***Art / World / Disaster***

A project by Pedro Lasch with the participation of artists, students, and activists in Beirut\*

AUB Byblos Bank Art Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon

November 28, 2013 through January 19, 2014

Opening: Friday 6-9pm, November 29, 2013

\*Note: the final list of participants will be added to exhibition announcements and materials in mid October, once all proposal submissions have been reviewed.

***Art / World / Disaster*** was conceived and organized by U.S. based Mexican artist and Duke University professor Pedro Lasch specifically for the AUB Byblos Bank Art Gallery and the broader artistic community of Beirut. Large-scale banners produced by Lasch are hung in the vaulted arches and windows of the AUB Byblos Bank Art Gallery, as well as in other venues in the city. Inside the gallery, the banners are accompanied by the works of local artists, activists, and AUB students, all of them produced and selected according to their resonance with the theme of this exhibition. The project is accompanied by a series of workshops organized by Lasch at AUB, as well as two public discussions.

*For anyone interested in joining the Art/World/Disaster* project, *see the ‘How To Participate’ section below. Please note that submissions for the show and registration for the workshops close on October 1st, 2013.*

**Pedro Lasch** is a visual artist and associate research professor at Duke University. He also leads ongoing projects with immigrant communities and art collectives such as the 16 Beaver Group in New York. His solo exhibitions include *Open Routines* (Queens Museum of Art, 2006) and *Black Mirror* (Nasher Museum of Art, 2008). He has also participated in group exhibitions at MoMA PS1, MASS MoCA, the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Walker Art Center and CAC New Orleans in the USA; the Royal College of Art, the Hayward Gallery, and the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in the UK; the Centro Nacional de las Artes (Mexico), The Singapore Art Museum (Singapore), the Museo Reina Sofía (Spain), the AND AND AND platform of Documenta 13 (Germany), and the Gwangju Biennial (South Korea), among many others. Appearing in numerous exhibition catalogues and edited collections, his art and writings have also been published and reviewed in specialized journals across disciplines, such as *October Magazine*, *Saber Ver*, *ArtForum*, *ARTnews*, *Rethinking Marxism*, and *Cultural Studies*, as well as diverse and international news media like *The New York Times*, *The Philadelphia Weekly*, *El Diario de México*, *El Universal*, and *La Jornada*. A selection of his projects may be seen at: <http://www.pedrolasch.com>

**Exhibition, Workshops, and Discussions in Beirut**

**Artistic/Curatorial Statement**

Pedro Lasch

At the end of 2009, I was working with a small group of artists, curators, scholars, and activists in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti on the first edition of the *Ghetto Biennale* (2009). The event was truly memorable and successful in many ways, but in spite of our numerous efforts to bring the relevance of the Biennale and Haiti to international attention, there was little to no art or political media engagement with the event. In early January 2010, only a few days after I had left Port-Au-Prince and the *Ghetto Biennale* had ended, Haiti was shaken by one of the most tragic earthquakes in human history. Many thousands died or disappeared, including many collaborators with whom I had worked at the Biennale. The same international media that had consistently neglected this land had now suddenly descended upon it, turning it into a global media event for many months to come. All of a sudden, policy experts began to describe the humanitarian effort in Haiti as a “third U.S. military front” – the first two being Afghanistan and Iraq, of course. Art critics from the New York Times suddenly “discovered” contemporary Haitian art. The very artists who had given birth to the *Ghetto Biennale* in 2009, mostly to be ignored at the time, were now celebrated with the creation of a Haitian Pavilion at no less than the *Venice Biennale*. A particular conversation from 2009 pre-earthquake Haiti resonates in my mind as I work on the ***Art / World / Disaster*** project in Beirut. A man asks, “*Do you know what our politicians are hoping for?*” You shake your head, not knowing the answer. “*Another disaster*,” he replies.

The project ***Art / World / Disaster*** takes its point of departure from this personal experience, which is not exclusive to Haiti. Over the last few decades art biennials seem to have grown at the same rate as global disasters—a parallel that may instantly bring to mind Naomi Klein’s book *Disaster Capitalism*, in which the author exposes the relation between predatory capitalism and global catastrophes.

My artistic contribution for this project is a series of banners in which I provocatively pair well-known art events with global political, economic or ecological disasters. These banners belong to a new series of works entitled *Art Biennials and Other Global Disasters*. Each banner offers a different challenge to viewers and participants, by the sheer specificity of its double naming. For instance the banner *"Venice / Chernobyl"* triggers very different associations and significations than *"Sharjah / Kanungu"* or *"Kassel / Banqiao"*. Additional layers of meaning appear through the physical and cultural context in which these seemingly celebratory corporate banners are placed.

I see my curatorial and activist contribution to this project as one of setting up a dialogue with local participants by means of a series of workshops and public discussions. Within the framework of this project I hope we can collectively reflect upon such questions as: What today constitutes a memorable event that includes but also goes far beyond art? What categories do we use to reconstitute the geographic links between cities in rapidly changing structures of culture, trade, and finance? Can sites of disaster or armed conflict also be economic and cultural hubs, or are these two terms mutually exclusive? Would it be absurd to seek connections between the mechanisms through which we respond to global tragedies and those that are central to the creation of international art biennials? What analogies between today’s preeminent global art events and international relief efforts might be relevant —beyond the expensive logistical operations that involve the temporary incursion of hundreds or thousands of people in both biennials and disasters? To these general questions one could add others that draw upon the immediate context. How, for example, did the war and post-war reconstruction in Lebanon contribute to the rise of contemporary art institutions, of new artistic practices and initiatives?

Through its exhibition, workshops, and discussions in Beirut, the ***Art/ World /Disaster*** project seeks to generate artistic and intellectual encounters where questions such as these may be addressed and sustained in a public fashion. As the project grows and moves to different contexts, an international network of interlocutors may also expand on these first encounters.

***Art / World / Disaster*** **Events in Beirut**

**Scholars, artists, and activists discuss the relationship between art & disaster**

American University of Beirut, November 27.

After a brief introduction by Pedro Lasch of the key ideas and processes of the ***Art/World/Disaster*** project, a group of local artists, scholars, and activists discuss their ideas on the relationship between art and disaster from their own perspective. Topics covered include disaster capitalism in a global sense, local and regional debates on art infrastructures and economies, and other ideas that emerge from the first stage of the ***Art/World/Disaster*** project in Beirut: the open call and its resulting submissions. The audience is also invited to contribute with questions and comments.

**Presentation and discussion with AUB Fine Arts and Art History (FAAH) faculty**

American University of Beirut, Date & Time TBA.

This presentation + Q&A is for AUB FAAH faculty, focusing on lessons and experiences from the Department of Art, Art History & Visual Studies at Duke University, where Lasch has played a key role since 2002.

**Student workshops at AUB (for those registered and accepted by Oct 1st):**

Students participating in the exhibition attend a series of four workshops. During these meetings Pedro Lasch helps them develop their own projects. Their original works may include two-dimensional objects, altered photographs, paintings, t-shirts, designs, online interventions, texts, or performative actions and events. Students learn how to make artworks on the basis of significant research, how to maintain a collaborative working method without sacrificing an individual voice, how to combine art with other disciplines, and how to integrate traditional art forms with media that are considered to be part of vernacular visual culture.

The first two workshops are held with Lasch via remote connection (Oct 8 and Nov 5), and the other two with the artist physically present in Beirut (Nov 26 and 28). All workshops happen in the context of the ‘Concepts’ seminar with Kasper Kovitz at the American University in Beirut. Participants may or may not be students, but all have to be ready to meet with the group at the same times. Lasch, Kovitz, and AUB Curator Octavian Esanu work with the group and each participant as they develop and finalize their works for the show.

**How To Participate**

Practicing **artists, scholars, or members of organizations** in Beirut are asked to submit a proposed artwork or event for the project. Artworks may be old or new, and the events can be anything from a public conversation to a screening or an action. Send your idea and a few lines on how you think it relates to the topics of the exhibition in a statement of maximum 1 page directly to [plasch@duke.edu](mailto:plasch@duke.edu) by October 1st, 2013. Write ‘AWD Proposal’ in the subject line of your message and make sure to include your full name in the text. You may accompany the text with 1 or 2 images, and also include web links if you think they are helpful. Those whose works or ideas have been accepted for inclusion will be notified by October 18th.

If you are a **university art student or activist**, you can also produce works or events for inclusion in the show, but this will be done in the context of a series of workshops with Pedro Lasch. Attendance at all workshops will be mandatory for students. The first two workshops are held with Lasch via remote connection (Oct 8 and Nov 5), the other two with the artist physically present in Beirut (Nov 26 and 28). All workshops are free of charge, and happen in the context of the ‘Concepts’ seminar with Kasper Kovitz at the American University in Beirut. All A.U.B. students are invited, but you do not have to be a student at A.U.B. To join, simply send a short email directly to [plasch@duke.edu](mailto:plasch@duke.edu) by October 1st, 2013. Include the word ‘Workshop’ in the email subject line. In the message, please state your full name, what you are studying, where you are studying, and why you care about these topics. You may accompany the text with 1 or 2 images, and also include web links if you think they are helpful. Students who have been accepted for the workshops are notified by October 4th.