

“Six of them hide in my body

Two at the entrance, two on the second floor

Two on the 24th”

- Lyrics from the song Holiday Inn (March 21 – 29) by Mayssa Jallad (2023)

Not far from the palm-lined corniche on Beirut's Mediterranean coastline, you will find standing tall the Holiday Inn Hotel. An abandoned shell of its former luxurious self and today an infamous monument to the Lebanese Civil War (1975 – 1990), with its surface still pockmarked and riddled with bullet holes. Its notoriety was cemented as a snipers' den in what was dubbed the “Battle of the Hotels” at the onset of the civil war in 1975.

This paper will refer to the notion of architecture and the building as a witness to history. Granting it anthropomorphic qualities. During wartime, the built environment is carved up by the warring factions into territories. Such was the case of Beirut during its civil war, the city was divided along religious affiliations between largely Muslim West Beirut and Christian East Beirut. Once buildings were occupied in these newly claimed territories, they often stood at the forefront of war and from which battles were waged.

Extending the notion of the “building as a witness”, this paper will further refer to visual art representations of these once wartime-occupied buildings like the Holiday Inn Hotel and the Burj al-Murr. Utilising Visual Art/ History of Art as a new form/ modality for architectural historical narration. By making reference to select artworks depicting these buildings like the Monument for the Living (2002) by Marwan Rechmaoui, Holiday Inn Hotel ‘Seeking The Heights’ (2010) by Ayman Baalbaki and Lamia Ziadé’s Hotel War’s (2008).