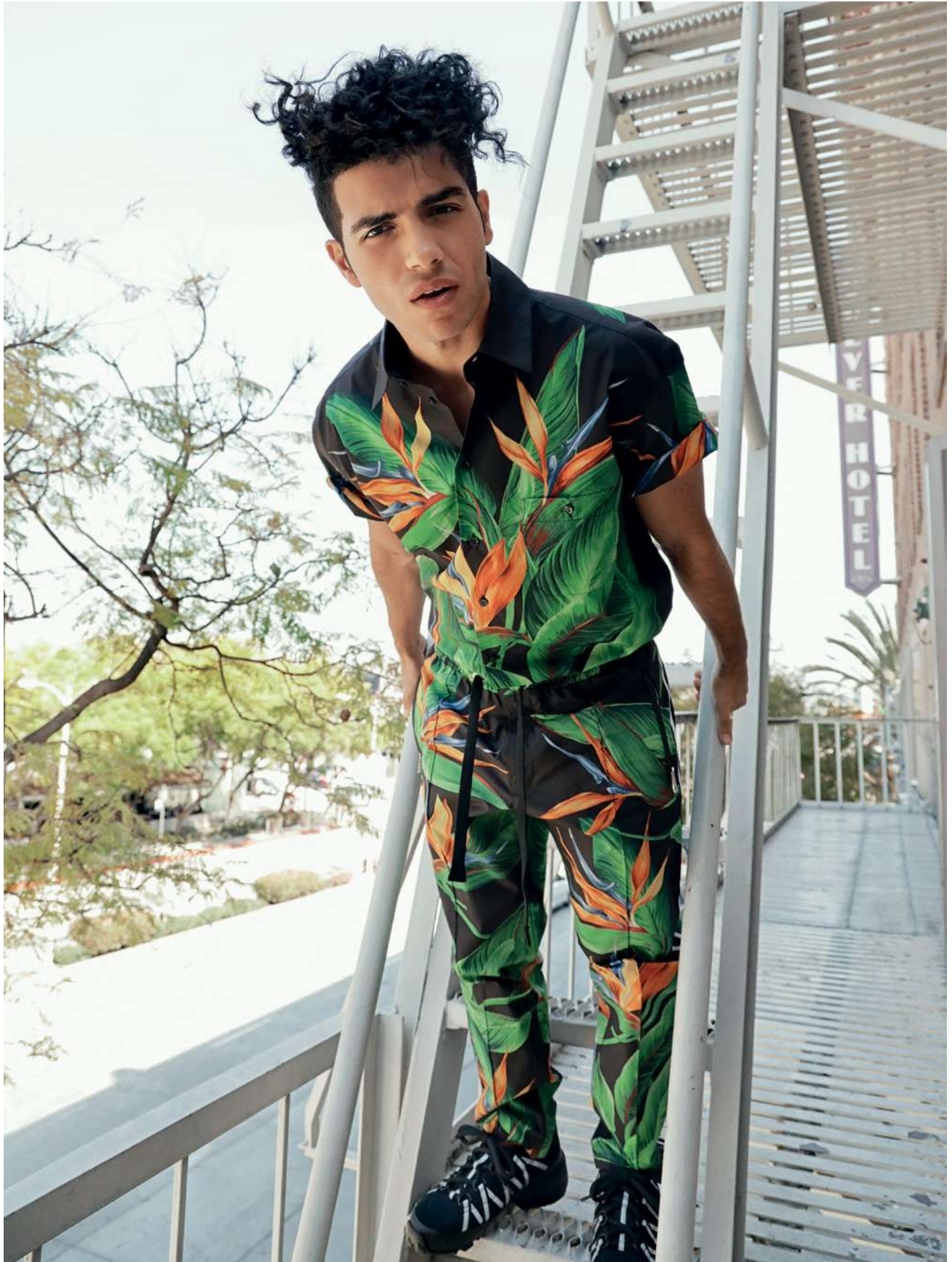


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THE ULTIMATES AWARD ISSUE

Art Centric

Once one of Europe's best-known hedge fund traders, Philippe Jabre has turned his attention to art, building one of the single most significant collections of orientalist art in the world.

Words: Stephanie d'Arc Taylor



*L'*arrivée au Liban, par un soir sans nuage, et tel qu'un comptable qui à cet instant d'un rendez-vous ou l'on aperçoit, au bout du chemin, la robe d'une inconnue attendue.

Et d'avance nous pas ainsi des rendez-vous avec certains lieux de la terre particulièrement destinés ?

• Comment appeler-vous ce drama de neige qui prend au coucher du soleil des tons de fleur d'amarante ? Oh ! mais il change de couleur : de mauve le violet qui devient pourpre, comme si la neige saignait. Comment l'appeler-vous ? Je veux y monter.

Cette question, je cache bien que c'est la première que je pose en débarquant à Beyrouth, et sur le pont même du Lotus, avant de descendre dans la héliport. On frôle avec soi, partout, comme un loup tout prêt à être dépiqué, une étrange d'attente et on les attend sur les discours nouveaux que la vie nous propose.

Élevé au bord d'un lac qui les brèves d'automne semblent allonger tristement, accablés à chercher les montagnes autour de mon horizon. Je n'oublie pas de déplorer à mon arrivée en Orient, dans la lumière, Beyrouth se dresse surdosse de la mer, précédée d'une grève de sables roses, élevant ses étages de toits rouges dans une vague chère, s'appuyant aux collines et dominée par la majesté du Liban protestant.

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Philippe Jabre's imposing art collection will soon have a new home in the mountains above Beirut. Gaby Daher and Jean-Louis Mainguy, art dealer and interior architect, are remodelling Jabre's summer residence, a 19th century traditional Lebanese house, and adjacent bell foundry in Beit Chabab. The resulting museum will feature over 800 square metres of exhibition space.

Jabre's collection numbers 310 paintings, over 1,200 photographs, and around 100 other pieces including dolls and travel posters. The collection predominantly comprises important Orientalist work by Lebanese and European painters, as well as rare works by such lauded artists as David Hockney and Andy Warhol. Four works by the latter two artists, exceptional in the fact that their subject is the city of Beirut, were given pride of place at this year's Beirut Art Fair, held in September at Beirut's Seaside Arena.

Jabre is a seasoned hedge fund analyst, famous for his unorthodox approach and split-second decisions. His firm, JabCap, used to manage over one billion USD until this year, when an increasingly unpredictable market led him to return the funds to investors. The timing of this career shift couldn't be better: with the museum opening in the next few years, this will leave Jabre with more time to focus on what may be his most meaningful legacy.

The analyst, who was born in Beirut in 1960, has "never tried" to paint and has "no interest," he tells us. His interest in the art world, instead, derives from what started out purely as an investment. "The moment I realised I loved art," says Jabre, "was when I started to buy repetitively and found myself with a number of paintings. I realised

Above: The exhibition at the 2019 Beirut Art Fair featured more than a hundred exceptional artworks and artifacts, spanning rare objects representing, testifying or resulting from travels, such as automata, dolls, postcards, photographic or watercolour albums. **Left:** Eschewing a traditional chronological narrative, 'A Tribute to Lebanon' was curated by art expert and collector Gaby Daher, with scenography by architect Jean-Louis Mainguy.



Above and opposite: The Beirut Art Fair will not be the last time you catch Philippe Jabre's collection, for he's now in the midst of creating a permanent exhibition space in Beit Chebab, for all 310 of his paintings (including four pieces by David Hockney and Andy Warhol), 1,200 photos and around 100 other pieces.

that I liked what I bought, and became a collector."

Over the years, his collection has grown to include important relics of Beirut's and Lebanon's history as an art capital of the Middle East and Mediterranean. Orientalist works – Lebanon depicted through the lens of a Western painter – run the gamut from high to vulgar. A 1904 painting by German artist Michael Zeno Diemer of a sailboat off the coast of Lebanon with a snowy Mount Sannine in the distance is juxtaposed with a collection of erotic bronze figurines produced in Gilded Age Vienna.

As the custodian of one of the most significant collections of Orientalist art, Jabre feels a certain responsibility. "The idea of the museum came as a way to give access to the public to view a large collection of paintings and objects, and more importantly to make sure that the objects remain together for the benefit of all."

Jabre is also clearly interested in conveying Lebanon's unique legacy to future generations, both in terms of its artistic heritage and history. "The intent," Jabre adds, "is to sensibilise people to art, its beauty and how important it is to protect our memory. It can also influence young artists into new ideas and new projects." ☺

