

An interview  
with Dayna Ash  
Beirut, July 11, 2021

13:52 Hello, my name is Dayna Ash. I'm the executive director of Haven for Artists. Haven for Artists is an arts organization that acts as the unapologetic platform at the intersection of art and activism. ----- (0:12)

13:53 Since your stay in Haven for Artists for the residency in 2018, exactly two years later the August 4<sup>th</sup> blast happened. Of course, coinciding and being compounded with the financial crisis that has currently devalued the Lebanese currency 1200% and of course Covid-19, the pandemic that hit the world. So in Lebanon, we've had to overcome those three alongside the revolution due to all of those elements that had been struggling the country for a very long time.-- (0:32)

13:53 Beirut in and of itself is a very torrid landscape currently. We have a gas crisis. We don't have access to gas. Gasoline lines are 5, 6 hours long to get barely enough to go back home or to go to work. Like I said, the devaluation of the local currency is 1200%. There is a crisis in medication, being with the country and the government cannot subsidize. Enough being that we are apparently as a country officially broke. We are tapping into our federal reserves. They are slowly dwindling. I believe there were 27 billion. There are now, they stated 14. That is the fastest use of the reserves that Lebanon was ever had to consume. ----- (0:42)

13:55 For Haven we have always been a reflection of whatever the situation is in the country and whatever our community needs. As artists and activists after the October 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution we all went on strike and turned our space into a meeting center for civil society and activists and protestors. A place for people to kind of sit and meet and discuss what they plan or what they see is the future of the country. And how they hope it will change. Of course, then due to the financial crisis we had to move from the space to a smaller one. And then the August 4<sup>th</sup> blast happened, that destroyed the spaces – both the old and new.

During that time of course there was the Covid lockdown. Due to Covid we had turned all of our programs and projects on to online based platforms. Creating online exhibitions such as "Molding Lost Space" we gave a platform. We gave our Instagram and Twitter channels and everything as a platform to artists to utilize as if they were their own to speak about coping mechanisms that they had to take up during the quarantine. So basically we adapted everything to online during the Covid pandemic. And then we adapted again after the August 4<sup>th</sup> blast. On the August 4<sup>th</sup> blast we turned our office into a shelter. We reacted for our community. We raised around a 100k from the international artists and friends all over the world and networks. With that 100 thousand we supported LGBTQIA+ individuals, migrant workers, single mothers throughout Lebanon. We rebuilt storefronts. We paid rent cash assistance. We gave food and hygiene support, basically whatever our community needed. We tried to fill that gap. ----- (1:36)

13:56 It's difficult to see a future as we are working day by day, trying to recover what little we can from all the things that we've experienced through the past 3 years. We still continue to experience because it hasn't ended. So for me, for Haven, for the community on the ground, it's basically taking it day by day and solving a problem a minute and hopes are keeping ourselves strong enough to face whatever challenge might come next. As we foresee many more challenges. Hopefully the October revolution will also have spiral towards a changing government, even if slowly. We are hopeful. ----- (0:40)