before gigantic infrastructures were built to accommodate a maximum number of pilgrims.”