

Silent Narrator

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Another pleasant day has passed, and as the children lie in their beds the window opens suddenly on the realm of sleep. Before them appears the night sky: an expanse of deep, boundless blue. The stars shine, and as strange and beautiful music wafts through the air, shadow-creatures beckon the children to that blue world. It is a moment of bliss for those who have not yet learned to fear.

The world created by Nadim Karam has something in common with the world of dreams visited by children. There, neither past nor future exists. That does not mean time is absent. It means instead only an external time exists, Space and place are there as well. Topos does not refer to a priori place where spirits dwell. Spirits bestow existence on what had been a space of nothingness, so that it becomes a place and eventually enters the deep valley of human memory.

Some may call such childhood experiences simply moments of dreaming, but Nadim appears to be saying that they in fact constitute the only meaningful reality. And meaningful reality is what we, who live in a world full of fear and contradiction, ardently seek.

Thirty-eight years have passed since Nadim was born. He appears in the Archaic Procession at times as a child, at times as an old man, and at times as a giraffe or a dream creature. It is a long journey, long before he was born. The journey began in a small village called Baskinta deep in the mountains of Lebanon. The journey eventually took him to Senegal, Japan and Europe and back again to Beirut. It is not certain whether that represents for him a homecoming, since the journey continues. Yet without a doubt the installation for the National Museum is his homage to the beautiful city of Beirut and the memories of it all of us share.

I first visited that beautiful city in 1959 when Nadim must have been still two years old. Summer had just begun. Early in the morning, I started in a car from Damascus, that oasis amid the desert and the mountains, and drove straight through the Golan Heights. By afternoon, I was already standing on a hill east of Beirut, looking down at the blue waters Mediterranean, flecked by glittering whitecaps. It was my first encounter with that sea.

It is my hope, one that is surely shared by all who possess loving memories of the land, that with its restoration, the National Museum will continue to bear mute testimony to the glorious history of the Place.